Gracious Encounters:
Listening to Women who Listen for God

by

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GRACIOUS ENCOUNTERS:
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(ABSTRACT)

This research explores how older women have been empowered by their religious faith to survive losses and crises in their lives. Using triangulated methodology, a feminist perspective and a theoretical orientation based on symbolic interactionism, the researcher conducted focus groups and in-depth interviews with Lutheran women over 65 in the United States and Germany. She also kept a personal journal to record her reactions to the research experience.

Differences in the perception of how external factors influence resiliency as persons age have not always been taken into account in past studies of successful aging. This study confirmed that the way in which an older woman interprets her situation may be just as important as external factors. Her interpretation raises questions of meaning that are also questions of faith.

The study is specific to gender because often the voices of older women have been neither respected nor
heard. It is specific to denomination because lack of denominational clarity in religion and aging research has, at times, prevented clear understanding of themes and images of spirituality. It is cross-cultural because variations in how women survive crises and reconstitute their sense of self after losses can be greatly influenced by the particular historic events and symbols of their culture.

Themes of community, affect, and relationality occurred repeatedly in the narratives of these older women. For them, a strong sense of community was integral to their spiritual strength, and provided worlds of meaning (Berger, 1967,) not just avenues for social activity. The women had integrated affective aspects of their religious experiences with their daily lives, and were able both to feel and to express a wide range of human emotion. As expected, human relationships were important to the women's faith, but these relational interests were maturely integrated with traditional beliefs and with the capacity for on-going theological reflection.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This research examines the relationship between spirituality and resiliency in the lives of older women. Using feminist, qualitative methodologies (Baber & Allen, 1992), symbolic interaction theory (Larossa & Reitzes, 1993), and a Lutheran perspective on spirituality (Holt, 1993, Sager, 1990). I have observed older Lutheran women in Germany and the United States, participated with them in exploratory focus groups, interviewed spiritual nominees from among them, and reflected on my research experience through the keeping of a spiritual journal.

Recent trends in gerontological research, particularly the "biomedicalization of gerontology" (Estes & Binney, 1991) have tended to "obscure positive images of old age in favor of disease models and biological reductionism" (Moody, 1993, p. xvii). I wish to contribute to changing the image of older persons by giving heed to one particularly under-heard group of older persons, women over sixty-five. Assuming that the story of the "dynamic plasticity of the self—even into old age" (Payne, 1990) is best heard when researchers begin with open-ended questions, rather than with narrow questions and preconceived categories, this project focuses on listening. The study holds onto listening as
the crucial core of its theory, method, and ideology, and as the unifying theme of the research act.

My research results are intended for a diverse group of potential listeners, including gerontologists, theologians, religious leaders and individual spiritual pilgrims who are experiencing their own aging process. People such as Boyle (1983) have taught us that the church and synagogue, along with other institutional members and professionals, sorely need an increased sensitivity to elderly persons. Payne referred to institutional behavior that is disrespectful to older persons as one of the many "insults of ageism" (1990, p. 37). An appreciation for senior members of religious communities and for their struggles is a primary precondition for this increased sensitivity. Along with increased understanding comes the recognition that new and more meaningful roles for elderly persons are not only possible but desirable. Church leaders are now acknowledging that the time has come to view the elderly in their congregations as potential contributors to a common life together, rather than as a "problem" to be solved (Nouwen, 1974) or a troubling group to be "ministered to" (Tilberg, 1989). Yet seldom does anyone ask these people to tell their stories; seldom does anyone ask them what they have learned through life-long
efforts to relate faith to the joys and crises of everyday life.

I conducted this research in several steps, using qualitative methods. First, in December, 1994, I observed Lutheran women at Glade Creek Lutheran Church, a small rural congregation near Roanoke, Virginia, as I attended with them two worship services, a woman's Christmas party, and a coffee hour after worship. Next, I participated with a group of 10 women over 65 years of age in a focus group on the theme, "Women in the Bible." The two purposes of this group meeting were to listen for reoccurring spiritual and life themes and to help in the selection of my spiritual nominees. At the next stage, I conducted in-depth, open-ended interviews with four of the women from that congregation. In January, 1995, this sequence was repeated in St. Bartholamaus-Kirche, a Lutheran parish in Wilster, near Hamburg, Germany, where the same number of women participated in the in-depth interviews, and 12 women attended the focus group. I analyzed data in February, and wrote my results during March and April. This coming summer, I will be giving written feedback to the women, sharing with them the themes and categories that I heard emerging from the discussion groups and interviews. This last stage will be a final check on the accuracy of my ability to listen and
to understand before my results are published in book form. Throughout this time period I have also been making entries in a spiritual journey, which have reflected my own struggles and joys as a faith pilgrim.

For this research project, I called upon the interview and counseling sensitivity I learned in my education and vocational experiences as a pastoral counselor. My past experience with elderly persons as their chaplain and parish pastor has alerted me to some practical considerations in interviewing the elderly women, as well as helped me to be sensitive in discerning potential spiritual themes in their lives. My cross-disciplinary knowledge as a gerontologist and a theologian has informed the theoretical work of the project. My ability to speak and understand German at an advanced-intermediate level was also important. Finally, my experiences as a Lutheran pastor, as well as a woman who is herself aging, have allowed me to be both denominationally and personally sensitive to many of the issues these women face.

Purpose

The goals of this research were at once applied, academic and personal. The applied purpose was to allow the voices of older women to be heard so that respect for elderly women might increase and the church's mutual
ministries with them might grow in depth and sensitivity. The second goal was to work for the larger academy as I: (a) present a new model for qualitative, feminist, cross-cultural research in religion and aging, based on a combination of traditional theory and innovative methodology; (b) identify themes and categories of older women's spirituality for later qualitative and quantitative research; and (c) demonstrate the importance of being specific about gender and denomination in conducting research in religion and aging. Finally, I intended to "live my research" (Fonow & Cook, 1991). I have experienced both increased joy and growth in maturity as I have come to know more intimately the faith experiences of older sisters in two cultures. As Barbara Myerhoff (1978) discovered in her work with Jewish elderly, it is not always possible or necessary to distinguish fully between research for professional reasons and research that becomes a "personal quest" (p. 12).

Research Questions
The themes for exploration in this project were closely tied to both the Bible study topics I introduced in the focused discussion groups (see Appendix A) and to the standardized interview questions I asked all of the spiritual nominees at some point during the in-depth
interviews (see Appendix B). All three primary research questions took into account my emphasis on listening as the central activity of this study and were, therefore, posed in terms that directed attention to the belief systems and interpretations given to spirituality by the women themselves. First, how significant is spirituality in these women's lives as they themselves experience it? Do they speak in religious categories? Do the patterns of strength, courage and empowerment in their stories point to a spiritual source? Second, do the women believe that faith in God has enabled them to gain a new perspective on life, especially during times of transition? How have they come to reframe the story of their lives through the symbols and meaning systems of their faith? Finally, how are continuity and change related to their sense of themselves as women of faith? To what extent has their spirituality led to a sense of continuity in who they are (and whose they are, as Lutheran would say), throughout their life span? Has their faith made it possible for them to come through, intact and resilient, the numerous changes they have witnessed in their public and private worlds?

Each of these research questions overlap somewhat, with one category leading to another. Each contains implicit sub questions as well. The first question,
significance is most basic to the project. This question was, in part, answered by both how frequently and how early in their narratives the women refer to their spiritual faith. For each woman, three sub-questions related to significance were asked. The questions concerned (a) the daily importance of faith: How important are God and her relationship with God in her life? Is it a part of her life about which she cares deeply and thinks often? Does her love of God dominate all other loves? Is her faith in God her primary resource in times of trouble? (b) the significance of the personal versus the communal in her spirituality: Are her most salient memories connected to interior, personal experiences of spirituality, or to communal manifestations of faith within the larger religious community? Which is most often mentioned, private prayer or corporate worship and fellowship? How important are Word and Sacrament, the two central Lutheran worship experiences, to her? and (c) the relational aspects of spirituality: Is her life story interwoven with narratives of her interdependence with family, church family, and the larger community? What part has mutual ministry and works of love and mercy played in the formation of her spirituality?

I expected to find that the women have been significantly affected by their spirituality, and that
they would bring the topic of their faith into their life stories early on and frequently. This expectation was based on (a) my personal experience as a chaplain with women of strong faith; (b) my readings of women mystics such as Saint Catherine of Sienna (1347–1380) and Saint Gertrude the Great (1256–1301); (c) the writings of feminists interested in spirituality (reviewed in Yates, 1983); (d) my readings of older writers such as Scott-Maxwell (1968); and (e) my review of empirical studies, showing the importance of religion to older women, by researchers such as Myerhoff (1978, 1992), Hurwich (1993), and England and Finch (1991).

The sub-question related to spirituality as predominantly experiential and private or as traditional and communal is especially intriguing. Lutheran theology stresses the centrality of Word and Sacrament, and teaches that "the Christian journey is fundamentally a communal experience" (Sager, 1990, p. 81). Although recently there has been more interest in spirituality (Sager, 1990), this term is often met with suspicion by Lutherans, who see it as a non-Christian alternative (Holt, 1993). However, pietism, a Lutheran reform movement of the seventeenth century, stressed "affective dimension of the spiritual life" (Holt, 1993, p. 84) and emphasized the personal acts of self-examination.
dimension of the spiritual life" (Holt, 1993, p. 84) and emphasized the personal acts of self-examination, repentance and conversion. One of the best known Lutheran writers of all time, Soren Kierkegaard, was an "individualist in the extreme" (Holt, 1993, p. 94). I therefore expected to find a mixture of personal and communal spirituality in the women, and I did not know which domain would dominate. Because empirical studies of Lutheran women from this cohort group have not, to my knowledge, been previously conducted, this study was one of the first to explore this question.

The second research question concerns reframing. My intention here was to explore, in a less rigid, more post-modern sense (Baber & Allen, 1992) the old issue of how religion may function to assist older persons during times of loss and crisis; that is, how religion may contribute to their well-being (Ellison, 1983) or to their life satisfaction (Ellison, Gay & Glass, 1989). Posing this question in terms of reframing rather than in terms of functionality resulted from (a) my feminist methodology, which "recognizes the problem of reducing the complexity of women's lives into dichotomies..." (Baber & Allen, 1992, p. 2); (b) my personal faith, which resists viewing faith in secular, functional terms (Berger, 1969) rather than as a gift from God; (c) my
positive experiences in using cognitive therapy with aging women in private practice; (d) symbolic interactionism, a theory that views persons as creators of their own worlds of meaning (Berger, 1967); and (e) a trend in recent Lutheran writings on religion and aging that focuses on the relationship of religion as a giver of new meanings to the aging experience (Kimble, 1993).

Finally, in this project I explored the relationship between change and continuity over time as related to self-identity and spirituality. Rather than the tired old question of whether or not persons become more religious as they age (Witter, Stock, Okun, & Haring, 1985), I investigated whether and how these women's religious faith is related to a sense of self-continuity in the midst of a world of rapid change. Would this stability be frequently mentioned as a particularly comforting aspect of their spirituality? Would spiritual faith be, for them, a "mighty fortress" (Luther, quoted in Owen, 1993) against the storms of change, including those resulting from personal experiences, but also from changes after tumultuous public events in history? How would they react to changes within the church itself; would the women experience these changes as particularly challenging to their faith? How would these women of faith live "by the light of their souls" so that even though they may have
been "cut down in so many ways" they would "grow back anyway" (Estes, 1993, p. 38)?

Here again, questions of personal versus communal faith would present themselves. We know that persons establish an identity over time by virtue of interacting with the primary groups of people with whom they feel comfortable (Worthington, 1989). How often, I asked, would the women make comments that showed that being Lutheran and belonging to the Lutheran church has kept them centered throughout their lives? More theoretically expressed, would the women derive more of a sense of self unity from their membership in the religious community, as suggested by Durkheim (Hammond, 1988, p. 1), or from private aspects of their spirituality, as suggested by some feminists (see Yates, 1983).

In terms of personal history, this question was related to the second research question, reframing during crises. As I listened, I expected to hear the women describe how, during difficult times, they maintained their sense of self as ageless (Kaufman, 1986) by means of personal and communal spirituality. Kaufman suggested that culture provides an individual person with "a framework for making sense of and interpreting his or her own life and its larger contexts" (p. 15). For example, Nye (1993) found the self-identify of elderly blacks to
be closely tied to religion. Thus I expected that this question would be answered in the affirmative for the Lutheran women, and that they would tell life stories in which spirituality was, in fact, one of the primary cultural forces providing for their continuous self-concept.

However, in addition to questions about personal history, a sub-question concerning historical time arose. How important would faith be in keeping a sense of self identity in the midst of public historic changes? During traumatic events, such as World War II, how would their spiritual faith help these women to carry on with the responsibilities of their daily lives, to keep sane and intact? It has been shown (Simmons, 1993a) that the historic moment cannot be neglected in research on religion and aging, especially in the area of faith and its development, and that the personal faith interview must be connected to "the historical forces that, in part, shape human lives" (p. 321). I would be listening, therefore, for indications of how the forces of public history affected religious faith in the life stories of these older women.
Definitions of Terms

Adaptive competence: "a generalized capacity to respond with resilience to challenges arising from one's body, mind, and environment" (Featherman, Smith, & Peterson, 1990, p. 53).

Critical Gerontology: A perspective in gerontology that seeks to broaden the context of the study of aging by introducing "interpretive and emancipatory philosophic questions" (Atchley, 1993, p. 3).

Ecumenical: The movement to unite different Christian denominations (Holt, 1993).


Incarnation: The teaching that the Word became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth, thereby strongly affirming the goodness of human and physical life. (Holt, 1993).

Mysticism: A type of spirituality that seeks union with God or the Ultimate (Holt, 1993).

Resiliency: The ability to move beyond being a survivor ("a tough little plant that managed--without water, sunlight, nutrients--to send out a brave and ornery little leaf anyway") to being one who thrives, that is, "now that the bad times are behind, to put ourselves into occasions of the lush, the nutritive, the light, and
there to flourish, to thrive with bushy, shaggy, heavy blossoms and leaves" (Estes. 1992, p. 197).

Spiritual Maturity: Persons who are spiritually mature have the ability to (a) examine their faith critically and risk change (McFadden, 1985); (b) search for meaning in their lives through such paths as relationships with others, work, religion, and personal development (Birren, 1990); and (c) find self-fulfillment through service for others (Moberg, 1990). This is, they do not just see religion as help for hard times (Sayer, 1990).

Spirituality: (a) The lived experience that includes those attitudes, beliefs, practices that animate people's lives and help them to reach out toward super-sensible realities (Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality, 1983); (b) a unique style of Christian discipleship, for which each denomination has a particular combination of themes and practices (Holt, 1993).
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Part One: Review of the Literature In Religion and Aging

Because this study is theoretically complex, a review of previous work must include more than a summary of scholarship in the area of religion and aging. I have been oriented, in this study, toward faith across the life span, and I have been influenced, in my understanding of religion and aging, by a variety of philosophical works. Inasmuch as I have listened for women's voices, feminist studies that are relevant to spiritual issues must be reviewed. Clearly this research has a complex theoretical framework; however, it is often necessary for gerontologists, working critically and in postmodern times, to move back and forth among intellectual paradigms (Atchley, 1993). My purpose here, therefore, will be to summarize and critique the relevant literature in areas of (a) gerontology and religion, (b) life cycle research, (c) philosophical issues, and (d) feminism.

Introduction

In some ways, the field of gerontology has “come a long way in its short 40-odd years” (Gubrium, 1993, p. 60). Social scientists have investigated many facets of the aging experience during this period (George, 1990). Many factors that influence the success of human aging--
culture, health status, shelter, genetics, gender, ethnicity, education and religion—have been explored in empirical research, but repeatedly the results show that the influence of each factor on lifestyle, behavior, and well-being is extraordinarily complex. Clements (1989) described the challenge well.

The task of describing these variables and isolating them from the context in which they naturally appear is a highly abstract activity. To accomplish the task of description, scholars must choose some significant variables and ignore hundreds of others that undoubtedly have important influences on human behavior, lifestyle, and aging.

(p. 1)

Religion and Aging

The literature leaves no doubt that many people experience high levels of stress in old age, resulting especially from obvious problems related to physical health and finances (Krause, 1991). But given the diverse nature of human personality, and the wide variety in the ways in which people experience external circumstances, gerontologists quite obviously could not concentrate solely upon external phenomena. However, when one wishes to include, as a factor for research, the perception of overall life quality, additional complications arise.
This intangible, internal processes of perception, although intuitively related to both external social and physical circumstances, has proven to be extremely complicated in both etiology and effect. Nonetheless, it has great importance for this age cohort, just as it does for younger persons.

Even labeling this internal perception was a challenge, until an inclusive term for the status of older persons who have dealt positively with the aging process was adopted from psychology—the phrase "subjective well-being" (George, 1990, p. 190). This term soon became the dependent variable of choice for many scholars interested in internal processes, but from the first it resisted measurement by quantitative methods. Concepts that fall into this general category, such as life-meaning (Chamberlain & Zika, 1986), loneliness (Johnson & Mullins, 1989) and death anxiety (Given and Range, 1990), have been researched with varying degrees of validity. Overall the question has been, What independent variables do we need to include in our on-going task of researching the causes of subjective well-being in the elderly population?

Not surprisingly, more than 30 years ago (Levin, 1989) religiosity was added to the list of these independent variables. Defined variously as "intrinsic" and
"extrinsic" religiosity, or sometimes, "organized" and "non-organized/subjective" religion, researchers began to investigate this potentially relevant factor as one more add-on in the search for causes of subjective well-being. Scholars interested in a wide range of problems from alcohol abuse and coping with stress (Kraus, 1991) to issues of death and suicide (Idler and Kasl, 1992) eagerly included religious variables in their work.

Prior to 1970, the study of religiosity in sociology was chiefly restricted to looking at two variables, age and formal church participation. With a few exceptions, many researchers used a single measure of formal church participation, frequency of attendance, to operationalize religious practice. When it became evident that the correlations between church attendance and perceived well-being or health may be spurious because both were correlates of the person's physical capacity" (Broyles & Drenovsky, 1992), prayer, watching religious TV programming, other external activities, and "self-ratings of religiosity" (Tobin, 1991, p. 120) were added. Clearly, attendance among the very old decreases often because they are too frail to attend services, do not have transportation, or cannot climb the steps of the church or synagogue (Tobin, 1991). In response to this limitation, Mindel and Vaughan (1978) included attending
religious revivals and contributing money to religious activities as examples of religious practice. They argued that more focus should be given to non-organized aspects of older people's religious participation because it was obvious that religion continued to be valued highly by older people, even when they could no longer formally participate in worship services (Mindel & Vaughan, 1978).

Early on, the impact of variables such as health on religion and well-being were of interest. Yount and Dowling (1987) researched what Mindel and Vaughan (1978) had anticipated, to see if formal religious activities decrease, and informal activities increase, with age. Although they, too, hypothesized that people who rated their health lower than other people of their age would have lower levels of organized participation and higher levels of non-organized activities, their research did not support their expectations (Yount & Dowling, 1987).

The results of the research of Yount and Dowling (1987) are typical of the lack of consistency of results in religion and aging studies. For nearly a generation, gerontological researchers "with a behavioral and quantitative cast of mind" (Moody, 1994, p. xi) have searched for an activity that would somehow serve as an accurate index for religion. However, "They have not
found it, and they never will" (Moody, 1994, p.xi), for religion is a matter of the heart, as well as the head; it produces deep thoughts, commitments, and emotions, not merely formal behavior. It is "much deeper than anything that can be measured by participation in congregational activity" (Moody, 1994, p. xi).

Not all scholars have been deterred by either the inconsistencies in research results or the theoretical weaknesses; some have been determined to measure religious faith and behavior quantitatively. However, to measure this variable, it first has to be named, and its components theoretically identified. Most early empirical research was conducted using quantitative methods, with unidimensional measurements borrowed from or modeled after those used by sociologists of religion (see, for example, Wuthnow, 1979). Glock's (1962) five dimensions of religiosity were popular, and ever since have been widely used in quantitative work. A proliferation of scales for religiosity and spiritual well-being followed, in an effort to obtain more consistent, multidimensional results (see, for example, Kass, Friedman, Leserman, Zuttermeister & Benson, 1991). The Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Ellison, 1983) has been most widely used, even though its reliability and validity have been strongly debated and never demonstrated.
Payne (1990) identified another problem in early quantitative work. She wrote that the high interrelationships of period effects, previous religious activity and chronic health problems also contributed to the invalid results in these studies. Indeed, creating a research model free of overlapping, intercorrelating variables will always be a challenge in social science research, particularly in more abstract areas such as those relating to subjective well-being.

A vague sense that something was missing in theory, as well as in measurement design, arose early on. Besides the five dimensions of religiosity identified by Glock (1962), a spiritual component of religiosity, pertaining instead to one's relationships with God and cutting across other dimensions" (Moberg, 1967) was identified in 1967. In spite of its abstract nature (Moberg, 1980), this spiritual component began to receive consideration in scientific research. Thus began the era of spiritual well-being research in gerontology.

In 1979 a collection of essays edited by Moberg contained conceptual studies of spiritual well-being theory, along with qualitative and quantitative research reports. This book was soon followed in 1980 by a conference at the Rossmore-Cortese Institute for the Study of Retirement and Aging. Here, authors working
across the disciplines of gerontology, theology and philosophy, and across denominations, came together to discuss "spiritual well-being as it relates to God, self, the community and the environment" (Thorson & Cook, 1980, p. 20). Moberg (1980) and his colleagues dreamed of a day when spiritual well-being would be respected throughout the larger academy. No champion of the field of religion and aging has written more eloquently than Moberg when he suggested, "Today we are on the verge of a quantum leap forward toward the fulfillment of that visionary dream." (1980, p. 20).

Indeed, during the 1980s the words "spirit" and "spirituality" began appearing more frequently in religion and aging literature. The Journal of Religion and Aging was first published, and articles about spirituality and its relationship to well-being were among the first accepted by this new publication. Some scholars began to distinguish between spirituality and religiosity as they described the dimensions of aging (Jones, 1984); others saw aging itself as a spiritual activity (Kollar, 1985). However, gerontologists continued to ignore religion for the most part, and considered it a dubious study area (Moody, 1994), as demonstrated most visibly by the rarity with which
articles on religion and aging were published in the more
prestigious journals.

Of particular interest for my research area are
scholars with a life span perspective, who, during this
period, preferred to look at how spirituality may be
important to individuals over the course of their life
stories. Examples include Huseby (1984), who focused on
the life history approach to spirituality when he
designed continuing education programs for use with
persons about to retire. Worthington (1989) reviewed
theories of religious development on a number of issues
related to life span. McFadden wrote of religious
maturity in the lives of frail elderly people, and found
that it was their life review that allowed aging people
who were religiously mature to appreciate deeply the
symbols, rituals, and myths they "encountered along the
wrote of spiritual development in the fourth quarter of
life. And Stokes (1990) found differences in men's and
women's approaches to faith when he looked at the
relationship between the aging process and faith
development. For all of these scholars, spirituality was
a dynamic, multidimensional experience that can best be
understood by exploring religious faith as a life-long
phenomenon.
Importance of Further Research

Studies in spirituality and aging using qualitative methods have been growing in popularity during the first half of the current decade. Recent work has greatly improved by becoming more in-depth theoretically and by employing more qualitative methodology (see Part Two). Although still a kind of step child in the social sciences, the field of religion and aging has grown, as reflected by increased attention to the topic at professional conferences and by a growing number of publications in the area including three journals within the past decade (Thomas and Eisenhandler, 1994).

However, serious limitations and problems with the research literature remain. Although religion is frequently found to be a positive predictor of subjective well-being (Krause & Van Tran, 1989) along with other social-structural determinants such as socioeconomic position, attachments to social structure, and age density of the residential environment (George, 1990), quantitative findings overall have been contradictory and inconclusive (Levin, 1989). In a meta-analysis, Witter, Stock, Okun and Haring, (1985) summarized 28 studies and found that although a small, positive association between religion and subjective well-being did exist, the results varied widely. Empirical studies with qualitative methods
are still rare, and ignored by the academy at large. These problems, together with a tendency to devalue religion in a secular society, have resulted in a dearth of articles on religion published in the leading journals of gerontology. In fact, from the founding of the Journal of Gerontology and The Gerontologist until the present decade, only 23 articles focusing centrally on religion and aging have been published, averaging out to less than one article per year (Thomas & Eisenhandler, 1994). Nowhere in the social sciences has the tendency to exclude religion been more prevalent than in gerontology (Thomas & Eisenhandler, 1994).

An additional subtle but serious limitation in much of the spiritual well-being work and in some studies of spirituality is a typical bias for viewing spirituality in secularized and individualized terms (Simmons, 1991). Most theoretical models for spiritual well-being are conceptualized as centered on the human spirit, not the divine spirit (see, for example, Seaward, 1991). Meaning and value have been seen as personalized, and the larger religious community and its systems of collective meanings have been largely lost from sight (Simmons, 1991). This is one significant short coming (see Chapter Three) to which this research is intended as a response.
Still another limitation affecting both reliability and validity in these studies has been the lack of attention given to denominational differences. This limitation is not unique to gerontology but occurs in sociology of religion studies in general. The tendency to use very general religious terms, and to assume that these terms have meaning for all religious people, has led to "attempts to identify religion in terms of functions rather than substance" (Wuthnow, 1988, p 474).

Gender is a third critically neglected area in religion and aging research, a result in large part of the inattention paid to gender in studies across sociology. "Studies carried out in the United States have not only failed to provide clear-cut answers to questions concerning gender differences in the aging process, but have produced confusing and often contradictory results" (Cool & McCabe, 1987, p. 93). Certainly religion and aging scholars have only begun to study the "problem" of gender, as can be seen in a recent bibliography on women and aging that includes only seven empirical research studies in the chapter, "Religion" (Coyle, 1989). Older women's lack of power and status in church and synagogue has been ignored, and their unique contributions to spirituality unexplored. Even scholars in the women's liberation movement chose to ignore the elderly. Wrote
Friedan. "In the women's movement, age didn't seem to count: we all felt young" (1993, p. 16). This neglect included feminists writing theoretically about spirituality, who also failed to give voice to the experiences of older women. For example, Hess and Ferree (1989) included in the women's movement: women in educational settings, women in various social classes, women of color and women with differing sexual orientations. They did not even mention older women or the contributions these women have made toward spirituality. Older women have also been absent as subjects in research endeavors (Cool & McCabe, 1987), which implies that they simply have not been perceived as important enough to justify a special focus.

A final problem results from the cultural blindness of social science research in general and gerontology specifically. A "retreat to privatism" (Moody, 1986, p. 13), so characteristic of modern thought, has influenced aging studies. All too frequently we in the academy are missing a cultural framework and are, thereby, unable to critique our cultural fabric at precisely the point where "the center cannot hold" (Moody, 1986, p. 13). As Sokolovsky (1990) wrote, "As the Western world plunges headlong into a new conception of old age it
will do well to examine the variations that exist within and without narrow societal boundaries" (1990, preface). In contemporary America, these boundaries include the modern view that the career cycle of education, work and retirement is equal to the universal life cycle, and that a life of activity is to be preferred over a life of contemplation. These American norms then result in a "horror of old age, which is a horror of the vacuum—the limbo state of inactivity" (Moody, 1986, p. 12). Meaning questions, when they do appear, are expressed narcissistically as the meaning of my life (Moody, 1986), and are seen as concerns of this world, not other worldly matters. The result has been an ideology of life span development that lacks shared public values whereby the idea of development might make sense (Moody, 1986). In the end, the empirical science of life span development must turn to the humanities and to cultural traditions in order to reconstruct a narrative unity of the human life course. (Moody, 1986, p. 12).

Of course, this cultural short-sightedness has been true across sociology; sociologists tend to exhibit parochialism (Berger, 1992). It is perhaps natural, although regrettable, that gerontology has not escaped
similar consequences. Berger, a prominent sociologist of religion, wrote of the ways in which cross-cultural studies can help to "relativize the relativizers."

The more conscious one becomes of the immense variety of human thought and action in this world, the more one puts in proportion the peculiar ideas and institutions that we subsume under the heading of "modernity" I am convinced that sociology today must be a cross-national, cross-cultural discipline, not because of some moral purpose of all-embracing understanding and tolerance, but because it is no longer possible to understand one society without understanding it in comparison with others. The kind of sociology, though, becomes in fact an overall critique of modernity. (Berger, 1969, p. xi)

Thus I designed this study to include a cultural element. I believe that including this dimension has allowed me to present my results as part of an on-going critique of American society, namely, the devaluation of older persons and their spirituality. Our action-oriented, youth-idealizing society is best seen in cultural perspective. In order to avoid thinking that becoming old is the same as becoming a problem (Nouwen, 1974). I have listened for the voices of older women in two societies, mindful of the ways in which past.
privatized and culturally biased research has sometimes contributed to a debilitating cultural process. In both America and Germany I have asked in what ways, if any, social beliefs and behaviors have (a) denied the basic solidarity of all people with the aging process, and (b) presented elderly people as a problem to be solved rather than as spiritual teachers and connectors among generations (Nouwen, 1974).

Overall, both measurement problems and lack of adequate theory have contributed to the serious problems in religion and aging studies. Some scholars continue to attribute these limitations solely to differences in how religion is measured (Chamberlain & Zika, 1988); others cite a lack of theoretical foundation (Levin, 1989). It seems clear that both are problems, and that both have arisen out of the prevalent norm in the social sciences, demanding value free research (Thomas & Eisenhandler, 1994) and objective theory (Dumont, 1979). Given the positivist paradigm so frequently employed by scholars in family studies, those scholars who are looking for "sound knowledge grounded in scientific observation" (Doherty, Boss, LaRosa, Schumm, & Steinmetz, 1993, p. 5) may find results to date from empirical studies on religion and aging discouraging. Small wonder that research on
religion in gerontology is often considered risky business.

Part Two: Intellectual Roots for this Research

Relevant Recent Studies in Gerontology

Some gerontologists, especially in the first part of the 1990s, have countered the limitations described above. In conducting this study, I have been indebted to their thought, methodology, and bibliographical work. Cole (1991b) wrote a historical account of aging revealing how stage and age thinking has negatively affected the role of religion and spirituality in understanding the life course. He argued that renewal of these faith values is essential to exploration of all aspects of human development. Simmons and Pierce (1992) compiled an annotated bibliography in the area of religion and aging. Much of the research for this project was greatly facilitated by their careful scholarship.

of America. Their volume also included quantitative studies and theoretical, historical papers.

As the following sections will show, this study is particularly indebted to those scholars who have wrestled with the search for meaning and its relationship to self development across the life span. These writers have examined the interface of human development, interpersonal relationships, the religious cultural milieu, and life crises with the complex process by which persons incorporate their life experiences into personal and spiritual growth. Some have worked within a secularized framework and others have implicitly or explicitly included the spiritual dimension. All have seen the self as an involved actor in her own destiny; all believe that each person moves back and forth between external and internal experiences, in conversation with others, to "appropriate a world" (Berger, 1967, p. 16), where shared meanings and interactions (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993) create and maintain a common reality (Berger, 1967). The work of these writers is, therefore, highly consistent with the symbolic interactionist theory on which this study is based (see Chapter Three).
Questions in the Literature

How are we to understand who we are over time? What is the meaning of human suffering? What does our faith in God have to do with issues of aging and suffering? Why is it that some persons can survive and even transcend the crises of their lives to thrive and grow while other languish or perish?

These abstract but reoccurring questions are not my own; they are timeless. They are, perhaps the questions behind the research questions articulated in Chapter One, just as they are the questions behind the questions of much previous research. Much interesting work throughout history has revolved around them in one way or another, and suggested answers of one kind or another. I have listened for echoes of these questions in the voices of the older women and in my own journal, and I have also borrowed some of the theoretical concepts of others in analyzing the data.

Life Cycle Issues

As someone makes his or her way through the cognitive maze (White, 1972) of a life story, group experiences within a culture, religious traditions, and interpersonal relationships help in interpreting what is happening so that persons can label their experiences and recognize patterns of meaning within them. In reflecting on
individual diversity within this process. Life cycle theory is helpful, in describing both individual differences across time and the dynamic development of the self into an integrated whole. Questions of who one is (i.e., how consistent the sense of self remains), and what particular traits help an individual to survive are particularly well-addressed by writers working in the areas of life-course development.

Three writers who have been particularly relevant to my work are psychoanalyst Erik Erikson, life-span psychologist Robert White (1972) and anthropologist Sharon Kaufman (1986). The work of these scholars has helped me to construct a cognitive framework for human growth that has been helpful in interpreting the stories I heard of older women's spiritual lives.

Even though the implicit age-linking of Erikson's stage structured theory and the rigid ways in which it is sometimes employed (Weiland, 1993) are troublesome, Erikson's thought has an almost irresistible appeal for any scholar interested in the relationship of human development and spirituality. Erikson's interest in the cultural and historic along with the psychological, and his ability to describe the interactions of all these elements with a particular human story, is especially appealing. His eighth stage, integrity versus despair.
which sees wisdom as the emerging strength, is a frame of reference I frequently used in past clinical experiences when listening to elders speak. Although the perception is true that relying strictly on stage and age structured views tends to reduce understanding of religion and spirituality in explaining the life course (Cole, 1988), I also find, in Erikson's theory, room for the centrality of religion and the spiritual life. For example, his psycho-historical studies of Luther and Gandhi showed that the principles of human development in a life history are only understandable when linked with religious values (Weiland, 1993).

White (1972) pictured the life-long process of self-development in the face of crises as a cognitive puzzle, and he viewed coping devices at times of loss as strategies (1972, p. 369) for survival and growth. These strategies have three main goals. The first is to bring adequate, relevant information to bear on the situation. The amount of information is adequate when it is neither "too small nor too great" (White, 1972, p. 370). The second strategy is to keep affect supportive rather than disorganizing. Supportive affects may include a range of feelings and emotions, leading to flight, anger, or even feelings of euphoria. The third strategy is discerning a plan of competent action in spite of any pain. One's
repertory of competent actions depends on innate qualities, stage of development, and "practice experiences in the past" (1972, p. 370). As I listened to the women in the study, and heard how they have dealt with life crises, it was helpful to think in terms of White's (1972) notion of strategies and repertories.

Kaufman's anthropological work (1986), in which she interviewed 60 older persons and found an "ageless self," was an additional helpful model for my project. Responding to her belief that researchers need to concentrate on the "essential humanity of the older lives under scrutiny" (1986, p. 5) rather than on the component parts of the aging persons, Kaufman wanted to look at the meaning of aging to elderly people themselves, as it emerged in their personal reflections on growing old. She found that as they spoke about who they were and how their lives had been, the older persons did not speak of being old as meaningful in itself. "that is, they do not relate to aging or chronological age as a category of experience or meaning. To the contrary, when old people talk about themselves, they express a sense of self that is ageless—an identity that maintains continuity despite the physical and social changes that come with old age" (p. 7). As I listened to the elderly women in Germany and the United States, I wondered if Kaufman's findings
would be applicable to their spiritual lives. Would they express an ageless sense of themselves as spiritual persons? Was their spirituality consistent over the life course?

Among other scholars relevant to this research are Amoss and Harrell (1981), Jung (1933), Spence (1986) and Berger (1967, 1969, 1980, 1992). For my concept of spiritual nominees, I have referred to Amoss and Harrell (1981), who described the "solace and security" some aged people derive from their roles as "religious specialists" (p. 22) in the later years. In watching for themes in the interviews and focus groups which give priority to spiritual development over personal ambition, Jung was also helpful: he applied a life span approach to psychoanalysis. In his book Modern Man in Search of a Soul (1933), Jung wrestled with questions of meaning and self development. To bring together life span and symbolic interactionism, I referred to Spence (1986), who wrote of the contributions of symbolic interaction to a life-span concept of aging. He believed that "developmental considerations" (p. 108) are central to the interests of symbolic interactionism because this theory assumes that people may experience the resolution of problems "without essentially changing" (p. 121) the conditions of their existence. Finally, Berger wrote of
man [sic] as "unfinished" and characterized by "instability" (1967, p. 5), a condition that leads to the need to engage in "world-building" (1967, p. 7) activities, such as establishing a relationship with the world through religion. He believed that the fundamental religious impulse is not to "theorize about transcendence but to worship it" (1969, p. 98), a good reminder that I needed to appreciate the possible importance of the women's worship experiences, along with their verbal interpretations of faith.

Philosophical Issues and Cultural Understandings

As noted above, questions about suffering, God, self and life meaning have deep historic roots. In philosophy (Tarnas, 1991), social psychology (Brytspraak, 1984), and cultural anthropology (Geertz, 1973), these issues have been interwoven to such an extent that they can not be neatly disentangled. A small sample of those most relevant to this research will be given here.

Tarnas (1991) traced the development of Western culture by focusing on the "crucial sphere of interaction between philosophy, religion, and science" (1991, p. xvi). For example, he wrote of Plato's view that the highest philosophical vision is possible only to one "with the temperament of a lover" (p. 41), where Eros was understood as "that universal passion to restore a former
unity, to overcome the separation from the divine and become one with it" (p. 41). This ancient thought is similar to the quest for unity with God so common in writings of mystics.

Because she believed that the meaning of existence questions are closely tied to questions about the sense of self. Brennspars (1984) used a rich array of methods, including portraits and biographical sketches, to do her creative work on the self in later years. Fighting against the tendency to see the elderly as "capable only of blotting up like a sponge the social forces and physical changes impinging on them" (1984. p. 79), she described the self as "dynamic" and "active" in character (1984, p. 79). She found that the tradition of symbolic interactionism had produced "some of the most explicit thinking on the nature of the self and its development" (1984, p. 30), but allowed that the self "has never been defined and used in a consistent way" by this school. She also raised the issue of the relationship of cultural setting to selfhood (1984, p. 35), which is sometimes neglected by symbolic interactionists.

Geertz (1973) was particularly interested in culture, which he called an "acted document" (p. 10), and in religion. He saw "The Problem of Meaning" (1973, p. 109) as that which drives people to belief in the first place.
but not as the basis for their belief. It is, rather "their most important form of application" (1973, p. 109) regarding that belief:

We point to the state of the world as illustrative of doctrine, but never as evidence for it. . . . We justify a particular religious belief by showing its place in the total religious conception: we justify a religion belief as a whole by referring to authority. We accept authority because we discover it at some point in the world at which we worship, at which we accept the lordship of something not ourselves. We do not worship authority, but we accept authority as defining the worshipful. So someone may discover the possibility of worship in the life of the Reformed Churches and accept the Bible as authoritative; or in the Roman Church and accept papal authority.

(1973, p. 109)

Geertz also stated that persons who would know must first believe, and that this is a kind of universal religious axiom, a religious perspective. But a person cannot stay in this perspective for long; he or she must move back and forth between it and the common-sense perspective that is "actually one of the more obvious empirical
occurrences on the social scene" (p. 119). Because anthropologists so often ignore this movement, they also ignore the contrast between the intensity of the moment experienced during a ritual, where the total person is engulfed, and ordinary moments when religious beliefs are pale. Remembered reflections of those experiences in the midst of everyday life (Geertz, 1973). It was important to remember this distinction as I listened to the women in this study, in order to ask if they are discovering their spirituality primarily in worship, or if their spiritual faith is to be discovered more in the less vivid moments of everyday life.

**Feminist Issues**

Perhaps because women's position in religious systems is so often a reflection of women's status in society, the religious experiences of women have not been thoroughly studied, and their contributions to spiritual life are greatly underestimated (Sinclair, 1986). Partially in response to this historic neglect, spirituality has recently become a popular theme in feminist writings, characterized by great diversity in theory, method, and political viewpoint (Randour, 1987). However, common to all are the central importance of using women's experiences as the basis for knowledge (Yates, 1983). The belief that the patriarchal rejection...
of women is "rooted deeply in both the individual and
corporate minds" (Eller, 1991, p. 288), and the "refusal
to ignore the emotional dimension of the conduct of
inquiry" (Fonow & Cook, 1991, p. 9). Central, too, are
the emphasis on human relationships (Randour, 1987) and
on questions of meaning (Langer, 1942).

Beginning in the late 1970s, feminists have criticized
traditional theories and methods in the social sciences.
They have conducted research based on personal awareness,
political advocacy, and the study of female subjects.
Feminism has become a new world view (Tarnas, 1991).
However, debates within the movement have never been
lacking. Early on, the lack of attention to ethnic women
was cited as a problem in the feminist movement (see Part
One of this chapter). More relevant to this research is
the controversy sparked by Carol Gilligan's work on "a
different voice" (1993, p. ix).

