



School of Humanities, Language and Global Studies

Ed.D

**The impact of singing by older choristers in church communities in North-West England: Social and spiritual implications.**

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## **GLOSSARY**

**Anthem** - a strophic text of religious character set to music and intended to liturgically sung

**Choral-Director** – a person who leads a choir of singers, also the author of this project

**Chorister** - a person or individual who sings in a church choir

**Clergy** – a person/people ordained for religious duties, often found in the Christian Church

**Eudaimonia** - ‘human flourishing’, a contented state of being happy, healthy and prosperous

**Hedonic** – ‘human flourishing’, the pursuit of pleasure; sensual self-indulgence

**Hymn** – a religious song or poem of praise to God

**Laity** - lay people, as distinct from the clergy

**Liturgy** - public worship, in this project refers to Christian worship in the catholic form

**Mass** - the celebration of the Christian Eucharist, especially in the Roman Catholic church

**Ordinary** - People

**Participant** – the older choir member interviewed/discussed in the context of this project

**Sacraments** – the taking of bread and wine in Mass

# **CONTENTS**

The impact of singing by older choristers in church communities in North-West England: Social and spiritual implications.....	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
GLOSSARY.....	4
<b>CONTENTS</b> .....	5
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	10
<b>CHAPTER 1: SETTING THE SCENE</b> .....	12
1.1 Introduction .....	12
1.2 Justification of the Study .....	12
1.3 Aim of the study, statement and purpose of research questions.....	16
1.4 Theoretical framework of PERMA .....	18
1.5 The Researcher, background, motivation and approach .....	18
1.6 Conclusion.....	20
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	22
2.1 Introduction and search method .....	22
2.2 Well-being.....	22
2.2.1 Introduction to well-being .....	22
2.2.2 Defining well-being and its role .....	24
2.2.3 Situating well-being within historical and linguistic contexts .....	27
2.2.4 Furthering well-being.....	28
2.3 Positive Psychology and the relevance to this project .....	30
2.3.1 Flourishing and Positive Psychology .....	32
2.4 The PERMA theory of well-being .....	33
2.4.1 Criticisms of the PERMA model .....	40
2.4.2 PERMA and later life Singing.....	41

2.5 Well-being: Music and singing .....	42
2.5.1 Well-being and music.....	42
2.5.2 Well-Being and singing.....	43
2.6 Well-being of older singers, the church, the social and the spiritual .....	48
2.6.1 Ageing and well-being with the older person.....	48
2.6.2 Music, sacred settings and older singers.....	50
2.6.3 Singing as an education in later life: Gap in the literature. ....	52
2.6.4 The church, community and well-being .....	52
2.7 Social capital, social connectedness, bonding and bridging capital .....	53
2.7.1 Social well-being and wellness .....	55
2.7.2 Spirituality, spiritual well-being, spiritual wellness, spiritual capital.....	56
2.7.3 Spirituality in music and setting.....	59
2.8 Conclusion .....	62
<b>CHAPTER 3: DISCUSSION OF METHODOLOGY, METHODS, RESEARCH APPROACH,</b>	
<b>QUESTIONING AND DATA ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>65</b>
3.1 Research questions and specific research aims.....	65
3.2 Research methodology .....	66
3.2.1 Discussion of methodology.....	67
3.3 Reflexivity of the researcher .....	68
3.4 The narrative interviewing of older people .....	69
3.4.1 Unlocking access .....	70
3.4.2 Pilot Interview.....	72
3.5 Research participants.....	74
3.5.1 Brief descriptions of research participants.....	75
3.6 Interview and questioning process.....	76
3.7 Approaches to qualitative analysis .....	78

3.7.1 Thematic data analysis (TDA/TA).....	78
3.7.2 Generating initial codes, identifying themes, constructing thematic framework and interpretation.....	81
3.8 Trustworthiness .....	84
3.8.1 Ethics.....	84
3.8.2 Limitations of study .....	87
3.9 Conclusion.....	89
<b>CHAPTER 4: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPANTS .....</b>	<b>90</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	90
4.2 Key themes and findings of the study .....	91
4.2.1 Background of singers and early experiences .....	91
4.2.2 To what extent might singing impact their confidence in music .....	93
4.2.3 Pleasure providing .....	96
4.2.4 Singing as an educational journey in later life.....	100
4.2.5 A sense of achievement.....	103
4.2.6 Conclusion.....	104
<b>CHAPTER 5: WELL-BEING.....</b>	<b>106</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	106
5.2 Social Well-being – Camaraderie and connectedness.....	106
5.2.1 Camaraderie and connectedness .....	106
5.2.2 Routine social events supporting social well-being.....	107
5.3 Spiritual well-being .....	111
5.4 Conclusion.....	114
<b>CHAPTER 6: CHURCH AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT .....</b>	<b>116</b>
6.1 Introduction .....	116
6.2 Church community.....	116

6.2.1 Parish.....	116
6.2.2 Family relationships .....	118
6.3 The importance of leaders as well as Choral-Directors, the positives and negatives.....	120
6.3.1 Clergy as leaders .....	120
6.3.2 Other forms of leadership.....	123
6.4 Spiritual wellness and journey .....	125
6.4.1 Spiritual wellness gained from participation in liturgy.....	125
6.4.2 Music as a source of spiritual wellness.....	126
6.5 Conclusion.....	128
<b>CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS .....</b>	<b>130</b>
7.1 Overarching theme 1 - Positive emotion.....	131
7.1.1 Pleasure providing .....	131
7.1.2 Participants' backgrounds and early experiences .....	132
7.1.3 The importance of the Church and its leaders including Choral-Directors the positives and negatives.....	133
7.2 Overarching theme 2 - Engagement/Educational Development .....	134
7.2.1 Singing as an educational journey in later life.....	135
7.3 Overarching theme 3 - Relationship .....	135
7.3.1 Social well-being, camaraderie and connectedness.....	136
7.3.2 Church community.....	137
7.4 Overarching theme 4 - Meaning.....	138
7.4.1 Spiritual well-being .....	138
7.4.2 Spiritual wellness .....	139
7.5 Overarching theme 5 - Achievement.....	140
7.5.1 Satisfaction.....	140
7.5.2 Confidence .....	141



7.6 PERMA in practice.....	142
7.6.1 Positive Emotion expressed in warm-ups.....	146
7.6.2 Other ways of using PERMA.....	147
<b>CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>153</b>
8.1 Introduction .....	153
8.2 Recommendations for older singers.....	154
8.3 Recommendations for choir directors and leaders .....	154
8.4 Recommendations for future practice/ further research.....	155
8.5 My reflections .....	161
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>164</b>
Appendix 1 - Conceptual framework for study into skills and knowledge required for music directors and educators.....	211
Appendix 2 - Participant consent form .....	212
Appendix 3 - Ethics checklist.....	213
Appendix 4 - Proposed questions for in-depth interview .....	222
Appendix 5 - Invitation form .....	223
Appendix 6 - Participants information sheet.....	224

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Overview of the research participants.....	75
Table 2: PERMA: Positive emotion block of introductory activities .....	143
Table 3: PERMA: Engagement block of introductory activities .....	144
Table 4: PERMA: Relationships block of introductory activities.....	144
Table 5: PERMA: Meaning block of introductory activities .....	145
Table 6: PERMA: Accomplishments block of introductory activities.....	145

## **ABSTRACT**

The impact of singing by older choristers in church communities in North West England: Social and spiritual implications.

It is widely acknowledged that people are generally living longer and healthier lives (Habron et al., 2013: 1). Singing in a choir leads people to live healthier, happier, and more community-driven lives (DeNora, 2016: 6). Over the last twenty-five years, there has been a growing interest in the formation of choirs across the United Kingdom. Now across the UK, choirs, both sacred and secular, meet each week to routinely carry out a systematic process of regular performing of choral repertoire and music. The Singing Network Forum reported that 2.2 million Britons in 2021 were members of an estimated 40,000 choirs in the United Kingdom with 36% of community choirs representing the largest sector (Voices Now, 2017). Stacy et al. (2002) in their review of a relationship between singing-based initiatives and health, concluded that singing had both physiological and psychological benefits.

Choir singing is now in a place where it might be viewed not just as a hobby or a pastime, but as an activity which might benefit the well-being of an individual (Beth, 2009). Arguably, this practice has flourished within the work of the church for centuries. Indeed, the experience of 'music as worship' (Porter, 2017: 62), suggested as a broader term, allows for individuals to express themselves through a culture of church-related interest. Choral singing provides a greater value to the life of the individual, but its effects have been little explored. This thesis investigates the motivation for retired adults, aged 60-85 years, wanting to sing in a church choir and the perceived benefits that are attached socially as well as spiritually. Indeed, learning to sing is not just the acquiring of 'a pleasant leisure activity but connecting with the world we inhabit in a fresh and life-giving way' (Rowan Williams in; Boyce-Tillman, 2016: 407). The central purpose of this study is to express the merits of church musicking to the individual through the participatory activity of choiring. How it is a worthwhile in the later learning of older persons.

Within my qualitative project are findings related to the personal experiences of the older singers, (nine participants in total), extrapolated through in-depth interviews. Further themes relating to e.g., early backgrounds of choiring, confidence, the enjoyment of singing church

music, the value of later learning and how these lead to positive (and negative) experiences in church-singing. Martin Seligman's PERMA model also referred to as 'the theory of well-being' (2011) outlines five key pillars for flourishing and thriving in life and beyond. This theory based on the canons of positive psychology, is about understanding the conditions under which people thrive. These are represented in the following blocks: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment. I believe these can be used through the associations of choiring to enhance well-being. The findings of this study indicate that in particular, church singing can be particularly a positive experience for older people and provides potential programs in the church setting that increase skills and abilities. Furthermore, it promotes others areas of well-being involving the social and spiritual and not focused on physical health as other studies might have indicated (Chavez et al: 2005).

The role of the Choral-Director I have found to be important in identifying these themes and crucial in the facilitation of positive learning. It is suggested that the qualitative essence within the blocks of PERMA can be used to facilitate more understanding and promote the idea of flourishing in older people through singing (Forbes and Bartlett: 2020; Lamont et al.: 2018).

# **CHAPTER 1: SETTING THE SCENE**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Music is at the very essence of our humanity (Blacking, 1995). Music, including the inflected vocal utterance we call 'song', appears in all human cultures and is therefore essential to an understanding of our evolution (Norton, 2016: 3). For many thousands of years singing has had an important role to play in society and it has had a central purpose in encouraging well-being amongst humans of all ages, across cultures, and contexts. This chapter aims to do the following: firstly, to investigate and justify the study involving the practice of participatory singing in older choristers; secondly, to set out a theoretical framework, a definition of terms and the research questions; thirdly, to specify the aim of the study and the research approach.

## **1.2 Justification of the Study**

The practice of music might be seen by music lovers as medicine in itself because of the unlimited boundaries of creativity. Medical practice, including that geared towards the social, is historically defined as both as a science and as an art, but today's training of healthcare professionals is dominated by scientific training. As the medical professions respond to ever more sophisticated technology, the 'arts' portion is increasingly sidelined (Norton, 2016: xix). Music and the arts are seemingly growing in importance to the ways in which they might be used to aid the well-being of people across the varied spectrum of society. Psychologists especially, have studied the connection between group singing and well-being and others have found that singing together results in cooperation, shared perspectives, and joint intentions (Bailey and Davidson, 2003). Coming together to sing presumes breathing and rendering pitch and rhythm in a coordinated fashion. When we sing together, we may also give voice to a set of words and an occasion that is deeply meaningful. Words articulated with our tongues have a way of insinuating into our hearts (Norton, 2016: 76).

In recent years, papers have been written about singing and its effect on well-being. Singing is reported to be the most effective of all artforms in promoting well-being and good health (Morrison et al., 2007). Studies in non-religious settings have often appeared to be more scientifically based, e.g., Bailey and Davidson who wrote about singing involving underprivileged men. In their first study (2002), they interviewed members of a small choir

for homeless men and three themes emerged repeatedly in their accounts. They found that group singing alleviated depression and enhanced emotional and physical well-being. Performing to an audience also encouraged a sense of personal worth and provided a means of re-engaging with wider social networks. Furthermore, the choir provided a supportive context for the men, within which they could develop their social skills and achieve collective goals – this directed their attention away from an internal preoccupation with their problems. The study used a qualitative methodology and looked primarily into the benefits of community singing. Bailey and Davidson used a diverse sample of singers and from evidence in the participant reports, they were able to associate a range of social, psychological, and health benefits from participating in regular singing. Bailey and Davidson (2003) also conducted a questionnaire study to compare the perceived benefits of ‘active’ participation in music (i.e., singing in a choir), ‘passive’ listening to music with others and ‘passive’ listening to music alone. Furthermore, Koelsch and Stegemann note that ‘making music, dancing, and even simply listening to music activates a multitude of brain structures involved in cognitive, sensorimotor, and emotional processing’ (Koelsch and Stegemann, 2012: 236). It has been recognized that when deprived of, or having limited, occupations, health and well-being will then be affected to increased detriment (COT 2006). As people enter later life stages, they may lose the opportunity to engage in certain occupations, so the creative arts may offer sustained accessible interventions for older people, enabling them to continue in their activities.

Clift and Hancox (2010) suggested that the more underprivileged saw singing as a stimulating activity, aiding concentration and ‘ordering mental space’ (Clift and Hancox, 2010: 9). In looking at different outcomes for different groups, the authors were measuring the varied responses and assessing the characteristics of engaging in music. The reasons for this were inconclusive. The thoughts offered by the authors are detailed and relevant to the area of collective singing, though little was offered on the style, or the repertoire used, which might have been causal and impacted the investigation.

Recently, researchers such as Baker (2011), Creech et al. (2014), Porter (2017), and Joseph, (2018) have directed their research to dimensions of community and have referred heavily to the collective process of participation in the overlapping areas of singing and religion, suggesting possible benefits to an individual’s well-being. Well-being is a phrase perhaps

overused in our language at present but possibly also misunderstood. So, to examine its implications and terms of usage is of paramount importance for any credible study.

I wish to examine and explore the idea and effectiveness of social well-being within this setting (White, 2008). In my research, I will discuss both the terms and roles of the social and spiritual and how they might be closely linked to well-being in both nature, hermeneutics and activity (Atherton, 2011), explicitly in a church setting amongst older participatory singers. The setting of the church and its community naturally invites investigation into matters relating to both the social and spiritual (Fancourt and Finn, 2019).

Community arts activities are not new ventures, the church choir is perhaps one of the oldest examples in existence (Morgan and Boyce-Tillman, 2016: 5). Older people presently make up the majority of the U.K.'s church organizations role of volunteers across the denominations (Church of England, 2016; Hillman, 2002). As an Anglican communicant with the privileged role of working as an employee for the Catholic Church, I felt professionally and ecumenically positioned to carry out a study examining the well-being of older adults through church singing. The environment provided by the contexts of church and community, I thought, would be complimentary to previous studies regarding singing and the benefits offered through the social and psychological aspects linked to well-being (Bailey and Davidson, 2003). The move from a Choral-Director working with older people on a regular basis, through to the new environment of academic research, and wanting to know more about them, therefore felt like a natural evolution. Most of my work over recent years has up to this point, been with older people and volunteers. Since the covid epidemic, access in schools has become more challenging. Therefore, energies have naturally transferred to those able to carry out the work and successfully deliver music to support the liturgy when choiring. As Miller and Murray (2005) observe, when those learners are 'supported by positive institutional experiences that strengthen their self-esteem and self-efficacy, they overcome the negative effects to at-risk factors.'

Most of the research in this field has been conducted in Australia and New Zealand (Hays, 2005). This is possibly because the rural locations have provided conditions to explore music, older people and spirituality. This was also because it allowed the researchers to carry out projects smaller in size and to give clarity of results and discussion. To date, very little has

been explored in the United Kingdom. The work of the Sidney de Haan Institute for Arts and Health in Kent, conducted since 2009, has been important for documenting singing, health, and social matters. Much of this work has been admittedly in the South-East of the UK, but its many evaluations and projects at a local level have been a powerful tool in the promotion of group singing, recovery, and the maintenance strategies of well-being (mentally and physically). It has primarily concerned itself with on-going mental health issues, but with additional wider implications. This institution is one of the few places promoting singing and working with older people with much of its work carried out within its locality. Interestingly, the detailed work regarding parishes, music and older people in my attached Diocese was very limited. I found very little had been addressed within my parish on this matter, not since a document had been produced by a former Bishop (O'Donoghue, 2009). The focus here being more on the fostering and promoting of authentic Catholic identity amongst parishes rather than of specific practicalities regarding e.g., church music and well-being.

In its own identity, the idea of 'well-being' is regarded as complex area (Raz, 2004: 269, Morris, 2016). It is to be treated with caution, and these complexities will be explored in the next chapter. Yet, the benefits to understanding its relevance to singing in older people and how it could affect them is an interesting part of this research project. The term might be seen as confusing and often used in many different as well as changeable contexts (Hobbs, 2016).

In recent years singing has been identified as a form of well-being beneficial to the individual as well as the collective (Hendry et al., 2022). For the purposes of this project my efforts have been centered around the social as well as the spiritual, as they are linked in through the church's social and spiritual activity and where the matter of choiring is concerned. Haslam (2018a) stated that social identity is important for health, describing it as providing a sense of connection, meaning, support and agency. Further to this, Hargreaves and North (1999) affirmed the importance of the social dimension of music in everyday life. They concluded that music has three main benefits to the individual's psychosocial well-being: the management of self-identity, interpersonal relationships, and mood. They argued that that the social dimension should be at the core of music psychology and noted that until recently it has been largely neglected. While Hargreaves and North's paper refers to music more generally, given that singing is a common form of musicking (defined through, listening,

performing etc.), these I believe apply also to singing in its own right. I believe the anecdotal accounts of experiences of regularly choiring, outline the healthful properties of melody and song and bring us closer than ever to that which is 'quantified by advances in neuroscience and psychology' (Norton, 2016: xvi). And here I echo Norton's words by restating that 'though I am well qualified to be a builder on the musical shore, my background is not sufficient to interpret clinical results as a scientist might' (Norton, 2016: xvi). But there is value to be sought in the non-clinical and the mere observations of someone who is working on the ground and the experiences of a trained professional musician can bring new thinking and valuable confirmations to the thoughts, decisions, and prescriptions of the clinicians.

In addition, there is a paucity of theoretical frameworks (Dingle, 2019) to account for and analyze such experiences. This study aims to fill these gaps.

### **1.3 Aim of the study, statement and purpose of research questions**

In this project I wish to investigate the role of older singers (60 plus) and their contributions within church-based choirs in the community. Further, I intend to explore how participatory singing impacts on the confidence of the individual, and the well-being of choral groups. Through this study, I will seek to explore the experiences and perceptions of the participants, exploring the results of the church-singing experience and its impact on their well-being. This will be looked at in terms of the social and spiritual, the learning and performance of music and how this is expressed further through their activity within the group. I regularly work with older singers in an ecclesiastical setting. This involves preparation of music for services and its associated liturgy. Most are retired or semi-retired, have now become volunteers, and provide music for weekly services. The singers come from diverse musical backgrounds, both instrumentally and vocally. Predominantly Catholic in faith or if not, happy to be in the company or environment of its representation and liturgy. For these reasons, I aim to understand the reasons for them engaging in this educational journey and understand their challenges and expectations. Eventually, having gone through this exercise, I want to know how I can improve my own practices as a Choral-Director.

The benefits of the PERMA model are that it provides a framework for advisors to intentionally cultivate these qualities through varied mediums such as portfolios, projects, self-reflection/assessments, and exercises. For those learning to sing exercises can come in



the musical form, not least through repertoire but in the preparing of this. It can be tied to existing syllabi used by advising departments and associations (Ward, 2008) but looks at the student, as a whole individual, facilitating both well-being, educational and personal success. Where team building and participatory activity is concerned, I felt a theory concerning well-being might offer development through the spoken contributions of each individual I might interview. It could even enhance the learning of the chosen theoretical framework itself.

I felt a close working with a theory would be of value and enable my own understandings. Hence the choice of Martin Seligman's 'theory of well-being' resonated with my thoughts and expressions. Over the past decade, the PERMA model has emerged as one useful framework for bringing well-being to life (Kern, 2020: 2). Seligman proposed that flourishing arises from five pillars: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Positive Relationships, a sense of Meaning and Accomplishment. A sixth pillar, physical Health, often compliments these five pillars. However, this was not part of the original model (2011) and currently receives criticisms and debate because of its recent introduction (Kern, 2020: 2).

In situating the PERMA model (Seligman: 2011) as part of my study, the aim has been to express its possibilities and utilization in regard to older adults' experiences of being in a church choir. By understanding the essence of PERMA through these narratives, I wish to contribute a qualitative study that will balance out those previous PERMA studies which have perhaps been more scientific and measurement based (Viljoen: 2018). Ultimately my intention is to express how church singing can benefit the well-being of older persons.

During the study the following research questions will be addressed:

- What are the benefits to the well-being of older people through performing church music and being in a choir?
- In what ways might church singing impact older participants in terms of their social well-being through PERMA?
- In what ways might church singing impact older participants in terms of their spiritual well-being through PERMA?
- How can my role as a Choral-Director and teacher be used to support the older individual and group in their general well-being and singing as a result of understanding the PERMA model?