Gilligan found relational aspects of their lives to be
highly important to women who were making moral
decisions. In her "Letter to Readers" in the 1993 edition
of her book, she wrote that she had found a tendency for
women and men to make different relational errors—for men
to think that if they know themselves they will also know
women, and for women to think that if only they know
others, they will come to know themselves. Gilligan's
influence was significant; as she herself now sees, her work has become part of an ongoing process of changing the world through the hearing of women's voices.

Among the many scholars who have heeded her call to listen to women were Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule. In *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (1986), they described the obstacles women must overcome in developing the power of their minds, and they interviewed women with the goal of giving them voice and honor. Their work, and their categories of knowledge as received, subjective, procedural, and constructed, were significant for this study.

However, Gilligan's work seemed to imply a sharp dichotomy between the experiences of men and women (Wood, 1994): this has had political and personal consequence not acceptable to all feminists. Recently, Wood (1994) wrote of what she called Gilligan's "rhetorical construction of woman" (p. 62); she also found Gilligan's definition of woman's nature both "inaccurate and regressive" (p. 62). Particularly important for my study was Wood's (1994) criticism that Gilligan's book actually contains two voices, one dominant and the other muted. One is the voice of the scholar herself, the "conventional, psychological" voice of a "faculty member
at Harvard" (p. 65). The other, muted, voice is that of the women with whom Gilligan worked. Avoiding this confusion of voices has been an important challenge for me as well. My decision to keep a personal, spiritual journal was one response to this potential difficulty. By hearing my own words speak directly through the journal, it has been more clear which voice is my own, and which voices belong to the women.

Diversity of opinion in feminism also exists about what constitutes the appropriate relationship with traditional religious theology and institutions. Briggs (1987) reviewed recent trends in feminist spirituality, tracing first the patterns of what she called the most innovative, radical feminism, including those women who used the image of the goddess as a symbol for "the divine within women and all that is female in the universe" (Budapest, 1979, quoted in Briggs, 1987, p. 419). Briggs also described the work of more conservative feminists, whom she calls "biblical feminists" because they wished to maintain a positive relationship with the Christian church, including Rosemary Radford Rutherford, Susan Muto, and Carter Hayward. These women are more interested in reformation than in revolution. It is within this more traditional category that I belong.
Early on, feminists interested in religious faith first chose the word "spirit" over "religion" (with its institutional, patriarchal reminders) to suggest "a vital, active energizing interior perception" (Yates, 1983, p. 60). To some feminists, spirituality was defined as "the core of a person, the center from which meaning, self, and life understanding are generated" (Yates, 1983, p. 60). This definition, although adequate for some, is too secular to be used in this research because it lacks any reference to that which is beyond self, namely, God. It is also without adequate reference to the collective nature of spiritual experience.

The writings of two feminists, Muto (1992) and Randour (1987), have been particularly formative for this project. Muto (1992) wrote of what she called "womenspirit," consisting of the search for self-knowledge, being in touch with the world, and valuing our relationships to others. She wrote of the "winters" in a woman's life and of how living deeply out of her tradition (Roman Catholicism) allowed her to find "wellsprings of hope" (p. 129) in the midst of a "wounded world" (p. 129). Her complicated relationship with the Roman Catholic Church, consisting of both wounding disappointments and abiding love, is similar to my own history with the Lutheran Church. Her attention to
denomination and her seeking spiritual depth within a particular tradition are similar to my focus here.

Although she spoke with mostly younger women, writer-psychologist Randour also listened for women's spiritual voices. In her 1987 study on women's spirituality and its intersection with women's relationships, she interviewed 94 women of various ages, denominations, and geographical and ethnic backgrounds and then narrated and interpreted their spiritual experiences. She also wished to discover what women's spirituality could teach about women's psychological development and expression, and she found a very strong relational element to the women's lives and spirituality. She also found that all the respondents she studied were "seekers of meaning" (p. 226), and that meanings frequently rose up out of every day life.

Although truth and beauty arise out of the ordinary, there is nothing 'ordinary' about any one persons' life. Each of us repeatedly face challenges that call into question a sense of order or coherence we once felt, but no longer do. ... It is in this ordinary and very human struggle to live with the responsibility for our freedom, the knowledge of our death, and the uncertainty about our future, that some of us find some of the time the possibilities for our extraordinary courage to strive for a
coherence or wholeness in life. All of us have a story to tell. It is the story of being human, of reaching for new understandings, of appreciating mystery, and of seeking wholeness, beauty, and truth. All we need to do is to ask, and to listen.

(1987, pp. 227-228)

With its emphasis on listening for women's voices, seeking for meaning, and telling spiritual stories based on ordinary women's lives, Randour's study has been a significant model for this project.

Finally, although empirical studies focusing on older women's faith are very rare, recently two qualitative studies in aging have been conducted that are relevant to this work. One was done with rural women (England & Finch, 1991) to explore their mid-life experiences, including their spirituality. In another (Hurwich, 1993), the author focused on the vitality of older women in Berkeley, California. She found the spiritual factor to be "consistently and unanimously important in their lives" (p. 53).

**Lutheran Spirituality: Introduction**

Because a denominational focus is important in religious and aging research, a review of dominant beliefs relevant to Lutheran spirituality is required in order to specify the central elements of this faith
tradition. "All spirituality is about roots...Tradition is the common nourishing and searching and growing of our roots." (Fox. 1981, p. 1). Persons cannot be understood apart from their roots, and spirituality is a "lived experience" that is best viewed in community as well as individually. (Holt. 1993, p. 6). Although varieties in emphasis exist from parish to parish and from historic period to historic period, the denominational heritage of Lutheran theology and practice has been an important component of the religious education and spiritual formation of the women I met for this study.

Like all spirituality (see Simmons. 1992; Sager 1990), Lutheran faith has always contained a tension between those who would emphasize more of a "heart religion" and those who are closer to a religion of the "head" (Nelson. 1982, p. 25). Theologically, the degree of unity that exists in world Lutheranism has grown out of the confessional writings in The Book of Concord (Lutheran Church. 1580, 1959). However, like other Christian groups, and in spite of their confessional heritage, Lutherans have always had, to some extent, an identity struggle (Braaten, 1983). Shortly after The Book of Concord (1580, 1959), especially in the period 1600-1800, Lutherans compiled a "massive intellectual defense of their faith" (Nelson. 1982, p. 82), in keeping with the
cultural climate of the time (the Age of Scholastic Orthodoxism). Although these confessional writings have been a source of Lutheran strength and unity through the ages (Nelson, 1982), significant movements have revolted against the heavily intellectual, scholastic nature of theological arguments, in response to the belief that, "The heart of religion lies in its personal pronouns" (Luther, cited in Nelson, 1982, p. 25). The most notable movement was Pietism, which called for more attention to the needs of ordinary people, especially in the "affective dimension of the spiritual life" (Holt, 1993, p. 84).

Lutheran Spirituality: Theology

The history of world spirituality reveals many and varying themes, including labor and prayer, service to the needy, asceticism, appreciation for the "small, daily pleasures of life" (Holt, 1993, p. 34), martyrdom, the reading of sacred texts, mysticism, narration, incarnationism, and narratives of personal growth (Holt, 1993). While containing these emphases to a limited degree, Lutheran spirituality has also been characterized by its own theological foci: (a) its questioning, "wintry" spirit (Marty, 1983a, p. 52), (b) an emphasis on the Word of God (Sager, 1990), (c) a focus on the goodness of all creation (Heinecken, 1986), (d) a
persistent emphasis on the communal nature of the spiritual experience (Sager, 1990), and (e) the primacy of the story of Jesus Christ, the gospel story of redemption and the Grace of God. (Tripp, 1986).

Lutheran spirituality begins with an honest look at the human condition, including finitude and mortality. Spirituality may be called "wintry", wrote Martin Marty (1983a). If winter is understood as a metaphor or an image of the heart and soul. "The search for a piety does not permit evasion of the central issue of life: its 'being toward death.' Every Yes hereafter has to be made in the face of 'ceasing to be' as the world ordinarily knows being." (Marty, 1983a, p. 53). Lutherans do not ignore the difficult questions of suffering, death, and the meaning of life when they write about their spiritual journeys. People can endure any kind of how if they can endure a why, says Marty (1983b). Like St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), who experienced a "dark night of the soul," they do not deny that the religious person can experience loneliness, pain and doubt, when the ambiguities of life and the estrangement that is "a quality of the structure of existence" (Tillich, 1957, p. 74) present themselves. Through such experiences as the death of a loved one or a personal illness, Lutherans may borrow from other religious traditions, from the social
sciences, or from philosophy to help themselves understand their existential situation. For example, Lutheran pastor and gerontologist Kimble (1990) used the logo therapy model of Frankl to explore how, in the aging process, the "defiant power of the human spirit" and the "Krankheit des Zeitgeistes" (the sickness of our time) may interact. But Lutherans also derive strength at such times from the rituals and symbols of their own tradition. Recently Kimble (1993) wrote of the spiritual dimension to his own personal aging and found that family and community rituals were very real supports for coping "with transitions and crises in a universe that is saturated with a blessed ambiguity" (p. 28). The well-known writings of Joseph Sittler (1987) also reflect a starkly honest, wintry mood: in his last lecture he said, "Life is characterized by temporality, mortality, passing-ness, mutability. Life comes, unfolds, closes, and departs. That is the only kind of life we know anything about" (p. 63).

But Lutherans do not stop with questions. From the very origins of this denomination, Lutheran theology has been centered on God's Word. In a work prepared in 1527, Martin Luther stressed that "everything our body does outwardly and physically is in reality and in name done spiritually" (italics added) if God's Word is added to it
and it is done in faith" (quoted in Sager, 1990, p. 25). Lutherans have found that the stories in scripture of creation, dividedness, journeying in the wilderness, and being called to return, "fit the reality of human experience with a kind of exactitude which evokes...constant surprise and admiration" (Sittler, 1987, p. 64). Because Lutherans believe that "the most important single thing we can do in a culture of disbelief is to worship and listen to God" (Vaswig, 1994, p. 170), the theology stresses listening and language. Sittler called it a "linguistic quality" (1987, p. 60), and he wrote of his "affection for language" in worship and the hearing of scripture: "Coming from a tradition in which both the Biblical literature and the old liturgical life of the Church were very important, this affection for, and this invocatory character of language as a way to understanding, were early grooved in my mind... " (1987, p. 60). This love of language finds its way into Lutheran worship as prayers, hymns, scripture readings, liturgy, preaching, and the spoken words that accompany the actions of the Sacraments: "Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me." (Lutheran Book of Worship, 1978, p. 90).
To Luther, the whole creation, all its creatures, all human beings, were the "masks" of the hidden god. "in, with, and under which" he gets all his work done (quoted in Heineken, 1986, p. 20). This metaphor is particularly helpful, said Heineken, when one wishes to know how philosophical speculation and scientific methodology might be combined. The Dominican priest, Matthew Fox (b. 1940), sharply criticized Luther's spirituality, viewing it as too harshly focused on human sinfulness and the need for redemption. Writing a history of western spirituality, he expressed his belief that Luther and Lutheran spirituality have a "pessimistic view of the world and the human race" (1981, p. 10): they are "encrusted with Augustine's redemption-oriented Neoplatonism" (1981, p. 11). Fox called for a de-emphasizing of "redemption spirituality" and a return to "creation spirituality" (1981, p. 4). However, Luther taught the opposite: he believed that a focus on the cross frees sinners from guilt and shame and enables them to experience joyous lives, made possible by forgiveness. Luther's writings reveal that although redemption is primary, his spirituality also has a creation dimension. Luther's hymns particularly show that some of his most tender words were for God's creation (Senn, 1986): "Now let all the heavens adore you. And saints and angels sing
before you... We gather round your dazzling light. No eye has seen, no ear has yet been trained to hear. What joy is ours." In this day of ecological crisis, the creational aspects of spirituality need new emphasis in Lutheranism and in all traditions. "Neglecting creation can result in a disparagement of the self as well." (Holt, 1993, p. 127).

Lutheran spirituality is communally based. For a Lutheran, the foundations of the spiritual life are laid in the Christian family, where the Commandments, the Creed and the Our Father are learned and where the first explanations of the sacraments are given (Tripp, 1986). Luther believed that "when Christians thus come together their prayers are twice as strong as otherwise. One can and one really should pray in every place and every hour; but prayer is nowhere so mighty and strong as when the whole multitude prays together." (Luther, quoted in Owen, 1993, p. 202). This prayer creates a sense of oneness with the entire human family as part of God's creation. Wrote one Lutheran writer, "The Christian journey is fundamentally a communal experience. God having fashioned us as 'the people of God.' A growing life with God leads us more deeply into a sense of solidarity, not only with the whole Christian Church but with the whole human family of which we are a part."
(Sager, 1990, p. 61). Finally Lutheran spirituality includes a belief in the ongoing spiritual unity of the community after death, based on the doctrine of the church as the Body of Christ. This belief is heard in the words spoken during the Lutheran service for the burial of the dead: "Almighty God, you have knit your chosen people together in one communion, in the mystical body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Give to your whole Church in heaven and on earth your light and your peace" (Lutheran Book of Worship, 1978, p. 209). This timeless, communal understanding of spirituality in Lutheran thought is a significant departure from much of what is written about spirituality in the social sciences, where individuals and their personal experiences are seen as central to the spiritual experience (see, for example, Seaward, 1991).

Luther's early attempts to perform as a devout monk, and the diligence with which he kept the monastic rule, are well known (Tripp, 1986, p. 344). The discovery of the sufficiency of God's grace and the inadequacy of human attempts at works' righteousness which Luther made through his reading and studying of the book of Romans was the central theme in his life and work. The central message of God's Word was, for Luther, the unconditional love of God, made known in the death and resurrection of
Jesus Christ. "For Luther the agonizing personal quest for knowledge of God was resolved in faith only after a costly surrender of confidence in the possibility of a direct knowledge of God's inner nature, and equally of confidence in the possibility of securing the divine favor by a meritorious quality of life" (Tripp, 1986, p. 344). This discovery had a liberating effect on Luther that is difficult to overestimate; its implications for Lutheran spirituality include the belief that spiritual discipline does not become a way to increase the Christian's "moral muscle" and draw closer to God. Because God has already come, in the incarnation, and suffered and died on the Cross, His Grace is sufficient for salvation. Lutherans believe that in the sacrament of baptism, the "ever-pumping heart of our spirituality" (Sager, 1990, 23), Christian men and women receive their status as God's adopted sons and daughters. To Luther, the sacrament of baptism was "a matter so great, gracious, and full of comfort, we should diligently see to it that we ceaselessly, joyfully, and from the heart thank, praise, and honor God for it" (Luther, quoted in Owen, 1993, p. 182).

Because all persons have been saved by God's work, not by their own good deeds, Lutherans believe that the spiritual initiative always lies with God. The "gracious
encounters" between God and God's children, for which this study is named, are a gift from God, not the result of human effort. Concerning their faith, Lutherans prefer to say "I have been found," rather than "I found it." There is a surprise element to spirituality viewed this way, and limitless opportunities to discover life's adventures and joys. In Lutheran thought, God's purposes go beyond language, which speaks of religion as a way of "coping" during tough times. Wrote a retired pastor in a recent article in The Lutheran.

We begin with God. Spiritual formation or nurture or sanctification—however we name it—is not about learning to live with unhappiness or how we can feel better or worse. It's about the great work God is doing: God is forming Jesus within us. This isn't done by us; it's done by God" (Vaswig, 1994, p. 17).

Lutheran Spirituality Through Practice

In practice, spirituality has emphasized the two sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion, and preaching and teaching of the Word of God. Lutheran worship is central to the spiritual life of the community; it is the "means by which Christ becomes truly and wholly present, really conveying the power of God's saving grace" (Braaten, 1983, p. 90). Music, including hymns, and liturgy are
interwoven with the spoken word in Lutheran worship, which has kept many elements of the Roman Mass. In fact, Luther retained a "critical reverence" for the dogma, liturgical orders, and church polity received from the Western Catholic tradition (Senn, 1986, p. 9).

The Biblical cannon is normative for all practice of the faith (Beintker, 1961), and the private practice of Lutheran spirituality is characterized by much reading and studying of scripture. The purpose of this Bible study is "that by it we may be confirmed in penitence, lifted in hope, made strong for service, and above all filled with the true knowledge of You [God] and of Your Son Jesus Christ" (Luther, quoted in Owen, 1993, p. 263). Prayer is to be a daily activity because it has been "commanded" by God; Luther did not understand it to be optional for Christians (Luther, quoted in Owen, 1993, p. 195). Prayer is the act of faith par excellence because "it is the point where the powers of darkness attack faith most sharply" (Tripp, 1986, p. 345). Wrote Luther, "Without the Word of God the enemy is too strong for us. But he cannot endure prayer and the Word of God" (cited in Tripp, 1986, p. 343).

For a Lutheran, the doing of good works and the care of creation are also important parts of spiritual practice. They are understood as occurring in response
to God's grace, to what He has done for humanity through Jesus Christ; they are never viewed as paths to moral perfection (Braaten. 1983). However, the Grace of God is not to be taken lightly or viewed as "cheap", for it cost a Man His life (Bonhoeffer. 1949).

**Conclusion**

As the preceding review of literature and theology reveals, only a research design sufficiently informed by past scholarship and aware of historic emphases in the diverse areas of gerontology, feminism, and Lutheranism would be adequate. As I began planning the methodology for this research, I attempted to kept in mind both what had been learned in the past and what might be possible in the immediate future.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

One of the questions that has become increasingly bothersome in my understanding of sociology is why we have not gone significantly beyond Weber, Durkheim, and Marx in our understanding of the human social condition. Why can sociology be so boring? Perhaps, just perhaps, we have assumed the existence of an impossible goal—that all the significant elements of the social experience can be measured.
(Hillary. 1992. p. xxxi.)

Overview of Research Design

I conducted this study using qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. The desire to listen (rather than to measure), the focus on religious meanings and cultural diversity, the theoretical roots in symbolic interactionism and feminism—all of these emphases required degrees of creative flexibility and theoretical sensitivity available only with qualitative methodology.

As used in this dissertation, qualitative research refers to the non-numerical participation in examination and interpretation of observations and conversations for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and patterns of significance (Covey, 1985). Recognizing that knowledge is constructed, not received (Lythcott & Duschl, 1990), and that often more than one explanation
is compatible with the evidence, my results are here defended by the "marshaling of good reasons in their behalf" (Lythcott & Duschl. 1990, p. 447.). They will next be subjected to larger consideration by the academy.

All knowledge is a process that involves not only data but also human perspectives (Warren, 1984). My goal in using qualitative methods was not to oppose traditional, quantitative approaches; I chose this method in order to hear, in the stories of the participants' lives, "alternative explanations" (Miller & Fredericks, 1991,p. 453) and fresh categories of meaning that quantitative studies may not have discovered.

The term "qualitative" in this proposal characterizes both a methodological strategy and a relation between the data and my answers to the research questions (see Chapter One). I intend qualitative confirmation of my results. By qualitative confirmation I mean the process of delineating the logical relationships that must hold between the actual observation reports and anticipated results to the research questions (i.e., my "hypotheses"). However, logic alone is not enough for confirmation of results; it is a necessary but not sufficient condition (Miller & Fredericks, 1991). The ultimate decision must be at the level of a separate judgment of reliability on data to be used as evidence
(Miller & Fredericks, 1991). A judgment depending on such aspects of the process as the level of theoretical sensitivity and academic expertise of both the researcher and the advisors.

Therefore, in this study I employed theoretically sensitive and academically informed qualitative methodology to listen for new patterns of meaning in the life stories of older Lutheran women in America and Germany.

**Symbolic Interactionism Theory and Qualitative Research**

Symbolic interactionism, a school of American sociology greatly influenced by George Herbert Mead, is a social-psychological perspective that assumes that a "symbolic universe" (Berger, 1967) exists as a socially constructed reality, and that this universe is discovered, not created, by human beings (Kimble, 1990). The focus is on the inner or experiential aspects of human behavior because interactionists believe that individuals order their world by a process of negotiation and re-negotiation. People make reflexive use of symbols to interpret and elicit meaning in their lives; they do not simply react to stimuli (Morse & Johnson, 1991).

Gerontologists interested in questions of meaning have increasingly recognized the suitability of
qualitative work that uses symbolic interactionism as its organizing domain (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Payne, 1990). I used it here because it is conceptually rich and uniquely compatible with the research design, cross-cultural framework, religious subject matter, feminist ideology, and with my insistence on the activity of listening for voice.

Symbolic interactionism is highly compatible with feminism because both ask "questions of agency and action" (Osmond & Thorne, 1993, p. 595) and both "have often drawn upon and reworked the interpretive frameworks" (Osmond & Thorne, 1993, p. 595) as they deconstruct traditional patterns of thought. Because I am interested in the relationship of spirituality to age and gender, this theoretical framework was especially appropriate in questioning the participants about their relationship to the Lutheran church.

Symbolic interactionism is a frequent choice for scholars working with a cross-cultural research design. Older people, like other human beings, are not passive actors in a system determined by outside influences. They create the conditions of their own existence, albeit within some limits outside their control (Amoss & Harrell, 1981). Symbolic interactionism explores precisely this process. It also provides concepts useful
for looking at the non-verbal and verbal symbols of a
cultural group, a focus deemed important. "Each cultural
system creates a perceptual lens composed of potent
symbols through which a particular version of reality is
developed" (Sokolovsky, 1990, p. 2).

The theory helped me to employ this "perceptual lens"
in both America and Germany. For example, the
glorification of the youthful, competitively self-reliant
and action oriented "Pepsi Generation" in America
presents a set of core values that are potentially
harmful to the self-esteem of older persons (Sokolovsky,
1990). In Germany the women's cultural reality included
the distant events of World War II but also the recent
fall of the Berlin Wall, a symbolic structure that had
separated two eras as well as two political systems
and meanings across a number of life histories can
illuminate the impact on individual and family
development of historical macrosocial events such as war
and the forced relocation of millions of people"
(Detzner, 1992, p. 88), and because it is the aim of
symbolic interaction to "identify the constructed
meanings of human interactions to determine the
underlying patterns of these interactions" (Detzner,
1992, p. 89). This theory was ideal for my purposes in both countries.

This perspective has also been well suited to my subject matter, spirituality. An exploration of any system that depends on symbols to give inner, spiritual/emotional experiences their outer expression is appropriate for symbolic interaction. One scholar wrote:

As religion on one side anchors the power of our symbolic resources for formulating analytic ideas in an authoritative conception of the overall shape of reality, so on another side it anchors the power of our, also symbolic, resources for expressing emotions, moods, sentiments, passion, affections, feelings—in a similar conception of its pervasive tenor, its inherent tone and temper.

(Geertz, 1973, p. 104).

Similar to Frankl’s (1969) meaning theory, symbolic interactionism provided language that could be employed in describing how people use spiritual resources to understand the meaning of their lives.

Finally, because language itself is a "consensually validated symbol system" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986), symbolic interactionism was ideal for a project in which listening was the central organizing principle. As I heard the women’s voices, I listened for
how the self-concept of my participants was expressed in their choice of words. This theory focuses on the concept of the *acting self* as one of its primary themes. The interpretive process through which persons give meaning to their experiences, a major focus of this theory (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993), is also something for which I listened.

Symbolic interactionism is ideal for someone with a love for "playing with ideas" (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p. 135), for someone who wants to use imagination as one tool among others. In addition to the reasons expressed above, ultimately I chose symbolic interactionism as my model because I liked it and felt personally at ease with it. As Krieger wrote, "Rather than asserting that one was choosing model X because of its superior power to explain the world, it might be more honest to admit that you were fond of it. ...People were often just more comfortable with certain ways of seeing than with others" (Krieger, 1991, p.21). The sense of pleasure I receive from thinking with this nonrationalist perspective was, perhaps, the most honest reason for choice.

*Qualifications on the Use of Theory in This Research: Voice over Theory*

In his chapter "Voice and Context in a New Gerontology", Gubrium (1993) focused on "how social
researchers, particularly gerontologists, hear what their subjects or respondents tell them" (p. 45). He called for giving context "its due" (p. 50) when researching elderly persons. Investigators must pay attention, he wrote, to how local culture "provides a way of conceptualizing how circumscribed domains of understanding situate the meaning of aging" (p. 50). When some one speaks of self, that person is both subject and object: thus becoming "interlocutor" of one's own thoughts and feelings (p. 53). Gubrium noted that although experience does coincide with life, researchers can not assume that life itself is simply "there for the asking, containing and giving shape to personal experience, even under the best of methodological and communicative conditions" (p. 56).

Gubrium's (1993) main concern was that, in the rush to "discover and trace personal meaning," gerontologists might discount the social organization of finding our own ways of self expression (p. 61). That is, they might forget to attend personal expressions in context, including the various and diverse contexts within which speakers and listeners "formulate, communicate, and respond to interpretations of life" (p. 61). I agree that it is crucial for gerontologists to "wend their way between the varied voices and contexts of experience rather than attempting to integrate voice and context
into an analytically unified vision of aging, totalizing experience" (p. 62). Gubrium's caution, that researchers do not become overly focused on "theoretical integration," which wishes to "put it all together into an analytically consistent and comprehensive framework privileging certain voices and silencing others" (p. 62), was a helpful reminder to me that theory in this project was to be a tool not an end, and that ultimately the voices of the women in this study must be permitted to speak. I have been straining to hear them, in cultural context, and attempting to hear them with respect and honesty, even when they appeared to contradict a theoretical "fit" I might have wished to use. In this research and in its analysis, voice has been given priority over theory.

The Importance of a Cross-Cultural Study

All three "audiences" for in this study, gerontologists, feminists and Lutherans in America and Germany, can be enriched by increased cross-cultural understandings. Too often Americans forget that their experiences are neither generalizable nor normative for all people. To avoid parochialism, it is vital for scholars to include ethnic and international groups in their research. Such work can potentially increase understanding of what it means to be human, and create
new possibilities for living and cooperating in a world community.

Gerontologists have come to recognize that culture makes a real difference (Sokolovsky, 1985). A dramatic increase in research on culture, ethnicity and aging occurred over the past decade. Variously referred to as "ethnogerontology" and "anthropology of aging," this new specialty area has helped gerontologists to understand the impact of varying cultural contexts on the social interaction and physical and mental well-being encountered in old age. For example, one cultural system may provide highly successful solutions for some problems of aging and do poorly in regard to others (Sokolovsky, 1985).

Cultural variations are particularly interesting when one is researching questions of symbolic meaning. Even the field of psychiatry has come to endorse cross-cultural methods because of the potential for increased understandings (Bracken, 1993). When it comes to meaning questions in gerontology, the capacity to explore the complex web of cultural meanings is one route to important insights. For example, one might ask which public meanings in each culture nourish and which impoverish the search for meaning that is so much a part of the aging process (Cole & Gadow, 1986).
Feminists, too, need to think and work cross-culturally. Women are not a homogeneous group, and to speak of them as though they were is to obscure the richness of their thinking, experiences, and contributions. There is no one woman's voice, no one woman's story, but, rather, multiple voices and many stories (Baber, & Allen, 1992). This need for attention to cultural diversity certainly applies to the study of older Lutheran women. A central reason for working cross-culturally is, therefore, to emphasize the enriched richness that cultural variety can bring.

A cross-cultural study is timely, too, in terms of the current emphasis on diversity by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Historically, Lutherans have been alternatively fascinated and ambivalent about international work such as the Lutheran World Federation (Nelson, 1982). Since the Reformation, there has been no internationally structured Lutheran church, only Lutheran churches resulting from geographical or political barriers, from the emigration of Europeans to America or from the establishment of indigenous Third World churches. These churches, within cultural limitations, have developed their own ethos and cultivated their own idiosyncrasies (Nelson, 1982). But the Nazi era taught many Lutherans the importance of such international
church organizations as Lutheran World Relief (Nelson, 1982) and the need for a sense of themselves as Lutherans that transcended political boundaries. More recently, members of the denomination have recognized that survival for American Lutherans may ultimately depend on overcoming past tendencies to be defined ethnically, as they learn to think across cultural boundaries. A study on the spirit of Lutheran faith is ideally suited to play a role in such a process.

Finally, an important reason for doing this project cross-culturally was my position in relationship to the work itself. As a Lutheran and a feminist, working across cultural groups has allowed me to "stand back" a bit and see the spirituality of Lutheran women in perspective. Through gracious encounters with my sisters in America and Germany, I have been better able to study and to reflect on what daily life is like for strong women who listen for God's voice.

The Importance of a Denominationally Specific Sample

Each person responds to his or her spiritual impulses in diverse ways, creating patterns that are varied and rich. Surely personal experience is a large factor determining the manner of one's human faith expressions, along with such factors as church tradition, historical era, education, age, gender and social class (Simmons.
1992). However, denominational identity is also an important part of understanding the individual's spirituality, both by itself and in interaction with the above factors. Together, all of these influences can be viewed as parts of the "formative tradition" of each individual, the way in which a person tries to live a life of faith "compatibly and compassionately within an endless variety of human formation fields," while staying faithful to basic convictions (Van Kaam, 1991. p. 12). To use the language of symbolic interactionism, denominational tradition offers the symbolic language and the social roles with which an individual, as an involved actor, then creates ongoing patterns of participation in the religious life.

Spirituality at its best is ecumenical because it reflects mutual appreciation both for one's own tradition and for the tradition of others (Hinson, 1993). However, to ignore real differences is the "wrong" way to dialogue (Merton, cited in Hinson, 1993, p. 8). A better approach is to develop a capacity for *listening*, for respectful listening is what encourages others to open up and disclose their own deepest insights (Steere, cited in Hinson, 1993, p. 11).

Van Buren (1993) believed that it is the people of prayer who have "touched the deeps of their own
traditions" who seem to be the "glue" that keeps the rest of us from completely breaking away from one another" (p. 58). She recognized that there is a very real need to go deeply into one's own denomination in order to reach the "deep underground spring" it offers, to experience the "security" that it alone can provide (p. 55).

Furthermore, because conflicts continue to exist within denominations between what people experience and what their traditions teach, it is important to bring "fresh insights from one's own tradition to current times" (Van Buren, 1993, p. 56), and to listen for the unique pulse of spirituality which a particular tradition offers. Only then can theology and religious practice be refreshed and renewed (Van Buren, 1993): only then can scholars of religion avoid a "hardening of the categories" (Steere, cited in Van Buren, 1993, p. 59).

Population Sample and Sampling Methods

In conducting this study, I solicited the informed consent and participation of women over 65 who are members of the Lutheran Church. Specifically, they are currently members of the two parishes participating in this study, Glade Creek Lutheran Church near Roanoke, Virginia, and St. Bartholamaus-Kirche, near Hamburg, Germany. Participants in the focus groups/bible studies included all women in Glade Creek parish in this age
group who were willing to participate; in Germany, participants were a more select group invited by the pastor because he felt that they would be interested in attending and able to speak easily of their faith. For the in-depth, biographical interviews, I screened informants, whom I am called "spiritual nominees," for suitability by age, life-long membership in the Lutheran church (not necessarily their current parish), willingness to participate in a long interview, and, above all, depth of spiritual maturity (see Definitions, Chapter One). They were women who were able to articulate their spiritual faith and were known to have done so in the past, either in private conversations with the pastor or in the process of participating in the church's ongoing ministry (for example, they have called on fellow members and shut-ins, or participated in the church's teaching programs or governing boards.). I asked for assistance from the two pastors in making my selections for the long interviews, and I gave them a copy of my proposal to read in advance.¹ A final source of data was the use of researcher as self (Krieger, 1991); in this study, this source was tapped through the use of a personal journal.

¹I asked the pastors after the focus groups, "Who among this group would you go to yourself for spiritual help?" This question seemed most helpful to them as they tried to assist me in choosing spiritual nominees.
The sample selection was purposive, convenient, and theoretical (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It was also made with the following important factors in mind: consistency with the primary purpose of the research, availability of resources, and ease of access (Fennell, 1990). Because the study's purpose was to be denominationally specific, it made sense to use active members of the Lutheran Church. Because of the spirit of cooperation and hospitality extended to me from both pastors, resources important for the work were available in both parishes. Finally, because I live near one parish and visited the other in January, ease of access was facilitated. In using this purposive sample, I assumed that "The researcher's task is to locate the good informants and invest more deeply in them than in others" (Fennell, 1990, p. 71).

The concept of "spiritual nominees" as informants for the long interviews first occurred to me when I heard a presentation by the German life-span gerontologist, Paul Baltes. He described the "wisdom nominees" he had used for an exploratory research project (Baltes, 1993). In an exploratory investigation of wisdom, Baltes decided to use people selected from society for their reputations and history as "wise" people. Similarly, I interviewed spiritual nominees, selected from each congregation for
their reputations and histories as "spiritually mature" persons (see McFadden, 1985).

Although I intended to remain open to the themes and categories that developed out of the women's stories, I did have some expectations about how these women's lives might reflect their faith, chiefly through my readings in the spirituality literature. By using this idea of "spiritual nominees" to help plan a conference, at which I was a keynote speaker, I was able to further refine the concept and become increasingly aware of additional themes I needed to listen for. Among the appeals of this terminology for me was the affirmation, the I-Thou status (Buber, 1958), it extended to the elderly informants themselves. The notion of spiritual nominees identified participants primarily as contributors to accumulated spiritual wisdom, rather than as objects for study.

The primary incentive for participation was the women's desire to have their stories told. None of the women I asked to visit refused me (although in Glade Creek, one possible nominee was unavailable because of a trip out of state). Detzner (1992) found that "elderly informants want their life stories to be told as a means of leaving family, cultural and historical legacies to the younger generation" (1992, p. 88). He also found that this desire "apparently transcends cultural boundaries"
(1992, p. 89). The potentially therapeutic value of telling one's story for life review purposes also exists for elderly research participants (Baum, 1980-1981).

Before both the focus group meetings and the in-depth interviews, potential informants read and signed consent forms describing the purpose of the study, assurance of confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time. (Please see Appendix C for copies of these forms.)

**Data Source Triangulation**

Because I had three sources for data, the focus group, the spiritual nominees, and myself, I used another aspect of triangulated methodology. The term *triangulation* was created by Denizen (1970) as he worked to solve the problem of rival causal factors in qualitative research. Today this approach is consistent with "pluralistic" work in gerontology in which more than a single approach and perspective is taken and in which many different categories of information may be involved (Kellaher, Peace, & Willcocks, 1990). The term can be applied to any combination of sampling, methodology, or theorizing in which three sources or styles of data gathering and/or interpretation are used (Kellaher, Peace, & Willcocks, 1990).

Methodological triangulation was particularly helpful when I analyzed my data and searched for categories.
because it added an additional voice, my own. Marshall and Rossman define triangulation as "the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point" (1989, p. 146). By using a number of data sources, I could see spiritual themes from several "angles" (Fennell, 1990, p. 122) and I could go back and forth between data that suggested over-arching "themes" and data that filled in details.

Research Validity in this Research

A triangulated source was also appealing because "In social research, findings emerging from multiple sources are judged more valid than findings from a single source" (Gilgun, 1992, p. 249). Ultimately, however, the criterion for validity is in the area of the "assertoric" (Chapman, 1966), a middle kind of knowledge, somewhere between the certain knowledge and the problematic knowledge posited by Descartes (cited in Thomas, 1989). Assertoric knowledge is validated by the living context in which it is embedded. It is based as well on a careful consideration of whether more convincing arguments can be made for the validity of the research results or by competing claims (Thomas, 1989). Here theory joins sampling and methodology in leading to decisions regarding validity. This in turn involves a judgment of
the quality of the research by the entire academy.

Theoretical Triangulation in this Research

The importance of theoretical sensitivity in qualitative research has often been noted (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I also used theory triangulation, operating with a perspective that was at once feminist, Lutheran, and symbolic interactionist. Happily, these theories are highly compatible between and among themselves. All, for example, give centrality to meaning over form; all have emerged partially in protest to structures that did not permit individuals their autonomy in interpretation of meaning in data. Frequently, scholars in each of these areas are concerned with empowerment in the face of suffering. They often employ the use of symbol and ritual to communicate meaning, and, eschewing simple answers to complicated issues, they stress the importance of individual imagination over literal interpretations in an ongoing search for truth. All ask the question, "Will we see Truth or will we cherish our opinions? Will there be a "hardening of the categories", ... or will they be opened up to reveal the Light? " (Van Buren, 1993, p. 59).

Methodological Triangulation

Although the in-depth interviews are the "heart" of this project, I used several other methods to obtain data
for my study, including participant observation, focus
groups, and journal keeping. In his study of community in
the monastery, Hillery (1992) demonstrated that
triangulation in methodology is particularly well suited
to exploratory religious research. Others have suggested
elsewhere as well that this approach, using different
methods to explore analytic themes or "frames," is one of
the best ways in which data may be effectively compared
(Fielding & Fielding, 1986). When I analyzed the data for
comparability, I used the "data combined" method
described by Kellaher, Peace and Willcocks (1990). In
this method a coding system is used to chart the emerging
categories of meaning across the various sources of data.

Participant Observation

The model for participant observation in this work is
a project by Detzen (1992), who studied elders from
Southeast Asian refugee families. He explored how
individual and family developments interact with
historical macrosocial events such as war. He found
participant observation to be an excellent supplement to
long interviews. Detzen employed the same theory I used
here, symbolic interactionism, in a cross-cultural
design. Using participant observation, he was able to
identify the "constructed meanings of human interactions
to determine the underlying patterns of these
interactions" (Detzner, 1992, p. 89). Participant observation was also helpful in keeping him culturally sensitive to his informants because he learned so much about them as he observed them in the context of their everyday lives. In combining ethnographic participant observation and in-depth interviews, he was able to allow "meanings and explanations to emerge from the words and constructs of the informants rather than from the preconceived notions of investigator" (Detzner, 1992, p. 89).

Participant observation was actually going on throughout the entire time I visited the parishes. Attending worship and coffee hours, conducting bible studies/focus groups, and spending time in long interviews all allowed me to observe the women in different contexts and under varying conditions. These experiences as observer, along with the taped transcripts, helped me to develop the properties and categories of the women's spiritual experiences, and to place those experiences more concretely in the context of their lives.

The notes I made immediately after my observations were helpful on both the individual and congregational levels. For the individual women who participated as spiritual nominees, I used participant observations to
supplement my verbal recordings. I watched for non-verbal behaviors, such as the emotional quality to their relationships with other people in the parish, their posture, their outward signs of devotion during worship, their signs of fatigue, and their emotional responses. I also watched where they sat, and whom they greeted.

My observations of the congregations enabled me to be sensitive to the "climate" of the spiritual community. I noticed, for example, that in both parishes, people greeted one another warmly. They lingered after worship for coffee and conversation. No cliques were apparent. A feeling of acceptance and warmth pervaded in both communities. In both parishes, I attended worship services on two Sunday mornings, and remained afterwards for coffee hour. As the women also met for a Christmas party in Glade Creek during my time with them, and informally after worship in Wilster, I attended these gatherings as well.

Even though I have been attending Lutheran services regularly all my life, attending worship in the role of a participant observer added a different perspective. Also, significant differences exist from parish to parish, as well as from country to country, including the pastor's theological emphases, and even the physical environment in which the community meets for worship. I noted how the
physical plan of the worship area reflected aspects of spiritually revealed in the women's interview. For example, the centrality of the cross was consistent with a focus on Christ and his sufferings in the women's private devotions, and the seating arrangements reflected the social circles that older women were a part of. I made field notes immediately after each event, noting specific characteristics of the environment and any behavior by the women, verbal and nonverbal, that seemed potentially significant for understanding their spirituality.

My introduction to the women of the parish was important. I was introduced as a Lutheran pastor who was writing a book on religion and aging issues. I stressed when I met the women that I wished to learn from them. It was important that they viewed the process as their opportunity to teach me and to tell their stories, not as an invasion of their privacy.

Focus Groups

Certain advantages to the use of focus groups in qualitative research were particularly applicable to my purposes. The ability to provide data from a group of people quickly and inexpensively (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990) was relevant, because I was working within economic and time limitations, especially in Germany where I had
to accomplish all my work in 3 short weeks. Allowing the women in the groups to react to each other and to build upon the responses of other group members (Stewart & Shamdasnai, 1990) was also helpful; this "synergistic effect" (Stewart & Shamdasnai, 1990, p. 16) resulted in some ideas and categories of spirituality that might not otherwise have emerged. Because at least one of the women (Lovey) had difficulties reading, this group conversation allowed her to participate without use of a pen and pencil device such as a questionnaire would require. Less assertive women may have felt more comfortable talking among friends than in a one-on-one interview with a relative stranger. Finally, the results were easy to understand, and provided an ideal way to identify emerging categories before I began analyzing, in more depth, the long interviews.