I use the literature review to explore the various types of well-being and link them to studies in older people, singing, church and community. I suggest how church singing relates to the

social and spiritual well-being and the place of positive psychology. My intention is to express the value of church singing as a participatory activity in later life. The subsequent chapters (four, five and six) explore this in finer detail, through the project itself, and the findings involving the spiritual and social. Chapter seven discusses these findings, chapter eight looks at the conclusions to the research and how ultimately my own practice, that of Choral-Directors, might be improved and assesses the value overall.

#### **1.4 Theoretical Framework of PERMA**

Four intentions were decided upon in order to place the relevance of study in the domain of well-being:

- To outline the relevance of well-being offered by understanding the PERMA model in older people's participatory church singing.
- To facilitate the theoretical ideas involving positive psychology and flourishing as expressed through social and spiritual well-being and the associations of choiring and through church life.
- To bring about the understanding of church-community and the singing of sacred music as a theoretical and practical tool in understanding and validating particular behaviours and lifestyle choices in positive psychology.
- The potential benefits of PERMA in understanding older choristers' music education and its uses for Choral-Directors.

#### **1.5 The Researcher, Background, Motivation and Approach**

This research will be of great interest to me, as my work is based at a Northern church, as Director of Music. My formative experiences when beginning my own musical journey saw a personal singing experience of serving as a Cathedral chorister between 1983-88. It was a time of rich learning, socially and spiritually. As a child this shaped a lot of what I now am able to draw upon as a professional and a Choral-Director overseeing the music education of all ages connected with my job. Not least, part of the reason for research will look at how I can improve my own practice in more detail. The music educationalist, Graham Welch, believes that 'Singing is a musical behaviour and a characteristic form of human expression worldwide' (Welch, 2011: 3). In singing, the melodic and rhythmic features of speech are heightened and extended into an art form. Lyrics in particular are given greater emotional emphasis (Harkins,

2012). Welch goes on to state that there are a wide variety of potential impacts that arise from engaging in singing at any age. This is especially true during childhood when formative experiences can shape lifelong views on identity and ‘a willingness to engage in subsequent musical activity’ (Welch and Saunders, 2012: 3; Barnes et al., 2013: 1).

Recent studies into the health benefits of singing have uncovered a background and variety of justifications for taking up singing as a hobby or regularly practiced activity (Clift, 2012; DeNora, 2007: 271). Although there are variables to individual standards of musicianship and learning, Welch acknowledges that more competent singers are likely to exhibit a ‘more positive self-esteem and a greater sense of social inclusion’ (Welch, 2011: 4). A lot of research work into singing and its educational benefits have been invested lately. This has concentrated on younger people and has paid significantly less attention to older adults (Papageorgi, Saunders, Himonides and Welch, 2022). There is, however, a growing portfolio in this domain to which this research will add. In looking at, for example, confidence levels in older people, we might ascertain the effect and impact that singing can have on individuals, groups, and those experiencing it (Musick et al., 2000; Hays, 2005). Singing lifts moods of the singer and listener alike and to hear the stories of those on a similar journey connected with church-life I feel is to be told, regardless of age.

Whilst this thesis may contribute to the inter-disciplinary bridge-building of others, such as Choral-Directors, church-leaders, music therapists or those connected to social healthcare, I need to make the following point clear. Again, one must reiterate Kay Norton’s words that “Though I am well qualified to be a builder on the musical shore, my background is not sufficient to interpret clinical results as a scientist might” (Norton, 2016: xvi). My citations and discussions relating to medical in the area of health, the psychological and social are more like invitations to not only research further and to participate more in cautious and deliberate speculation. Comparably, this might be said of those medical scholars, physicians and scientists who have failed to address the meaning of singing in human experience. My work is therefore the best attempt to address the research lacunae arising from the daunting task of synthesizing musical and psychological research.

Music-making and participation in musical activity may be seen as a spiritual experience since it involves ritual, routine and more personal as well as collective social interaction. The

motivation of wanting to sing in a Church will often take place in a consecrated place. I have witnessed in my work as a Choral-Director people expressing their feelings towards music and learning. I have observed how the regularity of church singing contributes positively to the maintaining of good health because of social interaction. I also have seen them also consider the value of others and evaluate different aspects of their own lives and their spiritual well-being (De Souza and Halahoff, 2018: 102). This is arguably enhanced through an approach centered around Christian ideas and values, through worship and involvement (Lazar, 2018: 1). Added to this, the idea of well-being lies at the very heart of the Catholic Mass (2011: 2). We find in the Eucharistic Prayer 1 the liturgical wording, as follows:

Remember Lord...all gathered here, whose faith and devotion are known to you. For them, we offer this sacrifice of praise or they offer it for themselves and all who are dear to them. For the redemption of their souls, in hope of health and well-being, and paying their homage to you, the eternal God, living and true.

This was another premise for the investigation and the modern wording in the phrase 'health and well-being' caused me much curiosity as well as interest. It was also for this reason that I wanted to deliberate further and emphasize in my work the area of well-being involving the social and spiritual. I believe such benefits are offered through singing and particularly the role that the church institution and environment could play through this identification and the cost-effective nature of its purpose (Lamont et al., 2017) in choiring. My motivations within my work are purely connected to a form of health and well-being involving church-singing, and forms of related social and spiritual health. It is hoped that Choral-Directors, teachers of music therapy, music educationalists, gerontologists and those connected with the church institutions will find that my avenues of inquiry will spark insight and motivate further.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the project will look at the benefits of church singing to the older person (choir singers, older choristers, church singers, participants, interviewees – the terms are used interchangeably and refer to the different roles and descriptors of the same person). I will assess how singing in a church choir can benefit the individual, the group, and wider communities (Mezirow, 1996; Outhwaite, 1975). Therefore, I feel the job of a music educator/Choral-Director is to further recognize the power of singing, by researching it

through the role of older choristers (aged 60 plus years). This is because it is a matter with which I am familiar through my work as a Choral-Director. In doing so, I will explore the maximizing benefits of singing, whilst minimizing the possibility of negative impacts, as a result of the 'multi-faceted nature' of the activity (Welch, 2011). By achieving this through individual and collective observation and participant interview, I can begin to add more to the scholarship of PERMA relating to this age group and ways in which church music can be utilized to aid later education. This is reflected through the togetherness in the shared experience of choral singing. I believe this to be enhanced by the social and spiritual dimensions and affectations of a church-based environment. Gaining such an insight into how volunteer perceptions of their well-being is affected by singing, will enable me to share the findings with other leaders and colleagues. Ultimately, the main intention is to improve my own professional practice (and others) and with this in mind, it is desired the research questions and aims will lead to answers as a result of the collected data. In the next chapter, with the help of the literature review, it is hoped that there will be clarity of thought in addressing these areas of interest regarding my research propositions.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Chapter 2 aims to introduce the concepts and ideas defining well-being. Following this, well-being and the arts are discussed. Thereafter, the chapter discusses other related aspects of well-being and the implications of the social and spiritual. This leads to a discussion on the impact of music-making on well-being.

### **2.1 Introduction and search method**

The literature search was an on-going process throughout the period of January 2018 and July 2021. The search comprised of two stages, at the beginning to formalize a general bibliography covering singing and church related topics and at the end to revisit those already cited and to add newer and more recent additions. Searches included related terms such as 'social well-being', 'social-connectedness', 'spiritual well-being', and components of well-being such as 'psychological well-being' and 'eudaimonic well-being'. Closely related terms such as 'quality of life', 'happiness' and 'flourishing' were also investigated. Further to this, 'health', 'age' and 'spirituality' and 'capital' were also observed.

This review will accomplish four key tasks; (i) map the fields relevant to this inquiry into music and well-being, (ii) establish which particular ideas and methods have preceded my own study, (iii) create a warrant for my research and (iv) identify the particular contribution that my work will make in this regard (Kamler and Thomson, 2011: 16).

### **2.2 Well-being**

#### **2.2.1 Introduction to well-being**

Throughout history happiness has been viewed as a defining motivation for human action and purpose and has subsequently been explored in great depth by both philosophers and psychologists (Bradford, 2020:25). Because of this, the field of health and the interest involving the psychological has grown over the last 30 years. This is partly to do with societal trends and the importance of the individual and the importance of subjective views in evaluating life (Bradford, 2020: 26). More recently, the rise in the interest of positive psychology has proliferated and furthered well-being debates particularly in North America (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

In her thesis, Bradford (2020) makes mention of the importance of the 1980s to the growth of psychological debates. One advancement of the time was in the accurate measurement of happiness. It is now referred to as well-being. It was central in gaining a scientific understanding of the components of well-being. Through Diener (1984), there was recognition that well-being had three components 1. It was subjective and each individual experienced life differently – objective conditions might be influential but no longer viewed as inherent or necessary; 2. Positive measures became included rather than just absence of negative factors; 3. Measures extended to include a global assessment of all areas of the individual's life. Because of such extensive debate, Veenhoven later (2007) made the conclusion that happiness may act as a buffer to stress and as a result society was more likely to flourish with happy individuals. Happiness and well-being are said to benefit not just the individual but society as a whole. With the recognition of positive aspects in life, the research focus on the negative factors drifted away. The positive psychology movement began to grow in its importance throughout the 90's and by the turn of the century, had established recognition amongst scholars. Naturally, this growth has led to further debates and uncertainties regarding assessment (Kreuger and Schkade, 2008), reliability in the measurement of differing types of well-being in data collected, particularly where scales and questionnaires are used (Bradford, 2020: 96). Added to this, a number of profilers to date have involved large scale samples and this in turn has led to difficulties in ascertaining clear results (Butler and Kern, 2016) and further complexities (Hobbs, 2016, 58) within the research outcomes. Scales can be of value but often do not lend themselves very easily to small sample projects in their use.

Positive psychology is said to be 'the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups and institutions' (Gable and Haidt, 2005: 105). It looked at what made people happy and discussed what it was in life that was worth living. Of course, this was nothing new and had been discussed in Greek Philosophy by Aristotle (384-322 BC). He looked at matters surrounding virtue, the good life and morality. William James (1842-1910) had a theory of happiness. This depended on choices that the individual was able to make. The term positive psychology had first been coined by Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) in his book 'Motivation and Personality' first published in 1954. While the previous waves of psychology focused on human flaws and escape from unhappiness, his

writing began to focus on well-being, contentment, excitement, cheerfulness, the pursuit of happiness and meaning in life.

It was in 1998 that Martin Seligman became President of the American Psychological Association although his main interest was in positive psychology, he was looking for new ideas and ways to express himself within this arena involving people and groups. Positive psychology is now a diverse subject and appeals to all areas of study. For example, sport and performance, music and Down's Syndrome. The broad concept of well-being is now linked with positive psychology and this in many respects has influenced its definition. It continues to receive further debate and discussion and not just those researchers in the field of psychology. For example, in the area of Higher Education. I will discuss this in further detail later and the work of Seligman and his idea of flourishing expressed through the PERMA theory of well-being.

### **2.2.2 Defining Well-being and its Role**

There are many contexts for the use of the term well-being, however the majority of them agree that well-being involves an experiential understanding of what is important in the domain of everyday life (Hobbs, 2016: 33; Diener et al., 2003; Marks, 2007; Ryan and Deci, 2000). To date, scholars argue that individuals determine this through cognitive, affective experience, and memories by life domains (Clark, 2002; King, 2007). This is also determined by their human needs and responses (Ryan and Deci, 2001; 2006) and the reasoning behind our behaviour. Well-being is recognized as a subjective phenomenon, which reflects how people think about, feel about and assess their lives (Dolan, Peasgood and Wright, 2008) and this is often understood as a basis for definition. Researchers agree that each domain of 'well-being' is not fixed or conclusive within its own dimension (Ryff, 1995). They are holistically inter-related (Diener et al., 2013; Ryan and Deci, 2001). Each area is often complex in its own right because of its definition (Cigman, 2012: 449).

In 'Philosophical Perspectives', Raz begins by stating that 'well-being signifies the good life, the life which is good for the person whose life it is' (Raz, 2004: 269). The term and explanation is coined from a selection of other sources and he offers to explain what kind of life is good for the people whose life it is and what constitutes well-being (Raz, 2004: 270). He also explains that well-being is a good thing to have and acknowledges that 'well-being



consists in successful pursuit of *valuable* goals and relationships' (Raz, 2004: 292) and because of this 'there is an obvious reason to pursue whatever it consists in, i.e., those valuable goals and relationships.' Raz's paper also gives an insight into the term well-being but he makes no account of instrumental discussion or particular methods of practice or measurement. His pursuit justifiably aims 'at the most abstract of cases for duties or reasons to care about people' (Raz, 2004: 292). To which he concludes that 'different people will care about different aspects of their life, as long as they do not value the valueless or denigrate what is valuable...' (2004: 292). From experiences in my own practice, I believe older persons value participatory skills and tasks.

To try and define the concept of 'well-being' is perhaps confusing without a contextualized purpose (Hobbs, 2016: Dodge et al., 2012: 222). For this reason, one may look for other terminologies and reasons for where we place an individual issue or subject in discussion. This is equally so when considering all the many types of well-being and how they relate to the participant/s and collective circumstance. A sense of well-being is something desired by most human beings (Ellis, 2018: 111). The frequency of use in the term well-being in society 'and the diversity in the vast array of approaches has created blurred and sometimes overly generalized definitions' (Bradford, 2020: 28). Well-being is synonymously used alongside other terms such as 'quality of life', 'life-satisfaction', 'active ageing' and 'happiness'.

It is important therefore for the researcher to analyze specific components of well-being. Hobbs refers to this as the 'Domain Approach' (Hobbs, 2016: 33). Thus, by doing this, it enables the analysis of particular components in relation to another. It also explores the current state of knowledge for the empirical study. However, we must be cautionary in adopting such a process as 'some question the efficacy of utilizing this approach because they tend to result in research being conducted in silo, failing to reflect the holistic nature of well-being' Atkinson (2013; and Atkinson and Joyce, 2011). A 'Chronological Approach', another term coined by Hobbs (2016: 33) is often a structured way of offering a framework to the conceptualizing of ideas as it 'moves towards integrating the diverse domains and dimensions of well-being through a relational and situated account of well-being' (Atkinson, 2013: 138-9). This broadening of approach is perhaps more in keeping with well-being's holism and development of character and suitability in the widening of framing and application of category (Atkinson, 2013: 140).

In short, the term 'well-being' has innumerable understandings (Hobbs, 2016: 33). Most agree that a lot is dependent on or important and experienced through regular routines of the individual/s (Ryan and Deci, 2001). It is argued also that individuals structure their cognitive, affective experiences and memories by constructed or consequential life domains of approach (Hobbs, 2016, 33; Clark, 2002). This is often furthered by needs of the individual (Diener et al., 2003; Ryan and Deci, 2001). Experts on the subject of well-being also agree that these domains are not exclusively mutual (Hobbs, 2016: 34; Ward et al., 2012). This appears so when we look at the process of ageing and the well-being of older people (Creech et al., 2014) and how government's approach the issue.

Within my thesis, I contest that there is a need for more qualitative work and reporting of the individual and their perspective. Part of the reason is because of the complexities surrounding well-being. For example, Ryan and Deci argue that well-being is about the 'concerns of optimal experience and functioning' (2001: 141). There is much debate about the components and how they combine to produce a so-called 'happy life' and the practical as well as theoretical implications of them. Their arguments reflect the ancient Greek philosophies of hedonism and eudaimonia. Hedonism suggests the idea that well-being consists of the subjective experience of happiness or pleasure. Eudaimonia acknowledges the understanding that human potential involving optimal psychological functioning and self-realization. This is more than just happiness in itself and something that is not instantaneous. Past research has concentrated on either the hedonistic side of the matter involving positive affect and deeper life satisfaction (Diener and Lucas, 1999) or the eudaimonic side which involves the psychological form of well-being and the fully functioning individual (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci in a later study (2001) argue that well-being is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and as a result studies concerning the issue of well-being should take both of these matters into their account. I argue that both the eudaimonic and hedonistic have their place. In agreement, Ryan and Deci (2001) identify subjective happiness and life satisfaction (the hedonistic) as separate from positive psychological functioning (the eudaimonic). The point here is 'the identification of a means whereby individuals can seek hedonic and eudaimonic outcomes, which are not detrimental to the rest of society' (Bradford, 2020: 12). The theory of well-being which I discuss later through PERMA (Seligman, 2011) goes some way to reconciling the previously differing perspectives on theory and measurement of well-

being, as it incorporates both aspects of the hedonistic and the eudaimonic. My thesis adopts the PERMA model as a foundation for the definition and essence of well-being. This is valuable because it can be helpful in improving performing, building resilience, and increasing success and life satisfaction.

It is important to note that over the last ten years, the UK government has promoted the idea of well-being (Bradford, 2020: 14; Department of Health, 2011). It is seen to benefit not just the individual but society also. As a result, there have been a lot more studies and health initiatives linked to the idea. Because of this, it is acknowledged that income alone is not an adequate measure that secures the well-being of the individual. It might be argued that the idea of wealth and economic growth as an indicator of progress of well-being is now out of date and inadequate (Diener and Seligman, 2004: 1). Diener and Seligman (2004) express the point that amongst wealthier countries such as the United States there are 'distressingly large, measurable slippages between economic indicators and well-being' (p. 1). Material goods, wide-ranging healthcare and public systems cannot reflect the well-being of society as a whole. Easterbrook (2003) refers to this as the 'progress paradox'.

As a concluding thought, Abdallah et al. (2009: 3) defines well-being as 'a dynamic process that gives people a sense of how their lives are going through the interaction between their circumstances, activities, and psychological resources.' I like this more recent way of thinking. So too, the idea expressed by June Boyce-Tillman (2016: 93) where well-being being is linked with artistic creativity enabled through regular social and spiritual practice. This seems apt that for the idea of well-being as a relevant meaning. Thinking in this way, gives contextualization to my work and reflects the norms, values and assumptions of study. Along with the theory of well-being offered in the form of Positive Psychology, I am able to offer insight into older people's church singing and how it impacts well-being.

### **2.2.3 Situating well-being within historical and linguistic contexts**

Inglehart and Klingemann (1998) and Kingfisher (2013) have argued that historical and linguistic contexts have played a powerful role in well-being research. But they have also received insufficient attention in the majority of research because they are complex and difficult to disentangle (see also Hobbs, 2016). Kingfisher (2013) has urged a necessary understanding of historical roots, because in doing so it allows us to examine the importance

of contextualization. He argues that only in exploring the 'how' and 'why' questions are we then firmly able to answer questions concerning the appropriation and mobilization of the applied nature of well-being (2013: 68).

The growing importance of the ideas surrounding well-being within society, its linguistical usage over recent years has encouraged us to question its relevance and appropriateness to our personal and collective state. This can be important for research concerning subjective and objective states (Oishi et al., 2015). Oishi (2012) and McMahan and Estes (2011) have looked at states of happiness and well-being. Through this they have been able to offer new insights into interpretations of well-being within historical contexts and suggest this may be due to individual conceptions and functioning.

The idea of happiness, as seen in the writing of McMahan (2006; 2006a; 2006b; 2010) has been examined in relation to its historical and linguistical meaning over time. They have concluded that the linguistic analysis of the term is critical to advance particular theories e.g., psychological theory and the more scientific-based understandings of well-being. They have further recognized the need for specific historical and linguistical contextual of well-being (Hobbs, 2016: 76). Kingfisher (2013) offers his thoughts towards the ways in which future research might be deliberated:

To situate well-being/happiness in historical context as there is nothing in our current conceptualizations or practices that is transparently self-evident...that can be easily universalized across time and space. It is only by reflecting on historical and cultural contexts of our categories of analysis, investigation and action that we can gain insight into how our work relates to form of governance and the interests that they serve (2013: 79).

I believe that situating ideas and concepts regarding well-being helps to underpin eventual practice through both historical context and cultural discipline. In doing this, an individual or group can hone their skills, as with singing, both through time and with a situated purpose. This links with my work regarding older people and how the Choral Director can aid these changes of analysis, investigation and action through church singing and the course of their learning over time.

#### **2.2.4 Furthering well-being**

I have outlined the background of well-being and wish to elaborate and explore the definition. In this section I suggest the idea of 'furthering' well-being, not so much improving it but more associating it. A comprehensive review covering the majority of large-scale research works since 1990 was explicated by Dolan, Peasgood and White (2008) and looked at the potential influences on well-being. This was important because it suggested categorizations of the idea. The main categories were; (1) income; (2) personal characteristics; (3) socially developed characteristics; (4) how we spend our time; (5) attitudes and beliefs towards others/self/life; (6) relationships; (7) the wider economic and social and political environment. It was suggested by them that these categories represented important factors in determining well-being.

Positive psychology research has been important in helping to understand this. Particularly through the areas of engagement, optimal self-functioning and flow (Seligman and Csikzentmihalyi, 2000) and what constitutes well-being (Bradford, 2020: 33). For example, positive psychology interventions have found to be complimentary in strategy to mental health management and a support structure for well-being. Bolier et al. (2013) found this in their study of the effectiveness of positive psychology intervention. They concluded that positive psychology intervention enhanced well-being through the increasing of positive feeling, behaviour and cognition.