Some limitations exist, however, in the focus group method. The interaction of respondents with one another and with me, although helpful in some ways, potentially had two undesirable effects. First, the lack of independence of the responses may have limited the categories that emerge in some cases. The second potential problem, an extremely dominant person or persons such that more reserved group members are inhibited (Stewart & Shamdasnai, 1990), did not occur in
this research. The first limitation was addressed in part by the semi-structured format I had planned, which was centered around the stories of well-known Bible women. The second limitation was mediated by my experience in leading other kinds of groups, such as nursing home support groups, where I frequently had to learn techniques to limit the contributions of overly-dominant persons, and by good fortune. At times I asked directly for contributions from those who had not spoken, or I would make a general statement such as "Let's hear from some of the rest of you."

The women who came to the focus group were less carefully screened than the spiritual nominees. They were recruited through the assistance of their pastors. On my behalf, the pastors invited 15 women over age 65, recognizing that from 6 to 12 persons would be best in a focus group (Stewart & Shamdasnai, 1990) and that not everyone would be able to come. "It generally is better to over-recruit slightly than to cancel a group because too few individuals are present" (Stewart & Shamdasnai, 1990, p. 57). In Glade Creek, this number was approximately equal to the total membership of healthy women in this age category. In Germany, the pastor invited women he thought would be most interested in participating in a project of this type.
The American group met in a comfortable lounge in the church basement, which is used as a classroom or sitting room. In Germany, we met in a large room in the church parish house. Both rooms were comfortable, available, and easy to enter. Location in the churches was psychologically helpful because it was a comfortable and familiar environment and because it served as a clue for the agenda, setting the tone for religious subject matter. The group meetings were tape recorded in order to aid in data analysis.

After asking the women to sign informed consent forms (see Appendix C), we began by reading from scripture, First Corinthians 12: 1-11. I chose that passage because it dealt with the "varieties of gifts" given by "the same Spirit" and I had found in the past that this was a good way to remind women that they do not have to "fit a mold" in order to feel good about their own spiritual gifts. I used the interview guide given in Appendix A for these group meetings. However, the purpose of this guide was to provide direction for the group’s discussion, not to give a literal agenda for what was be addressed (Stewart & Shamdasnai, 1990). The first questions were more general and unstructured, with more specific questions coming later. I also began with questions most relevant to my research purpose, listening to the voices of women’s
spiritual experiences. I recognized, however, that "groups often take on lives of their own" (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 62), and I allowed the actual agenda to be dictated by the natural flow of the discussions. I was able to include at least the first two primary questions in both the German and American groups. The length of the group session was approximately one hour, because the women in both countries seemed to be tiring at that point. In America, the meeting ended with refreshments that I provided; in Germany, refreshment came first, provided by the church (I offered to provide them, but the pastor explained that they wished to extend hospitality to me).

Stewart and Shamdasani (1990) gave the characteristics of a good focus group leader, all of which I attempted to implement during these groups. I tried. I believe successfully, to demonstrate my genuine interest in the women's thoughts, feelings and experiences. I gave a few personal reactions as needed, but only to reinforce the direction of what they were saying. I attempted to be animated and spontaneous, and showed enjoyment of the humorous conversation that arose at times. I demonstrated my empathy with what they said, with both body language, eye contact, and brief words. I explored meanings, asking "Why?" frequently, out of genuine interest. I expressed
my thoughts as clearly as possible. Above all, I tried to remain flexible in order to respond quickly to the direction of what was happening in each group. Please see the results chapter for additional discussion of the focus groups.

In-Depth Interviews with Spiritual Nominees

The long interview has been called "one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory" (McCracken, 1988, p. 9). Because my goal was to present and interpret a sequence of symbolic interactions (Denzin, 1983), the interview method took me into the "mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world" (McCracken, 1988, p. 9). Because categories of spiritual experience and the meaning structures these experiences reflect were the focus of this study, the long interview was the heart of my project.

In each country I met first with the focus group, and then discussed the choice of spiritual nominees with the pastor. As mentioned earlier, I asked the pastors to assist me in locating women for suitability by age, lifelong membership in the Lutheran church, willingness to participate in a long interview, and, above all, depth of spiritual maturity (see Definitions, Chapter One).

Although I was looking for women who could articulate
their faith and talk easily, being well-educated and verbal was not a requirement. It was spiritual, not educational. maturity I wanted to explore.\textsuperscript{2} I took the pastors' suggestions and compared them with my own impressions of the women from the focus groups, making the final decision on the basis of research purposes rather than my own preferences for a certain personality. In America, for example, I had a positive reaction toward one woman at the focus group, but she did not become a spiritual nominee because both the pastor and I felt that my positive response was based more on her friendly personality than on spiritual depth. As anticipated, one of the spiritual nominees, Rebecca, was not a member of the focus group because she was home bound.

When I called the women and asked them to participate in the interviews, I explained the purpose of the longer interviews in relationship to my research. I gave them an opportunity to decline but also encouraged their participation by stressing how important it was for the coming generations to be able to learn from older church members. After they agreed to participate, we set a time

\textsuperscript{2}In Germany, the pastor's wife, Selma Steenbuck, participated in the discussions about who would be the best nominees. This pastor and his wife operate as a team in many ways, and Selma, who earlier was a church parish worker, was better acquainted with several of the women than was Karl, the pastor. We both respected her opinion, and, even though this input had not been planned in the research design, it was very helpful.
to meet at their convenience. In America, where one woman could not participate because she was leaving for Florida, the pastor and I had already agreed on a fifth choice.

The interviews lasted about 1 to 2.5 hours. All were conducted in the women's homes except those with Emma, who lived with her children. Meeting in the homes was helpful. The minimization of "ego threat" (Gorden, 1975) is important in an interview, and the informants may have felt less threatened in their own home environment. Another advantage to talking at their home was that the surroundings were more familiar, and special objects in the home, for example photos of special people, pets, and crafts the women had made, could serve as memory facilitators and could give me additional insights into them and their lives than I might otherwise have gained.

By the time we met for the first interviews, all of the women except Rebecca already knew me from my attendance at worship, coffee hour, other meetings, and the focus group discussions. They knew that I am a pastor and someone who wished to learn from them. But when the interviews began, I again explained that I was especially interested in hearing about their life experiences and their faith experiences. I reminded them of the purpose of the study, to allow their voices to be heard by the
church and by those people interested in learning from older members. In order to put them more at ease, I also stressed that there were no "correct" or "incorrect" answers to the questions, so that they would not feel they were being tested on their orthodoxy or Biblical knowledge.

I tape recorded the interviews, using a high quality Lanier MC60 tape recorder with cassettes suitable for transcription. I also made a back-up copy of each session with an additional recorder. Later I created verbatim transcripts of the interviews so that the actual "voice" of the informant would not be lost through faulty or selective memory on my part.

After asking simple informative questions ("How long have you lived in this parish?" etc.) to relax the informant (McCracken, 1988), I used the primary questions in Appendix B to begin the interview. I allowed the women to set the agenda, within the confines of my basic research interest in spirituality and resiliency. I listened for themes of female spirituality and also of Lutheran traditional spirituality, but I did not guide the conversation toward these categories. The second and third days of interviews usually began with a question I asked after reviewing the tapes from the day before.
Because the purpose of these interviews was to explore how the women saw their world in light of their spiritual experiences, it was important for me to be as unobtrusive and nondirective as possible during these interviews. Even what is normally called "active listening" in counseling would have been too directive, because it would have a tendency to suggest terms and categories to the informant (McC racken, 1988). Control over the interview came not from my setting the agenda or even from supplying the terms for the discussion but rather through the use of neutral "prompts," as described by McCracken (1988). Often I reflected on their experiences and encouraged them to go on speaking by repeating a key word or words used by the informants. Non-verbal prompts, such as simply raising my eyebrows, were also helpful. Asking the respondents to recall exceptional incidents in their lives when their spirituality was important was also useful from time to time (see, for example, Appendix B). The question about a second chance in life was especially fruitful. Another productive approach was to ask the respondents to clarify differences between two categories, x and y, or to explain the meaning they gave to a frequently used word. "Tell me more about..." was a typical interview probe. All of these methods, of course, were used in addition to
the general questions I asked each respondent (Appendix B).

At the end of the first interview, I thanked each informant for her help and explained that I would like to meet with her again if she would agree; all of the women did. We again arranged a time and place to meet at her convenience. This pattern continued for up to two or three interviews, as needed, until I began hearing repeated themes and categories, and thus knew that the data were saturated and sufficient. The women appeared more eager to continue talking and less fatigued than I had expected. They did not seem eager to break for the day as early as I had expected.

Because the interviews tended to be longer than anticipated, in no case was a fourth interview required. In each country, I met with two of the woman for two interviews, and with two others for three interviews. The shortest interviews were with Rebecca, whose many physical limitations made it more challenging for her to talk. The longest transcript was that from my three meetings with Emma, an especially articulate woman who talked easily and quickly, and who kept coming up with new categories of spiritual experience well into the third meeting.
After each interview I returned to my room and recorded field notes to supplement the verbal transcripts. These descriptions included any significant aspects of the woman's affect, posture, nonverbal behavior, along with a short description of her home and neighborhood. Later, when I interpreted the results, I found these notes to be excellent memory triggers.

I gave each woman who participated in these interviews a gift of thanks, a small dove pin (symbolizing the Holy Spirit). I also gave her my name, address and phone number and assured her that her help was greatly appreciated. Finally, I mentioned that I would contact her later to discuss my interpretation of the findings.

Journal Keeping and Field Notes:
Method and Self in this Project

Journal keeping has a long tradition in spirituality, reaching back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Holt, 1993). It was an important part of this project for both personal and scholarly reasons. Personally, journal writing can be used as an exercise to remove spiritual roadblocks because it promotes self-awareness and soul searching at a level more profound than either conversation or discussion (Seaward, 1991). In keeping a journal, the signs of God's love in everyday life may
become more clear, and one's own complicated motivations may be more apparent.

The model for my journal was *The Genesee Diary* (1976). This journal reports the joys and disappointments of a well-known Roman Catholic priest, Henri Nouwen, whom I have known and respected from my seminary days. It was written during the time he lived in a Trappist monastery, and is refreshingly frank in its self-examinations and soul searching. His book is an example of journalizing as a spiritual discipline, a "response to grace" (Sager, 1990). For a highly involved researcher, writing a journal can also be a way to experience renewed energy and spiritual refreshment.

I began the journal in September, when I first began working on the proposal for this project. I wrote entries written on and off throughout the next months, and ended in March when I was analyzing the data. The majority of the writing was done when I was in Germany; during this time, I was more intensely involved in the project on a daily basis and also felt very spiritually alive.

I analyzed my journal for categories and themes in the same manner I analyzed other data: reading and re-reading, coding, and then analysis with *The Ethnograph®*. Please see the results chapter for a discussion of these findings.
The scholarly reasons for keeping the journal related to its function as a window into my own inner experiences during the research time. Kleinman and Copp (1993) looked at fieldwork's feelings during the research process, and argued that in these postmodern times, awareness of one's own emotions as a researcher should not be suppressed or denied. Rather, authors should "present themselves as emotional agents in their accounts" (p. 54). They wrote that two unhelpful images of the field workers are the "perfectly empathic researcher and the perfectly distant writer" (p. 54). Writing a journal was an excellent way to keep track of my emotions as well as my spiritual life during this experience.

A final reason for journal keeping had to do with the validity of the research. It is important to distinguish between first and second order constructs when conducting qualitative research (Daly, 1992). In this study, first order constructs arose from the words and meanings of the women informants. Second order constructs arose from out of my own analytic interpretation of their words. I wished to preserve the participants' own meanings and categories and to be sensitive to significant aspects of their experiences that differed from my own, so as to avoid falling into "blind holes" (Douglas, 1985, cited in Daly, 1992, p. 9).
The "fallacy of objectivism" (Denzin, 1970, p. 8) could have occurred if I had repeatedly substituted my own perspective for that of the women I was studying. My strategy to prevent that result was to keep two extensive sets of notes during the time of data collection. One was the set of field notes, referred to above. The second was the personal, spiritual journal, which included my feelings for and about the women, my speculations about them, my own spiritual issues as they arose, and my reflections on how the work itself was affecting my spiritual life.

Special Challenges in Gerontology

The study of older people can involve special challenges that need to be considered in planning any research project in gerontology. These challenges most applicable to this project included the possibility that the researcher would be threatening to the informants (Covey, 1985). In this study, feelings threatened to be a potential danger because I was unknown to the women, and, in the case of the German women, I was "eine Auslanderin", a foreigner. This "foreignness" could have resulted in such behaviors by the women as attempts to either deceive or please me, or in to their withholding information or avoiding sensitive topic areas. My best defenses were (a) an alertness to this potential problem.
(b) my outgoing personality and enjoyment of people, and 
(c) the fact that I do not hold negative, stereotypical 
views of older persons. Also, the fact that my family of 
origin on both maternal and paternal sides is German-
American may have been an asset.

An additional potential difficulty was the fatigue 
level of the respondents. I recalled that "During the 
course of research older people may grow tired or hungry 
more quickly than the young, have diminishing senses such 
as vision, and otherwise become less responsive research 
subjects" (Covey, 1985, p.44). Here my years working 
directly with elderly people was a great help, enabling 
me to be alert to signs of fatigue, hunger, or diminished 
responsiveness. I planned for a series of relatively 
short interviews to avoid over-tiring the informants. 
However, as discussed above, the women's interest in 
telling their stories gave them apparent energy and 
allowed for generally higher energy levels than I 
anticipated. With the exception of Rebecca, who was 93 
and had many physical problems. I found that the 
emotional work the women were doing during the groups and 
interviews was more exhausting than any physical 
limitations they might have had.

In gerontological research, the relationship of the 
researcher to the informants is crucially important
(Warren, 1984). In this project, being introduced by a known person, the pastor, greatly facilitated both my access and my ongoing relationship with the women. I was fortunate in having the opportunity for personal relationships to develop between me and the two pastors both before and during the research project. Their good will and spirit of hospitality were very important to the success of this project. In Germany, this was especially important because I was a foreigner. The deep love and high regard the German women had for their pastor and his wife, I believe, helped tremendously in my initial acceptance by the women.

Data Analysis

My work confirms that analysis of qualitative data is highly demanding, even though the exact nature of how to do this analysis has frequently been one of the least examined aspects of qualitative research (Miles, 1979). Technically, data analysis began the first moment of my first contact with the informants, in this case, during worship services. It continued during the focus groups and long interviews, as I listened to them and drew preliminary hunches about spiritual themes in their lives. As soon as I became partially aware of emerging categories of spirituality, data analysis, in a sense, had already begun.
However, after the last interview was conducted, data analysis began in earnest. The transcripts of the American women were transcribed in order to create a verbatim account of both focus groups and interviews. Transcription of the German interviews was a formidable task, requiring the language familiarity of a native German speaker. Three of the four German women's conversations and the German focus group were transcribed by Karen Carter, a German American pastor, and the fourth interview was transcribed by Roswitha Jarrett, also a German American professional. I reminded all the transcriptionists that I wanted complete, verbatim accounts, not excerpted or summarized versions of the original (McCracken, 1988).

I then carefully reviewed the transcriptions myself, and in a few cases, filled in from memory text where the voices had been inaudible. Fortunately, the recordings were clear and of excellent quality: very little additional work was necessary to achieve accurate transcriptions. The most difficult to transcribe by far was the German focus group, where everyone spoke at once on several occasions. Karen Carter very patiently worked with both the primary and backup copies I had made of this group, playing and replaying the tapes for many hours, and piecing sections together with great care and
remarkable success. In the end, she captured almost every word of the conversation.

I then began a long process of reading and reviewing my field notes from participant observations, the interview and focus group transcripts, and my journal. searching for categories and the relationships among them (McCracken, 1988) that reflect the women's views of their spiritual lives. As I read, I was aware that my knowledge of feminist and Lutheran spirituality was alerting me to possible categories, but I was also fully prepared to find themes and interpretations that differed from what either feminism, Lutheranism, or my own experiences might have lead me to expect.

I analyzed the data by a stage process, modified for cross-cultural research, from an approach suggested by McCracken (1988). First, I treated each statement in the original transcriptions of the interviews, groups, and journal entries on its own terms, not by its relationship to different statements in that text or in others. For example, if a woman said, "We always prayed at home," I noted that sentence about prayer for its own sake, without focusing on how frequently it appeared in the transcription, or even how it might possibly be linked to other mentions of prayer.
At this point, I decided to listen again to large sections of the original interview tapes, using the speaker of a transcribing machine, so that I could recall more accurately the unique qualities of each woman's voice. Because my memory of the focus groups was beginning to dim, I also decided to listen to the entire tape of each focus group while I read along with the transcriptions and highlighted with a marker sections that stood out. This technique was very helpful and resulted in my being able to spot phenomena I might otherwise have missed, for example, what became the code word "Paiseothers" in the American group. Finally, I reread a few sections of the German conversations that I had not fully understood during the interviews. During this stage, I was reading, listening and observing.

I then needed to do some manual, technical work to prepare the transcriptions for analysis with the computer assisted program I had purchased, The Ethnograph®. I learned to use the program, formatted the transcriptions of the interviews, groups, and journal according to the program requirements, and then created printouts of the transcripts with each line numbered. I experienced some difficulties with the German transcriptions because my

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3 This code word was later combined into the larger category "Humility" in the coding of the individual interviews, see Table III, p.
printer would not accept the German diacritical marks.
Thus I edited the original transcriptions to substitute
an "e" for each umlaut. I was then finally ready to code
the data.

At the next stage I developed the observations
described above according to additional evidence in the
transcripts, and related and compared what I was finding,
noting especially repeated words, phrases and topics. I
created and modified several times a list of code words
that was based not only on my knowledge of prior theory
but also on patterns in my observations, and in some
cases, on words or phrases used by the women themselves.
(For example, "always go", stood for church and worship
participation and "enjoylife" resulted from frequent
mention of those words. See Tables I, II, III). All but
two of the code words I used were English. When I
noticed overlapping, more inclusive categories, I refined
the list. In a few cases, I added a code word even
though I knew that it would probably appear in only one
interview, for example, "write" for Elizabeth (see Table
III, pp.239-240): this permitted comparisons within a
particular nominee as well as comparisons across data
sources to the focus groups and the journal.

I then reread all the transcripts and the journal
entries and recorded the code words into the margins of
the numbered texts. Most codes were nested within others, and many appeared simultaneously, such as "Death" and "Hardtimes" (see Table III, pp. 239-240). When this process was completed, I entered the codes into the computer program, and reprinted all the data in their coded form.

I was then ready to search for coded sections of text and to analyze the transcriptions for frequencies and for larger themes. The Ethnograph® was very helpful at this point and well worth the hours I had spent learning the program, preparing the transcriptions, and entering codes. As explained in the results chapter, I believe that I might have overlooked at least one major finding, the importance of affect, without this tool. The time I saved is difficult to estimate, but my guess is that a project of several months would have become at least a year-long task without the aid of the data analysis program.

Having moved away from the actual transcripts, I turned attention to the observations as data themselves and the categories and themes that emerged from the coded data. I noted cultural variations between German and American discussions, for example, the higher frequency of hard times and war in the German conversations (see Tables II, p. 123 & Table III, pp. 239-240). I made
charts showing the frequency of the code words for each
spiritual nominee and for the focus groups and journal.
Finally, I reread the review of literature and a few
journal articles, as preparation for writing the
interpretations and discussion of my results.

This last stage was actually a cultural and
denominational analysis of the themes and categories I
had discovered. These, in effect, became the formal
scholarly conclusions of the investigations based on the
data analysis. They are reported in the chapters that
follow.4

In qualitative research, the investigator has a
significant role because he or she becomes a kind of
"instrument" in the collection and analysis of data
(Cassell, 1977). In order to be successful, the
researcher must, therefore, call upon "a broad range of
his or her own experience, imagination, and intellect"
(McCracken, 1988, p. 18). Listening becomes an act of
experience and imagination, especially listening for
patterns to emerge from the data. For example, the
investigator must read interview testimony with an eye to
seeing what is in the data, but also what the data "set
off" in the self (McCracken, 1988). I found in this work

4As a final check on accuracy, I asked Gudrun Freeman, a
native speaker of German, to read and correct the English
translations of German dialogue given in the following
sections of this dissertation.
that I needed to draw upon every bit of my readings, knowledge, experience and imagination in order to analyze the data.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Part One: The Focus Groups

As anticipated, the focus groups allowed me to capture interesting data in a short time with very little expense. The hoped-for "synergistic effect" (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990) occurred, and discussions were lively in each group. In fact, in Germany the women were so "synergistic" initially that Durchseinander [all talking at once] resulted in much confusion. Although some were more vocal than others, all of the women in attendance at both groups made at least one or two contributions to the discussion, and no one person dominated.

The groups accomplished the two intended purposes: they allowed me to meet potential spiritual nominees and thus enter into the process of choosing from among them. Also, themes of spirituality arose from the discussions that were carried over into the private interviews later, especially in Germany. The groups became mirrors of the topics that would later emerge as most significant: affect, community, and the tension between relationality and belief.

But research is never quite what is expected, and, in addition to the original purposes, some unexpected findings from group meetings occurred. It was these positive surprises that, more than anything else,
convinced me of the importance of this aspect of my triangulated methodology. First, the groups allowed the women to meet me for the first time in a less intense environment than that of the private interview. I had wanted to "check them out" as prospective spiritual nominees, but I came to see that it was also helpful in reverse: they needed to "check me out", to decide whether or not they would want to be interviewed. No one refused in either country, and that was perhaps because of this opportunity. Something that I found out after the group in Germany confirmed this: Pastor Steenbuck (hereafter, Karl) had misunderstood my plans for the individual interviews, and had told the women, when he invited them to the focus group, that I would be meeting with all of them for individual interviews after the group. We were able to clear that up without any major difficulties, but in the meantime, one woman he had invited did not show up at the focus group because, she told her friends, she did not wish to be "interrogated". However, she met me later, at a different function, the "Alters Gruppe [Older persons' group]" where I was also introduced and given the opportunity to talk about my work. After listening to my presentation there, the woman called the parsonage and requested that she be interviewed! Although that was not possible, it showed me
how crucial it had been for the women to meet me first in a group setting, especially in Germany. The endorsement given me by Karl, who is highly respected and loved by everyone I met in his congregation, was no small part of this process of trust building. An additional factor was that the subject matter appealed greatly to the women: they reacted enthusiastically to the idea of being spiritual resources.

Another advantage was the opportunity the groups gave me to observe, first hand, the dynamics of the two faith communities. In Germany, this exact group had never been together before, and in the United States, they frequently were together in that exact group. But in both countries, I learned much about how the women interacted, especially how they supported and nurtured one another, that was helpful both in gathering the data and later in analyzing it. In the focus groups the women did not so much discuss community as live it.

The groups had an advantage that I had originally seen as a potential disadvantage, since it was not the recommended procedure for focus groups (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990): the members knew each other in advance. I found that knowing and being known by group members facilitated high levels of comfort, support and trust, and facilitated group cohesiveness. I am not sure
the discussions would have been as fruitful without the community feeling and deep levels of friendship that were present.

Finally, the German group allowed me to cast aside a stereotype. I had grown up thinking that Germans are very emotionally controlled and wear masks to hide their feelings. This thinking resulted from my childhood experiences in a Pennsylvania German community, where it was definitely *not* acceptable to show strong feelings, especially in public. It appears to be a common misconception. For just before I left on the trip, a local pastor asked me, "How will you be able to distinguish spiritual resiliency from just-plain German stoicism?" Ironically, both the focus group and the interviews in Germany were more emotionally intense overall than in the United States, and no one in Germany was the least bit apologetic for the tears that were shed. After the focus group there, I quickly put this stereotype of stoicism aside, at least for women: Karl speculated that emotional constraint may be more of a typical characteristic for German men.

Comparing the groups yielded both differences and similarities. In both, there was much informal conversation, laughter, and references to church members who were not present. However, the subject matter varied
between countries, resulting from differing historic and cultural experiences. As shown in Table I. (see p.122), faith was the most frequently discussed topic in each group. In the United States, however, the topics appearing with greatest frequency after faith were children, teaching experiences, readings and special people, whereas in Germany the topics next in frequency were hard times (especially the war), the gospel, death, and questions of human suffering (coded here "darknites"). It is interesting that, as will be shown, in both groups concern for children (both their own and all children in coming generations) was central to the particular theological issues that arose.

American Focus Group

Although their attitude was friendly and positive, this group of 10 American women got off to a slow start because they had some difficulty remembering enough about the women in the Bible to be able to talk about them. As I saw this occurring, I read aloud a line or two about each woman from a book I had brought along, Women in the Bible (1955). That tactic helped stimulate discussion. Even though I was not particularly interested in this educational aspect of the group, the procedure planned to assure consistency across countries was to use the Bible women format to start conversation started in each group.
About 10 or 15 minutes into the group, the American women had begun talking about their own faith issues as I had hoped, and we left discussion of the Bible women behind.

Two major findings from the United States group were (a) the ability of community to practice affirmation and identity building and, (b) the importance of theological reflections. Table I (page  ) shows the frequency of all the code words assigned to this focus group.

The American women demonstrated how their affirmation for one another can be a community gift. The code "praiseothers" (PRAISEOTH) captures a phenomenon I noted in my readings of the typed focus group transcript: although Lutheran theology states that human abilities are gifts from God, acknowledging one's strengths publically often contradicts cultural norms. It was difficult for most of the women in the focus group to speak of their talents. Only spiritual-nominee-to-be Martha took the risk.

I asked the question, remember a few weeks ago when I asked the question if any of us felt that we had a God-given talent? I was the only one that was bold enough to speak up and say that I knew I did. (Showing me an altar cloth she hand stitched). Now you see why I said I have a connection with Lydia? (Bible woman)...Look at those little stitches in
that hem...Now you don't feel like I was bold when I
told the Sunday School class that I felt like God
had given me talent?

Martha mentioned this because in a way her behavior went
did go against the humility norm (actually, a
misunderstanding of humility) that is particularly
emphasized in Southern culture: speak humbly about
oneself and do not brag about abilities and
accomplishments. I was amazed by the way the women got
around this norm by praising one another, thereby
allowing their talents to be affirmed. By the time the
hour was over, I had an excellent idea of what each
woman's accomplishments were, without their ever having
to tell me directly. Said one member of the group,
"Martha, your name ought to go there (on a list of
saints) for keeping flowers on the altar all the time."
Another said about a group member and her husband.
"They've made the wine ever since I can remember."
And still another acknowledged the mentoring one woman and
her husband had done for her grandchild. "I appreciate
Gary\(^5\) sticking by Spence until he got confirmed. He's a
17 year old teenager now and other things come first for
them, you know."

\(^5\)Grammatical errors that occur within direct quotations
will not be noted as "sic" in this paper.
The chief topic of conversation in this group, beyond talent affirmation, was especially interesting because of (a) Gilligan's work on the role of gender in making ethical decisions, (b) German spiritual nominee Inge's experiences with Baptism during the war, and (c) the themes of love and forgiveness that emerged from spiritual nominees-to-be Lovey and Martha. The discussion topic had been sainthood, but it turned to forgiveness, judgment and salvation after one of the women (Mary, not a spiritual nominee) posed the question, "How do we know that we are going to be saints when Christ comes again?" We have to have faith, responded several women. But Mary was not convinced—what about judgment, she asked. "The Bible says, 'vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.'" From this point on, Baptism and its relationship to salvation, and, especially the fate of children who die without being baptized, became the focus. Said Mary, "But I've always been concerned about this, too. When a little baby comes into this world, it's born into sin. And it dies before it can be baptized."

The women went on for several minutes debating this topic. Interestingly, a combination of what Gilligan would call abstract principles and relational considerations was used by the women as they talked. They moved back and forth between relational considerations.
including forgiveness and original sin. The combination of these factors confirms the interview finding that, although relationships are always present in women's thinking, it is an oversimplification to dichotomize their spiritual lives into categories such as "relationality" or "traditional beliefs".

In retrospect, I find a sad irony in the fact that the American women argued about the very topic that was so painfully recalled by the German woman Inge in her life story: the proper attitude toward unbaptized children. At no time did any American woman suggest something so dreadful as what was done by the German pastor in Inge's story, but I believe Inge's story demonstrates what can occur if only institutional dogma is applied without human considerations.

In this discussion, spiritual-nominee-to-be Lovey made statements consistent with her loving and compassionate personality. "That baby is helpless and can't help itself." and "Lord teaches if you ask for forgiveness...if they really in their heart have asked for forgiveness I believe they will get it." Similarly, Martha insisted on an attitude of compassion and understanding, a theme that reappeared during my
interview with her. The spiritual nominees were not chosen because of mercy and love characteristics alone, but given that justification by grace is the yardstick Martin Luther used to measure the world (Holt, 1993, p. 69), it is not surprising that these Lutheran women are persons for whom God's forgiveness dominates over judgment.

**German Focus Group**

As explained earlier, the pastor attended the German group meeting with me. My field notes record how impressed I was with the difference in cultural atmosphere upon arrival at the German focus group. Rather than casual chatter and lounging around on sofas and chairs, the twelve German women sat at tables with purple linen cloths where coffee and cookies were elegantly served by candlelight. I felt somewhat anxious until Karl graciously introduced me and told the women, "Selma und ich haben Jan sehr lieb gefunden. [Selma and I have found Jan to be very dear.]" At that point I lowered my head, pleased but a little embarrassed, and several of the women said, "Sie versteht! [She understands!]" From that point on, I was doubly accepted as someone of whom their beloved pastor approved, and as someone who understood their language.
After coffee, we moved to another part of the room where I had arranged chairs in a circle. Spiritual-nominee-to-be Inge was the first woman to speak individually, courageously sharing how she identified with Mary the mother of Jesus because she, too, had lost a son. When the group moved from all speaking together to speaking in turn, the room was almost too quiet for a short time. However, the participants soon reached a balance of animation and order. The women were sitting in a circle, so it was easy for all to see one another and to communicate both verbally and nonverbally. As in the American group, the women soon left behind the topic of Bible women and moved to talking about their own spiritual issues. I was amazed at how quickly the topic of war experiences came up (about one third of the way into the transcribed conversation); this helped to prepare me to expect the topic to arise often in the in-depth interviews.

One of the most difficult problems facing both would-be Christians and practicing Christians is the question of suffering and its relationship to human sin. The women in Germany have been forced by the experience of war to face this issue in a way that has not presented itself in America, where most can reflect at greater distance on the consequence of that dramatic episode of sin brought
on by Adolph Hitler. Although this topic's importance in the conversation is no great surprise, given the horrors of that war and the Holocaust, what did surprise me was the trust the German women demonstrated by discussing this issue so openly with me, an American. Here again, the only explanation is Christian community. This bond made me an insider in a way that I did not anticipate. My nationality was overlooked. As my journal reflects, the concern that I had about being a foreigner before going to Germany turned out to be unwarranted.

The focus group experience in Germany first moved to the topic of suffering (see Table II, p. 123) when one of the participants, Frau P., said, "Mir hat der Glaube im Krieg sehr viel geholfen. Ich habe...es waren Zeiten, wo ich nur den Tod gesehen hab. [My faith helped me very much during the war. I had...it was a time when I saw only death.]" She related at some length a traumatic experience as a refugee, trying to get a ride on a train out of a heavily bombed area with her small child and old mother, and being helped by a stranger. Frau P. cried openly as she told her story, and soon another woman, Frau C., surprised me somewhat by saying that, during her difficult times during the war, "hilft der Glauben gar nicht. [faith did not help at all]." Communicating her pain through her bent-over body posture and facial
expression of unhappiness, she went on to say that since that time, however, her faith has grown stronger through her experiences in the church. Immediately, several other women jumped in and said that their faith had been helpful, had helped them to get through war experiences, including deaths of family members and the traumas of being refugees. Frau C. continued to look pained; she soon came back into the conversation to say that as she gets older, and sees so many innocent people suffering from terrorism and war, she finds herself again questioning, and "keine Antwort geben [not getting an answer]". But it was when this woman spoke of the suffering of innocent children that the conversation became really animated.

Aber jetzt, je älter ich werde, kommen wir wirklich echt Zweifel auf, wo bleibt Gott und warum müssen die unschuldigen Menschen, vor allem Kinder die koennen doch wirklich nichts dafuer. Also da stehen so viele Fragen bei mir offen....

[But now, as I become older, genuine doubts really do arise. (as to ) where God is, and why the innocent people must (suffer), above all the children who can do nothing about it. And so many questions present themselves to me...]
Before anyone else could speak, I gave the group my permission to voice their doubts publicly by saying, "Das kann ich verstehen. [That I can understand]." The next 10 or 15 minutes were fascinating, as the woman began speaking "durcheinander" [all together] again, with great intensity and interest. Anna, another spiritual-nominee-to-be, said that war is created by human beings, not God. I noticed she was held in high regard and appeared to have a high level of social authority in the group, as seen by the way other women looked at her when she spoke and then quoted her by name. Emma, also interviewed later, participated at length, and said repeatedly that Frau C. had formulated the question incorrectly. This conversation made a great impact on both the women and me. Both the interviews and journal entries to follow refer to this theme, and this specific conversation, repeatedly.

I was very pleased that Karl was there because these women obviously needed some pastoral and theological care as a result of the discussion. Although Karl stayed out of the discussion in order to let the research progress, at the end he made arrangements with the women to meet again soon to continue the discussion. I was impressed with his sensitive handling of both my research needs and their spiritual needs. I was also surprised by how
cohesive the group had become 6, given that this particular group of women had never met together before.

6Cohesiveness is defined as "the desire of group members to remain as members of the group" (Cartwright, 1968, quoted in Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code Word</th>
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Note. Number reflects frequency of times this topic was introduced in the group, not the length of time given to discussion of the topic.
### Table II

**Frequency of Code Words in the German Focus Group**

<table>
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**Note.** Number reflects frequency of times this topic was introduced in the group, not the length of time given to discussion of the topic.
Part Two: The Interviews

The Significance of Faith

The first research question asked in designing this project was, How significant is spirituality in these women's lives as they themselves experience it? As I expected, these women spoke of faith early on and often in the interviews. Although my first question, "What kinds of things have been important to you?" did not ask directly about spiritual faith, it was understandable that the topic would come up early because the women knew that I was a pastor, that my research was about spirituality, and that they had been identified as persons of faith. If counting begins right after my first question to the women, faith or some aspect of their religious life was first mentioned by: Emma, line 77; Inge, line 65; Elizabeth, line 3; Anna, line 73; Lovey, line 8; Miriam, line 13; Martha, line 10; and Rebecca, line 16. The subject continued as the dominate theme of the interviews; at a count of the mentions 214, faith was by far the most frequently coded topic (see Table III, pp. 239-240).

7These codes reflect the fact that in Germany, where one typically behaves more formally in social situations, it took a bit longer to get down to the work of the interviews; thus more light conversation before the women began to talk about their faith lives usually took place.
But examining deeply the significance of faith in their lives is possible only by hearing these women's actual voices. The significance of their faith is best reported through their own words, as they narrate the ways that their spirituality has empowered them, not just to cope, but to triumph, over the many losses and struggles of their lives. Each woman that I came to know in this project presented a faith portrait that is a unique combination of her individual personality, particular talents and abilities, and family and work history; the cultural environment in which she lives; and the events that have most forcefully had an impact on her life. Never boring, the stories the women told me were all so different that any person could find in one woman or another something that resonates with her own spiritual life. But within this rich diversity there can also be heard dominant patterns giving form and continuity to the individual modulations and shifts. Taken together, the stories of faith I heard are similar to a musical composition: there is constant interplay, back and forth, between variation and theme, making the symphony of their combined voices memorable and powerful.
Rebecca: Strength through Prayer and Thought

I'm 93 and I don't know what in the world I'm left here for. I do have a lot more problems than a lot of people have, but I don't have any pain. I don't suffer at all... I feel like I'm lucky. I'm blessed I guess. I still believe in God, I believe in Jesus Christ the Lord. I know he is my Savior, and I'm ready to die. I think! When my time comes.

At 93, Rebecca is the oldest woman in this group, and has the most extensive physical limitations. Not surprisingly, these problems were a frequently mentioned topic of conversation: "They say I broke my hip, I say my hip's way up here, but I broke my leg anyway. I was rushed to the hospital. Then I was recuperating from that and I was in a nursing home and I had a stroke on my left side. So this side is broken and this side's got a stroke on it. So that was in 1992. I've recovered enough so that I can walk with my cane." She is legally blind, partially deaf, moves slowly and uses a walker or cane to get around her cottage. Since 1935, Rebecca lives alone in a small house immediately beside the church. She has attended Glade Creek Lutheran Church since it was built. In my field notes I recorded that several times during the discussion, when she referred to the church, she would nod her head to signify the direction of the church
building, as though its presence was very much a part of her immediate environment. She does not leave her house except for Sunday mornings when her niece and her niece's husband take her to worship.

A housekeeper comes in for a few hours daily to help her with personal care and to do whatever housework is necessary. This woman was just leaving as I arrived, and I noticed that her small daughter, about 6 years old, went up and kissed Rebecca good-bye as they left.

Rebecca spends most of her time in a special chair, beside which she has set up a tape recorder so that she can listen to recordings for the blind. Her house is very humble but is also cheery, clean and orderly.

Rebecca talked to me quietly and with great dignity. My field notes reflect my impression that she is accustomed to being listened to and respected, and, indeed, her pastor described Rebecca as the matriarch of the congregation. I found no traces of arrogance, but I did have the feeling during our conversation that she was prepared to switch roles and become my advisor if need be. At one point she said, "Preachers need strength more so than us ordinary humans I guess. 'Cause you might be tempted to neglect your duty or something." She asked me more questions about my family and personal life than any of the other nominees, even though I explained that it
would be best if we talk about those things later. A religiously conservative woman, she also tried to test me several times on my orthodoxy.

Some people...I've had some pastors to say that the Bible is just like a prayer. I don't believe that. Jan. It's the Word of God, and I think it's true. And I don't care how it sounds to some of these episodes in the Bible. I still believe them. Don't you? Literally?

This impression that she wanted to teach me and was interested in being helpful to me as an faith advisor was collaborated when the pastor told me that, in fact, she has served as his spiritual advisor in the past, during times of crisis and discouragement in his life. As he put it, he would no doubt have left the ministry without her help and encouragement. However, when I insisted on being vague about my own convictions, she came to respect that position and stopped asking me questions.

Rebecca was raised in a religious farm family as one of 11 children. She has been a widow for 10 years. Soon after they married, her husband became paralyzed and was unable to work. "We just lived here and he had a stroke in 1937, which he did not recover from. That was 5 years after we were married. And we raised a little garden here...We canned vegetables and had vegetables to eat
from the garden, all summer long." All through the years of her marriage, Rebecca had triple responsibilities for the house/garden, caring for her husband, and earning a living. She had no children. Most of her relatives are deceased, except for a niece who is now in poor health herself. Rebecca is not hesitant about getting help when she needs it, but she clearly values the fact that she can still live in her own home.

Attending church weekly, reading the Bible, prayer, and the Lutheran sacraments are all important for Rebecca. She quoted the Bible frequently, usually from memory. She spoke more of the Lutheran sacraments and what they meant to her than any other woman, and was the only woman to mention the role of the Holy Spirit in prayer.

Rebecca's physical problems are the biggest challenge in her life. The doctor now has told her she may need more surgery, and she dreads the idea. "I didn't want to have my whole body cut across...I think I'm too old. I believe I've got a good heart. I think my heart could stand it. I don't know. If it gets terribly bad, I may have to. I don't know what I'll do. Maybe I'll die before it gets too bad." And it is precisely these anxieties about health that she takes to God.
He sustains me day after day. I don't have to worry. I'm just like the Bible says, 'The Lord looks after them.' He looks after the birds so why wouldn't he look after people, if you let him...J: So you really have a sense that God is caring for you, don't you. R: Yes, after I do what I have been doing. Jan. Life is no bowl of cherries. You know that.

Church attendance has always been crucial for Rebecca. "I guess outstanding would be the fact that all these years I have always gone to church. Always gone to church...The first Sunday in January of '41 is when we had our first service over here. And then we've been here ever since attending services regularly." Later she said, "I don't think I ever missed...I hardly ever missed going to church unless the weather was really bad."

Rebecca's sense of humor is one of her gifts, and a sign that she can keep life in perspective. Speaking of how she's had so many birthdays, and that some of her friends dread them, she said, "If you don't have birthdays. Miss Jan, you're dead!"