Leading the field of study in the area of positive psychology has been research regarding sport (Penedo and Dahn, 2005; Taylor et al., 2015). Taylor et al. draw attention to the tremendous social benefits to people through participatory activity and teamship. They point out the following that 'well-being is the manifestation of the catalytic role that sport plays in stimulating social impacts.' They further this by adding that 'there is a positive relationship between sport participation and well-being' (pp.9-10). Though, I must point out here that there are also drawbacks associated with this. Not all individuals will have positive experiences within individual or shared activities. This may be due to age-related complications, disabilities both mental and physical (Sallis: 2005). Here one must look beyond to further the matter of well-being and appropriately choose a way to overcome the hurdle. To conclude, Bradford (Bradford, 2020: 34) in her thesis shares a quote from the Royal Society of Public health (2013: 4):

The practice of using the arts to promote healing is as old as the arts themselves. For early civilizations, aesthetic beauty in objects or surroundings and the soothing rhythm of words, movement and music contributed to the balance and harmony between bodily systems and environment which was believed to maintain good health.

As is often the case with debates, most is subjective, what will do for one will not do for another. The essence of well-being means that intervention in a situation can affect one and not the other. Music is growing in the body of research regarding well-being and its suggested links with positive psychology. I will explore this in the next section.

### **2.3 Positive Psychology and the relevance to this project**

Positive psychology insists that before we make a claim about the efficacy of an intervention or treatment, we must conduct research to find out whether or not that claim is justified (Budzińska and Majchrzak, 2021: 3). Much of the research existing emphasizes the positive elements of singing although there have been suggestions of less positive aspects also. For example, in the work of Kreutz and Brunger (2012) who found three influential sources of negative emotions within amateur choirs such as conflicts with the choir leader, other choir members, and disagreements over the type of singing. In essence, Positive psychology also recognizes the importance of separating out positive and negative effect (Hart, 2021; Ryff et al., 2006) and research has suggested that music-making (particularly performance) can also engender potential negative emotions (Lamont, 2012). If the activities are enacted positive emotion and engagement in flow is evident, older people are likely to gain (Collins, Sarkisian and Winner, 2008). But we must remember that with a heightened sense of activity and experience, some can be left feeling flat when they stop. Added to this, these negative effects of flow experience are still very much under researched. Partly because Csikszentmihalyi, the author of this work, neglected the negative aspects of flow experience (preferring the positive side) and to this avail there are different interpretations of his research here. These are generally descriptive and ignore the internal causes of flow (Dietrich, 2004).

As an educational tool, evidence suggests that positive effects of music-making on brain plasticity and anatomy being more pronounced in musicians than those engaged in other skilled activities (Altenmuller and Gruhn, 2002). Recent education studies highlight the benefits of musical participation in earlier life (Henriksson-Macaulay and Welch, 2015). The

relevance of this to later life benefits is not to be underestimated. Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich and Linkins (2009) have argued that within education and schools should prioritise well-being. It is in teaching that students learn how to nurture their own well-being. This so-called 'Positive Education' has been well-received by educators as an innovative approach that guides students of all ages to a happier and engaging life (Webster, 2014). As societies (such as the church) look for inexpensive and practical interventions that embrace contemporary approaches to education, ways may be sought to explore music and singing's great potential contribution to fulfil this social need in life. I argue that well-being effects through the participation of choiring has the potential to operate within the church context, which will then feed into a wider community and those participating across other life spans.

Previous research has highlighted the individual and social and spiritual benefits of participation for physical, psychological, social and spiritual well-being (Hallam, 2010, 2015). However, it seems apparent that less is known about the transformative personal and community aspects of the arts. Very few studies have investigated arts participation over a substantive period. Positive psychology and the PERMA model have become more prominent in projects. Recently, Hendry et al.'s paper (2022) 'Singing for well-being: Formulating a Model for Community Group Singing Interventions' researched the benefits of community-based group singing. It pertained to positive well-being and stated to the lack in Quality of Life in society. Within their work they claimed that no theoretical framework existed for community singing-based interventions. In their work, they interviewed members of a UK community choir using a semi-structured approach. They employed Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). Their analysis produced superordinate themes of Social Factors with key elements such as social bonds and group identity, psychological factors, highlighting self-efficacy, self-identity and seeking a new challenge. Whilst their methods might have been useful for their purposes and further highlighted 'the style/method of the group, teaching, music and group leader were shown to have an influence on perceived benefits of the singing group' (Hendry et al., 2022: 1) I argue that the simple narratives of in-depth interviewing can give us comparably rich data and that as Hendry et al. acknowledged any qualitative-based design whose methods will equally 'lend itself to subjective and under-researched topics' (2022: 3). Indeed, we might remember that 'well-being is a complex construct and difficult to measure quantitatively' (Cohen, 2009: 59). For this reason, I believe that my research

regarding church-singing will be of value within the positive psychology framework in explaining why choirs can promote the importance of well-being in their participants. This might be over time, but can be done through assessing the social and spiritual. These two elements are often intertwined. Worship is often corporate involving both forms. This might be highlighted through the PERMA model and through the examples of relationship and connectedness. Through understanding individuals and how a choir functions we can then assess the benefits of choiring (Murray and Lamont, 2012) and how individuals and groups flourish.

### **2.3.1 Flourishing and Positive Psychology**

The emergence of an alternative representation of psychological well-being and movement has become increasingly important. The concept of well-being is at the heart of positive psychology and it embraces strengths and virtues, enabling individuals and communities to thrive (Kahnemann et al., 1999). Non-biological approaches to the study of psychological well-being have come forward to explore alternative perceptions of this form of well-being. Alkire (2013: 6-7) for example compares psychological well-being to being a 'reflective life satisfaction, positive affect, spirituality and mind training'. These elements reflect the individual's ability to thrive and to self-actualise (Maslow, 1968; 1964). In doing this, they express a component meaning within themselves, from others and from within their environments (MacKinlay, 2001: 15). It might be described as 'flourishing', and of the motivation of the self to enable this. The description of self-actualization is a foreshadowing of the eventual PERMA model (2011), which outlines the characteristics of a flourishing individual. This I will discuss in the next section.

Flourishing is today regarded as a new idea supporting theories within education and it takes its origins from ideas relating to Aristotle and eudaimonia (Kristjansson, 2017). Its main purpose is seen as a 'positive ideal' (Wolbert, 2018; Wolbert et al., 2015). Because of this, it is open to further criticism within the application to practice. This is evident in policy-making and can be viewed as problematic. Identifying this, Cigman (2018: 37) argues students young and old should be taught such positive ideals as life skills and that vital details are missed when certain educational needs of e.g., special needs students, are over-looked for the



purpose of an 'ideal'. 'How to flourish' theories are often assumed, the current philosophical theories underlying flourishing thus need to be sharpened.

Flourishing is an important topic relating to positive psychology. It links to positive concepts and perhaps holds the key to improving the quality of life for people in their various stages of life and educational challenges. Discovering this jigsaw enables the piecing together of the flourish-puzzle and effectively applies these tremendous possibilities for the way in which a human-being lives, loves, and relates to others. One might hear about positive psychology and expect that it is only learning about happiness but it extends far beyond that (Wo, 2022: 8).

The concept of flourishing moves beyond the confines of simple happiness or well-being; it is part of a positive psychology construct and offers other insights and perspectives on what it means to feel well or happy. These more modern ideas surrounding flourishing were created by Dr. Martin Seligman, the initial idea being outlined in his book, 'Flourish' (2011). He discussed the point that even 'though we have spent so much effort in pharmacology and in psychotherapy developing interventions that relieve misery, such interventions are not the same as interventions that produce *well-being*' (2011: 233). Through the development of a positive psychology that is focused on 'the concept of well-being' and 'aims to develop interventions that build the enabling conditions of life' (2011: 234-5). Engaging in practices of music can positively contribute to one living a more flourishing life with greater psychological well-being (Koelsch, 2009).

Seligman's ideas form the basis for my understanding and application of flourishing within this thesis. Seligman outlined five factors in the PERMA theory of well-being and acknowledges flourishing takes place as a result of the workings of this model in practice (Seligman, 2011: 26). It not only supports holistic well-being but is a useful heuristic tool.

## **2.4 The PERMA theory of well-being**

Psychological theory and research has focused itself on abnormalities or what has gone wrong with individuals within their psychological and social functioning with the intention to make things better. Positive psychology on the other hand, seeks to understand what works, what

might be going well for people, and ultimately what leads to feelings of happiness and flourishing within their lives. It has been a needed area of focus, rounding out the fuller experience of people's lives (Viljoen, 2018: 25). Positive psychology approaches well-being as something that can be learned. Positive traits such as grit, virtues, and optimism are not fixed in each person and can be cultivated through awareness and practice (Wo, 2022:10).

In his early scholarship, Seligman aligned himself with Aristotle's view that all things that humans do are focused on making themselves happy. However, he was dissatisfied with the language and thinking behind happiness as it had become a term that was ubiquitous and particularly unhelpful when scientifically trying to understand what it is that makes people happy. This is not dissimilar to the matter regarding the term 'well-being'.

Seligman had written a book called *Authentic Happiness* (2002). In it he had proposed a theory of happiness that sought to break down the term 'happy' in order to explore and identify the facets behind it. This led his focus to three elements: positive emotion, engagement and meaning. He saw positive emotion as focusing on what the individual personally experiences through emotions - joy, ecstasy and so forth. This might be linked to hedonistic ideas of well-being with pleasure being at its forefront. The second element regarded the state of flow. He was interested in the work of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990). This is a state where individuals are seen to be immersed in their work or study. In it one loses their sense of time and it is a state where the experience of pleasure in retrospect and there is little awareness of one's own feelings. It is an all-consuming state to be in. Within this state, Seligman identified that it required all the individual's powers of cognition, thought, effort and emotion in order to carry out the task or activity in hand. There are no short-cuts to the state of flow, whereas there are multiple routes to feeling positive emotion – examples are shopping, watching television, reading or talking with friends, eating etc. Flow, or being engaged requires a focused effort of mind and body (Viljoen, 2018: 25-6).

Seligman's third element focused on meaning - this element is more linked to the world around us. For this reason, it is more akin to hedonic thinking. Engagement and pleasure can be pursued through solitary pleasure and individual means, the idea of meaning lends itself more to how one interacts and impacts in the world they inhabit and those people who are around it. Whereas, someone can experience both positive emotion and engagement

internally, meaning requires a broadening of the perspective, to connect to the internal with the external – a connection with something bigger than the internal world of the self (Viljoen, 2018: 26).

Regarding the theory of authentic happiness, Seligman made the following observations:

1. Ideas concerning happiness were too focused on mood, particularly the area of 'cheerful' mood. This he considered to be the most basic level of happiness. For him, this was another focus on the area of emotional state.
2. For Seligman, the focus was too much on the 'gold standard of happiness' (Viljoen, 2018: 26) – in other words life satisfaction. He wished to assert further understanding of this. Seligman believed this to be very limiting in measure. Those respondents within his work at the time were found to be again influenced by emotional state. This did not capture the mood or experience of measuring anything cheerful. So, if life satisfaction was the general measure of well-being, many in the world would not experience it.
3. Further to this, Seligman identified that ideas which he been proposed previously did not explore all the elements of what individuals pursue 'for their own sake'. He pointed out, there are many things of a flourishing life that can be pursued because they have their own inherent worth and value. Achievement is the example in this, which can be pursued for its own sake. So, Seligman came to the conclusion that any well-being theory 'must account for each element being pursued for their own sake. Adding to this, that they could be pursued for the sake of other elements also.

This led to Seligman revising his ideas in the pursuit of further knowledge regarding well-being. This culminated in his book *Flourish* (2011). In it he put forward the rejection of a 'thing' called happiness being measured by one using a single metric like life satisfaction. Instead, his new theory of well-being supported a construct view of well-being where well-being is made up of a group of elements. Each element cannot define what well-being is, but rather contributes to it. These elements had to firstly contribute to well-being, be pursued for their own sake thus contributing to the other elements and be measurable and defined, separate to other elements.

This was developed by Seligman to explain the various five element contributions of flourishing:

- Positive Emotions
- Engagement

- Relationships
- Meaning
- Accomplishments

Every element here contributes to well-being and happiness, they are of equal importance, and are determined independently. I explain each element in turn here:

**Positive Emotion.** For anyone to experience well-being, they need ‘Positive Emotion’ in their lives. To experience any positive emotion, such as peace, gratitude, satisfaction, pleasure, hope, inspiration or curiosity, one must be in the moment, thus enjoying the here and now. With positive emotion, happiness and life satisfaction are all aspects (Seligman, 2011: 24). Quite often, in teamwork these emotions are heightened significantly as they reverberate in accordance with the individual’s soul.

**Engagement.** In the building block of ‘Engagement’, those carrying out an activity e.g., a singer who is performing, they are likely to be carrying out the activity with passion and commitment. Bradford (2020) refers to this block as ‘Educational Development’ in her thesis. The overall concentrated process of engaging in activity is also described as ‘Flow’. We may refer to the act of singing as a flow-action in itself. This idea was championed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1988: 65; 1990: 1) who was a pioneer of the scientific study of happiness here also (flow being a part of intrinsic motivation). This act reaches beyond the individual and the idea of flow is demonstrated through participation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; 1990). Seligman refers to ‘Flow’ as ‘gratifications which absorb and engage us’ (2011: 262). This process can be very deep for the individual, especially when they are engaged in the act of listening and performing to a greater level of intensity as with the participatory act of singing (Habe, Biasutti and Kajtna, 2019: 114). Scholars argue that this leads to greater orientations of happiness and overall life satisfaction for those concerned (Peters et al., 2005).

**Relationships.** As humans we are of course social beings, and good relationships are core to our well-being. Quite often it can be evident that people who have meaningful, positive relationships with others are happier than those who do not. I believe this to be the case as witnessed through church communities where social well-being is a key element of relationship. Relationships, be it with the ordinary or the laity, can really matter to people. This is crucial in the working and flourishing of a community. Through positive relationship,

people can really assess who in their lives ultimately care for them, as well as what they care for (Seligman, 2011: 25). Often the nature of relationships are complicated, hence they require a fuller explanation as does their meaning.

**Meaning.** This comes from serving a cause bigger than ourselves. Whether this is a specific deity, or religion, or a cause that helps in some way, we all need meaning in our lives to have a sense of well-being. Thus, because of this we generally feel that what we do in our life is valuable and worthwhile (Seligman, 2011: 27).

**Accomplishment.** It is through accomplishment that many of us strive to better ourselves. Quite often this can be done individually or collectively through team work. This is achieved through mastering a skill, such as singing in a choir. Within this can be valuable goals involving the preparation for regular events and meeting deadlines. As such, accomplishment is another important thing that contributes to our ability to flourish again.

Seligman states his PERMA model to be a well-being theory. Seligman advises that he uses *happiness* and *well-being* interchangeably as the overarching goals of the positive psychology enterprise. He cautions that it is important to recognize that these two terms can refer to, both, feelings or to activities in which no feelings occur. Seligman contends that authentic happiness comes from 'identifying and cultivating your most fundamental strengths and using them in work, love and play' (Seligman, 2011: 13).

It is worth pointing out therefore that well-being should not be considered the same as happiness. Happiness often refers to how people are feeling moment-to-moment and does not always tell us about how they evaluate their lives as a whole or about how they function in the world. Well-being is a much broader concept than moment-to-moment happiness. It includes happiness but also other things such as how satisfied people are with their lives as a whole, and things like autonomy (having a sense of control over your life) and purpose (having a sense of purpose in life) (Michaelson et al., 2012: 6-7). I believe these are key areas which relate to my work involving older singers.

The theory is useful because it indicates that with autonomous and purposeful behaviour, singers are able to make life-style choices regarding their older years and through the routine of their weekly lives. As a result, I am able to suggest that through these actions, the

theoretical ideas are reflected and impact them through the church-singing activity and this in turn benefit their social as well as spiritual well-being. When the PERMA model is used, it enables me to make sense and understand the various aspects of any individual or group-activity. For example, this can be found through the identifying the singers' positive emotions or the engagement of the world around them and the environment they exist in.

In the development of deep and meaningful relationships, as well as in their accomplishment of tasks. This is all done under the remit of the 'good life' (Seligman, 2011: 2) – good for the singer and good for those affected by this. It is my intention to show how Seligman's PERMA theory can be used to help understand the benefits of choral singing. His model offers five ways in which well-being is nurtured, and I examine these in turn and apply them to the findings from my fieldwork. They involve the varied blocks such as that involving 'positive emotion' and 'engagement'. I outline the findings through the reflections of my participants and then provide the relevant theoretical applications associated with each finding. I claim that Seligman's theory of well-being is useful because they are building blocks which provide interventions for people to increase their well-being. Through positive focus, the theory about well-being can give people hope, especially those who have experienced trauma, or disfunction in their lives but also those who adopt significant life changes e.g., those who have retired from regular working lives as with older persons. Positive experiences are remembered and contributes to good well-being and happiness.

In Seligman's own words 'happiness is the centre-piece of positive psychology' (2011: 24) and in looking at Seligman's writing regarding blocks we learn of the value in the activity of church singing for each of the participants. I use the theory in my project to suggest the significance of each block. This is expressed in and through the personal reflections given by each participant rather than by the demonstration of science or measurement in result.

Further to this, I emphasize that there needs to be less reliance on measurement by scale also. My work is purely qualitative in this regard and my approach is original as well as unique. In this, I hope to suggest ways to operationalize the ideas behind the PERMA theory and offer its uses in regard to church singing theoretically as well as in part practically within my own work. This is not dissimilar to the theoretically associated ideas regarding self-determination

theory where Richard Ryan called for more qualitative work to balance out the 'heavy' quantitative side of research (Ryan: 2021).

Very little at present exists in how to deliver the PERMA model regarding singing. My research has led me to participatory activity within the field of sport where the model of PERMA has been used (Uusiautti et al., 2017; Uusiautti and Määttä, 2016; 2014). I believe the ideas behind this model to be transferable. It is after all about participatory activity and teamwork. The suggested Theoretical review (Uusiautti et al., 2017: 30) show that operationalizing the PERMA theory offers a fruitful way of combining practical and theoretical expertise with knowledge-based practice. Uusiautti et al. (2017) in their work they operationalize positive emotions by identifying joy of winning, gratitude rituals, achieving goals and experiencing balanced psychosocial health. Engagement is operationalized into sports as: strength spotting, practices in training and game situations. Flow theory is identified through practices such as balancing goals and abilities in training. They state that relationships can be operationalized by using caring coaching, acts of kindness, social events, active constructive responding, team building and team rituals. Meaning is operationalized into practices that help recognize strengths, shared strengths as a team. Accomplishment is recognized through small goals over term period. Though achievement is not seen as a priority in terms of competition. Positive training through practices such as goal setting (individual/team, long/short term, monitoring and rewarding progress). The successful delivery of such a PERMA model is often dependent on the co-ordinator of group/s and the individuals in action. Nevertheless, the essence of this model suggests that its implementation is adaptable in character.

As one may identify in my own work regarding singing and suggest positive emotion is operationalized through singing beautiful melodies and repertoire and by the singers participating regularly in liturgical events such as Catholic Mass or worship. Engagement might be seen to be operationalized by regular practicing (individual/team) but also recognized as an important activity in later life study and learning. Relationship could be operationalized by evidence of caring coaching by Choral-Directors and through the social events and connectedness/camaraderie of others. Meaning might be operationalized by the singer individual finding and identifying what spiritual well-being and spiritual wellness is for them. Finally, the block of Achievement though it might not be recognized as a competitive

endeavour as in team sports, it may well be reflected in personalized goal for individuals as well as collectively for the singing group. Goal setting for older people might be the desire to grow to have new challenges or just grow confidence and appreciate the skill of singing through performing church music and its connected repertoire.

As a final comment regarding PERMA at this point, it might be emphasized that something that makes many of the five elements particularly important is that each is pursued for its own merits, and when people are acting under their own free-will, without coercion, will likely seek to fulfil the various dimensions of well-being where possible. The model in the PERMA blocks of positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment, seek to describe what people are doing when they strive for a sense of well-being and motivation. Theoretical Reviews of the PERMA model (Uusiautti et al., 2017: 35) have shown that its operationalizing requires creativity, innovation, joy and collaboration – and the ability to see things differently. By using the theory in coaching and training practices (e.g., church-singing) there is the possibility of enhancing well-being within the individual and group. These reflect its true value by offering them respect, communality, joy (when performing) and in the pursuit of excellence. However, this might not always be the case.

#### **2.4.1 Criticisms of the PERMA model**

Seligman's book 'Flourishing' and theories relating to well-being were only published in 2011. This is only comparatively recent in timescale and so it's only right that we express a certain amount of caution. The question of what constitutes human flourishing or psychological well-being has long remained a hot topic of debate among scholars, it has been argued in the literature that a paradigmatic or prototypical case of human psychological well-being would largely manifest most or all of the five factors of positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Croom, 2014: 16).

Koelsch (2009) suggested that 'music therapy can have effects that improve the psychological and physiological health of individuals' (2009: 374). It therefore seems viable that music practice and participation exercised through the activity of singing individually and as a group can positively contribute 'to one living a more optimally flourishing life with greater psychological well-being' (2009: 374-5). However, on this point I argue that not enough studies under the PERMA framework have been written or reviewed to endorse this



suggestion. Indeed, Croom's work in (2015) was a helpful step on this matter but very little has to date advanced this review.

More recently, Bradford (2020) in her thesis makes mention of the criticisms of the PERMA model regarding music and Down's Syndrome students, that these were predominantly 'concerns on an over-emphasis on happiness and positivity and she made mention that rather than looking at a more balanced perspective of a combination of positive and negative factors' (Freidmann and Robbins, 2012; Kotter-Grühn, 2022). We must also draw attention to physical health and mindset (Tang et al., 2019) as a factor within the individual. This is something Seligman argued was linked to other constructs rather than being on its own merit. Human beings are highly complex in nature so the theoretical model of well-being will always have its challenges and limitations (Bradford, 2020: 31). There is a need for more qualitative approaches to well-being (Perkins, 2022) and for people to tell their stories through personalized narrative and depth of individualized as well as collective experience. To date very few papers and projects regarding well-being and the PERMA model express this necessity.

#### **2.4.2 PERMA and later life Singing**

Recently, a few papers regarding singing and PERMA have come to light. They concern more secular-based contexts relevant to my own research work. For example, Lamont et al.'s paper (2017) 'Singing in later life: the anatomy of a community choir' reports a case study of an older people's choir over a four-year period, involving interviews, focus groups, observations and participatory discussion. In support of previous literature, choir members highlighted many individual and interpersonal benefits of being part of a choir. They also emphasized the importance of developing social relationships within a supportive community, and the importance of musical achievement was central to the ongoing development of the choir. Through their analysis they identified five main themes: personal investment and reward; inclusive community; always evolving yet fundamentally unchanged; a desire to connect; and leadership and organization. Such themes resonated deeply with my own study and it was this project that led me to reflect on the similarities of my own situation as a Choral-Director. Considering these with reference to Seligman's PERMA framework from positive psychology (2011), it is apparent that social relationships, meaning and accomplishment are particularly

emphasized as reasons why older people find singing in a community, as well as a church choir, so beneficial for well-being. Where Lamont et al. (2017) believed sustainability a major concern to their work and other 'factors such as an expert music leader to support this' (2017: 1) I believe the value of regular routine and religious practice to contribute significantly to an individual as well as an overall group routine.

Other singing studies involving PERMA have been conducted. The paper by Eickholt et al. 'Positive psychology in therapeutic Songwriting for People with Later-Life Depression: An Intervention Protocol' explores intervention with the methods of PERMA in older people and music writing to focus positive experience, resources, and the individual's ability to decrease their own depressive symptoms and improve their well-being.

Such expressions are again comparable to other studies involving music education such as reflected in the papers of (Evans, 2015) but also the relatedness suggested within Lee et al.'s (2017) representation of the PERMA well-being model through music facilitation practice.

## **2.5 Well-being: Music and Singing**

### **2.5.1 Well-being and music**

Music is a relatively new and under-researched factor regarding its impact on well-being (Bradford, 2020: 39). If we had to give some history to well-being and music, we might look to the work of the community musicians who visited hospitals to offer therapy to those injured or traumatized following the Great War of 1914-18 and the Second World War 1939-45. The American Music Therapy Association (2022) makes mention of the importance that these musicians had and we might attribute the beginning of the healing benefits of music being recognized within the field of Medicine around this time.

The renowned music therapist Gary Ansdell in his book *Music for Life* (1995) suggests the way in which well-being and music are linked is through the following:

- Our musical experiences help us explore, create and enhance our lives.
- Music can help us all because we are all musical.
- Music experience happens with others and not just down to ourselves.
- Music helps us recognise our basic human needs through the recognition of personhood, community, and relationship (pp.295).

Ans dell is important not just a practitioner but also as an academic, so his work has been pivotal in linking theory with a hands-on approach (2015). It reminds us that music offers so much more to us within the functioning of our societal needs, relationships and the spin offs of maintaining good mental and physical health as a result of the above.

One thing to note at this stage is to draw attention to the differences between music therapy and music education. The clarification of this is important. Bradford makes the following observation that music education concerns itself with the teaching and learning of music taught by a music teacher, whereas music therapy is a discipline involving therapeutic relationship between the client and therapist focusing on a specific goal. A music therapist usually works in sync with other healthcare professionals such as speech therapists, physiotherapists, pediatricians, social workers and specialist consultants (Bradford, 2020: 40). My work seeks to state the concerns with music education and active participation in music-making. Music education and active music-making might be seen as an alternative to music therapy especially when it has not been a success in practice for those who have tried and participated in it. It is in this 'active' way that I wish to explore the practices of older persons and their participation in church-singing and choiring.

### **2.5.2 Well-Being and Singing**

Singing is reported to be the most effective of all artforms in promoting well-being and good health (Morrison et al., 2007; Wall and Duffy, 2010). As stated in chapter one, there is a gap in the literature concerning the experiences of not only community-based singing groups regarding the psychosocial well-benefits of group singing and how best to harness them (Hendry et al., 2022). In particular there is additionally a paucity of theoretical frameworks (Dingle, 2019) to account for and analyze such experiences. Part of my study intention is to learn how singing affects community-based singing group members (and in particular that of the church community) and to offer a comprehensive insight into their rich experiences of singing within this environment and the social benefits they felt it afforded them. Having achieved this, one then could understand the factors that facilitate such benefits and develop an understanding of the idea of well-being that church and its leaders could key into and utilize further. This might be considered as the well-being benefits of church-singing amongst its older choir members.

Key texts centred around mental health typically have a scientific background, such as Gembris (2008) and Bailey and Davidson (2002) who have concentrated on the area of mental health in relation to impact on homeless men. In their study, they interviewed members of a small choir for homeless men and four themes emerged repeatedly in the accounts from their participants: group singing alleviated depression; enhanced emotional and physical well-being; performing to an audience encouraged a sense of personal worth; and provided a means of re-engaging with wider social networks. Furthermore, the choir provided a supportive context for the men in which they could develop their social skills and achieve collective goals and this directed their attention away from internal preoccupation with their problems. The study used qualitative methodology, looking primarily into the benefits of community singing. They used a diverse sample of singers, and, from evidence in participant reports, they were able to associate a range of social, psychological, and health benefits that resulted from undertaking regular singing. Bailey and Davidson as referred to already, also conducted a questionnaire study (2003: 3) to compare the perceived benefits of 'active' participation in music (e.g., singing in a choir), 'passive' listening to music with others and 'passive' listening to music alone. This positive transformation amongst homeless men showed that group singing has emotional benefits as well as a 'therapeutic' effect (2003: 4).

Two further quasi-experimental studies of singers in choirs reported positive health impacts from group singing for older people, using standardised measures and objective indicators of well-being and health. The work of Houston et al. (1998) informed us of improvements to levels of anxiety and depression in nursing home residents. This was following a four-week implemented programme of singing for residents. Cohen, Perlstein, Chapline et al., (2006) found significant improvements within mental and physical health in some older persons people who regularly participated in a community choir for twelve months.

Clift, Hancox, Morrison et al. (2010) are perhaps credited with the largest study of all regarding choral singing and well-being. This cross-national survey took the World Health Organization's definition of health and through a short form of the WHO QoL (Quality of Life) questionnaire, gathered informative data from 1124 choral singers. The study included participants from England, Germany and Australia. It was ambitious in size, with singers being asked to complete a 12-item 'effects of choral singing scale' and also produce written accounts identifying the personal effects of choral singing on well-being and health in

response to the given questions. Other health-focused participatory singing programmes have been completed and have focused on older people (Skingley et al., 2016; 2011).

Clift and Hancox (2010) also looked at written accounts of the effects of choral singing on the well-being and of participants with low psychological well-being, as assessed by the World Health Organizations WHOQOL-BREF (1996). These showed high scores on a singing scale indicating 'a strong perceived impact of singing on a sense of personal well-being (Clift, Hancox, Morrison, et al., 2010: 21; Gabrielsson and Lindstrom, 1993: 118). This in turn displayed four separate categories of personal and health challenges disclosed by group members. These included: enduring mental health issues, family/relationship issues, physical health issues, and bereavement. It was shown that singing was able to give support in coping with such challenges. The choir members' written reports of the challenges indicated singing as a powerful force in the aiding of mental well-being.

Other research has shown that group singing can influence mood (Unwin, Dianna and Davis, 2006) and physical health (Bungay, Clift and Skingley, 2010). Group singing is a musical activity that has been used and credited with having a positive effect on the treatment of neurological disorders (Wan, Ruber, Hohmann and Schlaug, 2010; MacDonald et al., 2012). Further to this, it was also understood as an expression of 'self' (Hays, 2005). Stanley (2009) stated this and argued that it is important to know how older people think and feel, especially given the growing numbers of older people in society.

Studies into these associated benefits (i.e., where older persons are concerned), include research by Hillman (2002). His research used a group of women and men over retirement age (60 plus in years for women, 65 for men). Age-wise, this was akin to my own study. He focused on those who attended a community arts project titled 'Call that Singing' (CTS). The CTS singing group was without financial cost, had no formal membership, and was without an audition for entry. Hillman discovered that the participants experienced 'perceived improvements in emotional well-being, social life, and social confidence' (2002: 170). Such findings were mirrored in the study carried out by Southcott and Joseph (2014). Their work reported an improved sense of well-being in a Bosnian choir based in Victoria, Australia.

Fogg-Rogers et al., researched older participants in the Auckland Celebration Choir. This group met regularly and comprised of people with a history of stroke or Parkinson's Disease. The study reported that singing improved their mood (Fogg-Rogers et al., 2016). As with this study, Clift, Manship and Stephens, (2017) agreed that regular singing by older people with these conditions and mental illnesses, helped to reduce mental distress and produced a heightened awareness of general well-being. Elsewhere, Judd and Pooley (2014) have contributed to the area of positive emotion in singing. They have used in-depth interviews with older adults regularly singing in choirs in Perth, Australia. They also found that all their participants described positive emotion as an outcome of singing. Some of their participants mentioned involvement as beneficial to combatting depression or illness. Research has found that social interaction and connection carries an importance for the individual participating within a choir (MacKinlay, 2001; Livesey et al, 2012). This is arguably increased and more significant for people as they become older (Schneider, 2011: 809).

Gridley et al.'s study (2011) centred around research involving social benefits between members of choirs. This was a large-scale survey using 200 singers in Victoria, Australia. The authors identified three themes relating to group singing: the singing and music, social connection, and health and well-being. The results revealed the participants' recognition that group-singing was important for connecting with their community (Bodkin-Allen, Swain and West, 2016: 25). They also found that sharing within the community at large led to a sense of togetherness and a sense of belonging (Human and Joseph, 2021) as a result of 'just singing' (Porter, 2017: 66; Adnams, 2008: 111). This had come through their interactions, enabling their social well-being that had arisen through singing. This was attributed to both the music and the social interactions between choir members. Further to this, Von Lob's research found that singing could enhance purposefulness (Bodkin-Allen, Swain and West, 2016: 25). They also found that singing provided escapism and distraction for those involved. This was particularly the case for those suffering from forms of trauma. It has also been suggested that the positive effects of music through singing have an impact on older people's identity (Ergen, 2019), stimulus and motivation heightened through community inclusion (Hays, 2005; Hays and Minichiello, 2005; Joseph and Southcott, 2014).

There is a limited amount of research into the benefits of singing in a variety of contexts and most research is arguably focused on non-religious contexts that support or inform a better

quality of life (Moss, Lynch and O'Donoghue, 2017; Fishburn, 2012; Scanlon, 1993). There remain relatively few studies regarding church singing and well-being – it has yet to really gain academic fruition, identity, and visibility. The majority of papers relating to choral singing and well-being are quantitative in character or reliant on the use of measurement through various scales. It is because of this, that the whole essence of qualitative research I believe to have been neglected. Whilst we may look to science for answers, history often dictates that it is the words of people and their experiences on a human and day-to-day level that appoint equal argument and revelation.

Much of the work involving singing and well-being has been focused on the area of mental health (Barberia, 2019). I acknowledge that this is indeed important to overall research and its associations with linked areas of well-being. I believe the environment in which the person is able to practice their discipline, such as in the skill and experience of church singing and its connected associations of well-being, is crucial for the quality of an individuals' experience and adds to a positivity of mental state affecting the educational learning and the ability to flourish in their chosen task and activity.

Perkins et al. (2020) concluded in their meta-ethnography, that little research has scrutinized the processes by which music has an effect on well-being. It was found that people benefit from participating in musical activities by engaging with specific and multiple processes that meet their individual needs and circumstances. This was also the case in the well-being study of Daykin, Mansfield et al. (2017) where for example in music listening and group singing, both regular occurring activities supporting marginalized groups within society. They concluded that 'although there was robust evidence for positive effects of music and singing on well-being in adults, there was a need for research within sub-groups who were at greater risk of low levels of well-being, and the processes by which may or may not be achieved' (Bradford, 2020: 41).

Kreutz's study (2014) is worthy of brief mention. His research centered on the psychological effects of amateur choral singing with a mixed group of new and untrained singers. He found that singing enhanced their psychological well-being and induced a socio-biological response. The research was relevant to my work because he cited the importance of 'flow'. Furthermore, choir singing (solo and choral) creates a positive physiological response (Beck

et al., 1999) resulting in less tension and improved mood (Bradford, 2020: 43). The voice is so ubiquitous that we can and do overlook its tremendous power to improve wellness. Evidence appears all around, once we are alerted to this possibility (Norton, 2016: xix).

## **2.6 Well-being of older singers, the Church, the social and the Spiritual**

### **2.6.1 Ageing and Well-being with the Older Person**

Ageing in older people represents an unforeseen barrier (Hobbs, 2016: 34). Schuz et al. (2009) state that the process of ageing has a lesser impact on those who care for themselves successfully mentally and physically by minimizing the impact of growing older. That is, when compared to those who are poor and unaided in their health issues. Experts of ageing and well-being agree that much is dependent on the individual's psychological functioning (Ward et al., 2012). Further to this, research in this area (Ryff and Keyes, 1995) claims that psychological well-being is often age-related. This is because of the associated affects, such as depression and anxiety, as well as a lessening in their 'purpose in life' or 'personal growth' (Hobbs, 2016: 34).

There are debates amongst well-being scholars to suggest that ageing is not associated with well-being. For example, Carstensen's (2009) research outlined that older people often choose to live in the moment and enjoy more fulfilling lives. He outlines that this is often in part due to significant personal experiences previously encountered and issues to do with mortality. Such 'temporal' perspectives (Hobbs, 2016: 35) are to be considered important to people's perspectives and perceptions. Whilst this is often the case, Layard (2005: 32-3) argues against this view and suggests that 'average happiness is remarkably stable over the lifespan'. Allen (2008) disagrees with this and believes that over the last 45 years statistics demonstrate a U-shaped curve joining age and well-being. However, he concludes that this might not be the case more recently. Often these physiological changes are personal, self-related (Oguz et al., 2013), and age-related (Steptoe et al., 2012).

The idea of 'active ageing' (also referred to as positive-ageing) is regularly associated with positive well-being. The term 'active' in itself suggests a healthy way of living rather than a negative way (Kotter-Grühn, 2022). This has led to its criticism for 'encouraging an idealization of active and successful ageing which relies on normative standards that many older people



cannot attain' (Hobbs, 2016, 35; Ward et al., 2012). However, the idea of 'active ageing' might be best viewed as an 'increasing quality and quantity of life years, enhancing autonomy and independence' (Stenner et al., 2011: 468). In doing this, the effects have permeated not only the individual and community, but, further, carry societal costs, including for local and national health care systems (Atherton et al., 2011: 134; Harris et al., 2005: 215).

The term 'active-ageing' is indicative of physical, social and mental activities of those experiencing later years. According to Hobbs (2016: 36), more research is necessary to explore how 'interactions between temporality, ageing and well-being... and resultant health conditions have been widely identified as detrimental to well-being.' When considering well-being, its many modifications of terminology, aims and objectives, such complicated matters lend themselves to further scrutinizing of the many, varied journals and dissertations.

In 'The Role of Religion, Spirituality and/or Belief in Positive ageing for Older Adults', Malone and Dadswell (2018) argue that the role of religion, spirituality and/or belief can have numerous positive outcomes for older adults including enhanced health and well-being, greater capacity to cope, social support, and opportunities to participate in society. They further argue that there are issues which could enhance the understanding of the role of religion, spirituality and/or belief in debates around positive ageing. They also indicate that there are a number of limitations in the existing literature, which indicate a need for further and specific research in this area.

Three reasons are cited in relation to this above point. Firstly, they believe a significant amount of literature is based on quantitative research. They state the importance of a qualitative methodology, as it allows for deeper understandings of such abstract concepts as religion, spirituality, belief and positive ageing to emerge. Secondly, much of what is written within literature is Christian focused and based in the USA. They argue that the spiritual and religious environment in the UK is very diverse and different to the USA, and this is also the case for the approach to healthcare. They suggest further study of not just Christian focused literature but also, other religion's literature. Thirdly, in their research in relation to the gap in literature linking spirituality and religion to successful positive ageing, the link between religion, spirituality and or/ belief and positive ageing as a more inclusive concept has not yet been developed in the literature. Malone and Dadswell suggest the importance of this finding.

They indicate that the possibilities for support through religion, spirituality and /or belief may in their words, 'have compelling implications for positive ageing in our current situation of an ageing population during a time of austerity in the healthcare sector' (2018: 5). Their paper qualitatively explores the role of religion, spirituality and/or belief in the everyday lives of older adults in the UK to understand how it may be related to positive ageing. Their findings remind us that:

Older persons have complex and changing relationships with religion, spirituality and or/ belief and it is not a panacea. Religion, spirituality and /or beliefs should be seen as one form of support within a plethora of others, both formal and informal, for a comprehensive approach to positive ageing (Malone and Dadswell, 2018: 13).

Quite often there are issues surrounding older people and understanding their spiritual and religious experiences (Mackinlay 2001: 15). Sometimes this might be to do with how older persons people articulate themselves and express these needs. But also, this may be due to health professionals and social workers as well as clergy simply failing to understand what their spiritual needs are altogether (Mackinlay 2001: 16).

Nevertheless, the major world religions advocate the importance of human relationship with God, according to the understanding of the particular faith (MacKinlay, 2001: 14). This is in keeping with the thoughts of Vogel (1984) where he suggests that through the church there are opportunities for learning and growing spiritually for older adults. Music can enhance this. The overall aim for learning in later life is the nurturing of spiritual well-being as it can be enabled through religious education and environment. However, one might argue that some older people may well need to learn the skills necessary for such a life review, as well as that of a spiritual life review. My work offers understanding of how the church environment can foster these needs in accordance with social and spiritual connectedness coming from the involvement of choring.

### **2.6.2 Music, Sacred Settings and Older Singers**

Globally, undoubtedly, music plays an important part in the social, religious and cultural fabric of many societies. People in multicultural societies find that through music they foster a sense of belonging and identity and music is at the very essence of their humanity (Blacking, 1995).

Engagement in music has been shown to benefit the well-being of individuals (Lamont, 2011; Weinberg and Joseph, 2016). I will explore the reasons for this later in this section. Music and singing furthermore has the power to connect with all cultures and forms of life (Creech et al., 2014). It is also a way to connect and celebrate diversity, not just in secular settings, but also in educational and sacred contexts (Mackinlay, 2011: 102).

Recent research has identified that music in sacred settings can add to growth and development of the individual (Hallam, 2010) and that this is causally linked to the situated and social context of churches and choirs (Joseph, 2018; Lave and Wenger, 1990). When people engage in an environment that promotes teaching and learning about religion, faith, and spirituality, they are involved in 'communities of practice' and within 'shared patterns of practice in concrete settings' (Smith and Smith, 2011: 12). Furthermore, religious sites can be compared to schools in the sense that these 'communities' are bodies with similar modes of practice and participation (Wenger, 1998). Usually, within this context is the involvement of clergy, lay personnel, and musicians, as in cathedral or monastic-like traditions. In such close partnerships, individuals and groups are able to forge relationships that give opportunities to learn from one another, as they rehearse and perform these co-related interests e.g., music and faith (Boyce-Tillman, 2016). These interactions are molded into routine-like practices through regularity and discipline (Wenger, 1998). In smaller settings such as parishes, music is often viewed as a community of practice where 'the power [can] transform the heart, soul, mind and spirit of the individual' (Joseph, 2018: 190).

Dawn Joseph (2014) has researched perceptions and understandings of music in churches, schools and in the wider community. The data was collected within Christian foundations and choir settings in Australia. The sampling was small, but informative and confirmed 'the strong connection music has to spirituality, God and the human person' (Joseph, 2014: 190). One of Joseph's conclusions was that through music people can connect with other Christians elsewhere in the world. Joseph's findings were recognized in Australia (Victoria's Parliament Inquiry 2013) and were put into practice within music educational programmes. Joseph believed that non-Christian communities could also positively engender well-being 'as music transcends cultural, linguistic and faith barriers, thereby fostering spiritual growth' (Joseph, 2014: 190).

### **2.6.3 Singing as an Education in Later Life: Gap in the Literature.**

I realised early on in this study that the area of collective singing and church-based choirs and communities is unexplored. Issues within current papers regarding 'relationships' within choirs, and those within the church community, have not typically been offered as key themes in academic discussions, with the exception of Gallet's paper (2016) 'Social Connectedness: the role of the local church in community'. This is particularly the case where older people are concerned. There is a real gap in this body of research. Choiring is a social activity by its very nature. Further to this, it has been suggested that there are benefits to well-being that stem from participating in choirs. One of the arguments put forward is that this is possibly dependent to the degree in which participants identify themselves within the group (Ergen, 2019: 4).