Rebecca told me that as she sits and listens to her tapes, she thinks about life and God and faith. As she ponders, she often works out answers to her own questions with words from the liturgy, prayers, the Apostles' Creed
(she quoted it to me at length), and the Bible. She does not always have answers to her questions, but the real bedrock of her faith is a firm belief that God is in charge of her life, and of human history.

R: The Lord taught us in the Lord's prayer, "thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven". He doesn't say on earth. He says in earth. Did you ever notice that? J: What does that mean to you? R: It means God's will is always done, whether you think so or not. Or whether you believe it or not. It's true.

For Rebecca, ultimately it is God's power, not human belief, that determines human history.

But Rebecca's faith is not only cognitive; she also has a strong sense of God as present daily in her life. "I know He's right here. I know He's always there. It has always seemed like that to me. Even when my husband had a stroke and was laid up for 48 years. I never questioned God and I didn't get bitter like some people."

Prayer is Rebecca's ministry for her church community, now that she can no longer be physically active. Rebecca firmly believes that faith should be put into action, and that Christians should lead moral lives. Although she talks often about evil and temptations, she sees her own life as having been mostly on track, but does not feel
she is anybody special. Like all of these spiritual
nominees, she does not view herself as unusual in any
way. She speaks modestly about her life. "And then we've
been here ever since, attending services regularly. Doing
whatever I could. Trying to live the right kind of life.
Never being anything very outstanding, I would say."

It would be impossible to overestimate how much
Rebecca's faith means to her in everyday life. Blind,
almost deaf, partially paralyzed and with no close living
relatives other than a sick niece, Rebecca considers
herself a "lucky" woman, "blessed" by God. Through her
faith, she has developed an amazing ability to search out
some positive way to view all aspects of her situation,
to accept things she can't control, and to see them as
blessings in disguise. Instead of whining about her
paralysis, for example, she focused on her lack of pain.
"I don't have any pain. I'm very fortunate that way. So,
I guess I'm lucky. " Being childless, she thinks of how a
biological child might not have loved her as much as does
the child of her day-help: "'cause as I said, I never did
have any children. And even if you have children Jan,
they don't love you like an outsider. You've heard how
kids treat their parents haven't you?" Although bad
weather can prevent her from her treasured, and only,
cutside activity, attending worship, she says.
I never questioned God and I didn't get bitter like some people. You don't do that. You don't question the nature of God. You don't. I don't like to fuss about the weather. If it's bad, I just accept it. I don't say I don't like this kind of weather. I hate hail storms and sleet and snow. I wish it wouldn't happen, but I never say that. I never say that.

Through her ministry of prayer, her ability to reframe her experiences positively, her Bible study and theological reflections, and her patience with her many infirmities, Rebecca illustrates how a spirituality can lead to a general resiliency that permeates all aspects of daily life. She may appear to those who do not know her well as a sad, sick old woman living a lonely life, but nothing could be further from the truth. By her own standards, she lives a full life of connections with others and with her God, a life for which she is grateful.

Lovey: Faith as Love and Family

Yeah, if I get down and out and feel bad, I pray. I talk with the Lord and he takes all of that away, you don't have to sit and worry and bother about it. It's just like dying. I don't mind dying, but I don't want to die. I want to live. He made a beautiful earth here for us to live in, and we are
supposed to beautify it. You just think of what all He does. Just look how pretty it is today. I looked out the window and said, "Thank you, God, it is so pretty. You have decorated this whole world and it looks so pretty. It's so beautiful." Looking out those trees are white and their limbs are all white and it was beautiful. I said, "I thank you for it and I love you."

Lovey is 89. and lives alone in the old farm house where she and her deceased husband raised their family. The modest white house is down an isolated country road, about one half mile from the church. We sat in her living room to talk each time, a comfortable room filled with pictures of family: children (2), grandchildren (6), and great-grandchildren (10). In the dining room, the floor was covered with a quilt Lovey has finished sewing and is now assembling. After the interviews, she showed me about 20 other quilts she has made, and we had a Coke in the bright, cozy kitchen that also serves as her sewing room.

Family is the central theme of Lovey's life. She has close, warm and very positive ties with her daughter and son and their families; they live close and stop by almost every day to see her. She says that sometimes they call and say "Get ready!" and then take her on a surprise outing; these trips are obviously the special joy of her
life. Lovey appears to be in excellent health and is very proud of keeping house for herself and of still being able to cook large family meals on holidays.

Like most people her age, Lovey has lost many friends and family members, and their deaths are her saddest memories. "Some [memories] are sad, of course. Mom and Dad, my brothers and sisters, there are only two of us living. There were eight in the family. Just two living now." Her life has had many personal struggles that included early caretaking responsibilities: she was left, when she was just 16, with total responsibility for raising her family of origin.

I had my daddy's brother, an old bachelor, Uncle Bill, just as sweet as he could be. He lived with us so I had to take care of him and my daddy. Two brothers and several little sisters. [one was] near 3 years old, that was in January and mamma died in March...course it was terrible to give your mama up at that time. she was young and so pretty and sweet and everything. You know you have to take the sad with your joys.

Hard work and long hours have been part of Lovey's long life, but she loves doing work and being able to still get around.
Like Rebecca, Lovey is highly respected in her congregation. She appears not to be so much matriarch as saint, a person known for her remarkable powers of faith. Miriam, another spiritual nominee, mentioned Lovey once in conversation with me, and during the focus group, the women listened to her with respect. Pastor Maier mentioned her first when we discussed possible spiritual nominees, saying, "Well, there's no question that Lovey must be on that list. She's remarkable."

Lovey is, indeed, remarkable. She speaks in the simple language of country folks, and uses an almost child-like style of discussing her faith. Although she sees nothing spectacular about herself, she knows she has a gift of faith, and was not at all surprised to be asked to share it with me. She talks comfortably about experiences that other people might consider shocking, or at least unusual, such as her visions. When I mentioned that I would not be using people's actual names in my dissertation, Lovey said, "Oh, I don't mind. Go ahead and use mine if you want to." She understands that her name matches her primary spiritual activity, loving. She talks often about her love for her family, for other people, and for God.

Lovey told me how even as a child she would take her troubles to God, but she does not complain about requests
that were never granted. For example, one of the sorrows of Lovey's life has been that she never learned to read well.

I never could read very well. I was a poor reader and I wanted to read, cause I loved to hear people read and I love to try to read myself, but I never have been able to read in public or out loud. I try to read out loud when nobody is around me and it's kind of stumbling, you know.

As a child, she began to pray, privately, for the ability to read better.

I remember, the house had rock around it and there was a place open that we could put things under the house, maybe the lawnmower or something like that...J: Sort of a secret place. L: Yeah, and I used to crawl back in that hole and pray. I can remember praying when I was a little kid that God would help me to learn to read good so I could read in public. I can read anything and just tell it, but to read it I wasn't much at it.

When her husband died, Lovey's grief was almost unbearable. "I thought I was going to die too, because it looked like my heart was getting bigger and bigger and I thought it was going to burst out of my body." She told me of calling the rescue squad immediately after she found
him sitting in the living room, dead. The emergency worker told her to go to the back yard and wait. It was then that she had her vision of God's presence, an experience still vivid to her today.

I hadn't thought to pray. I don't know why I hadn't thought to pray, so I turned around to go back into the kitchen. When I got to the corner of the table there in the dining room, well it just came over me to pray, and when I said, "Dear Father," he knew, I reckon, what I was going to say, because it looked like the whole house just opened up like that, roof and all. He said to me, "Don't worry, you are in my arms." You know, it all went down, my heart went back to beating like it ought to.

For Lovey, as for Rebecca, God is a very real, daily presence in life. Her only requirement for each day in the future is that God abide with humankind. When I asked her what she thought the world might be like in 50 years, she responded, "I don't know. I hope the Lord stays with us. That he doesn't forsake us and leave us alone, you know. Not be with us. Long as I live I hope He stays. Then I've got children, grandchildren, and I hope He stays with them." She stated directly what mattered to her above all else in life: "The Lord is the most important thing to me. J: Your relationship with the
Lord: L: Yes sir. That's what it is. That's the greatest thing. Nothing else comes above that."

Lovey is, indeed, well named. Her spiritual strength has grown out of her love-based interconnections with family, church family and with God. This strength enables her to live with joy and optimism. It is impossible to be with Lovey without feeling that you would like to go back to her warm home, pull out a chair and sit down for dinner with her extended family. Best of all, to be with her is to be caught up in her vision of the world as the beautiful place that God has made.

Martha: Faith as the Power for Work

Without His [God's] help we couldn't do anything. I know cause I couldn't do what I do...I know He's there. I believe if the devil walked through that door, I don't believe he'd scare me. I never have felt that way. My sister just worries about me out here and she just knows something is going to happen to me. But I never have had that feeling before. Anything would happen, or if it did that was the way it was supposed to be...Gosh no, nobody has enjoyed life more than I have. I've had a good life and I wonder sometimes why it has been as good as it has. Or why I deserved it."
Martha, the only never-married woman in this study, is an unusually independent woman who lives on the farm where she was raised and cares for the crops, the animals, and the buildings with a just little help from her neighbors. Her house was the most isolated of any of the nominees, about 5 minutes down a country lane off the main road leading to the church. Behind the house are other out buildings, including a large barn and a chicken house. Animals are everywhere, including a sheltie dog, 26 chickens, cattle, and a goat. Her sister and her sister's husband live directly across the road, in a newer house. Martha's house was the family home and is very old by American standards. Before her family lived there, it had been a tavern and inn.

Although she admits she fears little, and that she loves to work. Martha would not describe herself as independent or self-sufficient; doing so would be to deny her dependence on God. She quickly corrected me when I implied she was self-sufficient because she grew her own food. She told me firmly, no one is really self-sufficient.

Martha has a very direct, blunt style. She considers her sister a bit of a whiner and says, "You've got to look at the positive side. My sister's like that, she's always got a pain. I could not live like that. I think
that's part of her health problems. You can't be 'anti' everything."
She also has, by far, the best sense of humor of any of the women I interviewed, and most of her jokes are at own expense. For example, she laughs at her own workaholic personality. "I said, well I never sit down to rest unless somebody does come. If anyone would come by and see me sitting out in the field, they would know I was dead!" About pastors, she said, "They talk about preachers that we've had and I said I'm not going to leave because of a preacher because I'll probably outlast him. I have. I've outlasted several."

In addition to her sense of humor, she has many talents, which she recognizes as her gifts, including the ability to manage her farm, to grow incredible house plants, and to do fine handwork, including knitting and cross-stitch. She sees God as the source of her ability to do work and the source of the energy to get things done. Unlike her peers (see American Focus Group Results), she does not consider it bragging to mention these gifts.

I told you that the preacher asked if any of us thought that God had given us some talents, and I was the only one that would speak up. I noticed that Bernice went and got those [the altar clothes she made] to show you. I think that a lot of the things
I do are required as talents. I had Mary ask me things to pick up and repair. I put in new washers. She'll say, what made you think you could fix that? I'll say, well I don't know, but what made me think I couldn't if I didn't try? I'm sure that if God gave us the power in the brain, that gives me the power to figure these things out and do them.

We sat in her living room for the interviews, and I was struck by how simple and spare it looked. No pictures were on the walls and the furniture was a few pieces of antiques, including a beautiful, very old clock and a 200-year-old table. It reminded me of rooms that are reproductions of colonial days, such as those at Williamsburg. Martha is clearly a practical, no nonsense kind of woman who prefers simplicity in life. Her hair is cut short, in a boyish style; she wore sweat pants and a comfortable knit top. But she also loves beauty. After the interview she showed me a side room filled with at least 100 African violet plants, all healthy and blooming, and the hand-smocked dresses she had made for her niece.

Martha dearly loves her dog, Spot, and was eager for me to meet him (however, he did not reciprocate and almost bit me when I leaned to pet him; all research has hazards). After the second interview, Martha, Spot and I
went out onto the front lawn and she showed me proudly how Spot could catch a ball in mid air, like a circus animal. During the interview, she became teary when she said that, if she were to die, the dog might have to be put to sleep.

Martha has grown past the judgmental, frightening God she heard about as a child from relatives. She believes in grace and forgiveness, and expressed her sympathy for several persons accused of crimes. Her aunt told her once that God was in the thunder, and she laughs at herself for her former fears.

I told you, it was the song on Sunday that says that God was slow to anger and all this. Somehow I can't understand. I don't believe that He ever gets angry with us because He see things go on. If He did, He could do away with us right then. He has the power to. J: So its not an angry God you see? M: No, no.

Even though I used to think He was in the thunder!

Faith is very closely tied to work for Martha, and this is a subject about which she feels very deeply. However, her life style is simple and, as she cares for her land and animals or sews for the church, she works not for material reward, but for the glory of God. Anything else, says Martha, would be just plain stupid.
I'll tell you another one [Bible verse] I think about. Verse that says, "work while it's day, for the night comes." J: Tell me what that means to you. M: That I am supposed to stay busy at my own work or at God's work. I think that everything I do is God's work, and it reflects on me, the way I do it and the attitude I have towards my work. I feel like I owe it to God to stay busy every day. Wouldn't it be stupid for me to sit here and do nothing? Wouldn't it?

Faith is the natural energy by which Martha lives her active life and through which she has learned not to fear life or death. She told me that she ends every day sitting on the sofa, with Spot by her side, reading the Bible. She said she does not always understand what she reads in scripture, but she trusts God's good intentions for her above the literal meaning of the words.

I'll have to admit the one part of the Bible I don't understand one bit of it. I don't think. are Revelations and I have just tried not to confuse myself with it. As long as I have faith enough to believe that I will be with God, why should I believe all this stuff about these golden candlesticks and stuff? I don't care, if I'm in my heavenly home, what it's going to be like. Anything
is going to be better than what we had here... Was it
Paul that told us that we saw dimly now? My sight is
certainly dim!

Prayer, too, reassures her before she retires. "I just
feel like when my day comes to an end that I need to be
assured that I will be looked after and cared for another
day, hopefully. But if I don't [live another day], that's
not worrying me either." This close relationship with God
is something she learned as a child.

There was a blessing at every meal. As children we
was taught to say our prayers every night when we
went to bed, mother or daddy or Aunt C. would go
with us to be sure that we did. They didn't say, "Go
on up those steps and go to bed." They went up with
us to see that we were in bed and that we said our
prayers.

The significance of Martha's faith for daily life can
best be understand in visualizing her at the end of her
day, tired but strong and unafraid, as she closes her
Bible and walks upstairs to sleep. Instead of her
parents' presence, she experiences now a spiritual
presence, going with her to see that she is safely in bed
and that she remembers to say her prayers.
Miriam: Growth through Suffering

So we had it pretty hard, but I think with the help that I had, I came through it with a lot of help from everybody, and I knew the Lord was on my side. I've really been a person like that, really, 'cause I've had so much trouble in my life, and I've had a lot of joys. I feel like I've come through it with the help of the Lord.

Miriam is an attractive white headed woman of great enthusiasm and feeling who lives just off the main highway that goes through the town of Glade Creek. Her life has, indeed, been filled with a strong contrast of joys and sorrows, but my first impression, when I met her during the focus group, was: Here is a woman filled with happiness and energy. During the interviews, I discovered the source of her enthusiasm: experiences in Christian community. I learned, however, that there was another side to her story: great sorrow, arising from family tragedies. In fact, when Pastor Maier suggested her name as a spiritual nominee, he said, "Miriam is a woman who has had tremendous suffering in her life."

I visited this nominee three times, and, at her invitation, had lunch with her on the last visit. A widow, like Rebecca and Lovey, she lives alone in a small, white house. She told me that she and Johnny, her
spouse, had "a wonderful life together", but she spoke less frequently of him than of other people during the interviews. They did not have children, because her husband was opposed to the idea of adoption. Miriam's door was decorated for the season (Valentine's Day), and indoors I could see evidence that she enjoys crafts and bright colors. She also likes to be reminded of the many important people in her life. What was unusual in Miriam's living room was not the number of family photos, but the fact that in her case, everyone on every photograph has died. Miriam spoke often but without self-pity of her many family losses. "We've been such a small family and such a close knit family that when they drop one by one, it gets slimmer."

The sorrow side to Miriam's story is one of illness, accidents, losses and deaths. First her brother died in an accident when she was a young adult. Six months later she lost her father; he died in her arms. Then her mother, unable to cope with the losses of both husband and son so close together, collapsed physically and mentally. The newly married Miriam was for several years her mother's caretaker, until her mother recovered and went home. That role, of caretaker to her mother, returned again in later years, when her mother was frail and old. Miriam's husband died, in 1979, her mother died
in 1986. and last year Miriam lost her sister-in-law's second husband, who had become like a surrogate brother.

One of the most difficult periods of Miriam's life came after surgery when she was unable to walk for a time. During this time, her friend and former pastor, Pastor R., was very important to her. He stopped by the house very day to see how she was getting along, prayed with her, and encouraged her in her recovery. Miriam could not say enough positive things about this man and his care. The following example demonstrates how difficult it was, at times during her narrative, to decide whether Miriam was actually talking about Pastor R. or about God. To her, clearly the help and encouragement of the man represented the help of encouragement of God.

I think that was the most that I felt that the Lord was really with me. 'Cause it was almost every day that I could not keep up my faith. I just felt every day that I don't know if I can go another day. He'd come back and say, "Yes, you can!" I'd go another day and I think that's the time I felt the Lord was close to me.

The two greatest challenges for Miriam, who is now the only person from her family remaining alive, are being alone and worrying about who will care for her if her
health fails. Initially, just after her mother's death, being alone in the house was the primary struggle. Now that she has adjusted to that, she wonders what would happen if some of her earlier physical problems return, or if new ones develop. But it is precisely these two chief worries that her faith has most directly addressed. To combat her loneliness, she has, first of all, a Christian community. A church leader for many years, she has served on church council, sung on the choir, taught Sunday School, and participated in the woman's group. The members of Glade Creek Lutheran are now the only family she has, and she is grateful for them.

We've always been interested in this church here. We've made a lot of friends over the years. Some come and go, but I love this church. I love my church friends. I don't know what I'd do without them. J: They are important to you. M: That's right. They really are. They're down there quilting this morning. I wouldn't try it with the way my back is...

But she did have plans, back problems or no, to join a church group that evening who were visiting at a local nursing home.
Another weapon in her armory against worry is Miriam's attitude of gratefulness and her incredible sense of God's daily presence in her life.

Every morning and every night (I pray). A lot of times through the day. If anything happens, I say, "Thank the Good Lord." That's just kind of my byword when it comes to a crisis that happens. You are just really upset about it, but you can still thank the Good Lord for this or for that. I think we can say "Thank you. Lord." anytime during the day when you feel like it. It is a prayer. Anything that I have, you know when I come in and I've been down, the weather's been bad and maybe the roads are slick. I open my door and ask the Lord to take care of me and bring me home safe. I always do things like that. It means a great deal to me. I say, "Thank you" to the Lord for a lot of things that I'm doing, that worked out good. The other day, I said "Thank you, Lord, for getting this [problem] off my mind." I was so glad to get that over with. I didn't know what to do. When things are finished and you think. "Well, I've done a good job," you thank the Lord for getting you through that. "I'm glad I got that behind." J: So it doesn't have to be the most
serious matter in the world? M: No, just anything that I feel. I got through with the Lord's help.

To deal with her other anxiety, being left without a caretaker, she trusts the purposes and plans she believes God has made for her. She remembered how her husband died quietly in his sleep and says that she hopes and prays she may die the same way.

I found him dead in the bed. I hope that will be the way the Lord takes me, but we don't have our druthers. We don't know what's best for us. You wonder sometimes if things will work out like that for you. The Lord knows your circumstances, and He know me and I feel that He'll take care of me.

Looking back over the struggles of her life, she feels that they have served a purpose: her growth in faith.

I used to say, "I know how you feel," but until you've lost something like that and been through a lot of trials and troubles, you really don't know. But, I think it's all a purpose, which I know is true. And I think it hit me, Jan. I think it helped my faith to grow, I really do. J: In what ways? M: Well, I don't know. I fell like when I get up in the morning, I set down and do my reading, and I pray to the Lord for strength for the day, and I feel like He's with me. I can come in and undo my door and I
feel like I'm not myself. I pray every morning
and say, "I know I'm lonely, and I feel like I'm by
myself, but I know you're with me." And I do really
feel like it cause I had never stayed a night by
myself in my life until my mother died.

Being spiritually strong does not prevent problems or
anxieties from arising, as Miriam's life shows. However,
it does mean that even fear does not have the last word.
When this woman unlocks the door of her house and comes
in to spend another evening alone, she realizes her
vulnerabilities: to illness, to loneliness, to fear.
But she has such a strong sense that God is present with
her, making wise and compassionate plans for her future,
that she is able to go on. She not only functions in the
face of her fears and grief, she laughs and works and
plans ways to do good for others. Miriam worries, but
she does not get stuck in her anxieties. She grieves, but
she does not despair. Only spirituality can explain her
resilient life style in the face of these multiple losses
and daily concerns.

Emma: Faith as Reflections and Community

Wissen Sie, manchmal morgens (dass wollte ich Ihnen
noch erzählen), morgens, wenn ich aufwache und der
Wecker klingelt und dann denke ich, "meine Güte,
wie sollst du denn den Tag schaffen." nicht? Also
dass man so irgendwie denkt "wie soll das bloss gehen." Und dann habe ich ein wunderbares Gebet...Also ich finde immer, das Wort ist so hilfreich, dass man--naja, das ist wie eine Quelle, frisches Wasser, was mich trinke, was mich start macht fuer den Tag.

[You know, sometimes in the mornings (I want to tell you about that), in the mornings when I wake up and the alarm clock rings and I think, "My Goodness, how could you manage the day?", you know. And sometimes one thinks, "how will things go?" And then I have a wonderful prayer...I always find that the Word is so helpful, that one, well, it's like a spring, (like) fresh water for me to drink, that makes me strong for the day.]

The second-youngest of the women interviewed for this project, and one of the most articulate, was Emma, who is 68. She has been a widow for 2 years and lives in Wilster with her adult daughter because she has no home of her own; she was left penniless when her husband, an artist, died 2 years ago of cancer. She definitely has mixed feelings about living with her daughter and grandchildren: "Ich habe eben das Glueck, oder Unglueck, weiss ich nicht, sagen wir mal das Glueck habe, mit der Familie meiner Tochter zusammenzuleben [I have the
fortune, or the misfortune, I don't know, we'll say the fortune, to live with the family of my daughter]. She enjoys them yet finds them tiring and misses the peace of having her own home. Karl told me he nominated her because she can articulate her faith, is very sensitive, has survived hard times, is ready to try new things, and values her spiritual life over material possessions. All of these aspects of Emma were confirmed during the interviews. She was, in fact, one of the most spiritually impressive women I have ever met. It was an honor to come to know her, and to learn from her.

Emma was the only spiritual nominee whom I could not interview in her own home. Because of her noisy young grandchildren, we decided it would be best for her to come to me, so we had our discussion upstairs in the private bedroom in which I slept at the parsonage. I met with her three times because I kept hearing new and interesting things: my interview transcriptions from those meetings are the longest in this project.

One of the things I noticed about Emma when I first saw her at church, at meetings, and at the focus group was that she always wore the same pink sweater. Before I knew of her financial situation, I speculated that she was simply unconcerned about her appearance. She did wear a different outfit for the first time on the second
interview with me, but by then I knew that, in contrast to her more affluent friends in the congregation, she simply does not have the money to purchase an extensive wardrobe.

Emma went through a difficult period when she lost her husband. "ein ganz großer Schmerz, natürlich [a great sorrow, naturally]. Her identity had been tied closely with his, and with his work. They lived in a quiet, isolated house in the marshes where he could paint without being disturbed: they had no real friends, and their only acquaintances were customers who bought his paintings. When he died, she felt that her life, too, was over. But her children challenged her to "get a life", and she did: she became active in the local faith community, began attending worship regularly, joined a Bible group, and began calling on elderly house bound members. She now feels that her life is full and that she has actually started over on what she calls her "Weg" [way], a faith pilgrimage. Ironically, her husband's death became her second chance at life.

This change has not been merely emotional for her, because, Emma told me, she is a person who stays level in her emotions, not someone who swings between the "höchsten Höhen ... und dann die tiefsten Tiefen [the highest heights and then the deepest depths]." It was.
instead, an entire life style change. But when she speaks of what it has meant to her, she is, indeed, very moved.

Emma has many memories, and considers how they might relate to her faith; she shared surprisingly intimate thoughts with me, such as her sorrow at her son’s alcoholism, her regrets that her children do not attend church, and the pangs of sorrow she still feels when she sees retired couples together, enjoying more years than she and her husband had. She also has some regrets about her husband’s death, particularly, that they never talked together about their faith, even when he was dying.

[Then, when we noticed it was going that way, he knew it too, he said, "It won't last much longer, then it's past." So he knew that he must die. Then I only asked him if he was afraid. And he said, no, that he wasn't. But I was, I certainly prayed in that last hour.--I was. I was with him as he died, that was wonderful. That much we can say: that was wonderful for me. J: Yes, yes, I believe that. E: That he didn't have to be in the hospital, but was at home--And then I certainly prayed. But, I didn't pray together with him. And that, that's what troubles me.

A person of deep sensitivities and high intelligence, Emma was the evangelist of this group of spiritual nominees; she has both the ability to articulate how she feels, believes, and thinks, and the desire to share her spirituality with others. Whether she talked about her favorite subject, Christian community, her Bible studies, or a special person in the congregation, she was able to express succinctly how her faith relates to the rest of her life. Re-listening to the tapes when I got home, I was struck, too, by the way in which she did not often need time to think before answering my questions, did not
hesitate for more than a moment before speaking. I attribute this ease of expression in large part to the fact that Emma speaks so often about her faith with other people that she has thought things through and found words for her feelings and beliefs. For example, she told me that when she visits an older member who might be in danger of dying soon, she brings up the subject of faith so that he or she will have a chance to deal with this topic. In light of her regrets about her husband's death, this makes perfect sense. Here, again, she gets a second chance.

Speaking of Holy Communion, Emma said,

Wir Deutschen neigen ja oft dazu, das alles zu bitter ernst zu nehmen. Schrecklich, nicht? Aber, nein, dass man mit Freuden hingeh und teilhat am Mahl des Herrn, dass er da und uns sagt, 'Ja, ich bin fuer euch gestorben und ich hab mich fuer euch hingegun,' und dass das eine Freude ist und nicht so--mm. so Schrecklich.

[We Germans are so often inclined to take everything so bitterly and earnestly. Terrible, isn't it? But, no, that one goes there with joy (to communion) and takes part in the Lord's Supper, that He is there

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Karen Carter, my German friend who transcribed most of the German tapes for me, was very impressed with Emma, and reported that her own spiritual life was affected by listening to Edith on tape.
and says to us, "Yes, I have died for you, and I have given myself up for you." and that is a joy and not so. ---mm. so terrible.]

In spite of all she has suffered, Emma radiates a happiness that seems to enliven the room when she is present. She refuses to be pensive and somber, even though she is decidedly pious in the sense that she studies her Bible daily and quotes scripture readily. She feels faith brings joy, and that this must be communicated with others. This impoverished widow has riches that permeate all aspects of her life, including confidence in God’s love and forgiveness, the ability to be nurtured by community, and the discipline to participate in a wide variety of daily spiritual exercises. She is a resilient woman who has not let life come to an end through grief. Rather, her strength and joy grow stronger all the time through daily spiritual devotion, and through her zeal for sharing the gift of faith with others.

Anna: Faith as Connectedness

Ja. eilter man wird. desto mehr sieht man das auch alles so in grossen Zusammenhaengen.

[Yes, the older one becomes, the more one sees that everything is connected.]
Anna was, for me, more than a spiritual nominee; she was a gift. My journal reflects that, in dialogue with her, I had strong emotional reactions that continue to this day. She was more than an inspiration and role model, she was a resolution and a homecoming (see Journal Findings). Apart from my subjective reaction, Anna is unique. Even though I resist thinking in the rather rigid categories of faith stages. I found that when I was with Anna, I kept thinking of Fowler's description of those unusual persons he said were most spiritually mature:

Stage 6 is exceedingly rare. The persons best described by it have generated faith compositions in which their felt sense of an ultimate environment is inclusive of all being. That have become incarnators and actualizers of the spirit of an inclusive and fulfilled human community. They are contagious in the sense that they create zones of liberation from the social, political, economic and ideological shackles we place and endure on human futurity. Living with felt participation in a power that unifies and transforms the world. Universalizers are often experienced as subversive of the structures (including religious structures) by which we sustain our individual and corporate survival, security, and significance. (1981, pp. 200-201).
Whether or not one agrees that human beings can be placed in specific categories of faith, it was clear to me that, even among this group of remarkable women, Anna has a special gift of faith and maturity. In her life, apparent opposites combine with grace: reflection and action, thought and feeling, acceptance of individual responsibility and the ability to confront others, self-confidence and humility, hospitality and social courage, resistance to being pious and deep religious faith. I frequently found myself, in her company and since that time, thinking, "This is precisely what I wish to be like as an older adult."

As noted during my discussion of the focus groups, Anna was held in Hochachtung [high esteem], by the other women who attended the focus group; she said little, but they referred to her brief comments several times during the session, saying "as Frau M. said..." After the group, I was unsure of the names of most of the women I had met, but Selma, the pastor's wife told me a little about Anna's life (not her physical appearance). I was then able to accurately guess who Anna was when I saw her at worship the next Sunday, simply from the way she carried herself. Selma said that Anna was the "grosse Dame", the "great lady" of the parish. She is not at all arrogant.
but her dignity, style, and self-confidence set her apart immediately.

Anna is now 75 years old. At our closing interview, Karl and Selma told me they nominated her as a spiritual nominee because of her faith, her humility (Selma: "She doesn't know what she has."), her long years of church service, and her life of social action on behalf of the poor and weak. She is also concerned about ecology, active in the anti-war movement, and she raised a young boy, an Iranian refugee, in her own home. The first woman to ever be elected as the leader of Wilster, (called the "first lady of Wilster" thereafter) Anna also worked for 12 years as church secretary and was on the church's Vorstand [governing council] for 18 years where, Karl reported, she was "very vocal." When I first met her, I mistook her dignity for aloofness or dislike of Americans, and was afraid she might not agree to be interviewed. (She did not seek me out for conversation as did many of the other women, at worship and coffee hours). To my delight, she consented immediately.

Before arriving at Anna's house for our first conversation, I read an interview with her and several other townspeople in the book 700 Jahre Stadt Wilster [700 Year City Wilster]. When I arrived for the first interview, I found that she had prepared coffee and
cookies for us to share, as did all the German women, and she lit candles before we began.

I was nervous when we began, more than a bit intimidated by this "great lady," but her graciousness and warmth soon put me at ease. As soon as we began talking, it was clear that the war would be a dominant topic. Anna was born the daughter of a craftsman and married into a wealthy family. As a teen, she became enthusiastic about Adolf Hitler and, against her father's and later her father-in-law's warnings, joined the Hitler youth movement. "Im Rueckblick find ich das enorm. Aber da war ich so dumm noch. Da war ich so dumm. ja. Ich habe die Zusammenhaenger nicht gesehen. [In retrospect, I find it enormous. But I was so dumb. Then I was still so dumb. I did not see how things are connected.]" These were times of economic hardship in Wister, and Anna felt that Hitler would improve things and make life more exciting, that the older generation was just being difficult and stubborn. Although her participation was limited to this political stance and allegiance, and she did not take part directly in Hitler's atrocities, she does not attempt to minimize her mistakes during the these years.

Anna's faith has developed as a result of this early history. When her husband returned from the war, and their children grew up and asked questions, she found
that she had to come to grips with her membership in the
Nazi party. She has spent the rest of her life, not so
much focused on guilt, as on making a difference.
Although the regrets are clearly there and always will
be. She has a faith based on "nachdenken" [pensively
reflecting], and making sense of her own story, and then
moving on to trying to prevent a similar horror from
occurring. Anna told her story as a contrast between the
hubris of her youth and her current life in the faith
community. Faith she called her Gelaender, her hand-rail.
She objects to being called pious: "ich bin nicht fromm.
Fromm is so'n bisschen....verstehen Sie, was ich meine.
so sehr ubervoehn. [I'm not pious. Piety is such a
little....do you understand what I mean, so very 'lording
if over'.]", and she mentioned that she does not attend
church every single week. Although she prays and reads a
little book of devotions everyday. she told me she is no
Biblical scholar Instead, she has engaged in life-long
"nachdenken [reflecting], in political action, and in a
general learning process in which she attempts to
integrate her current life in community with her historic
past.

Ich mag, ich lese sehr gerne, leiste mir auch--ich
hab 'ne auskommende Rente--aber ich leiste mir immer
sehr gute Zeitungen. das ist mein Hobby, da reg ich
mich dann auf und ab, ueber die Politik und ueber alles.

[I like. I like to read. I read also—I have an adequate pension—but I always read only good newspapers, that is my hobby, that's how I get excited and then calm myself down. about politics, about everything.]

The quiet, dignified voice I heard from Anna was, at times, intense and dramatic, as she related how she had to risk offending others in Wilster because she believes that the church and its people are not always sufficiently involved in justice issues, especially in ecology, peace and anti-poverty work. From the Greenpeace sticker on her front door to the piles of books and newspapers in her small house, it was clear that Anna keeps herself well informed and busily involved in justice issues. Now a Social Democrat, her local political participation has led her to feel that she must work for justice not only in Wilster, which she calls her "kleine Welt" [little world], but throughout Europe and the globe. "Ich bin ja ein bisschen—nerv, ja." [I'm a bit—nervey, yes], she says of herself. A particular point of passion is her insistence that Germans take responsibility for World War II and the holocaust: this is not a stance that tends to make one very popular in a
town where, as Karl told me, the personal biographies
given to him before funerals tend to have a typical gap:
the twelve Nazi years. Nevertheless, Anna has taken a
strong stand in Wilster. When the editors of a local
history (jubilee) book, *Wilster 700 Jahre* wanted to
ignore the Nazi era, she was outraged.

> Da hatte sie zwei Jahre gearbeitet, nur fuer dieses
> Historische Buch, nicht? Und hatte sie nichts die 12
> Jahre, kein, nichts auf dem Papier.

[They had worked on only the historic book two
years, you see. And they had nothings (about) those
12 years, nothing, nothing on paper.]

From her position in the church office, Anna told the
young woman writing the book (who was seeking some
documents from her), "Dann kann sie das Buch ja gleich
behalten! Dann brauchen sie es gar nicht drucken zu
lassen, nicht? [She could just keep her book! She did
not need to have it published, no?]" The young woman
finally agreed to include the Nazi era if Anna would give
her a list of older people who might talk about Wilster
during those years. Anna prepared a list: most people
refused. However, a small group did meet for extensive
interviews, including Anna. She paid a personal price
for her stance, because she found the interview process
"wahnsinnig anstrengend" [madly exhausting]. But, she
insists repeatedly. "Man muss ja. Damit sich das nie wieder ereignet, muss man sprechen. [One must do that. In order for it not to happen again, one must speak.]" And so Anna continues to risk speaking out about the war and the holocaust, even risking a breach of another one of her values. "Gastfreundschaft" [hospitality]. She told me of some tensions she felt when other women came to call on her socially and they refused to talk about the Nazi period.

(Ich) will ja natürlich auch die Gastfreundschaft nicht missbrauchen. Aber ich bin nicht der Meinung, dass man das ablegen kann. Ich bin nicht der Meinung, als ob man so tun kann, als ob das nur 'n Unfall war, oder so. Ich bin der Meinung, man muss der Sache ins Auge sehen und man muss darüber sprechen, damit sich das nicht wiederholt, nicht? Aber das sind viele meiner guten Bekannte, die ich auch sehr schätze, die lieben das nicht sehr, die mochten das auch nicht so gern. J: Sind sie böse mit Ihnen deswegen? Anna: Nein, die kennen das mit mir schon. Die verzeihen mir.

[Naturally I don't wish to abuse hospitality. But I'm not of a mind that one can lay this aside. I'm not of the mind, that one can act as though it were all only an accident, or something. I'm of the mind
that one must keep these things in view, and must speak about it, so that it cannot be repeated.
right? But, there are many of my good acquaintances, whom I value, and they don't like this much, this doesn't please them at all. J: Are they angry with you about it? No, they know this about me already.
They excuse me.

Anna's spirituality-in-action, as it intersects with history and with her own life story, is an excellent example of what Payne described as spiritual maturity. Self-identity and life purpose are not assumed to come with biological birth but rather to have evolved out of relationships with others and society in a specific period of history with its unique sets of events, values and norms. It is out of such interaction that self-identity, values and meaning emerge. Spiritual maturity, then, as it is used in sociological context, would relate to the development of self-identity and purpose in later life as a consequence of the meanings of past and present relationships. (1990, p.29). She is, indeed, an "evolving" human being whose interactions with history have taught her the importance of Christian faith and community. Her ambiguous personal history has convinced her that a life of honest reflection and political action is preferable to a life of denial and passivity.
Inge: The Joy of Living


[When I was 70 years old. I invited 65 people here into the parish house, with food and drinks, with music and dancing. It was very, very wonderful. I can dance the whole night. I never get tired. I don't need to eat, I don't need to drink.]

Even before hearing her incredible story, filled with so much suffering, one feels amazed by the joy and enthusiasm that characterize Inge's life. At age 74, Inge has been the "Kusterin" [sexton] of the St. Bartholamaus for the past 5 years. She also works part-time as a fashion model. She has such a busy schedule that I had to make special arrangements to interview her before she left on her (down-hill) skiing vacation (cross country skiing, she says, is too boring). But Inge was nominated not because of her energy for recreational activities but because most of her energy is used for purposes of building up the Christian community and sharing her special joy with others.
Inge was the first woman I met in Wilster outside of the pastor's wife, and that was not a coincidence, because she is always the first to arrive at church functions and the last to leave. Not only does she enjoy the fellowship, but she stays busy making setting things up, moving chairs, cooking, and lighting the ever-present candles. She greets people on Sunday mornings, collects the offering, arranges flowers, sets up for coffee hours, puts out the hymn books, brings older members to the Senior club when they need a ride, and says frequently, "This is my family. This I do gladly." A few of these tasks fall into her job description, but most are done "above and beyond the call of duty", simply because she enjoys doing them.

Inge was nominated quite naturally by Karl and Selma, not only because she is close to them personally, but also because they consider her remarkable. She has had dramatic suffering in her life but has not become bitter. Also, although she has always had faith, only recently has she become highly involved in the Christian community. Now, her entire life centers around the church, even to the point of staying in Wilster over Christmas rather than visiting her daughter, so that she could be present for the special services. Light as a butterfly and just as colorful, Inge typical dress is
something like purple slacks, a pink top, a bright scarf and jogging shoes. She smiles frequently, and stopped by the day she left for her ski trip to say good-bye to me and to bring me flowers. She is one of those people about whom others say, "Doesn't she just brighten your day?"

But many of Inge's own days have been far from bright. When I went to her home to interview her, I already knew from the focus group that she lost a son in the war, but I did not know the details. During the three times I met with her in her home, she became so teary in telling me the struggles she's had that I kept the interviews shorter than usual, just over an hour. Here is Inge's simple narrative, in her voice, quoted in full because it is so central to her faith story, of her greatest sorrow, the death of her baby:


[We had never had sorrows....always much sunshine. ...Then (we) were at war, 1942. Then began the sorrows. My husband was, during all the years, in Russia and —in France and Russia, until the end. Then I bore a child, in 1943, and then left as a
refugee in flight. That was a very hard time. From Hinterpommern. I was born in Stettin and was evacuated to Hinterpommern with my child because I couldn't hold out any more. with the daily bombing. I was mentally fully ready. I was there from '44 to '45. And the Russians were only 4 kilometers from the place. It was night, and I was fleeing in a loaded wagon. LKW, open, without a cover, totally filled with many people, all together. We had head lice; it was a very bad time. J: How old was the child then? I: Two years old. That child had a lot to go through. He was never completely dry, and one couldn't clean him up, and he was sick, and in April he died. J: I'm so terribly sorry. I: Yes. (pause). And then came something that one can't believe, can't grasp. My child had not been baptized yet because my husband was in the war, and then I went to the pastor there, where I was --I didn't know anyone-- and asked him to bury my child. And he refused, because the child wasn't baptized.] It may seem difficult to juxtapose this story with my picture of the present Inge, a person who dances and parties with her friends, and so loves her church that she behaves with consistent joy and enthusiasm. At the very least, it would seem understandable after that
pastor’s outrageous behavior that she would never go near a Lutheran church again. That was, in fact, her husband’s response, but Inge said she refused to judge the entire church by the actions of one person. 