Recent studies about singing have been about a non-religious setting, such as Bailey and Davidson (2003; 2005) and Gridley et al. (2011). These projects have involved larger numbers of people. There have been systematic reviews of research gathered relating to singing and well-being (Clift et al., 2008; Clift et al., 2009; Clift and Hancox, 2010; Ellis, 2018) and these have revealed a relatively small and varied corpus of research. I will identify next in this literature review the links and forms of research concerning singing and well-being.

### **2.6.4 The Church, Community and Well-being**

In the search for what exists already, to establish a base of literature regarding church, community and well-being, there are two examples that stand out. Powell and Robbin's paper 'The churches and well-being: perspectives from the Australian National Church Life Survey' (2015) concerned itself with the inter-sections between well-being and religion in an Australian context. The research was conducted on regular church attenders. Using surveys, they sought to focus on why and how people experience their lives in a positive way. In their study, they aimed to clarify how volunteering and religious beliefs and practices are related to well-being in Christian church-goers (Dowson and Miner, 2015). Investigated also were positive indicators of mental health, and occupational well-being among church leaders and the relationship between religious orientation and personal well-being amongst church leaders. The paper admitted to being limited in scope because of the research being carried

out in a single country and ‘only studying a religiously active population’ (Powell and Robbins, 2015: 6).

In contrast, Gallet’s paper (2016) provided a brief overview of the role of the church in developing social capital and identified other studies which linked church congregations to the engagement of social practice within the local community. The paper focused more on social group advantages as opposed to the advantages of the individual. It found that while the primary role of churches is to nurture the spiritual health of their members, other activities, such as reaching out to those in need within the community, followed as a natural outcome of obedience to church teaching (2016: 3). In addition, Gallet found that most churches acknowledged they had a key role to play in community and that this needed to be developed more through social capital and through their locality, in order to promote their health and spirituality. When we consider well-being and ideas related to it in for example spirituality, one might be reminded of the words of Marcel Cobussen, that ‘although spirituality may involve a sense of the ineffable and the un-nameable, and although it lacks apt categories, these are not arguments relieving us from the task of bringing it up’ (2008: 33). It is in the act and participation of church singing that we find benefits of both the social and spiritual kind.

## **2.7 Social Capital, Social Connectedness, Bonding and Bridging Capital**

The term social capital is often brought up. Social relationships and social well-being are linked to social capital (Bourdieu, 1991: 1) and linked practices (Bourdieu, 1992: 9). ‘Capital’ is a term which often implies economic benefit (Atherton et al., 2011: 185). Underlying this term is the association of participation, bonding, trust and reciprocity (Hobbs, 2016: 59). We must recognize that a lot of social capital is linked to community and collective well-being, as with bonding capital. Gallet (2016) refers to this as social-connectedness in civic engagement.

Bonding capital concerns types of social capital which creates deep social connection and relationships (Sixsmith and Boneham, 2007: 82). On the other hand, bridging capital involves weaker ties and thinner relationships with colleagues from organizations, groups, and others beyond the family circle and close friends. Naturally this could include members of a choir. Indeed, Putnam’s work here is critical and influential here (Putnam, 1995; 2000). He sees bonding and bridging capital as ‘integrally involved in the creation, maintenance and use of

social capital' (Sixsmith and Boneham, 2007: 82). Whilst Putnam suggests an advantage from generating relationships through this type of capital, scholars such as Burt (2002) suggest that bridging capital declines more quickly than bonding capital. This is perhaps to do with their influence as well as the individual. Bonding ties may be useful and supportive in stressful times, bridging ties offer support in work-related and social advancement matters (Halpern, 2005). Musical bonding might be explained by value similarity indicated by shared music preference (Norton, 2016: 79).

However, one might look at the interpretations and definitions behind the idea of social capital, we should perhaps also be reminded of the verbal truths set out by Sixsmith and Boneham:

... it is vital to stop referring to social capital within the narrow confines of an economic term and to reap the riches of exploring the social processes in which it operates and can be enhanced to improve health and well-being (2007: 85).

Research has suggested that social capital positively (and negatively) impacts people's mental and physical health and well-being (Putnam, 2000, Halpern, 2005). Cohen and Wills (1985) further imply that improvements in health are brought about by the interlinking of community, family, and friendships. Putnam's writing (2000) co-relates to this and states that social capital is clearly linked to good health and high levels of happiness. He found that the more socially integrated the individual, the less likely they are to suffer from various conditions such as heart attacks, cancer, premature death, and even less severe conditions including colds and minor ailments (Sixsmith and Boneham, 2007). Putnam (2000) goes on to suggest that social integration not only prevents, but aids recovery from illness. He also argues that the reasons for this are the practical assistance that the social brings and the absence of social isolation, which has been shown to quicken the ageing process due to negative chemical effects on the individual. He outlines other advantages, suggesting it to be a therapy for depression. His discussion concludes that satisfaction and happiness are strongly linked to the way in which an individual connects to their group's social participation and activity. This is endorsed by Argyle (1987) who found that membership in groups, such as church and voluntary organizations, increased their general well-being.

In her book *Retired and Inspired*, Wendy Billington suggests that ‘socializing too has an important role to play; the loneliness prevalent among older people is sad to see. Churches and communities have a valuable role to play in helping to alleviate this’ (2019: 65). Whilst Billington’s book is not an academic study, her observations concerning ordinary life are useful particularly for those preparing for retirement and the withdrawal from paid work. It is also a reminder of the prevalence of loneliness in older people. Further to this, whilst her writing is predominantly aimed at those sympathetic to the Christian faith, she intends the value and interest of her study ‘to reach out to others of different faiths’ (2019: 8).

It is interesting to see how the wealth of literature relating to social capital connects with themes of happiness. This is through the way in which individuals might feel a greater sense of connection to communities and group organizations, such as choral societies and church choirs, and groups that promote a better quality of life. Putnam relates this allegiance through religion and relationships with forms of social capital. Graham (2011: 226) states the importance of Putnam’s work here and recognized he had ‘led the way in charting how religious values and organizations serve as rich sources of capital which foster precisely those networks and relationships that seem to contribute most decisively to healthy social networks, and thus to our quality of life’ This is particularly the case with his writing concerning bonding and bridging ties both relating to social capital. I suggest in my work that there is much capital to be gained through investing in church life and the advantages are both social (2.7.1) as well as spiritual (2.7.2).

### **2.7.1 Social Well-being and Wellness**

Social Well-being is said to be ‘that which affected and pertains to the personal’ (Hobbs, 2016: 58). It is regarded as having three dimensions – the personal, relational and collective (Ellis, 2018: 111). Whilst many well-being theories and studies relate to an economic and political focus it is noticeable that some theories ignore the importance of inter-personal relationships. This lack of context and acknowledgement is a vital element required for detailed evaluation (Bruni and Porta, 2007b). This is a matter for debate which I outline next.

Many empirical studies over the last twenty years have focused on the importance of well-being to social relationships (Joseph, 2009, 2013; Myers and Diener, 1995; Gasper, 2010). This has grown in its evaluation and relevance to the various strands of well-being studies. It has

led to Bowling et al. (2003: 272) making the comment that, ‘the largest body of empirical research on the various facets of well-being has focused on the structure of social networks and the functioning and supportiveness of human relationships.’ Furthermore, social relationships and social well-being are intertwined and causal to an individual’s own general sense of well-being (Welch et al., 2014; Gasper, 2010; Allen, 2008). Strong social bonds and ties, with family and relations, friendships, neighbours, and personal relationships are factors which are partially definitive of social well-being (Allen, 2008a; 2008b; 2008c; 2008d).

Along with the idea of relationships, social acceptance can also be viewed as necessary to social well-being and often dependent on ‘cultural synergy’ (Joseph and Human, 2021). Acceptance and belonging are said to be one of the same because of their closeness (Joseph, 2013; Haworth and Hart, 2007). These factors are often conditional for other types of well-being, for example psychological well-being and its affectation of stress, anxiety, isolation and depression (Hobbs, 2016, 58; Barnes et al., 2013).

Social participation and support are also a key area of social well-being (Joseph and Human, 2021; Ward et al., 2012). Participation and support are integral to relationships and offer a balance between dependence and independence (Allen, 2008). Research into this area has led again to the conclusion that social well-being is often shaped by social connectedness and this determines the management of one’s own well-being (Gorny-Wegrzyn and Perry, 2022; Ward et al., 2012). Poor social well-being has often led to individuals experiencing social isolation, lack of camaraderie, depression and anxiety (Allen 2008). On the other hand, successful and positive social well-being is dependent on the situation and networks of aid (Barnes et al., 2013). These often differ in quality and outlook, being often ‘superficial or one-dimensional’ (Hobbs, 2016: 59). The maintaining of these is again partially dependent on the individual’s continuation of general social wellness. As suggested before, this can often be linked to matters and routines relating to the spiritual.

### **2.7.2 Spirituality, Spiritual Well-being, Spiritual Wellness, Spiritual Capital**

Spirituality and religion are often closely associated ‘the terms overlap but are not synonymous’ (Hobbs, 2016: 46). Indeed, a person may be spiritual but not necessarily religious (Sartori, 2010). When assessing the impact of spirituality, spiritual well-being and singing, we must consider the application carefully. We must account for relationships



between the dimensions, that is how we might recognize spirituality and well-being (MacKinlay, 2001: 17) and further acknowledge the differences between spirituality and religiosity (Chavez et al., 2005).

Definitions and understandings of spirituality are notoriously elusive they rely upon phenomena that are connected to often ineffable subjective experiences (Morris, 2016: 395). On such a matter, we might focus upon spiritual practice or the so-called 'holistic milieu' (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005). In doing this, we are better equipped to locate spirituality in a particular place or set of activities, though we might interpret it in a clearer way as subjective inclinations that run through discursive formations of self-understanding, behaviour and experience. Visser et al. (2010) define spirituality as an experience of a connection with the essence of life. If considered in this way, spirituality becomes '...a form of relational epistemology – based on language and conceptual framing – that draws upon the internal and the ecstatic' (Morris, 2016: 395).

June Boyce-Tillman (2016) and Marcel Cobussen (2008) have referred to the collective process of singing and spirituality, suggesting possible benefits to the individual's well-being. Their clear examples of containing and structuring the idea of spiritual well-being within an appropriate setting will make participant's explanations characteristically interpretivistic (Yin, 2009: 34). Cobussen (2008: 33) reminds us again that, 'although spirituality may involve a sense of the ineffable and the un-nameable, and although it lacks apt categories, these are not arguments relieving us from the task of bringing it up.' Spirituality as defined in this study recognizes the sphere of ultimate meaning in people's lives; the meaning which arises from the core of one's being (MacKinlay, 2001: 59). Wills adds to this research by suggesting spirituality as something intrinsic in all aspects of the lived experience (De Souza and Halahoff, 2018: 4), which instills a sense of identity, belonging and meaning-making. She also suggests that through music and listening, it may inspire people further and add *something other* as a result of more growth and change (2018: 4-5).

Spiritual well-being is not an easy topic to conceptualize. Bonet, (2009) and Moberg (1979) suggested that spiritual well-being is not a synonym for religion. We might regard spiritual well-being as more of a specific concept, but equally it is a very broad term and applicable to matters other than religion. Indeed 'its functional definition pertains to the wellness or health

of the inner resources of people, the ultimate concerns around which all other values are focused, the central philosophy of life that guides conduct, and the meaning-giver centre of human life which influences all individual and social behaviour' (Moberg, 1979).

Achieving a sense of well-being incorporates an act, or acts, of self-realization, that is, a relationship to one's inner life or self (De Souza and Halahoff, 2018: 14). Of course, this suggests that not all spirituality might be considered totally God-related. For some it may instead involve 'an awareness that one is connected to something more, beyond the individual self, but which can be placed in an existential reality' and the sense of unity and oneness with those others around them, as experienced in a choir of singers (De Souza and Halahoff, 2018: 9).

Others have seen spiritual well-being as a part of the role of religion and spirituality in health (Koenig, 1997, 2015; Koenig et al., 2001). From this they have suggested that religion and spirituality act in accordance with one another to enable well-being. As a result of this people are able to make sense of obstacles and challenges, develop a sense of control and support the socio-cultural rules and observations that facilitate mutual support and cooperation (Graham, 2011). Added to this, the work of Vilhena et al. (2014) has concluded that spirituality could facilitate and improve emotional well-being and resilience through encouraging a sense of positivity (Vilhena et al., 2014; see also Bartlett et al., 2003).

Spiritual wellness corresponds with this and suggests that being connected to something greater than yourself and having a set of values, principles, morals and beliefs can provide a sense of purpose and meaning to life, then using those principles to guide your actions (Fisher, 2011: 25; Smith, E., 2016: 1). It is important to note that not all academics agree to this end. In disputing evidence of associations of positivity in well-being and spirituality, Hebert et al. (2006) in their systematic review of relationships between spirituality and well-being, suggest that associated effects lack clarity and true confirmation in result. The extent of its 'worth' and how we are to understand it more, I will now discuss.

With the phrase 'spiritual capital' there are ambiguities concerning this notion (Halpern 2005, Anhier and Kendall, 2002). There has been much critique surrounding the concept. For example, the term has been described as too vague, slippery and poorly specified (Baum,

1999). Part of the debate has been directed towards its usefulness in terms of measurement and attempts to tie it to other particular concepts such as the psychological. Moscovici (1984) has argued that if the concept is too tightly defined it can prevent investigation beyond its boundaries and prevents more forward-thinking research. Schuller et al. (2000) acknowledge that while there may be problems in defining and measuring spiritual capital and social capital. Both have many merits as heuristic tools. The challenges of thought and the shifting of analysis can only serve as a bridge both 'to the patterns of relationships between agents, social units and institutions' (Schuller et al., 2000: 35).

Spiritual capital is a term that was adopted by Zohar and Marshall (2004). It takes a broadening of capital and its associated ideas of wealth, advantage, profit and power to a new dimension. Through defining a sense of wider meaning, they are able to see a new vision enhancing human value. They sum this up by indicating that 'spiritual capital is the amount of spiritual knowledge and expertise available to an individual or a culture, where spiritual is taken to mean meaning, values, and fundamental purposes, (Zohar and Marshall, 2004: 27).

The notion of spiritual capital has been the subject of growing interest in recent years; however, the concept remains poorly defined. In their paper 'Clarifying the Concept of Spiritual Capital' (2013), Palmer and Wong define spiritual capital as 'the individual and collective capacities generated through affirming and nurturing the intrinsic spiritual value of every human being' (Palmer and Wong, 2013:1). This is in contrast to other definitions and theorizations of spiritual capital and they stress through their conceptual framework that: (1) spiritual capital is an autonomous form of value which is not merely a subset of social, cultural or religious capital (2) that spiritual capital is based on the affirmation of intrinsic value and, as such, offers a critical perspective on instrumental concepts of capital and its conversion; (3) that spiritual capital generates and transforms social and material relations. And importantly would affirm and nurture individual as well as group capacity to pursue intrinsic goals and serve the common good. (Palmer and Wong, 2013: 1). I suggest that in my work spiritual capital is informed through the ways in which the older choristers generate and nurture their commitment to their Catholic faith through intrinsically valued ways of being with others.

### **2.7.3 Spirituality in Music and Setting**

The writing of Seifert (2011) and Gembris (2008) suggests that in music-making, spiritual experiences are closely linked to the personal and collective. Sheldrake takes this one step further by suggesting that an ecclesiastical experience – that is, one experienced in a church could be referred to as ‘life in the spirit’ (Sheldrake, 1991: 37). The musical life of the church, due to its prominent role in services, is a key part of it functioning together as a community, and so the way in which church members are able to come together in a common practice is key to the broader functioning of the church body (Porter, 2017). Through this important way and the forms of ecclesiastical and Christian script set to music, the musician brings feeling through expression as a result of a spiritual experience and nourishment (Gumbel, 2021). When invoked as a group we might refer to this as a version of ‘expressive communalism’ (Flory and Miller, 2007). This is a term offered by Flory and Miller suggesting a religious orientation in which people seek spiritual experience and fulfilment in the community and through various expressive forms of spirituality, both private and public. In this regard, music is perceptible but elusive, recognizable but uncontainable. It is intangible, and its insubstantial nature particularly suits it to symbolizing the mysterious and wholly other (Gribben, 1994: 79-80). Langer outlines these subtleties further:

Music, on the other hand, is pre-eminently non-representative even in its classical productions, its highest attainments. It exhibits pure form not as an embellishment, but as its very essence, for instance, in German music from Bach to Beethoven practically offers nothing but tonal structures: no scene, no object, no fact. (1969: 209)

This reflection may explain why music is so effective in revealing and enabling an encounter with the transcendent. In the Christian tradition, music is a means to communicate with a God who is considered present as well as hidden. Weakland (1967: 11) attains to this perception by expressing that ‘music of all arts, thus tends to be transcendental; it expresses essences directly’. Thus, music enables the participating individual to encounter the spiritual in these terms, without the presumption to capture or contain the Divine or Self. One might observe this in the liturgy of the Eastern churches, where for example in the Byzantine rite, music is used powerfully to express a sense of the heavenly liturgy present here on earth. Within this state, the form of music is able to distinguish itself from other symbols of worship within the churches setting. This is because it has the ‘capacity to wed itself to the Word and share in its power is its most critical characteristic for the liturgy’ (Gribben, 1994: 80). Like the Word, music then becomes both event and utterance, and an important part of liturgy

(MacKinlay, 2001: 101). Foley summarises these attributes and outlines their uniqueness to communicate within the context of community and worship:

Music as the most refined of all sound events reflects the characteristics of all sound phenomena to the highest degree. Music's temporality, human genesis, dynamism and apparent insubstantial nature enable it to serve as a unique symbol of God, suggesting presence without confinement, eliciting wonder without distance and enabling union which is both personal and corporate (1992: 869).

Today, in ecclesiastical settings of worship and liturgy, in the United Kingdom, dependent on Christian denomination and the preferences of the church-led Incumbent, hymns and psalms might be accompanied by an organ, piano or keyboard of some description, in a traditional setting. This may vary in a more charismatic or Pentecostal setting, where the contemporary style will be accompanied by a selection of instruments, usually electronic keyboards, guitars, orchestration arranged accordingly and matched with the abilities of its musicians (Williams, 2005). There is a clear distinction between the traditional and non-traditional approaches to worshipping in Christian places of worship (Porter, 2017). Often, in more modern settings, parts of the service may have longer and more free forms of style, often using digital and electronic forms of projection and sound management to assist the participant in the following of song words rather than using a hymn book (Linman, 2010). On this matter, Birgitta Johnson expresses these thoughts:

The inclusion of a praise and worship period by churches has attracted many Christians seeking a deeper spiritual connection as well as those who want to exercise a more expressive worship lifestyle that does not end when Sunday service is over. (2008: 265).

In contrast to Johnson's thoughts here and how the variations of the different styles of worship may be received, positively or negatively according to musical taste and opinion, Joseph states:

As a tertiary music educator and church musician, I have found music can connect people from all walks of life: it traverses age, ethnicity, language and culture and offers people a sense of belonging that contributes to their well-being. (2018: 191).

How this is achieved I explore in a more defined way throughout the course of this thesis further expressed through the findings. These findings relate to ways in which church choiring

can lead to a sense of fulfilment and life satisfaction as a result of regularly being with others, learning through music and in the routines and practices of religious rite.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

My own work regarding older persons and church singing is important because it draws on aspects of former projects in themes such as those involving positive aspects of life (Judd and Pooley, 2014), the values of later life singing (Hillman, 2002), church life (Mackinlay, 2001), and the values of associated communities (Hays, 2005). It also expresses the merits of the PERMA model and the role it can have in participatory activity and the later learning of older persons.

I have found the work of Perkins and Williamon (2014) to be important in association with my findings. They found that learning a musical instrument enhanced the well-being of older people. This suggested that learning and creating music has a significant impact on health. In actively learning and performing music, older people enhance both the eudaimonic and hedonic perspectives of well-being. This is offered in their work through six stages of mechanism: 1) subjective experiences of pleasure 2) enhanced social interaction 3) musically-nuanced engagement in day-to-day life 4) fulfilment of musical ambition 5) the ability to make music and 6) self-satisfaction through musical progress. In enhancing such health promotion through participatory behaviour, the impact can be wider on the individual and community as a whole.

The effect of music on well-being is clear from the research and studies over the last ten years particularly. This is evidently the case with older adults and the more older persons (Creech et al., 2013). Music has been shown to be an important source for achieving psychological, cognitive and social goals for example in particular groups such as dementia sufferers (Bradford, 2020: 48) and in support of those suffering end of life illnesses as in cancer patients (Fancourt, Williamon et al., 2016). It has also been a useful resource in discovering the psychological, cognitive and social goals concerning those groups of people suffering mental health issues (Kreutz et al., 2004). Seinfeld et al. (2013) found that playing the piano and learning to read music was a beneficial activity for older adults to help cognitive and mental wellbeing. The social and spiritual are often linked and it is in the churches remit that we can observe scholarship regarding music and older people.

Flourishing is essentially a concept that supports theories associated with well-being. It involves the fulfilling or realizing one's own human potential. Under the remit of psychological well-being and psychology it takes a detailed '... form of universal statement...provides an explanation...and is testable' (Denscombe, 2002: 10) in my project. Its notions concern participants' feelings, thoughts and actions. Those matters relate to people and their participatory activities played out in both their social and spiritual lives.