Unfortunately, Inge’s many difficulties did not end with this episode. Her husband became an alcoholic who left her to try to manage children alone, take over their jewelry store, worry about finances, and, in short, assume all family and work responsibilities. She told of nursing her child, then rushing down to wait on customers, then rushing back to check on the baby. After her husband’s death, her son became a drifter who constantly took her money and now refuses to see her. Since her adult years were so difficult, Inge still thinks most fondly of her childhood years: although some time ago, the deaths of her grandparents and parents are still difficult today for her to speak without tears. This woman has known enough "Sorgen" [sorrows] to lead her to understandable bitterness, the very opposite of what she has become. "Aber ich hab auch immer trotz allem immer positiv zum Leben gestanden." [But I’ve have, in spite of it all, remained positive towards life]. Her positive attitude toward life, she told me, come from her trust in God, the special relationship she has with the pastor and his wife, and the love she gives and receives

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in her church family. "Ich hab einfach das Vertrauen zu Gott. und Er soll es auch richtig machen. [I simply have trust in God, that He shall make everything right.]

Simple trust is her antidote for the complexities of many deep pains.

Elizabeth: Faith and Personal Peace

Mein Hoffnung ist Herr Jesus Christ/Wenn alles droht zu wanken,/wenn meine Kraft zu Ende ist./Dann will ich Ihm noch danken./Das Alter naht, mein Leib zerfaselt/Ich kann so schwer verschmerzen./Doch wiss ich, was mich ewig hält:/Die Hoffnung in mein'ren Herzen!

[My hope is the Lord Jesus Christ/when all else threatens to waver,/when my power is at an end/then I will still thank him./Old age approaches, my body decays/I can suffer so hard/but still I know what I must hold onto forever/the hope in my heart!]


Elizabeth, at 65, was the youngest spiritual nominee in this study. She sat beside me at the focus group and spoke at length, in a carefully worded, sensitive response to Frau C. and to the doubts that woman expressed about suffering and the God of love. She was able to testify to her own faith without appearing
arrogant or judgmental; I was impressed immediately with her quiet confidence, and by what she shared.

After the focus group, Karl suggested that I speak first with Elizabeth, since we were in agreement about her as an appropriate woman for my interviews. Elizabeth, he told me, has a kind of evangelical piety. She participates very regularly in many aspects of church life, and has since her childhood. She articulates her faith well, and is open to new ideas. She’s progressive politically and takes the initiative in meeting other people’s needs. Her poetry is an indication also that she is a deeply spiritual person. In the past she has served not only as a lector in church but has had total responsibility for the service on at least one occasion when the pastor was out of town.

Elizabeth grew up in Wilster, the daughter in a working class family with definite gender ideas when it came to education. She explained to me why she had never been formally educated or learned to speak English, a fact that seemed to embarrass her.


[Yes. I entered school in 1933, just as Hitler came to power. My father was a worker. In the shipping works, Blom and Voss, in Hamburg. And we didn't have much money, no one could be sent to school. My oldest brother received a free place. And it seemed it was practically given to him. A stipend. He fell in Russia. He had been sent to Russia at 18. And so we in the technical school, we weren't instructed in English. For the common people, that was not permitted.]

Elizabeth was an ideal person for my first German interview: she was gentle, kind and patient with my poor pronunciation, putting me completely at ease. I found myself able to follow her German without difficulty. Most importantly, she was clearly precisely the spiritually resilient woman I wanted to meet. When I discovered that she had written much poetry about her faith, and was happy to share it with me, that became an extra bonus to my choosing her.
Elizabeth is the only woman in this study whose husband is still living. Her spouse, a former school master, is partially disabled and remained in his bedroom until after the last visit, when he came out briefly as I was leaving and met me. In dramatic contrast to Elizabeth, he immediately corrected my pronunciation: I felt like I'd been scolded in school, and Elizabeth looked embarrassed.

Throughout the interviews, Elizabeth spoke very softly, almost in a secretive tone, as though she were not wanting to be overhead. At one point, she told me a special secret, and specifically requested that I not include it in this report. My impression was that, although she may not actually fear him, she is somewhat intimidated by her husband, and is accustomed to keeping much of her life separate from their life together. As I discovered in the interviews, he no longer attends church, but Elizabeth feels she may be responsible for that, because at one time she was so busy and over involved with church activities that he became disgusted with the whole topic. However, she does not hesitate to invite friends from the church community into her home regularly, and he apparently does not object to that.

Elizabeth's faith is reflected in her writings, and rooted in her love of nature and her strong appreciation
for Christian community, the aspect of her faith life that she identified as most important. Of all the women I met, she was most enthusiastic about nature, and most specific about how her faith is often a thankful response to the beauties of the created world. Even though it was winter, it was obvious that the garden around her small house was cared for lovingly. Bird feeders hung by the windows, and at one point we were "interrupted" by the arrival of a beautiful small bird that resembled a humming bird. She belongs to clubs with other gardeners and plant lovers, and collect stones on her many "Urlaub" [vacations], most of which appear to be spent walking outdoors. Her precious stones are kept in a display case, and she brought them out to show me. One of the poems she gave me was typed on the back of a picture of her garden in bloom, and on my last days in Wilster, she arrived at the parsonage with flowers and another short poem as a farewell. Elizabeth is a warm, giving woman who, more than anything else, radiates a deep spiritual peace, a peace that apparently grows from her strong relationship to both the natural world and to her friends in the Christian family.

Elizabeth has suffered physical problems, as the poem above implies; she has had hip surgery. She anticipates, at 65, more problems to come, and watches as her older
husband rapidly declines. Here, too, she uses her faith, often expressed in poetry, to solidify and strengthen the confidence, the "Hoffnung" [hope] she already feels. She told me that when she writes a poem, the faith that she expresses becomes more certain for her in the writing. Sometimes it is not even until she writes down her thoughts and feelings that she can really know what they are. Writing is the medium, then, for Elizabeth's spiritual growth. She does not, however, use this gift for only personal purposes, but shares it with the whole community.

The Importance of Community

J: Welche Sachen sind ihnen am Wichtigsten, weil sie christlich sind? Elizabeth: Gemeinschaft mit anderen. [J: What things are most important to you because you are Christian? Elizabeth: Community with others.]

Reading, rereading and coding the data confirmed the importance of a category of spirituality I had noticed repeatedly during the interviews: Christian community. Not only did the women speak of community as important directly, but this category, coded at 76 points, was also implicitly present in the interviews in both countries, third in importance after "Faith" and "Affect" (see Table III, pp. 239-240). Elizabeth called Gemeinschaft
[community] "am Wichtigsten" [the most important] aspect of her life as a Christian: for Anna it was the results of maturity, the opposite of the isolated idealism and foolishness of her youth. I heard Rebecca's voice say that community is the place where the truth is not only preached but preserved, and Lovey spoke of a firmly based community where people are joined in love. For all eight spiritual nominees, the faith community was integral to their spirituality and a vital component of their general resiliency: they consider it to be an essential aspect of their spiritual lives, not an alternative choice for religious practice.

The term "community" as used here most typically refers to members of the women's congregations (St. Bartholamaus, Wilster and Glade Creek Lutheran, Glade Creek), but in traditional Lutheran understanding, and as used by these women, the term is not tied exclusively to local groups, but includes all Christians, across denominations and across the globe, living and dead. Christian community, therefore, is both symbolic and actual, an everyday reality but also an intangible concept.

Since community is seldom emphasized as an important aspect of spirituality in the literature, its strong presence here is of particular interest. The interviews
are filled with so many references to community and to its importance in these women's lives that a separate dissertation could be written on resiliency and spiritual community. Examples given here are representative, but by no means exhaustive.

Community and the Gift of Other People

Community is, on its most basic level, the daily environment in which these women make friends. "Ich habe nie Langeweile." [I'm never bored] reports Inge, whose entire life centers around her church and its members. One of the most obvious contributions made by community to the life quality of these women is the social structure it gives their lives. For Inge, who loves fun and being with people, it is an endless source of happiness and support.


[I am always happy if I can be in church. And, too, I have many friends and many invitations and I also invite many people to (visit) me.]

But brothers and sisters (as Elizabeth and Lovey call them) in the faith community provide far more for these women than companionship and friendship. They are also
resources for spiritual and practical assistance, teachers, role models, surrogate family members, connections to those who have died, and inspirations for the women's future faith development. Collectively, these special people in the Christian family become greater than the sum of the relational parts. They take on a larger, symbolic importance. They are not merely individual persons with whom one has relationships; they are, in the language of Christianity, "die Gemeinschaft der Heiligen" [the Community of Saints.]

Emma and Elizabeth both told stories of asking for and receiving assistance with matters of faith from other members of their community. Emma asked one special person in her church to speak with her children and grandchildren about faith issues, hoping that he might be able to do what she has not managed: bring them back into church participation. Elizabeth tells how she went to visit a younger woman for help during a period of doubt and depression.

For Miriam, Martha and Rebecca, who had no children of their own, the children who are part of their religious community are a special joy. Says Miriam, "You have to know the families. Of course I knew all the kids from teaching Sunday School, so I got to know their parents a
lot better. I just enjoy it. I enjoy the circles. I hardly ever miss."

Pastors, both present and past, have become important people in the community for these women, to varying degrees. I coded the number of times they spoke of their pastors. and found a surprisingly high score of 56 (see Table III, pp. 239-240). However, even though the pastors may be, both symbolically and realistically, important for the leadership and inspiration they provide, these women are quite capable of carrying on without them. In fact, the women reported that many of their most important spiritual experiences occurred at times when the pastor was not present. Said Emma, for whom Bible reading and study is a very important part of her spiritual growth. "Pastor Steenbuck predigt ja wunderbar, und man nimmt immer was mit nach Hause. [Pastor Steenbuck preaches wonderfully indeed, and one always takes something home with oneself]" But she goes on to tell me that in her Bible study, where the pastor seldom visits, the free exchange of ideas has been especially helpful to her.

Während wenn Sie ueber einen Text mit anderen reden. kriegen Sie ja irgendwie, dadurch dass man eben was fragen kann oder jemand anders sagt, "ich seh das so." oder irgendwie.
[If you read over the text with others, and struggle somehow, through that, one can somehow ask someone (about something) or say to someone, "I see it that way".]

Christian community does not end at the grave for these women. Lovey pictures heaven as one big family reunion. She is primarily connected to Christians, living and dead, through love, not blood.

J: What way do you feel connected to them (those who have died)? L: Well, I don't know, just the love you have for them I guess. Because you have love for your parents, you know how you have love them, well, they have love the same way. Your grandparents and all, they mean so much to you. They do to me....J: How about people that you're not related to, that you know in the church? L: They're the same way. People that I remember, now B. D. just passed away...well, I knew them too and they seemed close to me. Just like I told a girl yesterday on the bus. I said you all just feel like my sisters. I'm still close to every one of you and love all of you.

For the America woman in Virginia, being Lutheran is to be in a minority group, and Christian community
includes those outside their denomination. Martha, for example, speaks of her Brethren neighbors.

I've had neighbors, the R's, now they belong to the Brethren church. There were two old maids, and an old bachelor, for us children that was like going to grandma's house, to go visit those folks.

One of her non-Lutheran neighbors became like an extra parent.

J: (referring to a special aunt) It's like you had three parents, isn't it? M: It really was, and really we had a fourth one. There was an old black woman in the neighborhood. She came to help mother when I was a baby. S. would have gone through fire for any of us. She was a good old woman. She had a stroke in church and they came for my mother when it happened, because we had just gotten in from church. S was a good old women.

Lovey's memory was focused on denominational cooperation to an almost humorous extent when she talked about the people she gets together with now in a senior's club, and about her interdenominational church as a child.

We have some wonderful times. We have people from the Brethren church, from the Baptist church, from the Lutheran church. When I was young, we were in a
Union church and the Lutherans had the first Sunday. Baptists had the second Sunday, the Brethren had the third Sunday, and the Methodists had the fourth Sunday. I think I'm wrong there. I think the Methodists had the first Sunday. J: You had lots of denominations there. L: Yeah, and then on the fifth Sunday, everybody could have that day.

The "special people" in these women's faith communities extend beyond the immediate locality to include the writers, teachers and pastors they have read and heard about. Sometimes these other persons serve as standards of and inspiration for faith and spiritual growth. Emma, for example, likes to read Christian biographies; she has read Paul Gerhard, Martin Luther, a Pr. Busch, whom she says is a young pastor-missionary. She compares herself and her faith unfavorably to their own and realizes she still has a long way to go on her "Weg" [way].

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has a very special place among the German women as an inspiration. Remarkably, all four of the women brought out and showed me the same prayer written in prison by that German pastor, composed while

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9"Union" refers to a practice to combine two or more denominations in one church building, with shared use of the facilities.
10"Had" means that they were able to use the building for their worship service that day.
he awaited execution by the Nazis: He had participated in an unsuccessful plot to take Hitler's life. My journal reflects that this prayer by Bonhoeffer, who has been a hero of mine since my adolescence, is now a treasured part of my own spiritual life. For me, in addition to its comforting religious meaning, it is also a reminder of the warm acceptance into Christian community I experienced in Wilster, of Anna and her struggles in particular, and also of the strength and courage I found in all the women I met and came to know in both countries. The long, emotional but comfortable pause that followed Anna's reading of this prayer aloud just after she had shared her painful war memories, was by far the most unforgettable moment I knew in Germany.

Von guten Mächten wunderbar geborgen, erwarten wir getrost, was kommen mag. Gott ist bei uns am Abend und am Morgen und ganz gewiss an jedem neuen Tag. [Wonderfully confident through a benevolent power, we await with confidence what may come. God is with us, in evening and in morning and entirely certain on each new day.]

Community and Love

Emma explained to me that community is based on the second part of Jesus' new commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Echoing Lovey, she said that
for her, the very basis of community is love itself. "da
ist wirklich eingentlich der Verbindung die Liebe, die
Liebe Jesu zu uns und wir untereinander. [that is really,
actually, the bounds of love, the love of Jesus for us
and we for one another.]
"
The voices of these women showed that, for them, this
love is not only emotion but then is put into action.
Love in their communities is by and for them: they are
able to both give and take love from others. Miriam works
to send quilts to Lutheran World Relief: she is proud
that her little group made eight quilts last year. "I've
got one in here I just hemmed last week. I brought one of
them home to hem. I should have sent it down there but I
didn't. We save them up and give them to people who are
in need." Or she visits church members who are in a
nearby nursing home.

For Lovey, love both for individuals and for the
community as a whole may mean just the opposite of being
active at times. She has learned to step aside at times
and let younger members of the community have a chance.

Yes and I think that's a good thing 'cause the
young ones have to carry on later. They're always
going away. J: When you say you dropped out of some
of the groups, do you still feel like you're a part
of things at the church? L: Oh, yes, I still feel
close. Of course if they need me I'm there. J: So you are kind of waiting to be asked? L: Uh, huh. Well, not exactly that, but you know, it does, there's a lot of people there and there's a lot that can take part, and as long as somebody else will take the part they won't do it. That's the way the young ones feel. They don't want to root the old ones out, and if you kind of step aside they can go in there and be satisfied.

Although Rebecca is now home bound and seldom moves from her special chair except for Sunday mornings, she also finds a way to put her love into action: she is bound to the faith community by the prayers she makes for them.

Well, lately I've had a lot of people in trouble in our congregation. Some died and some have been real sick. So you have to pray for everybody, everyday. You don't just pray one time and quit. You pray for your family. You pray for the overall church. You pray for the seminaries that they'll turn out men and women that will spread the gospel light.

Several times during our interviews she mentioned members who were ill or who had recently experienced deaths in their families, and each time she very naturally followed by saying that she was busy praying.
for them. "Two of our church members lost their wives. Mr. W. and Mr. P. I have to pray for them, that the Lord will sustain them and help them." Rebecca believes that God's Spirit assists her in her prayer life, and heal others in the community. "I hope the Holy Spirit will help me to say and do the right things all the times. You can't do it without the Holy Spirit....I pray for the ones that are real ill and need special prayers. I pray that the Holy Spirit will take over and help."

These women do not have high levels of ego or pride that might prevent them from being on the receiving end of the community's love. Most remarkable was Emma, who told me of two acts of love toward her by members of her church. One was a gift of money, enabling her to pay tuition for a church retreat she wanted very much to attend. The other she asked me to keep secret; it consisted of a direct gift to meet a life necessity. Emma's theology allowed her to accept the gifts graciously, and enabled her to rejoice at them and to interpret them as coming from God through the community. Speaking of the money she received to attend the retreat she said, "Und dann hat die (die Freundin) mir das geschenkt! Und das ist doch wieder ein Gottesgeschenk. [And then she (the friend) sent me that! And that was indeed a gift from God.]"
But Emma is not always on the receiving end; she is constantly visiting others, especially shut-ins. With them she shares her time, her company and also speaks of her faith. One very special person for her is Frau A., who first invited Emma to attend the Bible study group. Emma reported that Frau A. taught her about prayer, namely that "es wirklich Gemeinschaft bring [it really creates community."

Now Frau A. is sick and house bound, so Emma visits her weekly. Yet Frau A. continues to teach Emma and encourage her spiritual resiliency though example. They have a mutual give and take relationship. Emma explains that she had been worried that Frau A. might die alone, but Frau A. has assured her "ich bin nicht allein. Jesus ist da." [I'm not alone. Jesus is there] Now, because of what she has learned from this role model, Emma herself can cope with the most serious challenge of her own recent life: feeling alone "weil eben mein Mann nicht mehr da ist [since my husband is no longer there."

Community love in action can be very mundane and every day, but none the less, it is appreciated. There are times when having someone from the community just to screw in a light bulb may be a definite advantage, and these women are glad for that kind of direct help. Inge told me about a recent phone conversation in which her
daughter teased her about always being able to find "einem Dummen" [a dummy] from her community to fix anything that may be "kaput" [broken]. But, says Inge, sometimes it takes more than single strength to do the job, so she does not even try to solve all problems herself. "sondern nur aus, aus dem Kontakt mit dem anderen heraus. Dann sagt mann nicht nein. [Rather only, only out of contact with others around here (do I get things fixed). And they don't say no.]"

**Community, Affirmation and Self Identity**

Maintaining a positive self-image is often a challenge for elderly persons, but for these spiritual nominees, it is greatly facilitated by their life in community. They frequently experience warm acceptance and affirmation by their friends in the church family, positive feedback that can then be internalized as part of their self-identity. The American focus group demonstrated this capacity for community life. In the interviews, too, this theme emerged. For example, Inge related how one member of the Church family expressed her appreciation for Inge's many contributions to the community at Christmas time.

Zu Weihnachten bekam ich von einer Kirchgaengerin in ein Paechchen mit einem ganz lieben Brief und sie
bedankte sich fuer meine herzliche und freundliche
Art allen in der Kirche gegenueber.
[At Christmas I received a package and a dear letter
from a Church member, and she thanked me for my
gracious and friendly style towards everyone in the
church.]

For Elizabeth, the community is the place where she is
able to combine her love of writing poetry with her faith
and to be recognized for both these gifts. At times, she
very directly spoke of her self-identity, for example,
the way a retreat experience assisted her in forming her
idea of who she is.

Wir haben uns, zum Beispiel, bei stillen Tage,
Zinkehrtagen nennen wir das, ein Thema gestellt:
"We bin ich?" Und wir haben begonnen, alle
Teilnehmerinnen—es waren auch seltene, aber auch in
Mittelalter—und dann habe wir alle so unsere Hand
auf Papier auf dem Boden so ausbreiteten, und haben
den Umriss gemalt, und haben den Name rein
geschrieben. Es war also so der Einstieg. Und haben
dann gesagt, 'also was haben wir heute so gemacht?
Was hat meine Hand getan?
[For example, we have, during a quiet day, a time of
pausing, taken the topic, "Who am I?" And we have
begun, all participants—it was old people and some
in middle age—and then we all took paper in hand
and, on the floor, got prepared, and we marked an
outline (of our hand) and merely wrote our name, and
that was also like an entry. And then we said, "what
have we done today? What has my hand accomplished?

Their experience in community is one of safety and
acceptance. Emma says she feels confident sharing some of
her intimate experiences with sisters and brothers in the
faith, who understand her better than her own family, and
who will listen to her, keep her secrets, and not look
down on her.

Dass ich weiss, da ist es gut aufgehoben, dass sie
das nicht weitererzählen, da wird nicht komisch die
Nase gerumtept. "ach, was ist das denn fur Eine,
oder so, nicht?

[Since I know that it (her thought) is well heard,
that they won't repeat it, that they won't turn up
their nose mockingly, and say, "Oh, what kind of a
person is that" or something like that, you see.]

Community and Life Style

The spiritual nominees believe that the mature life
includes a place for social justice and peace. Several of
the women in these interviews mentioned the importance to
them of living a simple, non materialistic life. None of
them appeared to be wealthy, and none expressed desire
for more material advantages than they had. In their
religious communities they are not required to make great
financial contributions or to dress in a certain style
[attire for worship in both communities ranged from very
casual (blue jeans) to more formal (suits and jackets)].
This is particularly important for Emma, who was left in
poverty when her husband died.

Inge describes the difference between having
things and being happy without things, if one is a member
of the community, and lives with special people.

Ich koennte mir vorstellen, ein einfaches Leben zu
fuehren. Mit gute Menschen zusammen, das koennt ich
mir gut vorstellen.

[I can envision leading the simple life. Together
with good people, I can well envision that.]

She expresses disgust with the materialism she sees
around her in German society.

Es ist doch so schrecklich, dass in der heutigen
Zeit, einer will immer mehr als der andere. Ich hab
klein Auto, der muss ein grosses, und das noch
grosser, also furchtbar, furchtbar. Die fressen
sich damit auf die Leute, die haben ja keine Ruhe.
Die muessen ja immer mehr, immer mehr. Und das finde
ich ist ein sehr grosser Nachteil in der heutigen
Zeit.
[It's so terrible, that in today's times, one always wants to have more than the next (one). I have a little car. (but) they must have a large one, still larger. it's frightful. frightful. People fret themselves over it: they have no peace. They must forever have more, always more. And that I find to be a great disadvantage in today's time.]  

Faith for these women very definitely includes working for justice and peace. Emma does not feel that she has done enough for world justice "Aber, also da hab ich in der Richtung noch gar nicht viel gemacht. [However, I really haven't done much in that direction.]" But she feels that she works harder for justice in her local community, and says she believes justice must begin there. Across the ocean, Martha would agree that justice begins at home. With her typical, blunt style, she told me how she has taken the role of peace maker in a fight between two neighbors.

Well. I think you try to feel right with everybody you have contact with. I think it [faith] effects your communications with others people. I had two neighbors up here that were at each others' throats all the time. I'm friendly with both of them, and I told them both that what they were arguing over wasn't worth neither one of them going to hell. They
wouldn't believe me...I can't do a thing with either one of them, and they are fussing over a little strip of land about the width of this living room floor. I really do. I think that the way we live should be an example for other people.

Anna's involvement in justice issues was the most extensive and reflective. Her community is the church, but also the world, and the risks she takes to work for justice are both personal and political "vorher...bin ich schon bisschen politisch tæstig geworden. Da bin ich also in Kommunal politick gegengen. [previously...I've been a bit politically active. Then I also entered into community politics.]" Her primary convictions that the helpless must be helped, the mistakes of the past must not be repeated, and the coming generations must have peace and a healthy environment, are at the base of her spiritual vision. The word she uses often, "Zusammenhaengen" [the connectedness], reflects this dream. Her vision is one of human unity that only the most spiritually mature person can keep constantly in focus. Anna understands not only love, but unconditional love, agape: she now recognizes that freedom (her dangerous choice as a young woman) must be tempered with will, duty, and concern for others (Hillery, 1992).
Community and Religious Symbols

The women in this study participated in a dimension less obvious than the good company, self-esteem support, concerns for social justice, and humble life style mentioned above. Juxtaposed to their positive experiences in relationships with other persons were also the strength and the power they discovered through the religious symbolism of the community. The two Lutheran sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion, are important parts of that symbolic life, and in addition, two unexpected symbols were found: the lighting of candles (for the German women) and the church building itself (for both the German and the American women).

On every home visit I made for an interview in Germany, the first thing the women did after my arrival was to light candles. In the parsonage where I lived, candles were also lit for coffee time, and they burned on every table at the coffee hour that followed Gottesdienst [worship]. Even Vorstand [Church council meetings] were conducted by candle light. My view of this act changed from seeing it as mere a simple cultural tradition (popular throughout Germany) to realizing that, for this community in Wilster, it was also part of a larger symbolic framework. This realization came after hearing several of the women talk about light in their spiritual lives. The Biblical book of John calls God the "light of
the world," and for the spiritual nominees, the simple act of lighting a candle served as a way to acknowledge God's presence in their homes, group meetings and lives. Lighting the candles on the table before us during my second visit with her, Elizabeth told me why the lighting of candles had become so important for her. During a time of spiritual struggle, she visited a young woman from her community (described above). Emma was crying when she arrived at the woman's house, and the woman acted symbolically, without speaking a word.


[She took a candle and lit it and simply put it down before me. Between us. Then suddenly I stopped my wailing. Then I remarked, "What do I have to talk
about here? That (talking) is not what will bring me around." That was so impressive. I said to her later. It is very important for us, the Light, by which we know, you see? By the way, it happens on this day, today, also. Well, that's what I experienced here in Wilster. That was for me primary (when ) she placed the light before me.)

Inge told me that when she is surrounded by the community and gazing on the light altar candles, or when she finds herself working alone in the church building Sunday evenings and thinks back on the community experiences of the morning, she feels peace and a lack of anxiety. She described those feelings to me during our second interview.

ja...J: Ein besonderer Ort. I: Ja, ein besonderer Ort fuer mich, ja.

[The most beautiful and best I feel is if I am in the church and many people are around me, and the candles on the altar are glowing and--I could gaze forever on that. There is so much peace, and even when there aren't any people at all in the church. When it's Sunday, in the evening, and I'm in the church, then I lock up. Since somethings have already happened with us, in the church--but not me, me in particular--here in the church I have no anxieties....In fact when I'm in the church, then I can really breathe deeply, and be at peace. J: A special place. I: Yes, indeed, a special place for me.]

For Rebecca and for Miriam, the church building itself has symbolic significance: so much of their time has been spent there, and so much family work had been invested there through the years. Rebecca narrated in detail the beginnings of the current church, where she and her husband were charter members. It represents for her permanence and continuity with her past religious life, and she talks about the exact dates of its completion just as others might speak of the birth of a child. "So it's been there ever since 1941, is when it was built."
The first Sunday in January of '41 is when we had our first service over here." Miriam thinks, too, of her deceased husband when she thinks of the church building. "Of course Johnny was a real good worker in the church. We worked and got home at 3:30. He worked digging foundations. My husband did what he could."

Community and Outreach

The spiritually resilient women in this study did not stop with simply "feeling good" about their community experiences; they shared their experiences with others. Anna referred to community as the place where "man doch irgendwie weitergegeben [One somehow gives back.]" In our third interview, Inge spoke of how she shares the joy she finds living, and singing, in her volunteer work with "the older people" (she considers herself, at 74 and a skier, model and dancer at 74, to be among the younger group). We were talking about her favorite hymns.

[I: "Let us sing with one another" and "Praise the Lord" are also wonderful. J: "With one another". You have said that other people are important to you.

I: Yes, and I've already sung this hymn with the older people, if someone doesn't know it, or as a closing, and I find it so beautiful. "Let us with one another").

Community: a Place for Sharing Doubts, and Joys, Sorrows

Perhaps the greatest gift these women have experienced in community is the joy mentioned above. Simply being together pleases them: as Emma explained to me, the conversation can well be over little things and still bring joy. However, community also serves as a safe place for them to go when things are difficult, even when the issue is one of faith. In Germany, I not only heard about this process from the women in the interviews, I saw it occurring during the time of my visit: Frau C., who had spoken out with strong feelings about her theological doubts at the focus group, was then invited by her friends to discuss her feelings in smaller community groups. They were worried about her, and wanted to be supportive to her during her "dark night" of doubt. Elizabeth told me that when a group got together to play cards someone again brought up the topic, and talked
among themselves, trying to give Frau C. an opportunity to air her feelings. But Elizabeth feared that she was stuck for a time and would have difficulty moving on because, she said, Frau C. was ignoring a way of knowing and believing that Elizabeth considers important, using the heart along with the head.

Und da hatten wir auch schon einmal über dieses Thema geredet und die war ganz aufgebracht. Also da sagte sie, "das will einfach nicht in meinen Kopf" ich kann einfach nicht begreifen". Sie glaubt an Gott, aber sie macht das alles mit dem Kopf.

[And there we again talked about this topic, and she was very overwrought, and then she said, "I simply can't grasp it in my head" and "I simply can't grasp it." She believes in God, but she does it all with her head.]

But Elizabeth knows, too, of the opposite community emotion, joy. She told me of the joy she feels when she by chance, meets up, somewhere in the world, with someone whom she knows from a spiritual retreat. Miriam’s spirit, too, is enthusiastic and her manner joyful; she no doubt adds much joy to the many community groups she is part of. Speaking of a project at church she said.

That's another hard job, but we have a lot of fun while we're doing it. 'cause we have more help with
that than we do anything Inge. We'd have sometimes 12 ladies at a time working. We are always gabbing and laughing and talking and stuff....I enjoy the fellowship, being with everybody. I'm a person that loves people....I've always loved to be out and be with a bunch that you can have fun with and still have time to get your work done.

The special anniversaries and occasions in these women's life also become experiences in which the entire church family participates, and all of the above elements—friendship, self-identity building, practical help, symbolism, simple life-style, and sharing with others—all come together for these marker events. Inge is already planning such a time, her 75th birthday party, to be held next summer in the church parish hall, complete with the dancing she loves. (In Germany one typically gives oneself a birthday party with friends.) Whether in joy or sorrow, the community is the place where one is comfortable and among friends. In the words of Elizabeth, that is where the women feel "zuhause" [at home].

Community: the Richness of its Contributions

Emma was the most articulate of all these women in describing explicitly what community means to her. In my three interviews with her, she gave such a thorough
picture of what community has meant in her life that it serves as a summary of this aspect of spirituality for all these resilient women. She talked of how individual prayer is important, not only for the strength it gives each person but for the community it builds. She talked of the believers' common faith in Jesus, and she described how, through that faith, another member of the church has taught her the courage not only to die, but to live. She mentions some of the community activities that give her most joy, and the equality created by Christian fellowship.

Und dann--wenn wir dann, wir koennen also auch, wenn wir uns besuchen, zusammen beten, was ich sehr, sehr wichtig finde. Und wir singen zusammen, also solche wunderschoenen Lieder, also die einen ja so froehlich machen. Und wir lesen auch schon mal einen Text zusammen, oder so, und--aber alles ist irgendwie getragen--ja, von dem gemeinsamen Glauben. Und das ist echte Gemeinschaft. Und dann auch so, dass keiner besser ist als der andere, also ein bessere Christ ist oder besser glaubt. Wir sind alle auf dem Weg zu ihm.

[And then--if also we then can, when we visit, pray together, which I find very, very important. And we sing together, such wonderful songs, that make one
so very happy. and we sometimes (study) a text
together, and all is somehow agreed upon--yes, out
of the common belief. And that is true community.
And then also. (we believe) that no one is better
than the other. is more Christ-like or believes
better. We are all on the way to him.]

The Importance of Affect

As I listened to the women in this study, and then
listened again to their stories on tape, I heard abundant
evidence for the presence of strong emotions. There were
tears, sighs, whispers, and long pauses. Most of the
women talked easily about their feelings and their
affective experiences, relating them comfortably to their
life stories and their spiritual lives. My Ethnograph
coding confirmed my hunches. to show significant affect
scores for all women (see Table II, p. 123). With the
exceptions of Martha and Rebecca (who both scored 3), all
scores were 12 or higher, with Inge's score dramatically
high at 35. Although Martha scored only 3, these 3
separate incidents were all quite intense. Rebecca's
interview was the least emotional, but she, too,
displayed deep feelings at several points.

In coding, I included the following words and phrases
under the category "affect": German: Angst oder
Schmerzen haben [to have fear or pain], begeistert
[enthusiastic], belasten [loaded down, troubled], das Gefuehl haben [to have feelings], Bewegung [emotion], der Mut [courage], die Freude [joy], die schwere Zeit [the war years]^{11}; die boese Zeit [a bad, evil time], die dunkle Zeit [the dark time, die Sorge [the sorrow], enttaeuscht [disappointed], es tut mir leid [I'm sorry], froehlich [merry, happy]: froh [happy], efreut [pleased, filled with joy], geweint [cried], gluecklich [happy]: ungluecklich [unhappy], leiden muessen [must suffer], schlimm [bad], Schmerz haben [to have pain], schwer [difficult, heavy], Sonnenschein [sunshine; used metaphorically], tief [depressed], traurig [sad], verzagt (despondent), verzweifelt [desperate], wenn es schlimm kommt [when something bad comes], zufrieden [peaceful, content]. English: love, feel, feeling, feel good, happy, joy, joyful, scared, cried, cry, crying, hard thing to talk about, laughing, depressed, discouraged, blue, bad days. Included in my coding, too, where sections of conversation in which the woman either spoke with tones of emotionality, spoke very softly, cried, or implied high levels of feelings through their non-verbal behavior.

^{11}Although this phrase means, literally, the difficult times, it is consistently used by this cohort group to refer to the years during World War II. (G. Freeman, personal communication, April 4, 1995).
Affect and Community

There is a strong relationship between affect and belonging to the religious group for these women. Emotions are not seen as simply a private matter but are anchored in the sacred symbols, history and daily life of the faith community.

For Elizabeth, learning about her faith in a community setting is an emotional experience. She frequently gives a voice to feelings through her poetry, thereby doing much of her emotional "work" and at the same time creating a means through which she can pass on her experiences to others.

Und es ist jedesmal eine Freude, wenn man irgendwo in unserem kleinen Schlesig-Holstein Menschen wie der trifft, mit denen hat man früher mal was erlebt, und mit den andern war man auf einer Reise oder man hat...wir haben manchmal so einen Retreat, so Stille Tage nicht?
[And it's always such a joy, if one meets, on a trip or somewhere in our little Schlesig-Holstein, someone with whom, sometime earlier, one had experienced a retreat or a "Stille Tage", you see?]

Elizabeth experiences just walking into a room of fellow members in the Christian community as a kind of homecoming. "Aber, wenn man da kommt, dann ist man wie
zuhause und das is das Schoene. [However, when one comes in there, then it is as if one is at home, and that is the beauty (of it).]"

Feelings and faith go together for Martha, too. who sees Christian community as extending beyond the grave. At one point in my second interview with her, she shared her beliefs about the community of saints.

J: What about some of the Christians that have gone on before you or have died. Do you have a connection or feeling to those people? M: Yeah, I can't explain it. I know I'll see them. I guess that's one thing that makes it as easy to give them up as it was...J: To have that expectation? M: Uh huh. (pause, tears) J: It's a hard thing to talk about, isn't it? M: If we didn't have those feelings...

that's where our faith comes in.

Love is the foundation of Christian community for Lovey. God is Love, and that love creates community. She moves comfortably and naturally from reflecting on God's love to the love she feels for others. Nowhere does Lovey become more animated than when she speaks of the emotion for which she is named "The greatest thing is the Lord. And you know love is one of the greatest things on earth. Love for one another. If everybody loved everybody like I love them, there's always good. I don't care how bad a
person is, there's always good there if you want to find it." Later she said, "I love people, I love everybody, I sure do. One of the greatest things. Love is one of the greatest things on earth. I'll say that all my life."

Lovey moves on to put her feelings into action. For example, I ask her to tell me more about the large group always present at the holiday dinner table: "L: Yes, I don't know how many. We've got a real good friend and he always comes 'cause his wife works on an airplane as a stewardess and she is seldom home for Christmas...We know she isn't going to be there to fix him breakfast. J: Open door, huh? L: Yeah. What I want is love."

Affect and Relationships

Not surprisingly, emotions ran high when these women talked about the people in their lives with whom they are or have been most closely bound, their children, husband, parents, pastors, and special friends. Family relations are sources of both joy and pain, and when relationships are troubled, these women suffer. Inge, for example, is deeply pained over the breach with her adult son, who would not work and repeatedly asked her for money, demanding, after she had no more to give, that she borrow money from a bank to pay his bills. When she said "no", he disappeared from her life and she now hears of him
only through the word of mutual friends living in his city.

J: Sie wissen, dass er gesund ist. I: Ja, ja. Und das, ich sage jetzt, genügt mir dann. Ich kann ja nichts. Aber es belastet mich (tears). Das ist meine Sorge. [J: You know that he is healthy. I: Yes, yes. And that, I now say, satisfies me. I can't do anything. But it troubles me (tears). That is my sorrow.]

These women suffer emotionally when they see their loved ones making mistakes and causing themselves and their families pain. One of the poignant examples of this was during my interview with Emma, who spoke of her son in quiet, deep tones, "ich habe eine ganz, ganz schwere Sorge: Mein zweiter Sohn ist Alkoholiker. [I have a great, great sorrow: my second son is an alcoholic.]"

The women also experience many deep feelings of worry when their children, spouse, or others whom they love do not stay involved in the life of faith and community. My coding showed (see Table III, pp. 239-240, "CONERNDG" for "concern, don't go") that this was especially troubling to the American women, for whom regular church attendance is understood as a necessary part of "being Christian."

And in Germany, too. Emma grieved that her grandchildren are not being raised in the Christian faith. "Meine
Enkel sind alle nicht getauft, was mich sehr traurig macht. [My grandchildren have not all been baptized, and that makes me very sad]."

For Lovey and Inge, breaches in human relationships seem to be among the most painful aspects of their lives; these women live to love and be loved, and rejection is very painful to them, even years later. Lovey told the story of her difficult stepmother, and of an event just as real to her now as many years ago. She and her young husband lived temporarily with her father and his new bride.

We showed our love towards him, and our stepmother was jealous of us and made it bad....Then one morning after she stayed, I guess I stayed there for 6 months or something after we were married. One morning she came down to the kitchen and we had all eaten and others had gone to work. Papa didn't go to work that day and he came over and sat in a chair, and he pulled her down in his lap and they sat there talking. I was fixing their breakfast, hot for them. She said to me, "I'll be so glad when you leave that I won't know what to do. I think it's time for me to take over." (pause, tears) As soon as we found a house, we moved out.
Joy is the other possibility in family relationships, and nowhere was it more deeply felt during these conversations than when Anna described the most memorable moment of her life, the birth of her first child. She spoke in response to my question, "When has God seemed especially close to you?" Because of the horrors of the war, the arrival of this baby became a sign of hope for Anna, a sign that God was close by her during even these dark days.

Und das erste Kind erinnere ich noch. Also, nein! Also, wissen Sie, da war Krieg. Der ist 1940 geboren. Ich wohnte oben im Haus. Im Krankenhaus habe ich das Kind gekriegt, den Ältesten. Das ist nun 54 Jahre her, er ist 54. Und dann war ich nachher in der ersten Nacht oben allein mit dem Kind. Und dann hatte ich so'n Koerbchen, da lag es drin. Und dann war das so'n suesses Kind! Nicht? Und dann fueltte ich immer die kleinen Atemzuege und dann, --nun mussessen Sie sich vorstellen, das war Krieg: der Mann ist immer weg. Und du lebst nur von Post, dass ein Brief kommt. Und dieses Kind, und wenn ich mal antworten soll, was Glueck ist -- also das war'n gluecklicher Moment. also, und dann ist Gott ganz in der Nahe. Dann ist man geborgen, denn, denn, denkt man, man betet, and man dankt, und man
denkt. Oh meine, das suessse Kind, so gesund geboren ist, und trotzdem immer nur diese Ungewissheit mit dem Krieg, was dies doch 'n Zeichen, was so was so wohl tut und so gut tut und so auch so, wo man Gott, wenn Gott Liebe ist, wo man das dann nah bei hat, nicht? Also das hab ich nie vergessen.

[And that first child I still remember. Ah, ah. And, do you realize, that was war. He was born in 1940. I lived above, in this house. I delivered the child, the oldest child, in the hospital. That was, now, 54 years ago; he is 54. And then the first night when I was alone with the child. And I had such a little basket. I laid him in it...and it was such a sweet child, you see. And then I felt his tiny little breath and then--you must imagine, it was war! My husband was always away. And you lived for the mail, that a letter would come. And this child! And if I had to answer the question, "What is happiness?" ah, that was indeed a happy moment, ah, and then God was totally close by. Then was one secure, and, one, one prayed, and one thanked, and one thought, oh, oh, that sweet child, born so healthy, and in spite of the constant uncertainty with the war, this was a sign that all was well and good and that God is
love, and that one had (Him) near by, you see? That
I have never forgotten.]

Affect and Self

Emotions were high when the women spoke about aspects
of their lives that related strongly to their self
identity. For example, Elizabeth spoke of her pride in
being called a "Hausfrau" [housewife]. "Das wollte ich ja
auch sein! Will ich auch heute noch sein! [That's indeed
what I wanted to be! That's what I still want to be!]" In
contrast, Inge's identity had been tied directly to her
career outside the home. She recalled the time of her
forced retirement at 65 with strong feelings.

Das hat soviel Traenen gekostet, ich war so
ungluecklich und traurig. Ich bin so gern da
gewesen. Dann hab ich gedacht, so geht das nicht:
ohne Arbeit kannst Du gar nichts sein.
[That cost many tears. I was so unhappy and sad. I
had liked being there so much. Then I thought, this
won't do. Without work you can't exist at all.]

Affect and Difficult Times

These women did not see the world with rose colored
glasses nor gloss over the trouble they knew. Nor did
they understand Christianity to mean that they are
required to deny the pains and doubts in their lives.
Elizabeth,! for example, spoke directly and bravely of the high and low periods she has known. "Ja, ich sagt ja schon, hoch und tief gibt es immer mal wieder. Und das is oft. Dann geht es mir so..." [Yes, as I already said, there are highs and lows, repeated over and over. And that's frequent. That's the way it goes with me...."

One of the most poignant moments in the American interviews came when Miriam told a story from her life, of the two sudden deaths of both her father and brother and her mother's subsequent depression. Losing both husband and son was more than Miriam's mother could bear. "She was 44, and my brother had just died, and my father had just died. ...She had a nervous breakdown. She lost her son in May and her husband in September. It was more than she could take." After long months in which her young mother could not attend to even her most basic human needs because of the depths of depression, Miriam finally was able to see some small improvements."

We had it hard and finally I got her up into a chair and I brought one of her rockers down here, sitting by the window. When he (Miriam's husband) came home we'd get her up in a chair and she'd sit there at the window. After she got so she could handle herself, she started to get into better spirits. But, she cried a lot....She was so despondent too.
She couldn't use her hands, and we got these big balls and she rubbed her hands with cocoa butter. And finally she got so she could use them a little bit, but that's as far as she got them even later in life. We got her some big needles, she loved to crochet. 'Course I had to do a lot of things for her, but she was able to sit on the stairs and wait on the steps.

For the German women, the present was also sometimes painful because of its echoes of the past. There were deep emotions when they spoke of current ethnic conflicts and European violence. Their war memories fill them with longings for peace and hatred of war. These emotions were strongest in Anna, whose community is the whole world, and who feels distress on a daily basis that people have not yet put an end to war. She has traveled in Yugoslavia and is especially heartbroken to see the destruction occurring there.

Diese, diese Unruhen auch so jetzt die da in Jugoslawien, die das ist einem alles so unbegreiflich. Ein so schönes Land, wissen Sie, so zum Reisen so, alles wie aus dem Bilderbuch: kleine Häuser, Berge, Sonne, Wasser — oh, Gott, nee. Nein, nein, nein, das ist sehr sehr traurig, dass die Menschen nicht klug werden.
[This, this unrest that also there in Yugoslavia, that is all so inconceivable. Such a beautiful country, don't you know, so often visited, all so like a picture book: little houses, mountains, the sun, water—oh. God, no, no, no. That is so very, very sad, that human beings will not become any smarter.]

Emma also expressed strong negative feelings on this topic, saying that she could hardly bare to watch the scenes of Yugoslavia and Tschechoslovakia on television, "wie schrecklich das ist [how terrible it is.]"

The women were courageous in being willing to talk about times when God seemed distant, even when others might misunderstand. Here, too, the affective element to spirituality was central to their experience. Says Lovey, "Yes at times I say to myself, 'Lord where are you? I can't feel you.'" For Lovey, her doubts are experienced directly as an affect, as a lack of feeling the divine presence. Emma remembers with sorrow that her husband taunted her about her "dark nights," her times of doubt and fear.

[He would often say, if you believe in God, you would not be despairing. But this I don’t know. Miriam feels depressed when God seems far "Sometimes I think that I lose sight. I get depressed and those things kind of come between us. But, I think He’s always near, never that far away."

Miriam’s last words capture an important theme in these interviews: pain and "down" times are not the end of the story for these resilient women. They do not get "stuck" in their emotionality but soon again experience God present with them, precisely because of their difficulties. Lovey expressed this:

It’s just a wonderful feeling. You just feel sweet, you feel like you’re loved all over. It’s something that you can’t express. you can’t tell nobody. J:

What are some of the times when that’s happened? L:

Well, just a lot of times. Lot of times when you are down and out. Then He can come in and make you feel wonderful.

A specific stress in her life occurred when her son left for Europe in World War II. (Lovey was the only American woman to refer directly to the war that was so much a part of the German women’s life stories). Lovey had vivid experiences of God’s presence during that period. “But you know when he went into service, after the Lord had
talked to me on the porch. I felt like He was close."
This closeness to God led directly to her feeling able to
cope with her anxieties for her son's safety, and to feel
certain that he was still alive. "Every night I could
feel him in his bed. He was there. J: Your son, you
mean? Yes. J: So it sounds like feeling close to God
made you feel close to him too. L: It did. If you're
close to Him, he pulls you in."

For Miriam with no living family member as possible
caretakers if her health continues to decline, is at
times a frightening experience. She recognizes, too, that
she is a woman who has always cried easily, and she
believes that her ability to cry is part of her inherited
"nature." "Yeah. I cry at the drop of a hat. I got that
from my mother. I reckon. She got it from her mother."
But Miriam's resiliency arises from a courageous
combination of spiritual faith and the ability to allow
herself to cry, to feel emotional pain, and then to move
on. "I have these spells when I'm here by myself, I cry
and go on. It makes you feel better." Ultimately,
Miriam's trust in God prevails.

When you are by yourself you have a lot of time to
think and if you dwelt on it, I don't believe you
could take it. I believe you would go out of your
mind if you dwelt on it a lot. I like to think over
my good memories and my bad ones too. I do a lot of that laying in bed at night. But I think, well. I'm here for a purpose and it will work out for me. I know it will. I feel like it will. I'm going to try to keep my faith that it will. I feel like it will work out for me. There will be a way.

Affect and Faith Experiences

The women varied widely on their ability to reflect in theological language on their faith, but they all recognized and accepted that faith includes feelings. Inge was most explicit in defining faith as feelings. When I asked her if her faith was more like a feeling or a thought, she responded "Das ist gar kein Denken; das ist Gefuehl. [These really are not thoughts; these are feelings.]" Many of the woman described faith as a feeling, a safe or good feeling, and none seemed uncomfortable with this aspect of their spiritual lives.

The diverse ways in which the women reported the effective aspect of their spiritual lives were directly related to the unique themes of spirituality that emerged from the each set of individual interviews (see pp. ff.). For example, it was when Martha spoke of her work that she was most moved and had to pause to compose herself.

I know I have a church bulletin somewhere that I saved. It shows an old scrub woman, cleaning between
the pews at church, and it has the verse on there
'Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.' I
thought, well if scrubbing the floor.... you don't
think about praising God when you're down scrubbing
the floor, do you? But I saved it. (pause, tears).
J: Looks like that really moves you, to talk about
that. How did you think about that yourself? M:
After that I felt like everything I did, I should do
it to the best of my abilities. If God had given me
the ability to do these things, then I should do it
the best I could....I truly feel that anything we do
we should do it as a praise to God. Cause He has
given us the strength to do these things.

Miriam, who loves music and who sang for many years on
her church choir, spoke of her delight in hymns. "I like
the spicy ones! Those joyful ones that we used for
processionals all the time. 'Bring out the Banner', and
that kind of stuff, you know."

Lovy said that she found it difficult to express her
feelings of being "close" to God, but in the interviews
she did so in colorful yet simple metaphors that captured
her child-like, trusting faith. In telling me of her
relationship with God, she said, "It's just one of those
things you cannot express, really. You feel like....I can
imagine how an angel feels. I feel that way. Just with
the imagination. you know how you'd feel if you were an angel. That's the way it feels." She speaks similarly about prayer. "Great things the Lord enlightens you to. I think that's where you learn, if the Lord's with you and enlightens you to things. Have you ever felt like he is just talking to you? Now that's great when you feel like that." Lovey's ability to use her imagination is intertwined with her emotional and spiritual life. About her favorite Bible story, Joseph in Egypt, she says, "That story just touches me when I think about that old man, and his boy had been gone for all those years. He met him, come back and found him and joined him and they cried. It just makes me almost cry myself. Just put yourself in their place!" Speaking about her confirmation day, she said, "When I walked down that aisle to make confession I felt like I just had wings, floating up there."

Emma finds it easy to discuss her faith with others, and she reports that it makes her happy to do so. Her fondest wish for the coming generation, and particularly for her children and grandchildren, is to discover what she has found in her faith.

Ich wünsche meinen Kindern oder den jungen Menschen, dass sie offen sind, dass sie das hören, dass sie erkennen. Gott will ja uns wieder—also
will uns helfen und zu sich zurueckholen. Also ich
denk immer, das waere also so ein wunderbares-das
schoenste Geschenk, fuer sie selber, und wenn ich
das sehen wuerde, ach ich waere gluecklich. Wenn ich
sehen wuerde, meine Kinder gehen, ja, Jesu nach,
sind auch in der Nachfolge.

[I wish my children, or the young people, that they
may be open, that they may hear, that they may
recognize that God indeed wants us again, helps us
and calls us back. Therefore I always think that it
would be so wonderful, the most beautiful present,
for them, if I would see....oh, I'd be happy. If I
would see my children following Jesus, being in the
succession!]

Rebecca described a sacrament, Holy Baptism, in
affective terms. She continues to have a sense of herself
as "baptized", and this leads to a feeling of security in
daily life situations where physical limitations are a
constant reality.

The Bible speaks of it. "He that believeth and is
baptized shall be saved." That's what it says. So
it's a good feeling. I've never been without that
feeling. I think I'm drooling. I think I'm talking
too much. J: No, no, that's the whole idea. It's
interesting to hear you say that it gives you a good

The Importance of Personal Relationships

As has already been indicated in the chapter on community, the interviews with these spiritual nominees were frequently interwoven with stories of relationships. Children, husbands, parents, grandparents, nieces, pastors, and friends; all appeared, disappeared, and then reappeared, on the "stage" of the women's lives as they talked about their faith (see pp. ff.). The women care deeply about other people, they learn from others, they appreciate other members of the community who are role models for their development, they nurture and care for others when needed, and they wish their children and grandchildren to find what they have found in the church. They suffer when there is conflict in their families (Emma and her daughter, Inge and her son), and they rejoice when things go well for the special people in their lives (Anna and her professional children, Lovey and her affectionate daughter). My coding showed that children are especially important to them, and those who have been married speak often of their husbands (see
Clearly, they value their relationships with others.

If relationships and faith are both highly important to women, what do they do when they must choose one or the other? Emma is an example of how the mature person might balance her desire for good family relationships with enthusiasm to share her faith. Her daughter and son-in-law do not attend church, and Emma worries about her grandchildren and their future. Naturally she wants to get on well with her children since she lives in their home. "Denn...die kommen natürlich dadurch in einen Konflikt, die Kinder, nicht? [Then naturally, they get into conflict, the children, isn't it so?]" But, because she is a mature person, Emma has devised ways to not so much compromise her position as to evangelize through modeling behavior:

Ich pass auch erziehungsmaessig so ein bisschen was auf meine Enkel—also auf meine Enkel einwirken kann, vorsichtig, weil meine Tochter ja ganz dagangen ist, aber so glaubensmaessig irgendwie, dass sie merken. Oma denkt so. Oma liebt die Bibel. [And with my grandchildren, I must be educationally restrained, careful, because my daughter is totally against it, and so evangelically restrained somehow.

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so that they (the grandchildren) notice. Grandma thinks that. Grandma loves the Bible.]

The picture that emerges from the interviews certainly does not support studies that suggest "women tend to remain in Faith Stage 3 which is characterized by socialization and dependency" (Stokes, 1990, p. 175). To label their intricate, caring and cognitively complex relationships with others "socialization" is a gross simplification, and I found no evidence of dependency. I have described, in the section on community, the multifaceted nature of the personal relations they had with others in their faith group. Within their own families, too, they played differing roles and met divergent needs.

They nurtured and cared for their children, whether biological children or those they taught in Sunday School classes (for example, Martha). Anna now looks back on those day fondly; in one interview with me she talked at length about a conversation she's had with her adult children, reminiscing about how, as young children, they would always ask "Wo ist Mutti? [Where is Mommy]" whenever she went out for a while. But these women were generative in an Eriksonian sense (see Gilligan, 1986) that transcends the mere ability to care directly for children. Even immature women can, at least temporarily,
nurture their own young. Generativity is "not just a
stage for making little things grow." (Vaillant, quoted
in Gilligan, 1986). These women also spoke often and
passionately about their hopes and dreams for the coming
generation, not just for their own descendants. Inge
wished them "Frieden [peace]" that comes from "mehr
glauben an Gott [more believing in God]". Anne hoped for
peace, tolerance and a clean environment. In Germany the
women used the word "Mensch" here, the more general term
meaning "human being".

Even though they enjoy other people, and feel it is
necessary to be part of a faith community, these women
are not "clingy (sic)"., dependent types by any means.
Their lives in community might better be described as
interdependency, since they give and take in an
atmosphere of mutual support and acceptance. They realize
that must mutuality is vital to human friendships, a
balance between giving and taking. Says Inge.

Man muss auch fuer die Freundschaft etwas tun. Man
darf nicht erwartten, dass das von den andern kommt.
Man selbst muss geben, denk ich.
[One must do something for the friendship. One must
not expect the other to do everything. One must give
herself, I think.]
Also important is their ability to receive; based on my chaplaincy experiences, I believe that receiving, for some older persons who have been very active all their lives, may be far more difficult than giving. Examples of being able to receive include Rebecca, who depends on others for her tapes, her daily care, and her transportation to worship, and Emma, who graciously accepts money and necessities.

They showed their lack of dependency, too, in that although they clearly enjoy other people, all of the women who lived alone did so successfully. They were able to differentiation between being alone and being lonely, a cognitive distinction that is both emotionally and spiritually mature. Rebecca stated explicitly, "I'm alone but I'm not lonely". Several of the other women said similar things. Although Miriam had found living alone difficult at first, she now sees it as an opportunity, "When you are by yourself, you have time to think and read and meditate more, and I think you grow closer (to God). I really do."

Because they are based on faith and mutual life together, the women's relationships outside of families tend to cut across rigid age divisions. Said Inge, for example, "Ich bin gern mit der Jugend zusammen und hab auch fast alle Freunde, die juenger sind als ich. [I like
to get together with young people, and I have almost all friends who are younger than I."

Miriam talked fondly of some neighbor "boys" (actually young adults) to whom her husband had given a Bible. Even though she said she sometimes felt uncomfortable with young people, Martha, too, spoke of warm relationships with younger neighbors, and with her niece.

**Faith itself as a Relationship**

A still more complex piece of this relationality puzzle is the question of how the women conceptualize their faith lives. One research question asked whether the nominees would consistently speak of faith itself as a personal relationship with God and experience God as a life companion, or whether they would sometimes speak more abstractly and philosophically about their faith.

The later has typically been considered to be more common to men's spirituality than women's. Stokes wrote, "Significantly more women than men define 'faith' as 'a relationship with God' while more men than women define it as 'a set of beliefs.'" (1990, p 175).

I found that all of the women did use relational language to describe their faith lives, and in some cases, this imagery and language dominated. But their profound spirituality was far more rich and multifaceted then is implied above. The women integrated both the
relational aspects of faith I had anticipated and abstract thought. "a set of beliefs" (Stokes, 1990, p. 175), in other words, theology. For Inge, Miriam, and Lovey, relational language was particularly prevalent; for Elizabeth, Emma, Martha and Rebecca, there were many occurrences of both stated beliefs and principles, and for Anna this combination has been extremely well integrated.

Lovey said that her relationship with the Lord was the most important thing in her life. "That's exactly what I would tell them (the children of the future) that's the greatest thing you could do. Be with Him and trust Him, and do what he enlightens you to do." Rebecca said she has never really experienced God's absence. "No, I know he's right here. I know he's always there. It has always seemed like that to me. Even when my husband had a stroke and was laid up for 48 years." A feeling that God is close gave Martha courage to work on the farm, even in the middle of the night. "Oh, I feel that (God's presence) everyday I'm home. If I didn't I don't believe that I'd even feel safe enough to lay down and sleep at night...To go to bed tonight, if I think there's a cow that might be having trouble in the barn. I'll go down there by myself and sit down by them." Miriam was the most enthusiastic about faith as a personal relationship. "I don't know, I
guess the most important thing for any Christian is to believe on the Lord Jesus. And to know He's with you....I feel like the Lord is with me all the time. I don't have the feeling that he's too far from me." She consistently speaks of feeling God's presence. "I've always had that close feeling, so I don't know what it feels like...I've always felt like I've been close....Cause all you've really got to do is ask him and he is there." Through her suffering, her relationship with God has only strengthened her. "I don't know, maybe I've grown stronger in faith with all those troubles, cause you can look back and see and realize how much He's done for you." Here it is not just the feeling, but the thinking back, that matters to her as well.

In Germany, Inge spoke often of God in relational terms. She described her trusting relationship with God as childlike (not "childish"). "Ich frage nicht warum und wieso, ich glaube einfach. Manchmal denke ich, ich bin wie ein Kind. Ja? [I don't question why and how. I simply believe. Sometimes I think, I'm like a child. huh?]" Emma called faith" ein sehr inniges Verhältnis zu ihm" [a very close relationship with Him].

Although Edith here uses sexist language for God, at another point in the interview she spoke at length of how difficult it could be to use male language for God, including the term Father, if one has not had a close and good relationship with one's own father. Her granddaughter, she said, was a case in point. She
in God's loving arms and she has, from childhood on, always believed and trusted that God would keep her safe. "wie man immer so sagt, 'ich kann nicht tiefer fallen als in Gottes Hand.' Und das hab ich dagegen gehabt. [as one always says, 'I can't fall down deeper than God's hand.' And I've always held with that.]" Elizabeth, like Martha, believes God is her personal helpmate in hard times.

Man ist zwar abhaengig davon, aber von der Gnade ist man abhaengig und man braucht im Grunde nur zu sagen: 'Ja, ich glaube, dass Du mir hilfst.'

[One is, to be sure, dependent on that (God's help), but by grace one is dependent and only need, fundamentally, so say, 'Yes, I believe that You help me']

In the approximately 5 hours I spent with Anna there were many examples of her ability to combine abstract thoughts and an relational approach to faith. In discussing most topics, she combined her strong love and concern for people with her passionate beliefs with perfect ease and naturalness. She has reached this point through a life time of both cognitive and emotional work, a life-time of "nachdenken" [pensively thinking back]. As described above, she read me the Bonhoeffer prayer.

herself had a good relationship with her father and prefers to use that term.
pointing to God's dependable presence in daily life.

immediately after the most intense section of our conversations (she had been speaking of her behavior during the Nazi times). Many of her sorrows over those years are relational in nature; she thinks of how she argued with her father-in-law, who hated Hitler, and was economically ruined by the war nevertheless; she thinks of having to explain things to her own children when they were old enough to understand. But she did not speak of hours spent on her knees, deep in confession. Those times may well have occurred, but they are past. She does not linger on her guilt but lives today, by her principles. By far the majority of our conversational time was spent on issues of war, peace, ecology (she had read Vice President Gore's book), ethnic tensions, the homeless. The metaphor she has for faith is also a combination of relationship and abstraction: "Gelaender [handrail]". God is daily present, a guide for her way.

Because she has this "handrail" Anna can take risks, and because she has definite beliefs, she can speak out with confidence. In the book, 700 Jahre Stadt Wilster (Kurtz, 1982), she was one of a small group of her cohorts who were willing to be interviewed about the Nazi years. In that conversation, too, she demonstrated how deeply she has thought about those years and formed
beliefs about God, the world, and human nature. At one point she said.

Es hat sich gezeigt, was ganz normale Menschen machen, wenn sie Macht in die Hände bekommen.

[It goes to show what entirely normal human beings will do if they are given power in their own hands.]

She remained true to her principles to speak about unpleasant realities. At one point, the topic of the church's do-nothing stance in Wilster came up. Yes, said Anna, it's true what you said, but remember, "wir alle 'die Kirche' sind. Wir alle haben stillgehalten. [We all are the church. We all kept still.]

The book editor asked the group if they did not know what was being done to the Jews. Several men on the panel said, in effect, no, we did not know; we hadn't read Mein Kampf. But Anna courageously told what she saw in a Berlin woods one day during the war years.


[I first had a suspicion during a visit in Berlin. There I saw daily workers in the woods, hundreds in striped suits.]
The last comment by Anna during that interview shows her orientation toward the future, where again she combines principle with a concern for human relationships.

Ich sage den jungen Menschen immer wieder: Seid nicht so sicher, dass euch so etwas nicht geschehen kann. Ihr müsst nachdenken. [I say over and over to the young people: Don't be so sure, that something like this can't happen again. You must ponder it].
### Frequency of Code Words in the In-Depth Interviews

#### Spiritual Nominees

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**Note:** Number reflects frequency of times this topic was introduced in the interviews, not the length of time given to discussion of the topic.
Part Three: Journal Entries

Journal keeping for this study has been both a spiritual exercise and an academic tool. I have learned about myself as a woman, as a child of God, and as a scholar through this aspect of the research. Actual journal entries are included in part of Appendix D. Reading them gives a view of this experience different from the impression gained by reading the more formal findings presented in the main sections of this dissertation.

As a woman and as a Christian, I have discovered how important it is for me to come to know strong older women who model patterns of spiritual resiliency, inspire me to develop further as a human being, and help me to re-imagine what it is like to be an older woman. As I came to meet these women, and then reflected on those meetings through the journal, I often felt challenged to grow stronger myself, to become more trusting in God and to feel less anxious. One early example was Rebecca and her ability to distinguish cognitively between being alone and being lonely. She emotionally survives a life situation where she must spend many hours alone each day. As the journal shows, traveling to Germany without a companion was a lonely and anxious experience for me at times, as was being in a foreign country with different
customs. But I had met Rebecca just before I left, and more than once I thought about her, sitting alone in her house, blind and disabled. Her great courage in that situation and her total lack of self pity were inspirational for me.

Later Anna became the woman I most wanted to model myself after; her remarkable combination of qualities has great personal appeal for me, particularly her seemingly natural blend of assertiveness, dignity and humility. As the journal shows, this is a combination that does not come easily to me. My reaction to her has been far more lasting and emotional than to any other spiritual nominee, and I think often about how I might to able to return to Wilster and spend more time with her.

But all of the woman have, in some way, contributed to my personal growth. As I stated in the journal, I now see more than ever how universal experiences seem to be for mothers, and from those women who were mothers, I have derived strength for this tremendously difficult role. Lovey reminded me how much I care about family, and Inge showed me that it is possible to get through relational difficulties with one's spirit of joy intact. From Miriam I learned that death of numerous loved ones is the price of survival but can be endured and conquered. Emma taught me to appreciate more facets of Christian community that
I had realized, and I have already made some changes in my level of participation in my own congregation as a result. From Elizabeth I learned that I need to spend more time outdoors, to get back in touch with my love for the natural world God has made for me; as a busy graduate student, that aspect of life has been sorely neglected. Also from Elizabeth I came to recognize that my creative writing, also forgotten at times, can be an avenue for spiritual growth, not just an emotional outlet.

This journal shows that my research project has changed the way I imagine the rest of my life. With my fiftieth birthday in sight (May, 1995), it is particularly helpful to leave behind some culturally derived gender and age garbage. The term "older woman" is so frequently used negatively in American culture that I had come to dread the thought of joining this group. Now, when I think of women like Rebecca, Emma, and Anna, I have an entirely different reaction. Suddenly words such as "foolish", "weak" and "helpless" are replaced, in my mind, by "strong", "wise", and "confident." To be like Anna now excites me far more than to be fixated on our "Oil of Olay" culture.

Most important of all, this project has gotten me in touch with the depths of my own longings for a fuller, richer spiritual life. The last entry, in which I
described a strange dream, does not capture fully the intensity with which I have felt renewed by this process. I know now that it is foolish to wait for troubles to arrive and then expect to be spiritually resilient. Rather, the bonds of love and support within the larger community, and the depth and intensity of the life of prayer are available immediately. Why wait for ill health and old age to enjoy them?

Coding my journal (see Table IV, p. 246) revealed themes similar to those of the focus groups and interviews. However, I am not a spiritual nominee, and my faith and resiliency are not at levels of those I discovered in these women. As shown in Table IV, the journal contexts coding reflect this: "faith", for me, was less frequently coded than "affect". Embarrassing as it is, I think it is true that in my life at the present time emotions more commonly dominate than faith in God. "Community" occurred often, despite traveling far away from my family and congregation for much of this work. The sense of world-wide Christian community I experienced was one of the most delightful aspects of this project. On a personal note, the travel and journal keeping showed me that my love for my husband and life companion is deeper and more important to me than I had known:
discovering this alone was worth the keeping of a journal.

From a research point of view, this journal keeping has been invaluable. As Table IV reveals, I was emotionally involved in this process, but writing my journal entries was an ideal outlet for my feelings. When listening to the tapes during data analysis, I realized that my emotional reactions had not impeded my work during the interviews; I was able to communicate compassion and concern as appropriate, but I did not lose control, even when hearing the sighs of Miriam or seeing the tears of Inge. During the data gathering experience, returning to my journal at the close of the day was very helpful, for in that arena I could allow myself to say or feel whatever came to me, without restrictions, or concern for objectivity. I am now a strong proponent of this aspect of feminist methodology and cannot imagine doing another research project without journal keeping.13

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13During preparation of the journal for coding, I corrected spelling and punctuation errors but did not add to or edit the body of the journal.
Table IV

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**Note.** Number reflects frequency of times this topic was mentioned in the journal, not the length of time given to discussion of the topic.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND SIGNIFICANCE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Community

Emma: Gemeinschaft aus gibt's dann so Freizeiten, werden Freizeiten angeboten...und das ist ja, wissen Sie, wie eine grosse Familie. Da kommen sie von ueberall, kennen sich gar nicht, aber nach ein paar Stunden kennen sie alle, und es ist so herzlich ist da Ganze, weil uns die Liebe zu Jesu verbindet, und das ist so schoen. Und manches, was man vielleicht selber gar nicht so in der Bibel entdeckt hat, oder wie, nicht? Also ich finde tatsaechlich, es ist wirklich wahr (jetzt begreif ich erstmal) dass man Christen wirklich nicht alleine sein kann.. Das kann man gar nicht. Oder jedenfalls nur stuemperhaft....Und ich glaube nicht, dass Jesus das so nicht gewollt hat, dass man das alleine macht. bestimmt nicht.

[The (church) community provides so many retreats, retreats are offered...and it's indeed, you know, like a large family. When you come, you don't know anyone at all, but after a few hours, you know everyone, and it's splendid, it's complete, because we are bound by the love of Jesus, and that is so wonderful. And much of what one doesn't understand in the Bible is uncovered, and someone says, "You must read that," or something. And I find,
actually, it's really true (now for the first time I grasp it) that one really can't be a Christian alone. That one absolutely cannot. Or, in any case, only incompetently...and I believe that it was not what Jesus wants, that one does this alone, certainly not.]

Results of this research are consistent with other studies that showed that group religious participation is highly important to elderly persons. In fact, even in early quantitative work, church attendance was consistently the most vigorous factor in predicting elderly persons' well-being (see Wuthnow, R. 1979). In more recent quantitative studies, such as those dealing with stress and religious involvement in the black community (Krause & Van Tran, 1989), researchers frequently have made conclusions compatible with the present findings. However, a brief quotation demonstrates how difficult it is, with traditional methodology and language, to capture the flavor or significance of real life in a faith community. Krause and Van Tran (1989) wrote, "Although the findings indicate that both organizational and nonorganizational/subjective religiosity counterbalance the deleterious impact of life stress, the precise intervening mechanisms that transmit these effects have not been identified."(p. S11). Other articles reduce the concept of religious community to
terms such as organized or nonorganized aspects of religious participation (Ainlay, Singleton, Swigert, 1992; Mindel & Vaughan, 1978).

As shown by the quote above from my interview with Emma, the concept of community that emerged from the narratives of these women is far more intriguing and varied than the passages by Kraus and Van Tran (1989). Ainlay and associates or Mindel and Vaughan (1978) would suggest. Judging by their own testimony, community exists for the women I interviewed, by them and in them. Community is more like a world of meaning than a form of social activity. In their lives, community is a resource for deep friendships, a source of both practical and religious assistance, a place to love and be loved, a safe environment where one is fully accepted and affirmed, an arena for social action and for world justice, a spring of ritual and symbolism, a base of operations for outreach, and a place to share the full range of human emotions. In community, the challenges of the aging process are confronted with a richness of resources. Taken all together, these gifts provide a life filled with meaning, the direct opposite of a boring existence. Says the creator of "saging", Jewish philosopher Rabbi Schachter "Now, looking at growing old, you see there's so much boredom" (Cole, T., 1991, p.3).
The spiritual tasks he calls for, reconciliation, gathering, and uploading, are precisely what I heard going on in the lives of Rebecca, Miriam, Martha, Lovey, Anna, Inge, Emma, and Elizabeth. But they are accomplishing this work within and by means of the faith community.

Discovery of this complex sense of community occurred because of the denominational specificity of this study. It is no coincidence that other studies best capturing this aspect of spiritual faith have been conducted with a single faith group, as exemplified in the classic work of Barbara Myerhoff in the Jewish community. Only when speaking to people who identify with a particular faith group can one hear how important this dimension is to them, and recognize traditional patterns of meaning within the community. It was helpful—it may even have been necessary—for me to be a Lutheran, and to have studied Lutheran theology, so that I could use my insider's knowledge to pick up subtleties of meaning in the conversations. Payne said that human beings are "instinct poor but symbol rich" (1990, p. 29); perhaps, then, intimate knowledge of a group's symbolic life is more important, in the social sciences, than is "scientific" knowledge.
When one moves from the academic world to consider implications for applied gerontology, the importance of community appears even greater. Western society today holds a mythical concept that to be well-adjusted and secure, individuals must master their own lives and cope with problems by means of their personal resources. Lasch called this tendency "the illusion of mastery", a rebellion against dependence, which has been "sanctioned by our scientific control over nature." (1991, p. 16). Self-sufficiency stands in a curious tension with the desire for community and interdependency. Said Bellah, "American culture has long been marked by acute ambivalence about the meshing of self-reliance and community...." (1985, p. 256).

The field of counseling, too, reflects this ambivalence, and even if clinicians acknowledge the spiritual element of resiliency, it is often viewed as an individual quest, a personal matter. One striking example occurred in an excellent new book on resilient adults by therapist-writer Higgins (1994) who, happily, included a chapter on spirituality, "Faith and Vision". Like many (who are not members of a faith community or who and have had negative experiences with one?) Higgins labeled religious families "formal religion" and described them as "conventional faith communities, which tend to impose
or to assume an uncritical acceptance of ideologies." (p.192). After hearing the courage with which the spiritual nominees have worked, within community, to reframe their lives, confront their doubts, and journey with God, this negative and oversimplified understanding of life in a faith community appears glaringly inadequate. By ignoring the importance of a faith community in the healing process, clinicians, whether working with elderly persons or with people earlier in the life cycle, are missing a significant resource for personal growth, mutual support, and meaning through a larger, non narcissistic vision.

The spiritual nominees in this research equated individualistic thinking with youthful arrogance and foolishness. Anna saw it, as reflected in her choice to join the Nazi party, as the source of her greatest error.

Ich denke, im Rueckblick, viel mehr mit Demut und weiss dass diese Hybris ungluecklich macht. dieses Ueberhohen, dass man alles selber kann,-- man gar nicht alles selber macht, man muss immer auch diese Begleitung durch den Glauben haben. Das hilft mir. [I think, in retrospect, with much more humility and know that this hubris makes (you) unhappy, these conceits, that one can do it all alone.--one
absolutely cannot, one must always also have companionship through faith. That helps me.)

As an adult, she grew, in spiritual community, to learn that she is not "der Mittlepunkt der Welt" [the center of the world]. She now knows "dass also die Welt voller Probleme ist, dass die Menschen der Hilfe bedürfen, and dass da immer jemand ist, der das gut mit Dir meint...[that the world is filled with problems, that human beings need help, and that there is always someone who means you well]." For Martha, it is a sinful misunderstanding of the work ethic to believe that we are self-sufficient, and for Rebecca, self-reference is not even a goal in her prayer life. "(I pray) more so for other people than I do myself...The Lord knows what I need. So why should I make requests for myself?" Emma, who knows firsthand what it is to live without financial security, spoke of how ridiculous it is to trust in money or self. "Im Leben ist ueberhaupt nichts sicher. [In life there is no security at all.]"

Faith and Feelings

Religion, therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us the feelings. (emphasis added) acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves
to stand in relation to whatever they may consider
the divine.
(William James, 1961, p. 42).

The women in this study have integrated the affective
aspects of their long lives with their daily experiences
of faith in the present time. Their spiritual resiliency
has developed along with and out of their emotional
experiences. In these interviews, they demonstrated that
they are courageously willing to allow themselves both to
feel and to express those feelings. This they do both
verbally and through symbolic acts of worship and
service. But unlike the decidedly individualistic
perception of religious experience quoted above, they
also have a strong sense of and commitment to the larger
faith community. Their roots in the community transform
both the nature and goal of personal affective religious
experiences. Although the women are not concerned with
either denying or suppressing emotions, neither are they
merely indulging in emotionality for its own sake. They
frequently share insights related to their spiritual life
that have grown out of a full emotional life, including
love, sorrow, worry, tears, with others in the church
family. Just as they were willing to risk revealing their
strong feelings to me during the interviews, so they
share the affective aspects of their faith with one
another. This is done at formal meetings, such as I witnessed during the focus groups, at informal meetings, such as their Bible studies, and through their music or poetry. They also bring feelings of love, concern and mutuality into their acts of kindness, including their visits to shut ins in the congregations. They realize that doing so may require paying an emotional price, but their goal is the enrichment and support of all in "die Gemeinschaft der Heiligen [the community of saints]."

The use of The Ethnograph® program for data analysis was particularly helpful in leading me to recognize the role of affect in the women's spirituality and to see that feelings were far more significant than my simplistic original thought: these interviews were very emotional experiences for the women and for me (see references to "feelings" in the Journal, Appendix D). As I read and reread the interviews, keeping in mind the frequency with which I coded affect, I began to realize that these women were not just being emotional as they discussed their faith and told their life stories. They have consistently full and rich emotional lives that are intertwined with their spiritual lives. Their faith and feelings are not separate domains, but, rather, are part of a whole in which spirit and soul are one.
These findings confirm the work of feminists such as Randour (1987) who found that some of the 94 women who responded to her questionnaire concerning women's spirituality contributed accounts that characterized "how they felt rather than what they thought at a particular time and place" (p. 115). Although some of the women in Randour's (1987) study, like Rebecca in this study, used a predominantly cognitive approach, others, like Anna, Miriam, Emma, Elizabeth, or Martha, balanced both emotional and cognitive elements, and still others, like Inge and Lovey, related almost exclusively to the emotional aspects of their spiritual lives. For them, like Inge, faith is "gar nichts Denken" [not at all thought].

Although I do not claim that the sample of participants in this study is representative of any larger population, these women's courageous work of emotional integration stands as a fine role model for younger women and men who wish who learn spiritual resiliency. There is no one way to be spiritually resilient, but it is difficult to imagine a spiritually mature person in 1995 who has not learned to incorporate a large portion of his or her emotional life into the life of faith. This does not mean that philosophical thought, reason, and cognition have no role in the world.
of spirituality, but it may mean that being a whole person requires a level of comfort between what one thinks about one's religious lives and behaviors and how one feels about them. It also implies that as one proceeds through the life review process, the goals of generation and integration may be enhanced by the psychological work done alongside cognitive labors.

There is as much risk in overemphasizing the role of emotionality in spirituality as there would be in insisting on pure reason, however. The old argument as to whether people know God with their hearts or minds appears foolish if one believes in the wholeness of persons. As C.S. Lewis wrote, "Didn't people dispute once whether the final vision of God was more an act of intelligence or of love? That is probably another of the nonsense questions." (1961, p. 89). Wiser approaches, reviewed in Sager (1990), emphasize that faith includes mind and heart. One can speak of God as sensed, known, revealed and, ultimately mysterious.

In the history of spirituality, however, where so much for so many years has been written and preached by men, the affective aspect has often been neglected. Miriam's belief that she inherited her emotionality from her mother points to a stereotypical thought in Western society that emotions belong to women, and that men are
not allowed or encouraged to be comfortable with the emotional elements of their lives. More recently, balance is returning, however slowly. For example, in his history of Christian spirituality, Holt called for a reemphasis on "God's passionate love" (1993, p. 128), and reminded us that "spirituality is not just something to study, but something to live." (p. 129). The present study of the spirituality of older women contributes, along with other recent work, to a corrective movement toward regaining balance in the understanding of how persons know and are known by God with both mind and heart.

Although not often emphasized, a strong role for affect in spiritual life also seems consistent with the symbolic interactionist approach to religious studies. This theory typically emphasizes the cognitive processes by which people create and reinvent themselves and their world, but the refusal of symbolic interactionists to resort to "either individual or societal determinism" (Breytspraak, 1984, p. 30) leaves sufficient room for an understanding of how people, as actors, can creatively integrate their affective experiences with other aspects of their lives. Humans use religious symbols to create community roles, build up a sense of self, and interpret their lives both individually and within families and society.
The strong relationship between emotion and community in this study is also understandable from a symbolic interactionist perspective. In community, the "worlds of meaning" (Berger, 1967) that affect our emotional life are created. In turn, people create the specific symbols of the community through, in part, their emotional life together.

The functioning of the focus group in Germany was an excellent example of this reciprocal process. The very emotional discussion that occurred at that group set a tone for three of the individual interviews that followed. Although Anna, Elizabeth, and Emma were reacting against what was said by their friend, Frau K., who questioned the love of God, they were also participating in the community's formulation of the issue. The very phrase, the "love of God" became a symbol for much in their lives, particularly for Emma and Anna, who had numerous experiences with human suffering and loss. This phrase was in one sense given to the St. Bartholamaus community by the larger Christian world of symbolic language, but in Wilster, in January 1995, it became re-formed. The very words, "the formulation is wrong", spoken during the group to Frau K. by Emma, point to the dynamic process by which a society transforms and
creates its own world of meaning for even the most
traditional theological phrases.

Also, the leadership roles of Anna, Elizabeth and
Emma, both in that group and later in informal groups
around the parish, demonstrate, too, the ways in which
actors become part of this on-going process of creating a
social-religious climate, or, in Berger’s (1967)
language, a world of meaning. And, present throughout
this entire process was a strong element of affect, an
element that functioned not only to energize but also to
influence the discussions, roles, and continuing
dialogues that followed. 14

Faith and Relationships

The results of this research emphasize the importance
of human relationships for women of faith, and also
suggest that their faith has a strong element of
relationality. However, this study also calls into
question previous research and theory that sharply
dichotomized gender differences in men and women’s faith
experience, such as that of Gilligan (see Wood, 1994). On

14 Perhaps one of the reasons why the affective aspect of
faith has been so seldom discussed in sociology of religion
studies is that sociology has difficulty incorporating both
of these domains, faith and emotion, even when they are
dealt with separately. Seeing them together may be twice as
difficult in this discipline, where positivism still often
dictates what we believe to be acceptable for both research
and discussion.
one hand, a definite relational element abides in these
women's faith. Their faith stories are intricately woven
into their relationships with the lives of people for
whom they care, and they often speak of their personal
women base their ethical decisions primarily on
relational considerations rather than abstractions would
initially seem to apply to their spiritual decisions and
the spiritual lives as well. Yet a more careful
examination of the interviews reveals that, as discussed
above, abstract thinking and theological beliefs are also
important to these women. Pulling apart the relational
and theological elements in their lives, and describing
their faith as purely relational, would do a disservice
to the richness and complexity of their spirituality.
Findings here suggest that, for at least these older
Lutheran women, spiritual resiliency entails the ability
to combine reflections on years of historic experience
(the raw material of life) and the confidence in God's
strong and certain presence in everyday life that comes
with through reflections that use the symbolic language
of the faith community.