In the self-motivated activity of singing, my participants have suggested in the data that they have experienced flourishing through church singing. This has been expressed by them as a result of the activity through its happiness and creativity established particularly over time. Many of them, have testified that through singing they are able to flourish, not just as musicians but as people in the discovery of themselves through participatory activity. This has been endorsed by positive emotion, engagement, relationship etc. which has come through the activity of singing. This is why Seligman's theory blocks and the PERMA model (2011: 14) are interesting and easy to operationalize, process and discuss. Ultimately, my project has been about people and focuses on their perceptions regarding church-singing as a later life activity. For this reason, I would say my own experiences in learning about them has helped me to personally flourish in this unique journey of Doctorate-ness (Trafford and Leshem, 2009: 1). I have been careful not to over theorize, as this can be detrimental to any project (Langdrige, 2007: 49) and the whole process I believe is to contribute to ongoing research and professional practice regarding church-singing, including how it affects the social and spiritual as well as the practical and lived.

This chapter has aimed at understanding well-being in the context of older persons, participatory singing, form, and definition. Well-being is shaped and influenced by other factors such as historical and linguistical content. The context to which the individuals and communities of people are exposed is relevant to any such study, including my own. The review has further identified that more research in regard to singing and well-being needs to be mobilized and facilitated. Particularly when considering the more qualitative in representation. In order to enable this, research perhaps needs to focus on its efforts to support theoretical evidence against corroborative empirical evidence. In order to achieve this, academics perhaps need to examine the theoretical and empirical gaps in the knowledge. My study in itself appertains to give further insight and consider the theoretical and empirical

evidence for the association of well-being between older people and participatory church singing.

The next chapter regarding methods and methodologies is an exposition of how my study has been able to proceed. It gives further insight into the qualitative project and how the results unfolded and were accounted for.



# **CHAPTER 3: DISCUSSION OF METHODOLOGY, METHODS, RESEARCH APPROACH, QUESTIONING AND DATA ANALYSIS**

## **3.1. Research Questions and specific research aims**

Following on from the Introduction and Literature Review presented in chapters 1 and 2, my thesis concerns how church singing can potentially benefit the well-being of older adults. In this chapter I restate the research questions and research aims. The epistemology is presented, and I justify my approach for the most appropriate route for this investigation (pragmatism); methodology and the selected research design (qualitative); the particular research methods selected to obtain the necessary data (interviews); followed by the analysis procedure (thematic analysis). I further evaluate the complexities, tensions and ethical considerations that have arisen from the use of such methods.

I sought to explore the personal experiences and perceptions of the participants', to scrutinize their learning encounters and the impact of well-being. My investigation into these encounters and experiences I felt was important to my present employment role. I work with older singers in a church setting. This is in the preparation of music for the public worship and liturgy. My singers provide music for weekly services in a large Catholic church. Many of them are retired or semi-retired. They come from diverse musical backgrounds instrumentally and vocally. I wanted to understand the reasons for engaging in this educational journey and their challenges and expectations.

During the study the following research questions will be addressed:

1. What are the benefits to the well-being of older people through performing church music and being in a choir?
2. In what ways might the teaching of singing impact older participants in terms of their social well-being through PERMA?
3. In what ways might the teaching of singing impact older participants in terms of their spiritual well-being through PERMA?
4. How can my role as a Choral-Director and teacher be used to support the older individual and group in their general well-being and singing?

In consideration of the above research questions, I wish to unpack them further in order:

- (i) To obtain an in-depth understanding of what taking part in regular singing sessions means to older adults.
- (ii) To explore how the PERMA model fits the data from the participants.
- (iii) To investigate further the social and spiritual impact as a result of regular church singing on the well-being of older persons.

### **3.2 Research Methodology**

Pragmatism is a 'real-life' centered approach which directly tackles the research question itself (Bradford, 2020: 89). Asking the research participants enabled me to answer these questions in a truthful and open way. These shared perspectives applied to the whole group. Indeed, such a form of 'pragmatism, where knowledge is always practical, provisional and open to further reconstruction, requires respect for the learners as practically engaged with the world, constantly enlarging their way of seeing the world' (Pring, 2017: 13). My job as a teacher is to encourage such active learning, introducing new situations, new experiences, new and more profitable ways of seeing the way ahead through the understandings (referred to in the different forms of knowledge) which I have gathered and inherited.

My research questions for the study have gradually evolved from the experiences of working as both a teacher and Choral-Director in Cathedrals and churches involving social as well as spiritual perspectives. In adopting a pragmatic approach, allowed me, the researcher, the freedom to select methodologies which best serve this 'real world' situation (Bradford, 2020: 89). In arguing for this approach, I was drawn to the words of the philosopher Rescher (1995) who states that;

The characteristic idea of philosophical pragmatism is that efficacy in a practical application - the issue of 'which works out most effectively' – somehow provides a standard for the determination of truth in case of statements, rightness in the case of actions, and value in the case of appraisals. (1995: 710).

Pragmatism has the advantage of making use of varied approaches in seeking relevant knowledge (Cresswell, 2009). With this approach, the broadest data collections containing varied selection of knowledge would be allowed for. This is especially the case with my own relatively under-represented field of research (Bradford, 2020:89). As a result, I was able to

look at research questions that no one else had asked before and my participants were instrumental in enabling this through in-depth interviews.

### **3.2.1 Discussion of Methodology**

Qualitative data has been described as an 'attractive nuisance' (Miles, 1979: 465). Words, which are by far the most common form of qualitative data, are a specialty of humans and their organizations (Robson, 2013, 465). Narratives might be described as 'rich', 'full' and 'real' and its collection often straight forward. The 'nuisance' refers to the legal idea that if an attractive object e.g., an unlocked car, where children can get into it, in today's world you may be liable for any injuries caused. 'Naïve researchers may be injured by unforeseen problems with qualitative data' (Robson, 2013: 466). Caution should be exercised, any account needs to 'live' and communicate to the reader, so in order for this to be generative, serious and detailed attention needs to be given to any credible analysis.

Phenomenological research focuses on the need to understand how humans view themselves and the world around them. The research methodology informed by Phenomenology Analysis (PA) seeks to reveal and convey deep insight and understanding of the concealed meanings of everyday life experiences. It is committed to the systematic exploration of personal experience (Tomkins, 2017). Through the two commitments of PA, 'giving voice' and 'making sense', my research will lead me to attain an 'insider perspective' of lived experiences.

Phenomenology refers to the 'study of human experience and the way in which things are perceived as they appear to consciousness' (Langdrige, 2007: 10) and it offered me a very 'flexible research tool' (Atkins and Wallace, 2012: 86). As a phenomenological study I wished to uncover meaning, and through focusing upon participants' thoughts, feelings, and memories sought access to their inner life worlds. The wider study of phenomenology can 'delve into an individual's reflection of routes taken through life and tease out what different eventualities mean' (Shaw, 2011: 32). Phenomenology recognizes that analysis always involves interpretation, and is strongly connected to hermeneutics in its investigation (e.g., of biblical meaning and text). I identified that the participants' descriptive experiences might have relevance to research questions involving spiritual well-being. This was demonstrated eventually when they were referring to their Catholic practices. For example, they typically found spiritual comfort through the melodies or biblical words of a hymn or in a sung anthem

often found in the performance of music at Mass. Although, I recognized that I did not have the same lived experience as any of the participants, I wanted to obtain a description which would get as 'close' to their views as possible (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006). This seemed an appropriate way to understand the reasons for older people taking up church singing and the perceived experiences they have in choiring.

Choral singing is an example of creative experience and considered as 'experiential'. Learning choral singing is no doubt experiential learning as well as being an experience. The context and environment are part of the experience (Noon, 2017: 2) and I realized this early on when formulating my ideas (see Appendix 1). I recognized that the difficulties in this might have been the way in which the individual may try and talk about the experiences of the group, so as a researcher I needed to try to keep the elements of conversation focused on the questions, e.g., relating to confidence, spiritual and social well-being.

I decided that the PERMA framework explained for me how long-term well-being is achieved through repeated experience of positive emotions and the other associated blocks. Other researchers have successfully used the model, for example in exploring student performers' musical memories (Lamont, 2012) and professional musicians' experiences of well-being (Ascenso, Williamon and Perkins, 2016). To date, there are a good number of quantitatively validated measures of this framework, and this drove my aim within this study to explore a more qualitative experience and meanings in musicking. I believe that focusing on a methodology in this way and in adopting the PERMA model, provided an analytic guide to interpret participants' experiences of singing in a choir. Through this qualitative and anecdotal-centered formula, using in-depth interviewing, would present a strong approach. I was examining the role of the church choir in participants' lives, focusing on health and well-being whilst allowing space for other emergent issues.

### **3.3 Reflexivity of the researcher**

In my professional position as a Director of Music I felt that being transparent in my work was paramount. I sought to disclose any influences, as well as mention any biases with regard to interpretation of the qualitative data and making sense of the individual's findings when considering their social and group experiences (Cresswell, 2009). I realized early on when conducting my pilot study that I was closely connected to such experiences as the Diocesan

choir leader. To recognize such researcher-participant linkages are necessary for identifying both strengths and weaknesses in research. Interaction and effective communication at interview level with older people could open up problems and unforeseen situations.

With such a privileged 'insider' position, one has to carefully manage situations both at interview as well as deliberating the collected data. In not making assumptions and carefully monitoring the proposed research questions and not detracting from their originality I felt was important and to do so would present risk. Seeking regular validation from my supervisors at all levels was a constancy through a practice of both habit and discipline.

### **3.4 The Narrative Interviewing of older people**

For my project design I used a narrative approach. The study of narratives has gained in popularity over recent years 'narratives have become a widespread research method in the social sciences' (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2007: 3), as has storytelling become more prevalent as a form of therapy within health-related fields (Nurser et al., 2018; Gustafson, 1994). Discussion about narratives extends beyond its use as a method of inquiry. In a discursive form, historical form, life and societal story form, narratives lend their usefulness to cultural and literary theory, language, historical philosophy, psychology and anthropology (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2007: 4). For these reasons, it will serve as a useful platform aiding me in the engagement with people- e.g., my participants, and in understanding their stories. This is because I am interested in interpretivism's more 'people centred approach' (Morrison, 2002) which has involved the participant's perception of singing and this 'study of instance in action' (Savin Baden and Howell Major, 2013: 152).

Interestingly, to date, there is very little written regarding the process of narrative interviewing of older persons. The contribution of Robertson and Hale (2011) was a small study (n=11) purposefully exploring and making recommendations for preparatory interviewing in methodology courses. In their discussion, Robertson and Hale (2011: 6) recommended the following steps when interviewing the older persons: creating a friendly, safe and encouraging first meeting, this following a polite letter or phone call to arrange a meeting. It is necessary to value the interpersonal nature of the relationship at the beginning.

Robertson and Hale (2011: 6) further suggest that participants check the transcripts. This is the exchange of ideas for mutual benefit. I personally do not agree with this suggestion. I believe it might throw up confusions and further difficulties. It could possibly even lead to a breakdown of the relationship. Having recognized this, I liked Robertson and Hales' ideas regarding two forms of reciprocity: premeditated gifting (security and equality of relationship) and spontaneous gifting of time. I suggest the real 'gift' of the researcher is to be able to identify and value their participant's narrative in a measured and respectful way through continued and guided way of practice (Roulston et al., 2003). It is important to remember that the researcher is constant in their collaborative and professional role.

More academic research is perhaps needed when considering the level of effectiveness in a narrative interview, especially with the involvement of older people (British Geriatrics Society, 2014: 2). I believe it to be an important way of collecting data, but the researcher has to be prepared for the realities of the research interview. Of each unique story told, and dealing with emotional and sensitive information, the impact and response of the researcher has to be treated accordingly. Living through and managing this on a personal, physical and intellectual level is a challenge. Thus, to respond and receive is a two-way process between the participant and researcher. This can only be achieved by building, focusing and negotiating change and objectively researching to a greater degree, both the study and the person.

#### **3.4.1 Unlocking access**

The participants needed to be in a place they were familiar with and in a position where they felt they could tell their story. Being at ease was a necessary part of the interview process and so the environment around them needed to be both unhindered and undistracted. Encouraging participants to talk is important (Atkins and Wallace, 2012: 85) but the interviewer needs to have understood correctly and it will 'give insight into their thought processes and the value judgements they bring to bear their thought processes' (Atkins and Wallace, 2012: 86). The researcher must understand their participant and engage constantly in 'the situation of the study' (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2007: 5). This should never be compromised e.g., if the interviewee suspects a hidden agenda coming from the researcher. I was of course in a 'situation of study'. Such moments are not uncommon when researching

within one's own field of study and the situation where colleagues or associates might be interviewed. As a Music Director I had a limited recognition of familiarity with the participants, this meant I would always have to exercise caution when interviewing them. I knew them in a formal and professional way and felt that there was mutual respect and understanding.

Whyte (1960: 352) recommends a six-point scale of directiveness in order to facilitate a successful interview: 1. Making encouraging noises; 2. Reflecting on remarks made by the informant; 3. Probing on the last remark made by the informant; 4. Probing an idea preceding the last remark by the informant; 5. Probing an idea expressed earlier in the interview; 6. introducing a new topic. However, it should be noted that sometimes for an older person, noises or comments might be misconceived and lead to discomfort and confusion with the interviewer. So, at this risk, the interviewer must prepare carefully and clarify the meaning if required and suggest classification during the response (Kvale, 1996: 130). I found Whyte's practical advice useful for my first steps as an interviewer.

I believed using colloquial language could create richer detail and authentic data. For example, with one of my participants a retired engineer and academic, I used pedagogy and humour with them in order to engage with them in a deeper way and the enhancement of richer data. Patton (1980: 225) advises against using academic jargon but I disagree on this matter as proven in the interview with one of my participants, an engineer. The circumstances were right and appropriate, as the interviewer I needed to use awareness and good instinct. If one considered the 'sequencing' and 'framing' carefully and a simpler approach, less threatening or controversial in questioning, a successful outcome was also more likely (Kvale, 1996: 132).

With the pilot interview taking place in-person, before the Covid outbreak, I considered the possibility that people might be wary of technology and that this should perhaps not be underestimated. If the participant is at ease, the interview can proceed more smoothly. Checking the recording devices is very important. Both my digital handheld recorders enabled me to have confidence in an event of battery failure. It also meant me being organized in the positioning of recording devices and equipment. The equipment needed to be put in an unobtrusive place, to be conspicuous and not so it had the appearance and 'connotation of surveillance' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2019: 520). This might have been a problem

especially if the participant has poor hearing or a lighter tone of voice. These were issues but the device was of excellent quality and ensured lighter tones and vocal disposition were not an issue.

Other considerations must be wisely thought through. Gadd (2004: 384) suggests the interviewer committing the information to memory and argues it is 'motivated' in nature. It is demonstrated through fluency of process and being further prepared where necessary. However, in lengthy interviews requiring concentration I argue that there is an issue where the memory can be selective when analyzing, so a recall can be more accurate with recorded data. Gadd also suggests making notes, but I suggest this has two drawbacks. First, if it is used by a non-experienced interviewer, the note taking could be sketchy and lacking in the given detail. Second, it might put the respondent off during the session. The warning here is that 'there is a trade-off between the need to catch as much data as possible and yet to avoid having so much so threatening an environment that it impedes the potential of the interview situation' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2019: 520).

### **3.4.2 Pilot Interview**

To give myself a feel for the Interview process, I undertook a mock scenario with an older female friend. The lady sang in a village church choir in the North-West of England area. She was an experienced singer and sang regularly with another choir. She was retired and around 55 years of age. The interview took place in person and was conducted a couple of months before the rest of the interviews and before the outbreak of the first lockdown in the pandemic crisis of 2020. I also was cautious not carry out official interviews before getting approval from the University Ethics board.

The interview lasted 40 minutes the transcription within the week following. I found this procedure to benefit my working and decided to adopt the same process thereafter so as to not lose important thoughts regarding the project. The lady was hard of hearing and so I found it was important to speak slowly and clearly and in recording the interview. The out-of-sight digital recording device did not affect the nature of topic and discussion.

My trial participant was happy to answer the questions. I asked the following questions:

1. On a personal level, what meaning does singing in a choir have in your life?



2. What purpose does singing in a choir have in your life?
3. What value does singing in a choir have in your life?
4. How and in what way is your spirituality reflected in your involvement in your singing in a choir?
5. Have you ever had any deep/meaningful experiences whilst in church/ sacred place as a result of singing in a choir?
6. Through your singing how aware of a higher being/cosmic force are you and in what ways do you feel connected with it?
7. If you have never had any connection or spiritual encounter, in what ways do you perceive a change (or growth) to your general well-being as a result of singing?

I found very quickly that the more structured approach to questioning impeded the fluidity of conversation. The questions themselves regarding meaning, value and purpose caused lengthy silences as the participant had to really think too deeply as to what was being asked. At one point, I found she repeated herself a little (though she was not interrupted) and she asked me to clarify what I meant in the question proposed. To differentiate between 'meaning', 'purpose' and 'value' were unnecessary and such terms could be differentiated in a more simple, subjective and natural way through the interviewee's voice. With this, I realized then the questions needed to be more straight-forward allowing her to feel uninhibited. As well as this the questions needed to act as prompts where I could collect information which would not affect the thought process. This made me realize that if I had some short questions, they could be used only when necessary and keep the discussion focused on the areas of well-being relating to the social and spiritual. I needed to have an in-depth conversation and adopting this approach in interview process meant the situation would be less complex, less formal and comfortable for the interviewee. Because of this, the data would also be richer and uncompromised without any danger of being biased as a result of leading or prompting in the conversation (Atkins and Wallace, 2012: 91). I felt I also had to learn quickly and trust that my participants would provide me the necessary data to equip me with material relevant to my proposed thesis and themes relating to well-being in particular.

The pilot also helped gain vital experience as an insider and to study the musical experiences of the participant. The researcher-participant provided many strengths to the research design, particularly the interaction and effective communication of the two parties, which might have been problematic when working with older people. I hasten to add that I

recognized at this stage themes were evolving that related to the PERMA but did not decide to use the model as part of my work until after all the interviews had taken place.

### 3.5 Research Participants

All participants were of Caucasian descent and lived in the North West of England. The participants were all aged between 60 and 75 years, this was part of their inclusion criteria. All were of British or North American descent and had been resident in the U.K. for most of their adult lives. People were chosen on the basis of their wellness rather than just chronological age i.e., those who were functioning sufficiently well and living independently in the community. All were regular members of a Cathedral-based ‘Diocesan Choir’ singing for four years or more. They had chosen to be in it and had an interest in choir singing (Norton, 2016: 77). This choir of older and mainly retired male and female members met several times a year to provide liturgical music for services. These services took place during Holy Week and on other festival or Diocesan-important occasions. The choir itself continues today and was established around 2009 by a former Cathedral Dean. Unable to meet Easter 2020 because of the pandemic, exacerbated the authors desires to review the choir members’ desires for singing and the benefits for participating in a Catholic choir of this standing.

Open invitations to take part in the study were posted during practices and at the start of each rehearsal (see Appendix 5). The participants, nine in total, were chosen at random having shown an interest in the nature of study. All stated to the author that they wished to participate to enable further study and understanding of older adults singing in church communities. Further to this, I chose pseudonym names and personally agreed these with the participants in order to conceal their identities. Only they (and me) would know the given pseudonym name and any people they referred to (see Appendices 2, 3 and 7). They were happy to keep their working professions.

	Gender	Age	Sector	Work Status	Family situation	Children
Angela	Female	60-65	Administration	Retired	Married	Grown up
Simon	Male	65-70	Finance	Retired	Married	Grown up
Martha	Female	66-70	Healthcare	Retired	Single	None
Martin	Male	60-65	Aviation	Retired	Married	Grown up
Catrina	Female	60-65	Industry	Retired	Married	Grown up

Daisy	Female	60-65	Education	Retired	Married	Grown up
Rupert	Male	60-65	Industry	Retired	Married	Grown up
Iris	Female	66-70	Education	Retired	Married	Grown up
Penny	Male	60-65	Education	Retired	Married	Grown up

**Table 1: Overview of the research participants**

### 3.5.1 Brief descriptions of research participants

#### *Angela*

The participant was from the North of the UK, worked as a Volunteer in her spare time and regularly sang each week in her local church choir.

#### *Simon*

The participant was from West Yorkshire and sang regularly each week with his church choir and had sung with others.

#### *Martha*

The participant was from the North-West, sang in several choirs each week particularly her local church choir.

#### *Martin*

The participant was from the North-West area and a regular in his church choir.

#### *Catrina*

Had lived in the UK for over twenty years and attended her local church choir regularly.

#### *Daisy*

Had lived in the North-West for over twenty years. Was a volunteer at a local Institution and regularly Directed and sung with her church choirs and previously with others.

#### *Rupert*

The participant had lived in the North-West for over twenty years and regularly sang with her church choir and had sung with other choirs.

#### *Iris*

The participant was from the North-West, sang regularly with her church choir and had sung with other choirs.

#### *Penny*

The participant was from the North-West and regularly Directed and sung with her church choirs.

All participants sang with the Diocesan choir at least four times a year for large scale services at the Cathedral performing several times a year. They were all UK residents. All sang regularly with their own church choir including weekly rehearsals. Most choir members had engaged in music-making since childhood and school, most had continued this on and off throughout their working lives. All had decided to return to singing on a regular and committed basis once they had retired. The activity was a voluntarily one. Entrance into the Diocesan choir was without voice audition.

In-depth interviews were therefore the decided upon. I had nine participants (n=9), chosen by myself, 60 years plus, 4 male and 5 female (self-identified). The number was manageable, not only in interviews but also further preparing transcripts for analysis (Savin-Baden and Howell-Major, 2013: 421).

### **3.6 Interview and Questioning Process**

The interviews took place just before and during the 2020 International pandemic crisis. Before each interview commenced, prior to the lockdown, the interviewee was asked to review and sign a university consent form required for participation in the study (see appendix). The Catholic Diocese and Churches safeguarding departments also approved the form. All interviews were conducted on Facetime or Whatsapp, with a video display of both myself and the participant.

I used methods of data collection which involved in-depth interview. The idea of interviewing individuals provided richer material for later analysis rather than trying to engage with focus groups before or after a choir rehearsal. But having the flexibility of a semi-structured format (as opposed to unstructured or structured approach) appealed to my research instincts. This is often a preferred format within social research. It allowed me a certain degree of flexibility whilst the interaction with the participant could be kept on track with the predetermined and proposed questions of interest. I knew additional questions could be included to determine clarification (Robson, 2011). This relaxed nature of interview I felt put the participants at ease. I was aware of the needs of each participant and their levels of cognitive understanding. By doing this I was able to facilitate the most effective interview technique possible.

Through the In-depth interviews I sought to gain information about participants' views (Weber, 1922) and experiences (Morrison, 2002: 22). This involved the processes of collective activity (Powell et al., 1996), social events (Goss and Leinbach, 1996: 114) and interaction (Kitzinger, 1995: 45). They discussed and commented on, their personal experiences about singing, what it meant to them (Powell et al., 1996: 499). In this short session (45-50 minutes), the research was allowed to be drawn from the respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions, in relation to the research questions proposed (see Appendix 4). The interviews were essentially biographical and involved life history research (Robson, 2011: 151) and my questions were led from the moments where the participant paused or seemed to have finished their train of thought. I avoided jumping in to their stories, preferring politeness and etiquette as advised (Holloway and Jefferson, 1997). I had it in mind, this was a particular kind of study where the individual person and the intention to tell their story of their life. Where they seemed to stray from the associated research questions I had in mind (see Appendix 4 ) and matters relating to their social as well as spiritual experiences, I could at a later date revisit their answers and do any further related questioning by phone. In taking such an approach with this narrative approach, I was aware of the advice of Robson (2011: 375) where the appeal of narratives often can include inappropriate assumptions and 'are complicit in the general culture of the interview society'. For this reason, I needed to be more systematic and sequential with my analysis later.

I considered a semi-structured approach as it permitted for a certain level of respectful freedom and able to tailor additional questions deemed necessary. The pilot interview had helped formulate questions to be used when they were appropriately desired. The conversation was designed to allow participants to describe their experiences in a way that was unrestricted and personal to them. They had the freedom to develop and address what singing meant for them, particularly the church singing without a focus on health or Quality of Life to allow for a flexible approach. Careful structuring of the interview ensured that they were not led in any way and allowed for participants to reflect positively or negatively on any subject. Full details of what the interview would involve were verbally conveyed to participants prior to its commencement. They knew already because they were presented with a participant information sheet outlining the purpose of the study, what it would entail and important ethical concerning data, risk, confidentiality and anonymity.

The 'flexibility' referred to allowed my research to be justifiably free as a result of its overall design and purpose (Yazan, 2015: 140) and supported the general consistency of the approach (Pring, 2001). If a researcher does not have the experience of regularly interviewing participants, it is a good thing to have such questions planned as a tool for guide and fluidity of navigation thus avoiding divergence (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2019: 519). The questions were intentionally broad i.e. 'How?', 'Can you tell me?' and this was purposeful in encouraging responses to give clarity to these perceptions and important information not avoided or omitted.

Immediately after the recorded interview I made entries into my reflective diary about how I felt the interview had gone and the impact that it had on me and the experiences that it had invoked. On completion, I transcribed the interview verbatim and added comments into the margins reflecting on my own experiences within the interview as well as observations that I had made about the participant and their responses. It was this process that I felt really made me an integral part of the research as I could see the participants in each transcript as the stories unfolded.

### **3.7 Approaches to Qualitative Analysis**

For the sake of my study, I chose to adopt an approach to qualitative analysis which involved thematic coding. I hoped by using this method the process of analysis would allow the progression and categorizing of content. Using a corresponding and structured way was complimentary to my project involving well-being.

#### **3.7.1 Thematic Data Analysis (TDA/TA)**

The advantages of using the principles of Thematic Data Analysis/Thematic Analysis (TDA or TA) are its 'flexibility' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 78) and that it can be used with other types of qualitative data. It is also 'a relatively easy and quick method to use' (Robson, 2013: 477) and communicated regularly by practitioner's, policy makers and the general public. Because of its accessibility, it is a method that works fruitfully as a research paradigm involving the participants acting as collaborators in the research.

The disadvantages of using Thematic Data Analysis are to be seen as follows. Critics might stress that the flexibility of method can be said to be broad e.g., in the data. This I will have

to be aware of at the start because I will need to narrow my content and overall data, thus focusing on important themes relevant to my study. Robson outlines that 'thematic coding analysis is frequently limited to description or exploration with little attempt made at interpretation.' (Robson, 2013: 477). To this I disagree and argue that this is down to the researcher and how the descriptions and explorations are presented. However, I agree with Robson where he conveys the feeling that 'where thematic coding has been carried out, and themes discussed, there is little or no information about the details of the procedure' (Robson, 2013: 478). This is often the case for qualitative journal articles and papers, where the procedures are not discussed fully, usually because the paper is a 'pilot' study for a larger one or an ongoing thesis, or the journal editors have specified a limited word count to the article in consideration. Thematic Data Analysis because of its generic approach appears to have 'less kudos as an analytic method' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 96-7), to which I uphold that assumption is only subjective and not important in the scheme of research. All forms of research are useful, providing the context and detail are entered into thoughtfully and managed effectively (Braun and Clarke, 2013). As a result, TA seems to be playing itself out relevantly and appropriately in the treatment of data within my work.

A thematic analysis informed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Maguire and Delahunt (2017) was to be conducted on the data to identify key themes relating to the role of music, spirituality, confidence and well-being in older adults. Thematic analysis was selected as an appropriate method as it allows extensive textual data to be summarized and organized without compromising on rich description, and therefore keeping the experiences, lived reality and meaning of participants evident in research.

Clarke's five stage process (2006) included the following models used in study. Through reading and rereading the various transcripts as suggested, as well as listening to the original recordings, I familiarized myself with the data, then coded and identified initial themes and potential subthemes, these were then checked and refined collaboratively with the guidance of my tutors. A total of 9 findings were presented in the form of summary and evidenced in the interview data. The approach was generic and selective of the 'range of discourses operating within society' (Robson, 2013: 474). The development of these field work, 'data bits, segments and chunks' (Ryan and Bernard 2003: 87) were of a continual concern to me early on as I prepared. Matching these up proved to be a complicated process. I identified

themes and sub-themes through the given data. My research epistemology was guided but what I learnt through my collated data and informed through formulated theoretical meaning (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 85).

My work was categorized into five sequential phases (Robson, 2013: 476; Braun and Clarke, 2006: 87). These organized procedures were important in the methodical working of organizing the data and in doing this preparing fully for the thematic analysis and coding:

1. *Familiarisation of the data* – I had already transcribed the data. I listened to the interview and re-read the script.
2. *Generation of initial codes* – Through my one script and progression to three from the advice rendered by both my supervisors.
3. *Identification of themes*- Colour coding enabled me to pick out possible themes. I checked the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and if it worked for three scripts, there was a high chance it will work for others. Collating it in this way added to the relevancy of potential theme. Revising regularly gave comfort at the stage of identifying themes.
4. *Construction of thematic network* – I gathered mentally as well as visually an overview of the thematic ‘map’. I also had a field notes book (a form of open-coding) where I jotted down similarities and related thoughts.
5. *Integration and interpretation* – I made comparisons between different aspect of the data using the process of exploration, description, summarisation and interpretation of patterns.

One point I wish to critique was that of the ‘transcription issue’ (Robson, 2013: 477). Robson states that with qualitative data analysis, particularly such as with conversation calls ‘for very deep transcripts’ (Robson, 2013: 478). This necessity for a full verbatim (i.e., word for word) accounts for all verbal features and particular utterances the project is dependent upon. Silverman (2006), talks about the tapes and transcripts offering more than just ‘something to begin with’. Indeed, the recordings are a record for the duration of the project, they can be played as appropriate and any transcripts ‘improved’ (Silverman, 2006: 204) and tapes preserve the sequences of talk. This is down to the researcher and their experience. But I suggest that it is an illusion to think that there is always a perfect transcript. It is false also to suggest that there might be a totally ‘complete’ set of data. This is where saturation presents itself (Robson, 2011: 148). I conducted my pilot interviews with actual in-person but thereafter with FaceTime. My participants were familiar with the technology and the first lockdown during the covid pandemic of 2020 meant I was prohibited doing otherwise. Admittedly, I couldn’t see all the facial expressions given in interviews (I did note the odd one at the time) and my transcripts are word for word.



Though one could argue the interpretation of expression given by participants. For example, the moment of context. I am arguably a careful listener as a result of my musical training. To 'dis-prefer' is a knowledge gained skill (Silverman, 2006: 208) and comes with many interviews over years.

As an interviewer you will have to at some point 'assume'. Critically I argue that if you are initially well prepared, the talk appears to be active and 'naturally occurring' (Silverman: 2006: 221). Following this the conversation transcript would be sequential and more successful in itself.

### **3.7.2 Generating initial codes, identifying themes, constructing thematic framework and interpretation**

Coding is central to my work and qualitative analysis. Gibbs (2007) describes it in the following way:

Coding is how you define what data you are analyzing are about. It involves identifying and recording one or more passages of text or other data items such as the part of pictures that, in some sense, exemplify the same theoretical or descriptive idea. Usually, several passages are identified and they are then linked with a name for that idea – the code. Thus, all the text and so on that is about the same thing or exemplifies the same thing is coded to the same name (p.38).

I checked for true representations within the scripts and in order to do this I asked myself, are the themes relevant? Did they match up with the thesis title and if so, how can they relate to theories such as social well-being and forms relating to spiritual wellness? Added to this, the table constructed enabled a 'weighting of evidence' (Robson, 2013: 487) and with the direct quotations of the participants, the work was allowed to be sensitive, exhaustive, exclusive, and conceptually congruent (Merriam, 2009: 186). Identified also were possible sub-themes relating to loneliness, connectedness and social acceptance. I could identify issues with naturally occurring data (Silverman, 2006: 299) and cross-themes i.e., shared strands which also related to both categories involving social and spiritual well-being under the 'umbrella' (Clarke, 2017) of community. I hoped in naming my themes well, concepts and ideas would be tied together in a more uniform way also (Clarke, 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2006), as opposed to just using single word terms for themes. This advice was useful because in

approaching it in such a methodical way. It meant I was able to identify the main themes confidently through colour coding and eventually develop them in detail. I was able to deal with uncertain and locate missing data and with the direct quotations of the participants. It allowed the work to be sensitive, exhaustive, exclusive, and conceptually congruent (Merriam, 2009: 186). Identified also were possible sub-themes relating also to Church Mission and Landscape Capital. These were themes which I was aware of and the importance to some of the participants. Because of the limited word count and wealth of data, I had to be sensible in my organizing of these themes and the relevance to my overall study and intentions when applying the theoretical framework. Preferring and dis-preferring was part of the journey I was on as a researcher.

I was immersed in both personal and organized discussion (Morrison, 2002: 22) as a result of interview. This involved the participant regularly referring to their activity (Powell et al., 1996), social event and interaction (Goss and Leinbach, 1996: 114). They discussed and commented on their personal experiences and how they were influenced by the repertoire they sang. This was through the lyrics and melody (Boyce-Tillman, 2016), how they could bridge worlds through common modes of being in music (Joseph, 2018:189). It produced themes relating to moments of connection and response, worship and ritual separation (Porter, 2017: 83), thus identifying boundaries of the communal, the spiritual and secular. I searched for possible themes relating to the fostering of belonging (Joseph, 2018; 2015; 2015b; Malone and Dadswell, 2018) and meaning making (Creech et al., 2014: 83). I explored the dimensions of the participants relationships with faith-based motivation and age-related participation (Baker and Smith; 2010, Atherton et al., 2011: 10).

Having generated the codes and themes, I was able to link these to the PERMA model. The conceptual framework of PERMA was used to guide a second step of analysis at the level of bringing together themes (MacFarlane and O'Reilly-de-Brun, 2012). Thereafter, themes and subthemes were checked and cross-checked throughout the analysis. I found some common ground with concurrent research as in Lamont et al. (2017) regarding singing in later life and her theme regarding inclusive community- meaning and social relationships and corresponded with the block of relationship. Likewise, in Bradford's (2020) work regarding the use of the PERMA model in her work with young adults with special needs and musical instrument playing and the work in regard to pleasure providing and this linked with the area

of positive emotions. Also, the work of Uusiautti et al. (2017) in their work on achievement, goal setting and support and Bradford (2020) again with satisfaction. Themes regarding spiritual well-being and wellness I felt were closely linked with the block of meaning. This can only be revealed as a result of familiarizing yourself with the data, for example in the areas of spiritual well-being and wellness. I reread the scripts on a regular basis. The two themes being separated by colour codes allowing the themes to become more evident as a result of this construction of my thematic network. The next stage was looking at how spiritual well-being differed from spiritual wellness. The following through of Integration and interpretation (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 87) was important in the five steps mentioned as it enabled me to ascertain that spiritual well-being in my study was about experience and support of others. I was able to ascertain further that, Spiritual wellness was an important factor for some participants and attending church was crucial in maintaining this thematic characteristic.

The work of both Bradford and Lamont was useful to draw upon and how I presented and shaped my findings, matching them in a way which would correspond with the PERMA blocks. It is important to note that although many of the blocks might be seen as independent, some of them could have linked with others. This is the very nature of the PERMA model where discernment of use is left to the operator in providing this analytic guide (Lamont et al., 2017: 3). The work of Croom (2014) was important in developing the analysis because in his literature Review of PERMA, reflections of the five pillars of the model could be used to characterize of my thematic findings. For example, I realized that both spiritual well-being and spiritual wellness were for me about 'Meaning' in this project. In his paper Croom (2014: 10), discusses aspects of 'Flourishing with music and meaning'. He talks about 'experiencing life as meaningful seems to be a major component of human well-being, and a major source of motivation for action.' He goes on to relate other aspects of meaning to involve 'individuals talking of meaning in their lives' and 'seeking and interpreting their own actions and experiences (2014: 11). These seemed to resonate with my ideas involving spiritual well-being. Likewise, such other important reflections of this pillar of meaning were outlined when he talked about 'relationship between faith and life purpose' which correlated with my own thoughts on spiritual wellness. This was how the analysis really started to unfold and gave credence to the ways I acknowledged, developed and the generated the data. I was able to model this in similar ways when approaching the other blocks of the PERMA model.

### **3.8 Trustworthiness**

For any research to be effective, it must be trustworthy. Cohen et al. (2011: 179) and Gronlund (1981) agree that this cannot be an absolute state and suggest that at best we strive to minimize invalidity and to maximize validity. In the case of this study, I hope that the specialist knowledge base of the participants and the richness of the data acquired together with the examination of the impact of my own reflexivity's within the process resulted in a trustworthy study (Riessman, 2005). Reliability and validity are terms that are used commonly within quantitative studies as a measure of the quality of the research study and findings. In qualitative research these terms have been substituted to focus on trustworthiness, credibility, and transferability (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). Morse et al. (2002) argue that reliability and validity are still relevant to qualitative research and that the change in terminology has in some cases led to a more evaluative process being implemented rather than an iterative process during the research. They argue that qualitative researchers should reclaim responsibility for ensuring the rigor of their research by implementing verification strategies that are integral and self-correcting during the conduct of the research itself. I have considered the research design and the relationship between the purpose of the study, the conceptual framework, research questions and methods and believe that the data analysis and interpretation is valid (Braun and Clarke, 2012). By using a qualitative approach to data analysis, I explored the themes and categories that were identified and used as a constancy.

#### **3.8.1 Ethics**

The question of ethics is of essential importance to successful research. The drivers behind ethics approval are underlying principles that the research will not cause pain or indignity to the participants and that they can be assured of confidentiality, informed consent, and the right to withdraw anytime within a limited an agreed period after the data collection. The rapport that exists between the researcher and the participant is crucial to the collection of rich and honest data and successful study completion, but must not be rushed or exploited (Cordasco, 2013). To complete this study, I had to apply for approval (see Appendices, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) from the BHASS ethics committee at the University of Central Lancashire (see Appendix 2,3). Ethics committees can be described as the gatekeepers of research ensuring that no harmful or badly designed research is permitted (Darlington and Scott, 2002). As the study did not involve children or clinically vulnerable adults, it was simplified somewhat and it was

possible to submit a shorter version (a proportionate review) following acceptance of the proposal from the University of Central Lancashire Ethics Committee.

I had to cogitate on whether I could ethically use all the data that I collected. Some participants discussed issues relating to colleagues not involved in the study, and my own observations and recollections would also often involve other non-interviewed choir members, past and present along with reflections on past incidents and occurrences. Including these anecdotes could violate confidentiality or potentially cause harm to my participants or others not involved in the research. I did not want elements of the knowledge generated from my research to be confined to what Stain (2003) refers to as 'privately remembering' and therefore remaining in my notes and diaries rather than being publicly written into my thesis. This information was kept in a locked draw. I also considered my own contribution to be an added dimension to what had been said and was integral to the generation of knowledge.

A process of continuous awareness and reflection has made me mindful at all times of the potential for power imbalance or possible harm to the participants of the study and those included through the discussion of my own experiences. However, I was led by the general principles of ethical behaviour. I believe that I have not caused harm, either socially or by reputation to the participants or those mentioned in the study who were not actively participating.

I am fortunate to have worked with a minimal risk group (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013: 323), to have had informed consent and to have worked respectfully with older adults. I was cautious that I did not become complacent in my work and that having been given the trust of not just the participants but also of the University Ethics Committee, I was bound to behave and act professionally at all times throughout the project and am cautious not to act inappropriately in regard to my own whims and intuitions.

In my job as a Director of Music, I have a responsibility to ensure that I am up to date with safeguarding issues regarding adults and those considered vulnerable. In May 2020, I took an online course with a Catholic Diocese and its Edu-care package. I have a CPD level 2 accredited certificate in safeguarding. I am also in touch with the Diocesan Safeguarding Office who work

under the remit of the National Catholic Safeguarding Commission and the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Service. This will ensure I am ready to deal with any issues regarding safeguarding. Further to this, I have monthly contact with the local Safeguarding Officer.

I have undertaken safeguarding training within my employment as stated above. I have ongoing Safeguarding/DBS training and clearance to work within my employment at my place of work and Roman Catholic Diocese and Edu-care. I have undergone level 2 Safeguarding Training (Older adults and vulnerable adults) passed an exam and therefore certified with DBS. These were important processes and steps before beginning the process of data protection and covered both the in-person and remote-person process.

There have been a few matters that stand out having been through the field of collecting data. I was keen to alert the participants to the fact that their real names are replaced with pseudonym ones and any of those of their spouses or partners. I wished to build up this trust with my participants, particularly when required to go back and find out information from them, which I did on a few occasions. I also stressed that any information given was stored correctly. I endeavored to get access to participants through pre-existing contacts within the local Catholic Diocese's church community. These gatekeepers needed to be kept informed even as a matter of courtesy, but still maintaining the discretion required for the participants privacy. As an employee of the Roman Catholic Church and a practicing Christian, I had to ensure and convince them that in no way or form would I compromise my own position within the research or the views of the participant through the narrative interview. It also allowed me to recognize that researchers are inescapably part of the social world that they are researching (Willig, 2001: 35; Finlay, 2002: 209).

However, I did encounter some tension at the interview stage. One of my male participants wished to know about the methods of data collection and my intentions for the outcome of study. At first it seemed like he was 'checking me out' or considering if it was 'a power-based struggle'. As a result of this, the interview could have gone either way, but in being transparent about my work, I was able to get the desired data he offered. The way in which I did this was paramount in allowing the situation to unfold carefully. First, the questions he asked involved reference to the 'ontological and epistemological'. I realized my participant was obviously trained to a high level of research skills. This I perhaps should have grasped

because he was a retired engineer by profession. But what actually came out was that he had started a Doctoral course, and unfortunately for him he never presented and completed it. This was partly because of his working life, but also, he had been under pressure at the time to get married many years before. I sensed his regret at this, and in keeping calm and being prepared early on to listen to his story, it allowed a barrier to be broken down enabling trust. He discerned that I was not someone who would judge him for any perceived failures within academia, but rather he could be of use to the next generation as a result of adding to another person's thesis and any subsequent papers. Being actively involved in this way as a key source therefore seemed a worthy motive. In valuing him and his story, the simple idea to 'be excellent to each other' i.e., respect for persons, of beneficence (ensuring well-being, mental in this case) and of equal treatment, I could proceed in a modest yet progressive way (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013: 333). This fact was applicable to the other participant's as well, particularly when having to listen to less related detail and strong opinions regarding people or situations. Furthermore, keeping the participants informed in the process of research where appropriate and necessary is part of your agreement with them and is representative of the validity in the findings as well as collaborative with their inclusion. Ethically, this was good practice, and it is through these 'honesties' that researchers can find plausibility within their work (Savin Baden and Major, 2013: 235).