One of the most vivid examples of this ability to
combine relational considerations and theological thought
was exemplified in my interview with Emma, who talked
about infant baptism. The topic here was especially relevant to this issue because many church's theologians have wrestled with a similar tension in the explaining the Lutheran practice to baptize infants. Generally quite orthodox in her Lutheran theology, Emma was still debating about infant baptism when we spoke. She understands the principle behind the Lutheran doctrine, that baptizing a child as an infant is appropriate because he or she is received into God's family, assured of salvation, and marked with the cross forever by Grace, not through merit. Even the ability to understand what is occurring is believed to be unimportant in the divinely initiated sacrament. But because of her concern for German young people, who so often are brought to church to be baptized and then not seen again until a confirmation or wedding day, Emma expressed her idea that it might be best to wait to baptize until a child can understand what baptism means and make a commitment to the church.

Also da bin ich in letzter Zeit eigentlich etwas Schwanken ueber die Kindertaufe und Erwachsenentaufe; bin ich eigentlich wo ich nicht richtig weiss, was is eigentlich richtig. Bei uns in der Kirche werden ja die kleinen Kinder getauft.
Taufe heisst ja eigentlich von Gott, also das Kind

[Recently I've actually been in some ways vacillating over infant baptism and adult baptism: I've come to the point where I don't fully know what is right. Here in our church the infants are baptized. Baptism is certainly from God, and a bringing of the child to God, or of a human being to God.... However, the infant can't grasp that. And, when there is no Christian raising, whether baptism has a meaning overall, that I don't know.]

The level of Emma's theological profundity is not the point here: what is important is that she, like Anna, is demonstrating that both belief and people are important to her and enter into her thoughts as she wrestles with questions of religious practice. They cannot be pulled apart completely, as two separate, dichotomous elements, but are, rather, dimensions of the whole of her spiritual life.

Although somewhat distorted by dichotomous thinking and speaking, the union of relationality and belief is more traditional in spirituality (see Holt, 1993). These
findings are consistent with historic writings where the importance of combining theological reflection with a close faith relationship with theological reflections has been recognized (for example, Nouwen, 1976; Holt, 1993; and Saager, 1990). At times, the relational element has been central to the actual definition of spirituality (see Simmons, 1993). Spiritually mature people have often been recognized as both theologically reflective and spiritually related: they not only walk with God, they also meditate on that walk, and make life decisions in accordance with their lived experience. The Bible reports that Jesus himself made this combination when he brought relational considerations into his practice of traditional Judaism. At times he had difficulties with authorities of the religious establishment over precisely this issue (for example, his defense of a woman caught in adultery, arguments with the Pharisees over the Sabbath, and his healings on Sabbath days). A combination of a close relation with God and reflections and mediations on symbols of the faith have always been elements of a full life of faith, even though, in their daily lives, persons of spirit may display one aspect more than the other.

This combination of faith and reflection is certainly necessary at times of moral crisis, but it is part of everyday life as well. An appropriate example is Dietrich
Bonhoeffer, mentioned several times above, who made the tough decision to participate in a plot to assassinate Adolph Hitler because of his horror at what was being done to human beings (relational reasons) and against his belief that he would be committing a sin in taking the life of another person (theological reasons). This ability to act in the face of moral ambiguity was identified by Kohlberg as the highest stage of moral development (1976) and may, indeed, be dependent upon the fully developed ability to combine relationships and principles. These women's stories suggest that they, as well as men, are able to make this mature synthesis.

Resiliency and Meaning in the Lives of the Spiritual Nominees

In his work on culture from a symbolic interactionist perspective, Geertz (1973) stated that although meaning problems are not the basis of faith, they frequently drive people to belief. Niebuhr wrote that "the problem of meaning, which is the basic problem of religion, transcends the ordinary rational problem of tracing the relation of things to each other as the freedom of man's spirit transcends his rational faculties." (1941, p. 164). Losses, war, death, problems with children, economic losses and physical limitations are only some of the life experiences these women have had that lead, eventually
and inevitably, to problems of meaning. The codes "concernth" (theological concerns) and "darknite" (dark night of the soul) both reflect these topics in the focus groups and interviews. Frau C. courageously asked the question for all the women in this study, and for all people of faith: in the face of suffering, where is the loving God? Where is God? These resilient women have not escaped persistent and profound problems of meaning. Yet today they are considered by their pastors and friends to be resilient and spiritually mature, precisely because they have navigated those struggles. Using diverse combinations of personality strengths, community resources, affect, cognitive ability, and symbols of the faith, they have, with varying degrees of consciousness, been able to create for themselves life stories that take into account existential questions about life and human suffering, but that also resonate with joy and hope.

Miriam has endured incredible family struggles, from her mother's mental illness to her husband's death. Her situation as the last surviving family member has led her to seek meaning in her faith. Because she has such a strong sense of God as personally present with her, and such deep roots in the life of her community, she is able to model courage for others in her church. It is within
the "pale" (Geertz, 1973) moments of everyday life that she works out the meaning of her faith.

Nowhere is the problem of meaning so strongly tackled as in the faith of Anna. Anna experienced the horror of the Nazi era, not from inside the camps, but from the perspective of one who, as a young adult, sponsored the regime that created the camps. Anna does not wallow in self-centered guilt, but she has engaged in a life-long process of "nachdenken" [looking back] through which she has been able to integrate her religious beliefs with her cultural and historic experiences. She is now concerned that the materialism she sees in contemporary Germany society is once again leading to hatred, ecological stupidity and injustice. These fears have led her to become politically active and to stay informed, but she does not speak in slogans, nor has she any illusions about ideological self-sufficiency, which she considers the height of stupidity and immaturity. "Ich brauch das Glaube so. [I need the faith so.]" she says. The faith she needs is firmly anchored in community life, but it is always one that she has arrived at only after an individual, life-long struggle to unite religious symbols and meaning. Although she did not use the language of the "Kingdom of God" in the religious vocabulary of these interviews, the language of that Christian symbol may be
best suited to describe what Anna has worked so
diligently to learn: the distinction between God's
Kingdom and the limited institutions of this world,
including church and government. Anna's spiritual
maturity is most obvious in that her suffering has led
not to narcissistic, self-referential guilt, but to
repentance, to a turning around. It is a turning that has
resulted in her engagement with the world as one of its
suffering servants. At times that makes her about as
popular as the original Suffering Servant himself.

Anna has discovered that the disillusionment that
leads to repentance must include "disillusionment with
self" (Niebuhr, 1937, p. 132). As a mature Christian,
she has substituted spiritual goals, peace and justice,
for the individualist, nationalistic goals of her youth.
She certainly realizes she can no longer place her
ultimate trust in earthly powers. Reinhold Niebuhr, who
wrote often about the human sin and the Nazi era, said:

Anyone who really understands the dimension of
the Kingdom of God ceases to have illusions about
the world's kingdoms. He knows that their power and
the relative justice of their balances of power are
not the Kingdom of God... Without acceptance of that
judgment, that is, without repentance, there is no
entrance into the Kingdom of God. For without such
repentance men live in the world without knowing that the goodness of the world is filled with evil and that the order and peace of the world are only an armistice between competitive forces.
(Niebuhr, 1937, p. 183.)

The Research Experience: Surprises and Limitations

Human self-consciousness is a high tower looking upon a large and inclusive world. It vainly imagines that it is the large world which it beholds and not a narrow tower insecurely erected amidst the shifting sands of the world.
(Niebuhr, 1941, p. 17.)

Ultimately the limitations of any research project are a function of the limits of the researcher's own perspective. In this project, I do not claim to describe the "large and inclusive world" of older women's spirituality. Rather, these results are only what I have seen looking out of one (or, perhaps, two) cultural windows within the narrow tower of my perspective. At times that tower did seem to me to be erected on the shifting sands of circumstance.

More than once during this project, the words of one advisory committee member, Dr. George Hillery, echoed in my head. "Nothing ever goes quite according to plan in the actual research experience," he said at my proposal
defense. Although in general this project has been surprisingly on track, there have been, indeed, some surprises and definitely some shifting sands.

The first near disaster occurred with the loss of my luggage when I traveled to Germany. I had foolishly kept my lap-top computer, my cassettes and records, my German language interview questions, and my proposal in my suitcase. Fortunately, the luggage arrived the night before I met with the focus group, and before I began any interviews. Needless to say, I learned a lesson from that situation and will always carry essentials on my person in the future when traveling. On the way home, I was far more careful and never let the micro cassettes that contained my interviews out of my sight for one second.

The second unexpected event occurred when Karl convinced me that he needed to be present for the focus group, in order to introduce me and handle any language difficulties. His advice was good, and I attribute my acceptance with the women largely to his introduction. My resistance had come from the fact that in America the pastor was not present and I wanted to duplicate all conditions for the two groups in so far as possible. I am not sure what difference Karl's presence may have made the content of what was discussed, but it certainly did not impede the process. The women in the German group
spoke very honestly and openly; the group was very lively and animated. Their prior trust relationship with their pastor was clear, and I do not feel that the validity of my results was compromised significantly from this one inconsistency.

The interviews themselves proceeded much as planned, and surpassed my hopes in many ways. In Germany, I was able to understand the women and therefore to conduct the interviews alone, without a translator present. This was a tremendous advantage, for it allowed me to form an intimate relationship with the women that may have not been possible with the presence of a third person. All interviews occurred in the women's homes except one, that of Emma, who does not have her own home but lives with her daughter's family; my three meetings with her were held very privately in my attic room in the parsonage.

A problem has resulted from language and time: I have not been able to report to the women as yet to get their feedback on the results. This is because none of the German women speak or read English, and I will need to translate or have translated large blocks of this dissertation, including the individual portraits, before I can review the result with them. Karl has agreed to reconvene the focus group and to share the results with them; this, too, will take translation time and time to
arrange. In America, I plan to conduct a similar meeting, but I can be present myself for that one. Before I publish the dissertation in book form, I will (a) send copies of relevant sections to each spiritual nominee for her reactions 15 and, (b) obtain feedback from the focus group participants in both countries.

One anticipated limitation of the project, my being introduced as a pastor, turned out to have both advantages and disadvantages. Several of the women, most notably Rebecca, frequently asked me questions during the interviews that I believe she would not have asked a nonclergy researcher. "What do you think about this?" was the essence of these questions. However, all researchers risk the expert status dilemma to some extent, and in other ways, being a pastor was a definite advantage. I sensed that I was more quickly trusted as someone who would know how to keep what was said to myself (for example, in Germany, not to discuss the interviews with the pastor and his wife) until time to write the results, and then to change names. Also, a general respect by this cohort group for pastors as trustworthy and caring people and their high regard for their own two pastors facilitated my acceptance in both countries.

15I will visit Lovey to discuss results since she has literacy limitations.
Another limitation that I could not foresee until I traveled to Germany was that the parishes were dissimilar, and therefore, the women, too, were less closely matched than I had preferred, not just culturally, but in level of education and sophistication as well. Wilster is a Kleinstadt, [a town or small city], and Glade Creek is far more rural. Because 80% of the people living in Wilster are technically members of the parish (they contribute 1% of their annual income to the parish), the population basis from which to choose the German nominees was much larger than in America. Karl, in fact, believed that virtually all the women who came to the focus group were spiritually deep and mature enough to qualify as nominees. Choosing the actual candidates was, therefore, more difficult, but the base of selection was greater. In America, almost all of the older women in the parish were invited to the focus group, and it was less difficult to recognize who among them would be appropriate to interview. However, the base for choice was smaller. I do not mean to imply, however, that the American women in this study are in any way spiritually inferior to the German women. I believe that the difference occurs more in the style of language used to express faith rather than in depths of devotion. In America, the women tended to speak more in metaphors and
in Germany they used more theologically correct words, especially Emma and Elizabeth. Nevertheless, it is important to mention this difference for purposes of academic integrity.

The Research Experience: Successes and Strengths

The heart of this project was the in-depth interview, and the most important reason for whatever success I have had here is the incredible courage of eight women. The spiritual nominees in both countries took risks to tell a stranger about their personal lives, their triumphs and failures, their hopes and disappointments. They were unconcerned about the tape recorders, tolerant of the pronunciation errors I made, and considerate in numerous ways. Their hospitality extended beyond the cookies and coffee and small gifts they gave me to acceptance in a woman to woman, Christian to Christian, spirit of cooperation that amazed me repeatedly. I was delighted when all of them told me, at some point, that the conversations had been helpful to them personally, even though they were also tiring and sometimes emotionally draining. In our second conversation, Anna said she had thanked God in her daily devotions that morning for the opportunity to talk with me. In both countries, when we met in church after the interviews, the women and I
seemed to have a special bond, almost as though we had shared a long journey together. In a sense we had.

The triangulation of methods felt right to me as I worked. The focus groups and participant observation were especially helpful in getting started in each country. I appreciated the opportunity to become somewhat acquainted with most of the women (all except Rebecca) through worshipping with them, attending their informal groups, and, especially, meeting with them for the focus groups before interviewing them. I felt welcomed into the community after those experiences, and, in light of how important community has been shown to be, I now see that without these experiences, I might not have understood how the community dimension actually works in their lives. Had I only met privately with the nominees, I would not have seen, first hand, the communal side of their faith.

Journal keeping was challenging because I often felt very tired at the end of the day, especially in Germany where the language difference made such demands on my concentration. But, as explained above, keeping the journal accomplished what I intended; it enabled me to gather up my strong emotional reactions and place them in an appropriate container, so that I could remain more objective while I was working with the women. In both
countries this was very important, but especially so in Germany where the adventure of it all, and the incredible World War II stories I was hearing, tended to make me more emotionally involved than I typically feel.

Implications for Future Research

This was an exploratory project, intended to extend propositions of past quantitative research by using triangulated, qualitative methods, symbolic interactionist theory, feminist methodologies and a cross-cultural sample that was both denominationally- and gender-specific. The act of *listening* as the central activity has held this project together and allowed me to retain a focus on the emerging voices of the women themselves as I designed the project, conducted the focus groups and interviews, listened to the tapes, read and reread the interview transcriptions, coded the data, and interpreted the results. My Lutheran identity allowed me both entry into and understanding of the faith language of this group, and my feminist ideology lead me to continually strive for honesty and self-examination in this process, rather than to pretend I was remaining objective. Repeatedly I asked myself. Are these the actual words and themes of the women themselves? or, Am I getting in the way of hearing these women? What else my be causing interference here? and, finally, Am I really
listening to these women listen to God? The use of a journal was an invaluable tool in keeping my own issues in place, as was the availability of the actual tapes, so that I could, from time to time, replay sections of the interviews.

I believe that denominational specificity of this study was crucial to its success, and that future researchers need to pay far more attention to this factor. As explained in the review of literature, too often denominational confusion leads to distorted results because of subtle or not-so-subtle theological differences in practice and in symbolism that need to be considered to understand what spiritual resiliency actually is for any one population.

Results of this study are consistent with many past research findings in religion and aging, but what is also suggested here is that research designed along these qualitative lines may be most fruitful in discovering a more complex picture of aging and spirituality. I believe that at this time theoretical complexity and sensitivity in hearing are necessary for fuller understanding of the significance of spiritual resiliency to improve life quality throughout the life span. If an appropriate metaphor for this listening exercise in religion and aging research is the symphony then the total sound of
spirituality coming from these women is definitely not a monotone or even a simple tune. Nor is their faith easily oversimplified or forced into faith stage categories (see Stokes, 1990). Their experiences are simply too diverse and too interesting to be captured by the facile distinctions typically used in academic language, such as "organized religion" (Ainlay, Singleton, Swigert, 1992) or even self actualization in Christian spirituality (Missinne, 1990).

This complexity was evident in all three major findings here: the importance of the faith community, the affective nature of women's faith experiences, and the balance in relational and abstract elements in their spirituality. All of these topics have been explored in past research, but this project demonstrates that the call for more theoretical work, made either implicitly or explicitly by many previous studies, may best be addressed by qualitative exploration. In a topic area where questions of meaning and interpretation are central and theory is scarce, a time for listening and interpreting by researchers is required, and may be more fruitful than the use of formulated questionnaires.

Because this project was exploratory, and its design broad in scope, much future research is needed before the findings here, suggesting the importance of community,
affect and a blend of relationality and belief, can be
(a) generalized to populations or (b) formulated into
theory. Both must occur before scholars and practitioners
can more fully understand how resiliency is actually
enhanced and strengthened by the spiritual experience.
The concepts of community (see Hillery, 1992), affect,
and relationality are themselves rather vague and need
clarification. However, this research contains many thick
descriptions that allow readers to assess its possible
transferability to other groups. Although a convenience
sample was used, the findings may well be consistent with
other population groups as well. Such conclusions would
have to be made on a case by case basis, in keeping with
both the characteristics of these women and those of the
other groups in question.

For example, what do these women really mean by
community? For purposes of this dissertation, I allowed
the term to carry its traditional, Lutheran meaning,
because that seemed consistent with what the women were
saying. But in practice, is community actually the local
congregation? Do the women visualize the larger church
when they say "Gemeinschaft" or "community"? Are they
referring to a group within a group, a smaller portion of
the church such as the women's group, or the Bible study
group, or an informal group of friends? And what are the
implications of Anna's vision of and concern for world community--how does that change her spirituality and affect her resiliency? Initially I did not fully anticipate the importance of this theme, so I did not consistently pursue these questions in the interviews. It was only after listening, reading, and coding that I more completely recognized the importance of the concept community.

An additional question for the future concerns what may happen in a faith group where the local community is less obvious. For example, do older persons in a large cathedral in New York City or a large synagogue in Jerusalem also find community experiences to be central to their spiritual resiliency? What subgroups within the larger group function to affirm them, nurture their growth, and render them practical assistance?

More abstract but no less intriguing questions concerning how issues of community intersect with world of meaning issues also present themselves. Spiritual well-being studies have tended to reduce questions about spirituality to secular and individual inquiries. Simmons (1991) wrote that recent journal articles have ignored this very aspect of spiritual well-being: the collective systems in which faith is grounded.
But in light of the importance of community shown here, future qualitative studies, also employing semi-structured interviews but focusing specifically on the meaning(s) of older persons' faith experiences within the larger community, would be helpful. For example, research questions might address how spiritually strong persons worked out the inevitable tension between their own life history issues and the more general history, symbols, and rituals offered to them by their faith community.

More work on the relationship of spirituality and affect is also needed. To some extent, any future investigations that integrate sociology and psychology will be helpful in this area, for example, research that courageously uses the "L" word. Hillery's (1992) study of the monastery, and particularly his chapter on the kinds of love found there, is one model that could be used for additional work. A research question might be formulated as: In what ways do spiritually resilient people incorporate the full range of human feelings, including love, joy, sorrow and grief work, into their faith lives? Knowing the ways in which those emotions are communicated and shared with others is significant, too, in order to keep the community finding operative simultaneously and avoid over-individualizing this topic: the cultural aspects of emotional expression must not be forgotten.
Niebuhr wrote that "Languages are the earthen vessels in which the treasures of the spirit are borne." (1937, p. 42). The relationship of affective language to spirituality needs more exploration. Although words such as "love" and "Schmerz" [pain] are ultimately indefinable, it would be fascinating and potentially helpful to be able to listen, in a research project, for more metaphors, connections and images arising from people's life stories. One could conduct interviews and then code the data so that connections between affect words and topics would emerge. In this study, for example, metaphorical language included, "Schmerzgrenze" [the border's of pain], "Gelaender" [handrail], "Weg" [way]. Christianity is a faith that emphasizes one's personal relationship with God. However, the language used to describe this relationship obviously varies by denomination, and possibly by cohort group as well. That is one reason among many why denominational focus is so important in religion and well-being studies. Future research with other denominations is another obvious need so that this aspect of spirituality can be understood in a more general sense, and the strength of older women heard in its complexity. The language of the findings here is not necessarily what one might hear from all
Protestant groups, or with Roman Catholic, Jewish or Muslim women.

Future work on denominational specificity might best begin with more detailed *theological and biblical* explorations of spirituality and resiliency, elaborations that are not attempted here. One might wish to ask, for example, In what ways do human beings themselves become embodiments of abstract theological concepts, such as grace, forgiveness, love, when they care for one another in the Christian community? This is an inescapably Christian question, for Jesus Christ's story is, to a Christian, understood as a moving beyond dogma and law into (a) an incarnation mode of thought about God, (b) a more personal encounter with and relationship to God, and (c) a life of response to what God did in Christ, including evangelism and social justice. I am suggesting in this study that both *knowing God in relationship with God*, and *knowing the beliefs, doctrines, and principles of the religious community* are important elements of the spirituality of these strong women. Recognizing that encounters with God include not only individual encounters but also the collective encounters of the faith community over time (particularly those told in the Bible) then one might also ask how resiliency in the life
stories of the people of God in scripture compares to
spiritual resiliency of Christians today.

Beginning with implications of the basic aspects of
the Christian experience would seem to be more
appropriate. In denominationally specific research on
religion and aging, than beginning with the assumption of
sharp dichotomies in the faith experience (such as mind
versus emotion). As has been shown here, such assumptions
may do an injustice to the richness of the any
individual’s encounters with God. Working backwards to
confirm or to disavow differences may well be less
fruitful overall than beginning with implications of the
theological principles themselves and then demonstrating
how these tensions work themselves out in the lives of
spiritually strong men and women. If differences are then
visible, they would be rooted more in tradition,
theology, and experience than in speculation.

Additional research questions may include questions
about interfaith spirituality. For example, How does
relationality in older women's faith outside of the
Christian tradition compare with this aspect of faith
among Christian women? Given the suggestion of previous
research that in Judaism, for example, older women do
speak as though relational elements are central to their
spiritual lives (Sered, 1989), after the resiliency of
two faith groups is compared, one might begin to see what
emphases are unique to each religious community.

Also helpful to the church and the academy would be
research that focused on the spirituality of older men.
Do older, spiritually resilient men also derive a
significant amount of their strength, meaning, and
identify through their lives in community? Is the
affective part of their faith lives important to them and
integrated into their faith expressions and experiences?
Is there an emphasis on relationality, or on belief and
principles in their religious lives? Theologically based,
denominationally specific comparisons across genders
would increase the ability to generalize aspects of the
spiritual experiences of older, Lutheran persons.

Implications for Successful Aging Research

From the beginning, the motto of the Gerontological
Society of America (1955) has called for "adding life to
years, not just more years to life" (quoted in Baltes &
Baltes, 1990, p. 5). As the narratives of the women
introduced here have shown, the spiritually resilient
life is one that can be very lively and worth while. This
research takes its place in the Academy beside studies
that emphasize the human capacity for adaptive competence
(see Definitions, p. 12). It is based on two positive
emphases: (a) the conviction that later years offer
opportunities and challenges as well as problems and losses, and (b) the belief that elders are best viewed as resources rather than as problems to be solved.

Currently, an important area in adaptive competence study is successful aging research, which explores the boundaries of human potential in the later years. Influenced by the scientific concepts of interindividual variability and intraindividual plasticity (Baltes & Baltes, 1990), this research is based on the principles of optimization, selection, and compensation. Baltes and Baltes wrote that, beginning with the Roman philosopher Cicero (106-43 B.C.), at least some people have refused to view old age as merely a time of decay and decline and have emphasized, instead, opportunities for "positive change and productive functioning" in the later years (Baltes & Baltes, 1990, p. 3). For these people, fears and anxieties about old age can make way for new feelings that are more harmonious and satisfactory to persons as they age (Baltes & Baltes, 1990).

Although such thinking could be called unrealistic, elitist or utopian, an important purpose for this line of thought is that it can expand persons' "imaginative horizons of human potentialities" (Berlin, 1988, p. 16). This study on older women's spirituality is related to research on successful aging in two primary ways: through
its positive emphasis on aging as opportunity, and because of its contribution to the search for the "elusive" (Baltes & Baltes, 1990, p. 4) factors that contribute to optimal conditions of the aging experience.

Similar to the approach of other research on successful aging, the positive emphasis here is maintained alongside a recognition of the realities of the aging process. Losses, death, and the possibility of deep regret have not been ignored in this project because they were themes that could not be ignored in the stories of these women. Just as Baltes and Baltes argue that biological realities of aging must be borne in mind by psychologists wishing to test the limits of potential in areas such as cognition, so it is important to acknowledge that the personal experience of significant loss and the spiritual experience referred to as the "dark night of the soul" must be borne in mind by religion and aging scholars who explore the limits of spiritual resiliency. This "in spite of" quality of faith is not optional if a scholar wishes credibility with the very woman who, as Baltes and Baltes wrote, "might be the one who has most often lost friends, most often stood at open graves, and perhaps, most often endured illness" (1990, p. 5).
**Validity and Reliability in this Research**

Validity in this study is enhanced by triangulation of methods, linkage of these findings to prior research, and examination of the internal coherency of the findings. Reliability is strengthened by the care and consistency with which I collected and analyzed the data.

The interviews, focus groups, and journal all highlighted, to varying degrees, the importance of community, affect and a balance of relationality and traditional beliefs in spirituality. Although the picture created by the interviews was the most complex, it is important to note that similar themes emerged independently from the other methods as well.

These findings, as stated above, are consistent overall with past research in religion and aging. What is possible here that was not possible in past quantitative work is the capturing of more subtleties in theme and more complexities in variations. This is especially true in the last primary finding, the combination of relational and traditional elements in spirituality.

In conducting the focus groups and interviews, I attempted to be as consistent as possible, and to avoid influencing the discussions in any way. In reviewing the tapes, I found that often, during long sections of the interviews, I said very little, only nodded or repeated a
few words, allowing the women to talk about themes important to them within the larger framework of the semi-structured questions (see sample questions in Appendices A and B).

My insistence on honoring worlds of meaning (Berger, 1967) was applied in data analysis as well, and I was particularly aware of the special challenge of this goal when analyzing the German conversations. I resisted the temptation to translate (or have translated) the German interviews as a first step. Instead, I had them transcribed into German and then I read them in German several times before and during coding. This allowed me to hear the women's voices with sharper attention to nuances and subtleties of meaning, possible only when one works in the original language of a speaker. For both the American and German conversations, the extra time I spent listening to sections of the original tapes (both focus groups and interviews) before I began to interpret and write about the results was also helpful in recalling the emotional tones of the interviews and groups and the personal characteristics of the women.

In addition to its usefulness as a time saver, the Ethnograph® computer program allowed me to obtain a higher level of objectivity in data analysis, and, therefore, rule out more rival explanations for the
findings than otherwise would have been possible. Comparisons were possible across countries, by topic, and by individual. I could allow the major findings to emerge out of the codings, and then evaluate them in light of my impressions from the transcriptions. I did not, for example, realize that community would be so strong a finding as it was, even though I began to expect it during the interviews themselves. As mentioned above, The Ethnograh® was particularly helpful in recognizing the importance of affect.

Finally, the internal consistency of the three major findings is a strong indicator of the validity of this research. Community, emotionality, and relationality are so interwoven in the faith experiences of these resilient women that at times it was difficult to decide into what chapter to place a particular quotation or generalization. It is within community that these women feel and that they experience an affective relationship with others, even as they also do the hard cognitive work of making sense of both their own life stories and their faith tradition.

Although this design was not longitudinal, the interview data are so rich and my experience has been so spiritually and academically exciting that I am hoping to have the opportunity to speak again with some of these
spiritual nominees. I would like to investigate how their continuing life experiences affect their resiliency in the future. Although I wish the best for my new friends, obvious new questions arise. For example, how would their perceptions of community and its part in their faith lives change if their health deteriorates and they are home? Would additional physical limitations affect their ability to be resilient? These are examples of topics that could be pursued in a longitudinal follow up.

Implications for Church Practice and Policy

The various ways in which these findings might be relevant to church practices could be the topic of an additional paper. Some initial observations are presented briefly here. If spiritual resiliency is, for many older Lutheran women, tied closely to their experiences in community, then those who participate in what is called ministry to the elderly must bear this in mind. An occasional pastoral visit to a shut-in, and the receipt of the parish newsletter (too often in small print and, therefore, unreadable) may be the only signs to an older person in frail health that he or she is still part of the community. Visits by a variety of members; being recognized as a minister through one’s prayers on behalf of the church family; continuing education opportunities,
especially Bible study for spiritual formation; calls, cards, and letters that remind the older person of the whole family's love and concern; all are crucial. But even when older members can attend church, they often experience a youth-centered environment and ageist denials that make it difficult for them to feel incorporated into the group. Simmons (1990) proposed that rituals in worship need to publicly name the life-stage issues so important to older members; this study validates such suggestions.

Another minor finding that arose from my coding (see Coding chart) was the frequency of "memory words" in the conversations of these resilient women. I suggest an obvious application: that the planners of religious education reexamine their methods. In years past, memory work, of Bible verses, creeds, and prayers, was a common part of Sunday School and confirmation classes. Modern approaches have de-emphasized memory work in favor of explanations and discussions of relevance to daily life. However, what are younger cohort groups really getting now that will replace these memorized words and verses? I think of Rebecca, with her physical limitations, and how crucial her memory is to her, how she works (or, she would say, God works) a wonderful chemistry, something like what clinicians call reframing, so that her
suffering and difficulties become blessings. She does so chiefly as she meditates on memory words and applies them to her life. Christian education that ignores this need may be modern, but less helpful, during the long years at the end of life that most of us will experience.

Ultimately, the spiritual resiliency of another human being remains beyond the ability of a scholar to describe or define. Just as each symphony creates a particular and special sound, so the marvelous, complex interweaving of the themes of personality, history, culture, and faith in each life story is unique. Yet if members of the religious community honor their older friends as the spiritual resources that they are, careful listening will allow them to recognize patterns of resiliency and to discover springs of God-given strength sufficient for a lifetime of faithful living.

Significance of this Research within Gerontology

This study is presented first of all as a new research model. Triangulated, qualitative methodology with a cross-cultural focus and denominational specificity combine here for the first time in an empirical study of older women's faith. This approach responds to the call of Atchley and others for the "evolution of adaptive new structural forms" in the study and research of gerontology. I have been energized by the "anarchy in the
marketplace of ideas" in these postmodern, multidisciplinary times (Atchley, 1993, p. 16), and I wish to join in the fight against the tendency to "leave religion off the map" (Thomas & Eisenhandler, 1994) in gerontology. With other scholars who risk working without a positivist paradigm, in order to open up new understandings, I searched out themes and categories for understanding women's spiritual experiences in the later part of life. However, as explained above, this research is exploratory, and will require much future work to fill in deeper levels of understanding.

The empirical nature of this work is part of its significance. It was said several decades ago that anthropological work on religion since World War II has made "no theoretical advances of major importance. It is living off the conceptual capital of its ancestors...." (Geertz, 1973, p. 87). Although this critique may no longer be completely true, empirical studies in religion and the social sciences are still rarely conducted, and, in gerontology, empirically based work has been slow to use non-quantitative tools (see Chapter Two). Only through research that takes some methodological risks does the potential exist to discover new categories of meaning. From innovative methodology, new concepts are more likely to emerge that can then be used as assets for
the future. In terms of my own research career, I consider this research to be the first step of a lifelong project. I plan to write a book based on these findings, and a minimum of three journal articles for publication on sub-topics of this dissertation, including the advantages of journal keeping in feminist qualitative research; the need for denominational specificity in aging and religion studies; and the importance of giving heed to older women's spiritual experiences within the women's movement.

**Significance within Feminism**

In light of the debate over the work of Carol Gilligan (1993), it has been interesting to see how the *relational* and traditional side of these women's spirituality come together, as discussed above. But more importantly, this work includes an advocacy proponent. Saiving said, "As an older woman. I sometimes wonder whether the women's movement is made up exclusively of women between the ages of 16 and 45, for so little is ever said about what it means to be human after the latter age." (1988, p. 117). Paying attention to the voices of older women is long overdue in the women's movement. The mistake of ignoring diversity, which was made early on with different ethnic groups, is now being committed with respect to older
women. With this study I take a place among work that aims to correct this sin of omission.

The study also has significance within feminism because it reveals stories not yet told, and gives heed to voices not yet heard. It has been exciting to see the interest in this work by the older women whom I met during the investigation. They want their stories to be told; they wish to be helpful to future generations. In her "Letter to Readers" in the second edition of her book *In a Different Voice* (1993, pp. ix-xxvii), Gilligan wrote that she sees her work as "part of the process that it describes—the ongoing historical process of changing the voice of the world by bringing women's voices into the open, thus starting a new conversation." (1993, p. xxvii). This study participates in the same process. An opportunity to listen to the special concerns and unique voices of older women of spiritual depth can only enrich everyone.

**Significance for the Study and Practice of Spirituality**

At the conclusion of his book tracing the history of spirituality, Holt (1993) suggested what he saw as needed by Christian spirituality in contemporary times. He called for "a *listening spirituality*" (emphasis in original), and wrote "We must be willing to hear the voices from continents and ages other than our own."
The findings of this study are not just academic; they have a role to play in expanding the horizons of the practice of the Christian life. There is significance in demonstrating how a partnership between the social sciences and religious institutions can focus on listening, an activity not only vital in today's academic research, where scholars are often urged to find their voice, but also in spirituality, where listening for God has been central throughout the ages. Lover of books though I am, I also agree that "A kind of knowledge is available to us from books, but personal knowledge, the kind that really counts, can come only from experience" (Holt, 1993, p. 129). By listening to older women who listen for God we can learn patterns of resiliency so important in gerontology, and we can experience something of God's passionate love.
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APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP GUIDE
Primary Questions:

1. Which woman in the Bible do you like best? Why? (Have you always liked her best, or just recently?)

2. Imagine yourself having a conversation with that woman. What would you like to tell her? Ask her?

3. Do you think the (Bible) woman’s faith helped her to cope with the problems in her life? How? Why?

4. How has your faith helped you to cope with problems in your life?

Possible Sub Questions:

1. How has being a member of the Church made a difference in your life?

2. If you were to find out that the church called you a saint after your death, why do you think that might be?
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Part One: The Significance of Spirituality

Primary Question: "Looking back over your life, what stands out for you?"

Sub Questions:

1. What kinds of things have been important to you?
2. What has stayed with you, in your memory?
3. Tell me about your life right now—what is it like for you?
4. What do you care about? Think about?

Part Two: Salient Aspects of Spirituality

Section A: The Inner Life

Primary Question: Tell me about your relationship with God.

Sub Questions:

1. What things are most important to you as a Christian?
2. During what times in your life has God seemed far away?
3. During what times in your life has God seemed especially close?

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4. Sometimes people who are Christians feel peaceful. Sometimes they still worry a lot. Which one of those best describes the way you've been feeling lately?

Section B: Society and the Community of Saints

Primary Question: What person or persons have been most important to you in your spiritual life?

Sub Questions:
1. What would you like to tell the coming generation about living a spiritual life?
2. Do you feel connected to Christians who have gone before you? In what way?
3. Do you think Christians have a responsibility to work for justice in the world?
4. Tell me about how you try to put your faith into action in your life.
5. What do you think the world will be like 50 years from now?

Section C: Theology and Spirituality

Primary Question: What Christianity teaching do you think is most important?

Sub Questions:
1. What teachings of the Lutheran Church have been especially important to you?
2. What teachings of the Bible have been especially important to you?
3. What Lutheran beliefs give you the most hope and comfort?

**Section D: Personal Renewal**

**Sub Questions:**

1. Tell me about your Baptism.

2. Tell me about what Holy Communion means to you.

3. Tell me about coming to worship services.

4. Tell me about your prayer life.

5. Do you have a favorite hymn? What is it? Why?

6. Was there a time in your life when you feel like you where given a second chance?

7. Do you feel God's is present in the everyday things of life?
APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORMS
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM: FOCUS GROUPS

This is an invitation for you to participate in a study of older Lutheran women and their spiritual strength. I am a graduate student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VPI) in Blacksburg, Virginia, U.S.A. The purpose of the study is to allow the voices of Lutheran women who have strong spiritual faith to be heard by others who need role models of resilience and spirituality.

If you are willing to share your thoughts and experiences regarding your spiritual faith with me and with others in a discussion group, you will be asked to participate for approximately one to one and one-half hours. The group discussion will be audio recorded and transcribed by a typist so that I may examine it in detail. Only first names will be used in these transcriptions. Your name will not be included in any book, article or lecture based on the group material. You will not be quoted by name.

I hope and expect that you will find participating in this research an enjoyable experience. However, if at any time you feel uncomfortable and want to change your mind about continuing in the group, you should feel free to leave. My name and local address and phone number is
listed on the attached sheet; please keep this just in case you need to get in touch with me. Information on my faculty advisor is also listed for your convenience. Please feel free to contact either of us at any time you might have questions about the study.

Thank you for your willingness to participate.

Date: __________________________

Participant: __________________________

Researcher: __________________________
This is an invitation for you to participate in a study of older Lutheran women and their spiritual strength. I am a graduate student at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VPI) in Blacksburg, Virginia, U.S.A. The purpose of the study is to allow the voices of Lutheran women who have strong spiritual faith to be heard by others who need role models of resilience and spirituality.

If you are willing to share your thoughts and experiences regarding your spiritual faith with me, an individual conversation will occur between us. The first interview will last approximately one to one and a half hours. After that time, you may decide if you would like to speak with me again.

Our interviews will be audio taped and transcribed by a typist so that I may examine them in detail. Only first names will be used in these transcriptions. Your name will not be included in any book, article or lecture based on interview material. You will not be quoted by name.

I hope and expect that you will find participating in this research an enjoyable experience. However, if at any time you feel uncomfortable and want to change your mind
about continuing the interview, you should feel free to
discontinue, pause or postpone it. My name and local
address and phone number are listed on the attached
sheet; please keep this just in case you need to get in
touch with me. Information on my faculty advisor is also
listed for your convenience. Please feel free to contact
either of us at any time you might have questions about
the study.

Thank you for your willingness to participate.

Date: __________________________

Participant: ______________________

Researcher: ______________________
APPENDIX D

JOURNAL ENTRIES
September 20, 1994

This morning I've been reading John's version of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4:7 ff.), and a strange verse stood out for me, verse 27: Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "what do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?

Not one of his disciples gave Jesus a hard time about breaking both the gender (and the racial rules). They probably thought plenty, but they didn't say a word. The Samaritan woman ran off to tell everyone what she had learned, and that Jesus might be the Christ. She wasn't sure, but she was excited enough to go tell everyone, just in case....

So often I see, or think I see, the same kind of look that I image was on the disciples' faces that day. "What are you doing, wearing that clerical collar...standing up there by that altar...even parking in the clergy parking lot?" I get so tired of it, of seeing the unspoken questions on faces. But I overreact. I am easily hurt.

Why I am so touchy. so easily bruised. Why can't I just ignore it and go running off, like the Samaritan woman, to tell everyone how thrilled I am that my Lord stopped for a while and "talked" to me. explained things to me, that he took a hard look at my life and told me to worship you "in spirit and truth"? No less incredible
that he would do that with me than with her: I'm not Jewish, or male, and my marital history, like that of this woman, is less than perfect. Yet he has come to me, he gives me "the time of day", and so much more.

Sometimes I feel just as free and excited and spontaneous as she was that day, and those are the times I'm listening to God. But inside me, too, are places were I hurt, where I'm afraid and insecure, where I'm afraid that maybe I just don't measure up.

Lord, be with me through this day. Let your peace stay with me, guide me, give me security and the assurance that you care for me, want me to be yours. Forgive the stupid, petty times. Continue to heal the scars I've wear from rejections by others, and from self-inflicted wounds. Draw me near to you through the keeping of this journal, through my writing, through this research. Still voices within and help me to listen to your voice.

**December 29, 1994**

I've just finished my first interview with a spiritual nominee. It was a good experience: I feel privileged to have listened to Rebecca, the 93 year old woman I met, and to have been let into her life.

I also feel somewhat sad. Maybe I'm wrong, but I'm afraid that lives like Rebecca's are a thing of the past. The simplicity of her life style, the firm values she holds, the lack of materialism in her environment, the
peacefulness: how different and remote it all seems from our family life. Driving home after the interview I wondered, "Can I, can anyone, have a faith as strong and sure as she has in a world that has changed so quickly and is so much more complex than the one in which she grew up?"

Her struggles were in no way less serious than my own: caring all those years for an invalid husband, not having an children in a world where bearing children was expected, the frail health she has now. Yet it seems, on the surface, that her life was so much more quiet and that the distractions from the spiritual life fewer. I came home to write this and found the stereo blaring out from my 22 year old son's room, the usual raunchy song, and I thought about Rebecca and her worries about people living together before marriage today. Our world has changed. Does she even guess all that is going on, how extensive those changes are?

I kept thinking about the quiet of Rebecca's world. She's no doubt still sitting there, in her chair, listening to a table. Later she'll eat a simple supper and go early to bed. Yet she's happy, content. My children complain constantly about "boredom". My life is packed with activity and people, every moment of every day. Will I someday sit and remember as she does, my childhood, my family, my church friends and experiences? Will I ever
know the kind of peace that she seems to know. "My life is very pleasant" she said. "It's the contentment." I wanted to say. Others would sit here and feel bitter.
"I'm alone, but not lonely" she added. What a gift. Oh, how I want to be more like her. I was so alone after my first marriage broke up; growing into being "OK" with being alone was a real struggle. This trip that begins in two days to Germany will include many alone times, especially when I'm not in Wilster. Will I be able to be alone, but not lonely? Do I have a quiet center, like Rebecca?

December 30, 1994

I'm packing for the trip to Germany, and preparing myself for this adventure. I have such a sense of people going "with" me even though I'm traveling alone: Joe, family, friends, the women at Glade Creek and friends at Christ Lutheran. Through all of them, I have a sense of God's presence as well.

I have many anxieties about being able to complete the project in a land with another language and a less than familiar culture. I'm anxious, too, about being a burden on the Steenbucks, even though they must be very kind people. It makes me feel so connected to the church, being welcomed like this across the ocean by a pastor and his family. I wonder what life is like for people who have no church roots, connections? That sense of
community has always been there for me, and I know often I've taken it for granted. I don't now: an experience like this really helps me to understand how wonderful it is to be part of the Church.

Meanwhile, I pray that my family will be safe and happy while I'm gone. I hope Joe's health will be good, and that the children will all thrive. There's always so much to worry about with five kids, all of whom are at different places at different times. I feel none of them has the spiritual center and life style I would wish for them, but I know part of that is their life stage. How ironic that as I study older women it my adolescent children who are so much on my mind. Maybe that's a good reminder that the women I'll meet in Wilster, and the women at Glade Creek, were once teenagers, with some of their own emotional and identity struggles. But what a different world they knew. But there must be strengths I can learn from women who grew up so long ago, in such a different world that would help me and later my children to live courageously in this world, now.

I spoke to a former client who is very bitter about a divorce after a long legal struggle, and who always has troubles with holidays. She spoke of the brokeness all around and I agreed, but after last night I wanted to add—but it's the brokeness, and our need for wholeness, that Christmas is all about. I don't fight that idea so
much anymore, that the world is broken and imperfect. I don't romanticize my life, my family, as I once did; too much has happened. And I know now that it is the brokenness that makes Christmas necessary-- for my family, for me. That includes the brokenness in me, the mistrust and greed and fear. How can you be almost broken by life and yet be whole? How can you "grow back", as Esters said. Maybe that's another reason I want to learn about being resilient. This work is about me, too, much more than I first realized when I "picked" a topic for a dissertation. Divorced, yet happily remarried; disillusioned with my romantic dreams for life, yet hopeful; fearful and filled with doubts, yet believing and listening; clearly, this topic "picked" me.

January 2, 1995

I am in Wilster at last. This has been a hectic day of travel from Frankfurt, with the stress level compounded by missing luggage. But the good news is that Wilster is a complete delight and my host family is friendly and gracious. They treat me with warmth and courtesy even though they know me only as "Bob's friend" and as the woman who wrote them letters in simplistic German. Their two sons are also friendly. Michael is quiet and studious, studying to be a lawyer. He gave me an excellent tour of the church but speaks only in German to me because, as Selma, his mother says, he is a bit
"genau", precise. Hearing my German errors should cure him of that! Raphael, "Raf", is his opposite--outgoing, artistic, a long-haired guitar player in a rock band. He will speak English with me and does so very well. I suspect that Michael will do so too as time goes on. I'm trying not to panic, even though the luggage has not arrived by bed time. Inside the bags is everything I need to do my work here including cassettes recorders, translations, lap top computer. I'm telling myself that I certainly need trust, not so much God (my bad planning is not God's emergency) as German efficiency (the bags were lost in the United States, but the German airlines promise to deliver them to our door).

There was interesting conversation with my hosts today despite the language differences. We were trying to get to know one another, especially checking out values and viewpoints. Being Christians doesn't necessarily mean that and two people are in agreement on social and economic issues, obviously. As it turns out, Karl and Selma are liberal in their views, much as I am (and, ironically, unlike our mutual friend, Bob!). I think that increased our comfort level with one another somewhat. but, from my point of view, anyone who serves incredible pastries that those I ate here today would be quite acceptable!
I called home for the first time tonight since arriving in Germany. Joe and Brian's voices had an echo, reminding me that there's a great distance between us. Yet love really does keep people close, and I feel my family's presence just as I had hoped I would. Does that mean that when God seems distant it's because our love has grown dim? Surely God's for us never does, so when there's a feeling of isolation and loneliness, it must be because we have tired of loving God, and gotten lazy about working on that relationship. So when God has seemed distant to me in my life, it's been because of a failure of love on my part. Those are difficult words for me to say, even to write down in this journal: "I have not always loved God." Yet why should they be more difficult to say than "I have fallen short and sinned." The second statement is abstract; the first is personal. Faith is about this personal relationship and if I could keep it more on that level in my life, I would love God more and sin less, because it's a lot easier for me to go against an idea than a loved one. Yet it is God whom I hurt when I turn away. God whom I fail to love.
From time to time I feel pangs of loneliness at being in such a strange environment. I keep trying to reframe this as a growth experience. When I start to feel blue, I think about how I'm proving to myself that I, a woman alone, can really do this. And it helps even more to
remember Rebecca, the spiritual nominee in Glade Creek, who sits there, alone in her home, blind, 93, and who said to me without a trace of self pity, "I'm alone, but I'm not lonely." Already one of these woman is a model of strength for me, and the project has just begun. I am so excited to think what stories I'll find here. But will the women trust me enough to open up to me? Why should they? I guess I'll have to leave that concern to tomorrow, and to God.

January 3, 1995

Today was much better and less stressful. Not only did my luggage finally arrive late today, but I have mostly gotten over that slightly nauseous feeling of jet lag. For the most part it was a quiet day at home, getting acclimated. I took two walks around the neighborhood and felt very much the stranger. But the beauty of the snow covered town and the regular ringing of the church bells remind me that I am no stranger to God. The Bible says we are all strangers in this world in a sense, since its values are not our own, not Christian values, and never will be. But because God made the entire earth, for all his creatures, I'm really no more out of place here, in an ultimate sense, than I am in Virginia. Culturally, though, and humanly, it's quite different. There are so many things to get used to: the way that Germans eat so quickly (I'm always the last one to finish), the proper
way to shop (you bring your own sack and bag your own groceries), the way to behave with strangers and acquaintances (don't speak, just nod to strangers who are sharing a close space with you). Of course you say "Guten Tag" [Good day] to acquaintances and "Angenehm" [pleased to meet you] when you meet someone new. "Tschues" [so long] is for when you're leaving. I am anxious, worrying that I will do something to displease my hosts. If I feel insecure, it's because I'm so dependent on them, I guess: it certainly isn't because they have been anything but fantastic to me. With Selma I feel particularly comfortable. We communicate very well despite my poor pronunciation and her lack of English. It's as though being women and mothers (and over worked!) gives us much in common. We laugh together at women's kinds of issues: like me, she is a feminist but also very committed to her family. Karl is a wonderful person, intense and committed. He loves the church and is very interested in many things: he's so bright and quick. I really enjoy our conversations. He's given me a Barth book to read while I'm here. I can understand his German better than anyone else's because he speaks so succinctly. Yet sometimes he makes me a little anxious because I feel as though he hasn't made up his mind about me yet. I get the feeling that my informality and spontaneity make him a bit uncomfortable.
For my devotions tonight I finally have my own English Bible. It was slightly bent en route but looks so familiar and comforting. When it took it out of the suitcase, it was like seeing an old friend. I found myself yesterday realizing that this old leather Bible would be the personal object that I'd miss most if the suitcase didn't arrive, even though the tape recorders are what I most needed.

God, I ask that you use this experience to work with me and to help me grow spiritually. May even the moments of homesickness and anxiety I feel be reminders that I need to be stronger in my sense of self as your child, and that none of us are ever completely at home in this world.

January 4, 1995

This morning I woke up sick with a cold and had to cancel my plans to go to Hamburg to explore the city on foot. I couldn't risk spending a day outdoors and being sick tomorrow for the focus group. My hosts were as kind and solicitous as always, and Selma brought me fruit and yogurt in my room in spite of my protests. I must admit that it felt good to be nurtured. I keep thinking the same thing over and over, how small the world is for Christians. If I can travel half way around the world and be accepted here, made to feel part of the family, then that's what we mean when we talk about the "body of
Christ". Yet so seldom do we actually experience this unity in a practical way.

Tomorrow is the focus group and my first meeting with the older women of this parish. Will they accept me as the Steenbucks have? Will they talk to me about their lives and their faith? I keep thinking, why should they open up to me? Why should they tell me anything personal about themselves? Will the language and cultural barrier make this experience very different from my conversations with Rebecca? My experiences outside this household have certainly not all been so positive. The train conductor over charged me by several Marks for a cup of coffee, and told me the wrong track number (deliberately?). The postmaster yelled loudly at me when he thought I did not understand German. Why should the women be different? Yet my hopes are that they will be, that they too will approach me as a fellow Christian and be kind and cooperative.

At each step of this adventure, I have had to learn to trust again that all will be well. Each difficulty seems to shake my confidence unreasonably. First, at the Roanoke airport, I thought I might not get to fly at all because of the weather. When the plane was announced as a "go", I had such a strong sense that God was helping me. Yet at the very next problem, the loss of my luggage, I had trouble trusting again. Now that I have my luggage
and that all is going well with my stay here. I again have trouble trusting God. I keep thinking everything is up to me and my skills, yet I also have a strong sense that I have God's support with this project, that I am being used here in spite of my poor faith and many insecurities. Prayer helps; I find that when I take my concerns to God honestly, and confess my anxieties, they diminish on the spot—not disappear, but diminish.

God, I ask now that you be with me on this day, and tomorrow. May my meeting with the German women be not only helpful to me, but to them. May they feel affirmed and strengthened as they realize what You have meant in their lives. May they grow through their cooperation with this project, as they realize how important they are to others. May I use all my talents and gifts in this work. Thank you for all that has brought me to this point. May the church bells I am hearing at this moment be a symbol of your presence and love, and may they ring in my heart when I have gone back home.

January 5, 1995

This afternoon will not be soon forgotten. I just returned from the focus group here in Wilster. To say that it was a success does not begin to chapter the experience for either me or for the participants. It is definitely one of those rare times of my life when I feel absolutely confident that God's purposes took over and
things happen far greater than I could have ever imaged. When the first woman, Inge, began sharing with me, telling me that she identified with Mary the mother of Christ because she, too, has lost a son. I was surprised and touched. That was only the beginning of my surprises. The emotionality of these women is so deep. They have been through terrible experiences. Being with them reminded me of being with the Vietnam vets last summer in one way: I felt respect for the seriousness of what they have survived. When one woman spoke of not knowing for days whether she would live or die, she cried. I suddenly realized that this research experience is going to be a lot more emotionally powerful than I had expected. I immediately had a sense of gratitude that she had allowed us to participate in such a moment. And I was astonished that they would be sharing such deep and meaningful things with me. I sensed that God was working, and that in spite of all my limitations, it was God's intention that the voices of these women be heard. Suddenly I knew that what I am participating in here is far more important than my degree; it is important because it is another piece of God's work. I feel recommitted to this project, excited about how I "stumbled" onto it and determined to do my very best with it.

I will never forget the faces of these women, their Angst when they told of painful times, and their pleasure when
they heard that their faith stories were going to be heard. When the pastor explained that I would be sending word back to them and checking out my findings with them before publication, they looked especially pleased. I think they, too have had a feeling of being a part of something larger than any one of them alone. I think now that the best thing for me is to "get out of the way" and let God's work be done: this journal will help me to do that. Tomorrow is my first visit with a spiritual nominee. I'm frightened, but, on the other hand, I can hardly wait.

January 6, 1995

This day has been beyond description. This morning I had my first interview with a German spiritual nominee, and I was so moved by the experience. This woman, Elizabeth, has such a quiet confidence, and so much to say about her spirituality. I couldn't believe how trusting she was with me. It was as though she was quietly delighted that someone cared about her ideas and stories. And as if all of that were not enough, she is a poet, and she shared with me several of her poems. Many are directly related to her spiritual strength. Everything keeps being so much better than I had ever hoped for on this trip.

Later, at Mittags [lunch break], I took all four of the Steenbucks out to eat at a local restaurant, and that was fun. It was good to see them relaxed and enjoying
themselves without Selma's having to cook. It troubles me sometimes to think that here I am doing a research project for feminist purposes, and now a woman has to work harder because of my presence in the household.

Before we began eating, Karl offered grace, very quietly. It was as though he did not want to disturb anyone or remind them of his piety, yet he was not willing to eat without giving thanks. He always says the same short prayer, which is the exact German version of the prayer we always said at home in Pennsylvania, "Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest". My German roots show up from time to time.

But by far the most fantastic part of the day was the evening. We drove to Itzeho, a nearby city, for Gottesdienst, worship services, because today is Epiphany. I was expecting a small group, and a simple service. What occurred was an experience I'll not soon forget. The church was old and beautiful with a large crucifix hanging in front. The only light was the candle light from candles at the end of each pew and from the large Tannenbaum, Christmas tree, in front. The atmosphere was so quiet and hushed; no one spoke above a whisper except for those who presided. The celebrant and preacher was the Provost, who is a church official somewhere between a bishop and a dean in our system. He has a dramatic voice which he uses well for worship. I
sat with Selma and a few of the older women I had met yesterday, including Inge, because Carl was assisting with the service. I followed along with the German hymns and could understand the sermon completely since the preacher spoke slowly and precisely. He spoke of the mystery of the "3 holy kings", as the wise men are known in Germany. He said that they brought their gifts in humility and that the mystery of Epiphany is to offer to God our pride and selfishness and materialism, to put all that at his feet so that we can experience newness of life with God. He said that it is difficult for us to do this, to live a spiritual life, because of all that we have. We mistake our material possession for riches.

There was Holy Communion, and in that atmosphere, so quiet and spiritual, with my new German friends, so far from home and yet so "zu Hause", at home. I was deeply moved. For some reason I thought about my mother during the service. I suddenly thought how incredibly fortunate I am to be having this experience. And I thought of how she has never been able to come to Germany; once she came close, but had a heart attack just before she and my father were to leave. She has had so little in her life, and so much sorrow. I have had so much, so many incredible experiences, so much joy. I wish I could tell her how much I love her and wish to thank her for all that she has done. I guess having an experience like this
one, one you're grateful for, makes you realize more than ever how deeply in debt we all are to those who have given to us. I am here because of the love and support of so many other people.

I kept feeling tears start in my eyes during the service. The Germany words were so beautiful. The same meaning as in English, the creed, the Our Father, but somehow hearing them in German was so precious to me. One dramatic difference I noted in this service was how quiet the congregation was, how worshipful and formal. In Glade Creek, there was so much talking and informality. It's not as though the people in Virginia were any less sincere or close to God, it's just a dramatically different culture. A female pastor assisted with Communion. That was good to see.

After worship we went by car to a parish house and had "Abendessen", which consisted of much conversation, beer, sausages and dark rye bread. I sat with the group from Wilster and talked with the women and with Selma, who graciously tried to draw me into the conversation. Imagine my surprise when the Provost asked Karl to introduce me and then when Karl asked me to speak to the whole room filled with people! He told the group gathered there, from various churches in this Kreis, [circle, a geographic area] about my work. I noticed two women who whispered and joked with each other when he said that I
was writing a book about older women. I told the group how much I appreciated the warmth and friendliness, and how strong a sense I had that I was part of the church community, having come so far across the ocean and yet feeling so at home. The faces in the room lit up when I said these things.

Afterwards the same two women (not from our group) who had joked with each other about being "older" approached me in the coat room. They looked sophisticated and intelligent. The one who spoke English told me, in English, that she thought it was different in Germany from the United States because in Germany there are many older women without partners "because of other war". She said being without a man makes a difference. I responded very seriously, even though at first she was smiling, and I told her that this problem exists in the U.S. also, having more older women than men. Although, I said, it may be a still worse problem in Germany. She appeared to be shocked to hear this and said wondered why there should this was so. In addition to the war, I said, women lived longer. I guess we're stronger. She told this to her friend and then asked me how she could get a copy of "my book". Once again I was moved to see how eager these women are to be heard, how important it is to them that someone cares about their situation.
On the way home I told Karl and Selma what a fantastic
day it had been for me, and they said they enjoyed it
too. But they could not have known how meaningful it was
for me. It was one of those days when you think, well,
even if nothing else ever happens to me in my life, I
will always be grateful for this experience. It's
difficult to express all the feelings going on inside me.
Being in a foreign country, feeling welcomed as a fellow
Christian and as a woman, has been doubly powerful. Of
course it's personally satisfying to know that people
here have accepted me for myself. But I constantly feel
gratitude for all those who have brought me to this
point. And, above all, to God. God has kept me safe.
God's Spirit has helped with everything from assistance
with concentrating on German to knowing what to say when
I have to speak to a group, to finding courage in awkward
situations. It is so true, as the Provost said, when one
loves and worships by putting herself at God's feet,
mysteries and miracles occur.

January 7, 1995
I am finished with my interviews with Elizabeth, and I
feel terrific about how they went, not just from a
research point of view, but especially since they seemed
to be so important to her. Her life seems peaceful.
that's the word that keeps coming to my mind. She is clearly at peace with her life, her story, her faith. I think that her love of the natural world has a lot to do with this peace. Her garden, her stones, her birds: she seems to have a deep sense that she, too, is part of God's world.

Joseph Sittler, one of my favorite Lutherans, wrote once that those of us who live in these times are "diminished" because our roots aren't so deep or so widely spread into the natural world of field and forest as were the roots of our ancestors. I had so much more time to be outdoors when I was younger. As a child I would especially find myself so happy outdoors, away from the tensions of our household. Everything delighted me, and I felt a bond with the streams and the damp leaves and the smells especially on autumn days. Knowing that winter was coming made those times particularly precious. My first spiritual experiences, separate from my family, were in the woods at the summer camp I attended. Perhaps being away from home made those times more powerful, (just as being away from home now is making this experience so much more intense). We would build a worship area in the woods as part of our church summer camp experiences, and I remember looking at the cross we constructed, and being amazed that just putting two large sticks together, ordinary sticks, would suddenly produce
such a powerful symbol. The sticks were no longer mere objects, but mysterious, somehow, reminding me that God was present through the story of Jesus Christ. I never fail to feel some of that mystery when I look at a cross or crucifix. The beautiful crucifix that hangs in the front of St. Bartholomew's Kirche here in Wilster is a far cry from the simple crosses we made in summer camp, yet it evokes for me many of the same feelings. Lately my experiences with nature have been few because of the pace of my life, and this is a part of my spiritual life I feel cut off from. At least when I had a dog to walk I would get outdoors regularly, but lately I have been inside, working and studying, all the time. A regular walk with no practical purpose in mind needs to be part of my life again. Here in Germany I'll be walking often since I have no car; hopefully I can continue to do so at home. Perhaps realizing its place in my spiritual life will help me to get outside more. I'll think about Frau Elizabeth and her peace and that model should help me to get going and out the door.

The other thing I've learned from this peaceful woman is the importance of creative writing in spiritual life for those of us who feel comfortable with this form of self expression. All her poems are spiritual in some sense; her faith in God permeates all she thinks and writes. I was especially impressed with her insight that
writing the poems helps her to believe more deeply: she says reading over what she has written makes it all more real for her. That is true of so much of faith; it has to be spoken and heard and lived to be made real. Yet Elizabeth also loves to learn and to think: in spite of her lack of formal education, she is intellectually alive and growing, never missing an opportunity to attend a seminar or retreat. But she is able to interweave, so naturally, the findings of her brain with her inner faith experiences. This is very impressive to me, and a goal I have. In some ways it's what I've been doing in graduate school, but not always. The times when I keep a journal like this I've done far more of that synthesizing of head and heart, knowledge and faith, but it simply doesn't happen by itself and I don't always give writing enough time in my life. I don't stop to express the connections between what I can learn about God's world with my head and what I believe in my heart. From conversations with Elizabeth, I have come up with 2 "New Year's resolutions":
1) spend more time in the natural world, walking and noticing the beauty of creation and taking my part in it and 2) regularly writing, either in poetry or journal form, about my experiences and how they intersect with my spiritual faith.

January 9, 1995
Today I met with a group of older members of the congregation, at Karl's request. Only Inge was there from the focus group; the others were all different individuals. After coffee and coffee cake, served as always in elegant fashion, with candles at each carefully set table. Karl introduced me and asked me to tell the people something about my work. There was quite a strong reaction from one woman, who had been invited to the Focus Group but who had not come (we learned indirectly) because she said she didn't want to be "interrogated". Today, however, she agreed enthusiastically that older women are not heard in society, at home, or in the church, as they should be, and their stories not told. She was also very interested in the Social Security system in America, and what I said about the problems of older women in America who are divorced in later life. She later told Karl that she would like to be interviewed now. "So that she could ask me more questions," and then later called the parsonage to repeat this request. Not everyone there, however, was on that "wave length". Immediately after she spoke, another woman argued with her, saying that older women have no place trying to get all the attention and should accept their lot in life quickly and let the young take over. Karl whispered to me, in English. "She's internalized the very attitudes you are speaking about!" These women were the only two to
speak or to ask questions. Overall there was a tremendous contrast between this group of older persons and the selective group of women at the Focus group. The women in the focus group were more articulate and more interested in religious matters, as well as far more self confident about speaking out.

January 10, 1995
I have been thinking about how connected I feel with the women I am interviewing, and I believe the connection has two "strands". One is our common faith, and the community it provides. The other is our commonalty as women. I had never dreamed that the latter would be so strong cross cultures, but when I sit down for coffee with these women, we are "two women talking" about life and death and sorrow and joy and faith. It is as though I've been prepared by all the experiences of my life, the pleasures of being young, the joys of loving a man, the happiness and sorrows of motherhood, and the sorrows I've experienced like losing an infant and divorce—all of these have prepared me for understanding what these women have been through. I'll probably never, thank God, know what it's like to ride in an open cart as a refugee from war, holding a two year old sick, dirty child, as Inge had to. But I know what it is to worry and cry about a child so that you think your heart will break. I heard
some guilt, too, in Inge, for the years she was so busy in the watch shop. She had to work because of her husband's uselessness as an alcoholic, yet she misses the times with her son and she makes (too strong, I think) a connection between her lack of time for him and his current problems. This is so familiar to me, the irrational yet never ending guilt. I had to go to work after my divorce, while the children were still young; I had no choice, yet I often feel bad that the children's years went flying by. I'm always thinking that their current difficulties are somehow my fault, that if I had only spent more time with them, they would have turned out to have fewer problems today. Yet Inge doesn't allow her sorrow over her son to dominate her entire life. She can sit down and have a cry, yet she has a happy and healthy life filled with giving to others through the church. Her sense that she is loved by others in the church keeps her joyful, keeps her saying, "Ich bin sehr glücklich. [I am so fortunate]." What an inspiration she is: her problems have been so much more dramatic and overwhelming; I've had so many opportunities she has not, for an education, for travel. But my faith and joy haven't begin to approach her own. I know I'll think back to her many times in the years to come when difficulties come my way, especially difficulties with the children.

January 11, 1995
No sooner do I write pious words about trust in God than I am put to the test. Last night I had a call from home and found out that my (18 year old) daughter, about whom I worry the most these days, now weighs only 88 pounds. She is taller than I am and this weight borders on the dangerous. I think she may be depressed, and I know she isn't eating properly. It's extremely tough to be this far away. All my motherly nurturing impulses are frustrated. And it so often seems with my daughter that either I don't really have anything to give her that she wants, or that she will accept; she is so busy finding her own way, making her path into adulthood. Sometimes, briefly, she seems to want some "mothering", but most of the time it's distance she needs and wants. I'm thinking of Inge, of her story about the son who never calls or writes to her, or even responses to her letters. Surely if she can bear that, I can bear my anxieties.

My husband says a doctor's visit is scheduled for this Friday. Even though he said he'd call me Monday. I know I'll call Friday night to see what the doctor said. Until then, I can practice being the strong woman I'd like to be and am not yet. There is no question in my mind that the most difficult part of being a woman is being a mother and worrying about one's children. Even marriage and love problems don't touch it.
But I do have a connection to my daughter. Through God. Though she wants "her space", I can pray for her, no limits on that. And God understands all that is on my heart—the guilt because I haven't been the perfect mother, the fears, the hopes and dreams for her future. I think, too. I will use what I've learned from Elizabeth and write a letter to Katie today. She wrote one to me before I left, trying to explain saying that she loves me. It was a big help; she'll never know how much it meant. It let me know that the relationship is still there, still important to her. God. I'm glad you're there for mothers (especially mothers of adolescents); we certainly need you!

January 12, 1995

Tonight I accompanied Karl to his meeting with the Vorstand [church council]. He asked me to come and help him lead the opening section of the meeting, which is always something devotional or spiritually educational. He decided we should discuss the fourth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother", and try to get those in attendance to talk about what this commandment means today, how it may be different in America and Germany, and how it's changed in the past and present. Karl says that in the past this commandment in Germany basically meant that one had to respect and obey, at any cost, not only one's parents, but also civil authorities. Luther's
catechism, he stated, has had an enormous impact on German life in this way, especially his interpretation of this commandment. It's resulted in a mixture of good and evil: obviously the Nazi times are the most dramatic example of the latter, when authority figures were followed against moral principles. In reaction to that phenomenon, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church in Germany has recently been emphasizing a change in understanding this commandment, saying "honor" should mean care, care for our elderly parents when they are old. We should minister to them as individuals and as a church.

But Karl says that since my visit and our many conversations, he's no longer comfortable with this emphasis. He now realizes that this approach, too, is limited, because it tends to make the elderly into a problem, into objects of care, not respected resources of wisdom and experience. Naturally, I was delighted that he was thinking about these things, and that he was saying that he might have benefited from my visit in some way. He and Selma have been so wonderful to me, have done so much.

He wanted to discuss all of this with the council, and did a good job of introducing the topic to them, relating all of the above. I then talked a few minutes about my work, and how I felt that, in America, we need to learn to listen to our older persons and learn from their
lives. I spoke in German, and there were nods and smiles, everyone was most kind in spite of my pronunciation and God—knows what other errors.

However, the discussion that followed was not what Karl and I anticipated. The room quickly divided between a few of the older men and the younger men; the women present (about five) said nothing (to my disappointment and frustration). The older men began talking about problems with unemployment, and the younger men said that the older people don't understand modern technology" and therefore shouldn't be in authority. Some of the speakers at least called for a two way conversation, but in general there was not the dialogue we'd hoped for. I'm afraid pastors like Karl and me are sometimes too idealistic.

But Karl regained control at the end. He reminded us all that this commandment is the only one that includes a curse and a promise. He said that shows how important it must be to God. And he said it is the hearts of the parents and children that need to change, not just the behavior. Karl is really a terrific pastor; he brings his theological knowledge and personal convictions into everyday situations so sensitively. I'm learning much from watching him. All in all, a good ending to a strange experience.

January 13
I am more than half way through my time in Germany, and I remain profoundly thankful that everything is going so well. One thing I really did not anticipate was that I would grow so close to my host and hostess during my visit. Selma and Karl have become real friends during the last 13 days, and I know it is a friendship which will last. I know. They are planning a visit to the U.S. during the coming year: I can't wait for Joe to meet them, and it will be so good to be able to do things for them when they visit.

The other aspect of this experience that continues to amaze me is the way that the woman share private details of their lives with me. Yesterday I met with the third of my spiritual nominees, Emma, for the first time. This interview may have been the most significant so far, because she has an amazing ability to interweave stories about her life with the significance of her faith and faith experiences. Emma has been a widow for only 4 years; her former husband was an artist, and they lived an isolated life out of town with no real neighbors or friends. The people in their lives were customers of his, not real friends. During that time, Emma stopped going to church regularly even though she continued to practice her faith at home, especially in raising her 5 children. But when her husband died of cancer, she found she had to find a new path through life for herself. It was then
that she became reactive in the church, and has become a new and different person in the process—doing so much for others, including the older-old whom she visits, sharing her story, attending a weekly Bible study, which she says is even more important to her than the pastor’s preaching.

Emma’s changes, after she found herself alone, really took me back to the time immediately after my divorce. Like Emma, I had let my (first) husband’s profession dominate our lives; like her, I had gotten lazy about church and although we attended, I was not really very involved. Then suddenly I found myself alone, finding my own path, and I grew to realize how important the faith community was to me. Not only did I become a different person, far more interested in others than ever before, but, ironically, like Emma I found new meaning for my life through visiting older persons. My divorce was my second chance, even though it certainly didn’t seem it at the time. In Christian language, I’d say we both found ourselves by losing ourselves.

And in both cases, it was only after we lost the men in our lives that we were able to do that. Loss, with God’s chemistry, can become gain. But I found myself realizing, as she spoke, that I am really afraid of the idea of losing Joe. That would be no second chance; that would be absolutely terrible. People talk about how
different he and I are; they have no idea of how what
goes on between us, how close we are. He is my dear soul
mate, and here in Germany I miss him so much. I
appreciate as never before how precious he is to me, how
much it means to have him in my life. Would I be able to
bear losing him, as Emma lost her husband, and as so many
of these women have? There is no way to anticipate how I
would navigate my way through that darkness, but I know
that the community would be there for me, and God,
somehow, would bring me through, even that. In spite of
it all.

That brings me back to one of the aspects of my
conversation with Emma that seemed most powerful was when
I pulled out of her sentence the word, "trotzdem", "in
spite of". She really took off with that word and
explained in a moving way that her faith is "in spite of"
all that has happened, and "in spite of" the continuing
pain she often feels when she sees other young-old
couples enjoying their retirement years together. But she
doesn't become bitter or "stuck" on these feelings; she
doesn't feel jealous in the sense of self-pity. She has
found a new way to organize both her life and her
thinking so that it is God centered. I can't really say
that I am at that point, yet. I still am so caught up in
my own accomplishments and worrying about my own life too
much to be at the mature level of faith this woman knows.
She always refers to what God does through her, not what she does. She has such a blend of enthusiasm and realism, about what life is actually like.

I respect Emma and hope that someday I can be given a faith more like hers. That kind of faith is a gift, but it seems to be gift that I can help to get ready for by getting "self" out of the way. As I continue to be concerned about my daughter, I recognize how universal these experiences seem to be for mothers. Emma has an alcoholic son, and other children who do not go to church, one who is in a new age cult. She worries about them but, like Inge, does not despair or allow her worry to rob her of either her convictions or of the joy she knows in her relationship with God.

As I mature, will my worries, too, become less dominant? Actually. I can already feel that happening to some extent. Katie was on my mind off and on all day yesterday, yet I had a somewhat less overwhelmed feeling about it, not caring less or loving less, but with a feeling that I could trust God more. I'm sure all will someday be well with her, and that I need to focus my own energies not on worry, which accomplishes nothing. Instead, there is, right now, my work, which can be helpful to others, and relationships with these new people, the nominees, the Steenbucks. Like Elizabeth, I can write about my concerns and doubts and faith; like
Inge, I can take comfort from the love of other Christians who care (at the present time, Selma and Karl), and like Emma, I can continue to walk the path that God has chosen for me, not just stumble around on one of my own making (particularly the non-path of fear and worry).

After the interview was over, I told Emma I had seen one of her husband’s paintings in my book on Wilster. She said there were three altogether in the book, and she looked in the index and found the other two. This seemed very important to her; she is obviously proud of his work. The paintings are appealing, rather impressionistic and pleasant. She then asked me again to tell her something about my own life, and, since the interviews were over, I did share a little. When I mentioned my divorce, and how that was my second chance, she became openly teary for the first time. How remarkable that she was so much more moved by my sorrows than she by her own! When we said good-bye, I gave Emma the same small pin (a dove to represent the Holy Spirit) I’ve been giving to all the women after the last interview. She seemed especially pleased with it.

January 15, 1995

I saw Emma in church today. She read the lesson during the service; she’s a regular lay reader. She also sat with a group of her friends from the Bible Study, who now
seems like my friends, too. Elizabeth is also one of them. After the service, Emma greeted me warmly, and pulled back her winter coat to show me what she was wearing on her collar: the small dove pin I had given her. I also saw Anna again, and I'm very eager to begin my interviews with her. I find both her and her story intriguing.

Jan 16, 1995

I have returned from my second interview with Anna, and my head is spinning. I never dreamed that this experience would be so fascinating and so emotionally moving. It's hard to describe all that I thought and felt today with this deeply spiritual woman who has seen so much, and grown so much from her experiences. Thank goodness for this journal so that I don't have to try to be "objective" about her. She is very special for me.

Ever since I first met Anna I have been fascinated with her and her story—her style, her smile, her quiet way of talking, the things she has accomplished. But I was afraid of her, as well—somehow I felt awkward around her, the way I'd feel. I guess, meeting a great person from history, like Lincoln. But after today I feel much more at ease, because of her graciousness, warmth and almost casual manner with me. I certainly don't feel any less in awe, however.
More than anything, I feel honored that we shared such intimate moments as we did in the conversation today. At one point, after talking about the war and reading Bonhoeffer's prayer out loud, she became very quiet and there was about a 2 or 3 minute pause, maybe longer. Those minutes were the most impressive of any time on this trip, a trip filled with impressive times. During that silence, I felt connected to her, even though I also felt she was far away, lost in her memories, thinking of times and people I will never know. She smiled a little sheepishly at me when the pause was over, and I told her I found her to be a very deep person, very sensitive. "Weil ich nachdenke? [Because I think back?]" she asked. Selma is right: Anna really has no idea of how special she is; that is, perhaps, the most amazing thing about her of all.

I feel like I've saved the best interview for last here in Wilster. That's not only true from the point of view of this work, but also for myself, personally. It will take some time for me to articulate all that meeting Anna has meant--I know, even now, somehow it has to do with things that go back to my childhood, to those nights sitting on the stairs in my parents' home, listening to dramatizations of the Nuremberg trials, reading the Diary of Ann Frank, and thinking, "I'm German, too. What does
all this mean? How could all these things be, and what does it mean about me, about people, about God?"

In Anna, there is certainly no final resolution of these questions—they have no answers. As she says repeatedly, these things are truly incomprehensible, unimaginable. Yet to meet someone who was actually a member of the Nazi party at one time and is now this wonderful person—what does all that mean about human resiliency, about God's Grace, and second chances? Certainly it means that we don't have to get stuck in guilt; we go on, we "nachdenk", yes, but we go on. Anna works for peace and justice, but with a sense of loving concern, not as though she's trying to redeem herself. She is responding to the love of God, not trying to earn her way somehow. And everything she thinks and does is out of love and compassion for those who have not had the opportunities she has had.

I can't believe how non-self-referential this woman is. I didn't hear one word about her own health concerns, or anything that even comes close to self pity from her. Always it is others she thinks about, often the whole human race. What a vision, what a way to live.

Selma is very understanding about my strong reactions to Anna: she is also fascinated by her. "Die grande Dame", she always calls her. Yes, the great lady.

January 24, 1995
I'm home at last. There has never been a sight so welcome as the faces of my husband and son at the airport. How I love them, and my other children. It is so good to be here.

This trip has really changed me. I feel more peaceful, more calm, somehow, more of my own person—yet at the same time I realize more than ever how much I love and need other people. I do feel some frustration, already, at not being able to share with Joe enough details of the experience to feel like he completely understands (he's trying!). I've taken lots of pictures, especially the last few days in Berlin, but it just isn't possible to explain everything to him. I guess that's OK, too, and maybe even necessary. The Steenbucks are, hopefully, coming to visit in October. But if only he could meet Anna, Emma, Inge and Elizabeth. Maybe someday he will, when I return to Wilster with him. I'm grateful for this journal, and for the tapes (I guarded them with my life on the way home!). They are the real treasure of this trip, other than my memories. It's incredible to me, to think that I'll be able to re-experience those conversations now, as I play the tapes and read the transcriptions. And then, after I write the dissertation and the book, other people can meet these wonderful women too.
Thank you, God, for my safe trip home, for this experience, and especially for keeping my family safe while I was gone.

Feb. 21, 1995 3:15 a.m.

I got up out of bed to write this because I was afraid of losing my thoughts and feelings. I had a dream that helped me to understand what I am doing in this project, and how much I want to be close to God.

Like most dreams, all dreams, it was a bazaar mixture of parts of my life, parts of me. Alan and Jo, my friends (a couple) were telling me to go to Lake Constance (in Switzerland, the city where Michael Steenbucks is studying law) in order to meet God. They told me that they had recently been there on a vacation, and had seen the face of God in a large wave. They were very precise on how I could go to a certain part of the lake and find this wave and see the face of God for myself.

Well, the dream is really outrageous in many ways. Theologically, it's ridiculous, of course, primitive and so literalistic—it's worse than Cecil B. de Mil and The Ten Commandments. And my dear friends Alan and Jo are special and close to me, but not really pious people by any means, not people who I would expect to be looking for God in the waves on a vacation.

None of that matters, though, because the phone rang on the children's line at 2:30 a.m., in the middle of
this dream, and woke me up, allowing me to remember the
dream, not just with my mind but with my heart, to think
and to feel all that it brought to me. As I lay in bed
thinking, I saw the wave again, and I had a remarkably
strong sense of God's presence, never mind the "stupid"
theology and images. And I began thinking about this
project and the women, including Martha, whom I
interviewed yesterday. They were so honest about God's
presence in their lives, so unconcerned about how
"theologically correct" that sense of presence is. Martha
can't really, or won't, talk about her "relationship with
God" when asked directly, much as Inge could not, or
would not. Yet she could tell me about sometimes getting
up in the middle of the night to deliver a calf and
feeling no fear as she goes down to her barn alone,
because God is with her. Or she can talk about, and cry
about, the Sunday School picture of the woman scrubbing
the floor "for God". She can question the suffering she
has seen, and admit that God's ways are beyond her.

As I lay there in bed, I felt such a longing for a
faith like that, certainly not for the first time in the
last months. But this time I put different words to the
experience, and I realized that I want so desperately to
be close to God, to "see the face" of God in my life, to
experience a daily faith relationship with God in a new
and closer way. And I realized, too, that this longing is
what this project is really about. It's not only about helping others learn resiliency, it's not only about writing a dissertation or a book. It's not only even about learning how to age myself and endure losses, even the worst possible one. More than anything, it's about wanting to be close to God. There's an actually physical feeling, inside my "heart", the way you feel right after you fall in love and then have to say good bye for the night.

Which is what I'd better do right now so that I can get up tomorrow and get back to work on this research.
VITA

JANET L. RAMSEY

EDUCATION


1976 Master of Arts in Religion, cum laude, Yale University Divinity School. Areas of emphasis: theology, counseling.

1967 Bachelor of Arts, cum laude, Muhlenberg College. Area of emphasis: English literature.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

1993- present Graduate Teaching Assistant, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. (Marriage and Family Dynamics).


1990-1992 Parish Pastor, St. Timothy Lutheran Church. Ordained by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, December 9, 1985


1985 to 1990 Nursing Home Chaplain and Director of Social Services, Virginia Synod Lutheran Home.

1968 to 1970 Early Childhood Education Teacher, Yale University Child Study Center.


HONORS AND AWARDS


Edward Ashley Walker Scholarship Prize, Yale University, 1975.
MEMBERSHIPS IN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Virginia Counseling Association 1994-
Gerontological Society of America 1993-
Mental Health Association of the Roanoke Valley 1993-
Roanoke Valley Counselors Association 1993-
Network, Association for Nursing Home Chaplains 1987-1990
Editor, Network News 1989-1990
Board Member, Network Executive Committee 1987-1990
Program Planning Committee 1989
American Association for Non-Profit Homes for the Aged 1985-1990
Virginia Association for Non-Profit Homes for the Aged 1986-1990
Philo Club for Professional Clergy 1985-
Président 1989
Roanoke Valley Ministers Association 1985-

PRESENTATIONS

Ramsey, J. Listening lessons: Tuning in to God through the words and lives of older persons. Key note address, Ecumenical Workshop for Clergy and Lay Leadership, The Senior Center, Charlottesville, VA. November 17, 1994.

Ramsey, J. New spectacles to study old age: The coming together of spirituality and gerontology in a search for the inner dimensions of aging. Southern Gerontology Society Annual Meeting, Charlotte, NC. April, 1994


Ramsey, J. Looking for God in all the wrong places: Aging and religion research. Association for Gerontology in Higher Education Annual Meeting, Cleveland, Ohio. March, 1994


Ramsey, J., & Hayes, F. The relationship between chaplains and administrators in nursing homes. Lutheran Association for Nursing Home Administrators and Chaplains. 1987


Signed: [Signature]

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