### **3.8.2 Limitations of Study**

I recognize that this study contains limitations that are common criticisms of qualitative research methodology and in narrative interviewing, but I have endeavored to minimize their impact. Researcher bias is a general concern within qualitative studies. I was also a participant as well as the researcher in this project, and this element was a key limitation. It was impossible for me to eliminate my own beliefs and experiences, but by adopting a reflexive approach throughout I hoped to have examined how these could influence the study in either a positive or negative way. I have clearly explained my position at the outset of this study and have questioned my possible influence and have recorded my responses throughout. I was conscious that I had to embrace all the data collected and not select that which stood out and fitted with my existing ideas and preconceptions (Miles and Huberman, 1984: 263).

The influence of the researcher is impossible to eliminate, and Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest that where the researcher is a part of the world under scrutiny, their influence is powerful and inescapable; thus, the aim within a qualitative study is to comprehend it and use it beneficially. Trying to minimize influence is not a meaningful goal for qualitative research, what is important is to understand how you have influenced what the participant has said and how this affects the validity of the inferences drawn from the data (Maxwell, 2013: 125). As a researcher I acknowledge that I knew those interviewed though I knew them in a limited and professional way, not socially. My participants were encouraged to speak as freely as possible without censoring their response. It was hoped in having this honesty that any supposed researcher bias would be mitigated.

The study sought to learn how singing and the well-being of older people are benefitted within a church setting could be considered as limited. However, for me it gave further insight into the social and spiritual interests and offered a comprehensive insight into their experiences. In doing so, it aimed to enhance the understanding of the factors that facilitated these benefits and to develop suggestions for other Choral-Directors and those working and leading within the remit of ecclesiastical milieu.

One important consideration is that my research was conducted in a highly secularized society. Although the participants in this study were religiously involved, one might raise the question whether all the participants perceived God as a personal figure actively in their lives (either in an autonomy-supportive or a controlling fashion). God might also be conceptualized as an impersonal, transcendental force rather than as a person actively interfering in human affairs (Kirkpatrick and Shaver, 1990).

A final limitation of the study was that the research sample was restricted possibly both numerically and geographically. My Anglo-Celtic sample size was small compared to past projects such as Bailey and Davidson (2001, 2003) and Clift and Hancox (2001). This restricted the possibility of generalizing the findings and the resulting recommendations to church choirs and denominations, however, the thick description (Geertz, 1973) and supporting background to the study should lend itself to the transferability of the study with the knowledge applicable to other contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Further research could take account of these limitations in an attempt to make wider predictions about the effectiveness



of older people and singing and its impact within church-based institutions, at local as well as national levels.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

As a final thought Merriam suggests ‘the first and one of the most important considerations in preparing to write your final report is deciding whom the report is for’ (Merriam, 2009: 229). This was a critical factor. The project looked at the benefits of choral singing for the older person aged between 60-75 years. I assessed how it might benefit the individual, the singing group and communities (Mezirow, 1996; Outhwaite, 1975) as well as fellow Choral-Directors. I wished to offer findings relating to this age group and reveal how singing could affect their well-being through the shared experience in a church environment. Further to this, having gained an in-depth understanding of what taking part in regular singing sessions means to older adults, explored how the PERMA model fitted the data and investigated further the social and spiritual impact, I could be sure I was meeting my goals.

Since, at the heart of the project the audience are participants in the meaning-making process, it is critical to identify the chosen forms of voice. My own voice would therefore have to be evident and wisely portrayed within that journey of research-scholarship. Chapter 4 looks at the personal experiences of the participants and explores the well-being gained through their experience of choiring.

# **CHAPTER 4: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPANTS**

## **4.1 Introduction**

In the opening chapters of the thesis, I have described and discussed the professional context in which this project is situated. I will present the key findings arising from the exploration of my research questions. My focus is the practice of participatory singing by older choristers. The investigation extended to look at the ways in which singing might impact on their confidence in music, and social and spiritual well-being.

From the data analysis discussed in the previous chapter, a number of major findings emerged from the data analysis:

1. Participants backgrounds and early experiences often accounted for their perceptions about singing.
2. Their confidence was positively impacted by church singing.
3. Singing church music provided enjoyment and positive experience.
4. Church singing was recognised as an educational journey in later life.
5. Participants gained satisfaction from the singing.

In this chapter I have chosen to talk about the more personal experiences of the singers interviewed. These embrace the earliest recollections and backgrounds because these were at the very foundation of their first musical experiences. I wished to understand the perceptions of my participants here. Starting at the beginning seemed a comfortable thing for them and this in turn encouraged them to share more. From here, I was able to enquire further about their backgrounds and confidences regarding these experiences and how it shaped their early years of participatory singing and how music impacted them. The participants were often keen to also give their opinions regarding their musical tastes, preferences and styles. This was important to know as it gave further insight into them as individuals and how singing affected them. Further to this, I aimed to know more about how they felt about singing in their later years, how it contributed to their lived worlds, and how it could possibly help others working within the church environment and local community.

## 4.2 Key Themes and Findings of the Study

The key themes and findings of this study within these personal experiences of the participants were five in total.

### 4.2.1 Background of singers and early experiences

*Finding – Participants backgrounds and early experiences often accounted for their perceptions of singing.*

The backgrounds of the participants were varied. Their early music learning and education depended on varied attributes relating to both the social community and family financial resources. All were practicing Catholics and, while some had previously been members of other Christian denominations, the majority of participants were of Catholic origin and descent. Most had been baptized Catholics, as in the cases of Angela, Simon, Martha, Daisy, Iris, Penny and Martin. The exceptions were Rupert who reported a conversion to Catholicism after he married. Within his early years, he had veered towards a more Anglo-Catholic root. His upbringing had been one of a close involvement at the local church and community life. Catrina was from a free-church background, although her paternal family had been catholic, she was heavily influenced by the evangelical wing.

Most participants came from families where music was listened to, and they had learnt an instrument, some without lessons. This was due to their social upbringings. A number were from larger families or blended families, where for example a parent had married again, as in the case of Simon and Iris. Daisy, Martin and Rupert, were from wealthier backgrounds and had been privately educated.

Many had positive memories of singing in their early lives. Most had sung in church choirs, as in the case of Rupert, Simon, Martin, and Iris. Iris and Penny had been particularly involved in church-based activities. For example, Catrina had attended bible camps during the holidays whereas Simon had attended choir social away days. This had been important because of the rare opportunities both socially and financially for them. The time had often been overseen by priests and church leaders. This undoubtedly influenced the participant's opinions later in their life. Two of the participants, Penny and Iris, had met their spouses through church.

Penny had also been a church organist at a very early age and this had led to having a career of teaching music at a Catholic Institution. These backgrounds, early experiences and perceptions regarding Catholicism, church community and singing clearly remained with all the participants in various ways throughout their lives and up to the time of the interview and reported authentically. For example, Simon:

My earliest experience was in West Yorkshire. We'd got a new choirmaster and was looking to expand his choir because there hadn't really been a choir there before that. My brother joined you see. I became, you couldn't call it peer-pressure, I suppose you call it peer- persuasion probably! There was no pressure involved in it but it was in today's language, it was 'cool'. (Simon, February, 2020)

Rupert's experiences were similar:

It was a fairly modern church, compared to a lot of churches, a pretty decent size. Good congregation and had a very active choir as well. So, my family got involved there and became very influential, and it was logical for me to go and sing in the choir. So that's how I got into it. I made friends with a number of other people who were also involved. Those at my Primary school as well. (Rupert, May, 2020)

A number of participants such as Martha, Daisy and Penny had been encouraged to sing in school choirs. Because of this involvement, they had been inspired by singing in larger places such as concert halls. This was a strong memory and lived out experience for Martha. Iris too had sung regularly in her local town hall as a schoolgirl. Simon remembered singing in large cathedrals. Rupert had the privilege of singing in a public-school foundation and music was part of the location, fabric and routine of his boarding school life.

Of the similarities existing between them, all the participants were from Christian backgrounds, and were influenced in some way by church-life and because of this were exposed to its musical style early on. Those from wealthier backgrounds had enhanced their learning through learning an instrument such as Penny, Angela, Rupert, Simon and Daisy. It was because of these positive early experiences that they attended church in their retirement and later years. Some of the participants had been very influenced by forms of what was offered by the church for children and young adults through the choirs. A number of them had continued to attend church irregularly throughout their working lives.

Positivity can come through taking part in a regular activity and from serving a cause bigger than ourselves. Whether through sport, or other forms of teamwork, it is a cause that can help our overall well-being. We all need positivity in our lives in order to have this good sense of well-being. Thus, because of this we generally feel that what we do in our life is valuable and worthwhile (Seligman, 2011: 27). My argument here is that the Church can offer opportunities of working together with people of all backgrounds. Singing was found to be a gateway for learning about choiring and related music for many of the participants' formative years.

My participants displayed personal traits and inherent tendencies to learn and develop in the act of participatory singing itself i.e., there was a willingness to improve themselves through the act of singing and creative expression (Creech et al., 2014: 78-80). Iris gave an example of this:

I wanted to do it because I was itching to do it. I liked music. I don't know how I started, my mum didn't sing, so she would sit downstairs and I would be upstairs. But it was something that I did. People must have said 'come into the choir' and that's when I realised that I loved it. Some of the ladies could be a little bit bossy, in those days you know you had to behave yourself, you couldn't have a laugh or anything. But I truly loved it! It gave me a focus and new insights where I could express myself. (Iris, April, 2020)

Many of the participants happy memories of singing in a choir at an early age had laid the foundation for their later years of learning (Creech et al., 2014: 118). The discipline of devoting time and energy to their studies, gave them internally motivated experience which they wished to continue in their later years through church singing. This is akin to the work of Sloboda and O' Neill (2001: 415) who suggest music can provide people with ways of discovering and interpreting their sense of identity. This is applicable to my finding and relates to the background and early experiences of music and singing with the participants. Furthermore, this theme has strong links to the 'experience' part of the PERMA model.

#### **4.2.2 To what extent might singing impact their confidence in music**

*Finding – Participant's confidence was positively impacted by church singing.*

Angela, the first to be interviewed, stressed that her confidence had been impacted by getting to know people through singing and the choir group. The activity helped her to feel at ease

amongst people. She felt acceptance not because of her abilities but in the fact that she was part of a group where other people had things going on in their lives. Thus, feeling connected through the music aided her confidence:

I have to say that when I started coming to the choir, I was pretty nervous all the time. Well, I was quite scared of certain people in the choir. I think that when I've been in a choir before people have kind of been bossed and I was quite thrown a bit by the participation and people criticizing, you know the sort of things and obviously some are very, very knowledgeable, and I found that quite intimidating at the start and I made myself come...I feel totally different now, I feel completely part of it and the music but when I started, I did feel quite intimidated really. (Angela, February, 2020)

The interviews revealed that for most of the participants, music was an escape for them and their complex lives. For example, in the case of Simon, whose confidence was developed through having a change in the daily routine in between caring for sick relatives:

It's lovely to put your mind on something else. It's a different challenge. For someone like yourself where you have been trained in music, it wouldn't be as much of a challenge I don't think. Because you look at a piece of music and you know immediately where you know where it's going to be. You can just do it can't you. I used to say to a friend, how the hell can you do that? He would say "It's just normal and automatic". I agree now. (Simon, March, 2020)

Rupert's analysis of this was more in-depth as he was an established and more seasoned performer:

It seems to me that what you have to do is look at the purpose of singing it. It's not just a sort of technical exercise, where you go through a set of, you know, practised manoeuvres or something whatever. (Rupert, April, 2020)

A number of the less experienced participants were found to practise very hard to be able to sing alongside those with greater experience and stronger voices. This was the case with Angela:

... at the start, well what would I do if I don't completely get it, I've got garage on my ipad. So, I plonk away, and teach myself the part, and it is plonking away, and I can't work it out if I do it quickly. But that gives me a bit more confidence when it comes to doing it. (Angela, February, 2020)

Her belief in her own abilities increased and this led in turn to an improved confidence. In her own words, she expressed that, 'faith is at the core of it'. This confidence not only expressed her self-management and autonomous behaviour but also her strong motivations for doing it, both for her Christian beliefs and in praise of the Divine.

Simon was of a similar mind-set here stating his confidence increased through practising harder, knowing it was for God. His story unfolded during the interview:

Sometimes more than others, and sometimes I know I know I'm going to struggle more than other times with certain bits of music. But yea, I don't like to be not able sing it, what I'm meant to be singing. I don't like to get it wrong. It's got to be good, it's for the Lord. If this is my Offering to the Lord it has got to be as good as I can make it. Which is again is really motivational for me, whereas I think if it was not a worship choir it could be very much one way. Why do I want to be good, then competing with my peers to be you know as good as them. Or trying to make it good for an audience. But when your audience is God, it has got to be good! Yea – that makes sense. (Simon, March, 2020)

It was clear that all the participants felt a growth of confidence as a result of performing regularly for the discipline of Church Mass some explanations such as Simon's was deeper. For others, it was a growth of ability helped by others, whereas for some it was a matter of routine and maintenance of their personal standards and goals. This became a routine and a necessary habit for them. For within the different stages of ability of each singer, the variations were explicated, as well as the degree of confidence which was perhaps felt in a greater way. This was more apparent than those participants whose abilities were less confident. Therefore, those who maintained their strong musical and technical abilities, were able to aid others they worked alongside e.g., with accurate reading of the music score and vocal performance, especially in the task of learning challenging and difficult music.

Within the findings are elements of ideas relating to competence. The finding concerned itself with the fact that older people's confidence was positively impacted by singing. My argument is that this again is very much focused on the motivations of the individual. The more the singer wanted to learn they would evolve and structure their routines in a way that enabled progression and empowerment (Boyce-Tillman, 2016: 169). They were able to work towards a greater confidence and regulatory of process through a series of intrinsic motivation as

opposed to extrinsic motivation, i.e., doing it for other reasons. Individuals who sing in choirs usually do so voluntarily with little apparent regard for extrinsic rewards (Stewart and Lonsdale, 2016) this true of Penny and Rupert. One might link these ideas involving achievement and goal. Quite often confidence and achievement are linked pillars (Seligman, 2011: 14)

In the process of intrinsic motivation e.g., through the increased willingness to take part in the singing, participants such as Iris benefitted by their own self-assessed levels of competence (i.e., they were led by the need to sufficiently act in order to affect) thus increasing her confidence. This example is in keeping with similar studies (Hays, 2005, Hendry, Lynam and Lafarge, 2022: 1211) where older people who were more focused on the successful outcomes of the 'self' (Hays and Minichiello, 2005: 88) were seen to have improved levels of competence. The sense of confidence provided takes us closer to the idea of achievement offered through the PERMA model.

#### **4.2.3 Pleasure providing**

*Finding – Singing church music provided enjoyment and positive experience.*

In the previous section I discussed the participants' confidence found through singing. In this section I wish to discuss how singing church music and its repertoire provided enjoyment and pleasure. There were a number of composers and their works which connected with them individually and this was reflected across the group.

The participants spoke confidently about repertoire that they had performed in the past. Many had sung large oratorio-style works when at school, such as Martin who had performed Schütz's 'Dank Sagen Wir Alle Gott' (from the Historia of the Birth of Christ). Others had sung Handel's 'The Messiah' and this had clearly influenced their opinions to what they considered as well-written choral music. Martha had been influenced by certain movements of the Oratorio:

The one I find hardest is 'For unto us a child is born', because the runs are quite low in my voice. I struggle really doing that. 'And he shall purify' (Martha sings the first line melody of this). It's just lovely. 'For Unto Us' is nice, but I find it a struggle. 'Glory to God' that's always lovely. Erm – I love hearing the solo bits as well (she continues to browse through). (DH – Like 'He shall feed his flock?').



Yes, and there's the lovely soprano one which will be here as well. For mezzo- I think. 'His yoke is easy', lovely, they are all just so lovely. (Martha, March, 2020)

She was able to state the ups and down of singing this repertoire and she had learnt it whilst at school. The continuing of singing the work at periods throughout her life gave her comfort and assurance as a singer in her technical ability and as time went on, aspects of the words and music permeated her thoughts more deeply:

And I just love the high notes really. 'Surely he's...'. I mean they are beautiful because they come from Psalms and the Old Testament don't they. (Martha, March, 2020).

This recognition of the text based on the Biblical Psalms was echoed by Daisy but she was of the opinion that singing the melody in the Alto part was far more interesting:

You know the loveliest parts of 'The Messiah' are in the Alto voice. (DH – oh right, okay). Often in the beautiful big chorales, the alto lines. The Soprano lines are too mighty. Too volcanic! They're just too up there! (we laugh). Ah, they're just too blousy. Whereas often the Alto, I grew up with Janet Baker, listening to Janet Baker, and she is just the most fabulous contralto I think. She is the most wonderful expressive singer. So, I think I had her sound in my ear quite early. (Daisy, April, 2020)

Iris was also drawn to the melodies within pieces rather than the harmonies. This may have been because they were easy to pick up when learning. The composer Philip Stopford was commented on by many of the participants, such as her:

Well Stopford for a start. It just makes me happy singing it. It's my kind of music, easier shall we say. I'm confident and happy with that kind of music. I mean, some pieces of his music I find a bit more difficult and maybe not my cup of tea. But what we have been getting is definitely my cup of tea. I love to sing. I go on to Facebook and find it and play it. No, it's that kind of, that matter of, it used to be that matter of somewhere I go to church choir, come back put everything away, until the next time. But it's not like that anymore, that's me being older and see things in a different way. For me it means more. I think that's because I'm getting older. And the pieces are just so beautiful. (Iris, April, 2020)

The strong melodies in the music of Philip Stopford were a real draw for some singers. As with Catrina:

I love some of the ones we have done, like 'Be Thou My Vision', I love that version, (DH – Philip Stopford?). Yea, I love the Stopford stuff. Because we were kind of listening to the older stuff that my husband has recorded, and I found myself liking those Stopford pieces quite a lot. They are just so melodic. I feel joy. (Catrina, March, 2020)

Catrina was also moved by more Classical contemporary arrangements of songs such as 'One Small Child' by David Meece. This was a simple composed piece, which she enjoyed listening to as well as performing herself with the choir.

I've got to tell you, my husband played for me last night, do you remember that song by, he was a contemporary Christian music composer, but he was exceptionally classically trained, he was a prodigy type playing, he really was an amazing artist, an arranger. So that song, 'One Small Child'. My husband recorded it when we sang it one time in church. And honestly, he recorded it up from the balcony, you would not believe the sound. I was lost in it. It was just so beautiful... more beautiful than I remember it. (Catrina, March, 2020)

This piece had caught the attention of other participants' who had commented on the work. Angela had been drawn in because of its beauty and this had reminded her of her son and the difficulties she had gone through. The music helped both Catrina and Angela in terms of the words and the underlying message of hope it offered. The participants were clearly drawn to stronger melodies and this raised comment. This was the case also with hymn singing.

Most of the participants had favourite hymns. Angela was a fan of the hymns considered more traditional such as 'Dear Lord and Father of Mankind' by Charles Hubert Hastings Parry. She was moved by words such as 'Take from our Souls the Strain and Stress'. She also stated she appreciated 'Soul of my Saviour' which might be considered a popular choice for Catholics and often performed during the time of Communion. As did Penny and Daisy who appreciated these more traditional types of choice. They included them regularly within the repertoire chosen for the weekly liturgy at their respected churches. The familiarity and repetitive nature of a hymn, offered sustained competence within their learning. Iris preferred the older hymns as they evoked positive memories:

I'm happy with the older ones. But it would be nice to have some more modern ones. We are still in the area of the old type of ones and not moving on, perhaps people don't want that. They want to keep that, what they did years ago. I don't

know? Sometimes when it's such and such a hymn, and you can hear the choir go (She gets very animated here) 'not this one! I don't like that one! Who's written this! And Martha will say 'who's picked this one!' I do that as well you know! That's how it is, that's life, but you just do it. It's not a big deal. 'Bring Flowers of the Rarest' was the hymn I remember. I remember that one. We used to do it for the Whit-week walks. (Iris, April, 2020)

Penny was particularly vocal and shared negative views. Her thoughts regarding the singing of hymns were very clear:

I don't mind the Worship stuff but I have an issue that some of the words to me are sentimental, dare I say it, rather than any quality praise sometimes. I know if it's done well and sincerely it's okay. But sometimes the words get a bit I'm thinking probably Praise and Worship words. And I find some of the music is so repetitive, not in the way Taizé is, is so repetitive, and it's so miserable to my ears. And there is no musical content, it is just dull. I hear that funnily enough from the choir, they say 'it's a bit boring that stuff isn't it' you know we can't hear the words.' (Penny, May, 2020)

All were aware of varied styles in church music. A number made reference to the music of Handel and Philip Stopford, hymns, worship songs and Taizé chant. They were all familiar with arrangements of old and new forms of melody and this was something approved of as a reason for enjoying a performance. Others too made negative comments on the more modern forms of written music and language in hymns and songs which they dis-approved of.

Concluding, purposeful learning is established when students pursue a learning goal or learning goal that is significant for them (Sellars, 2014: 170). In order for this to occur, it is important that their learning has relevance for them and allows some degree of 'ownership' (Sellars, 2014: 171). The singers were very particular in their preferences, many liked older works such as Handel's 'Messiah', and more recent compositions by Philip Stopford. Within these religious works are powerful references to the Psalm's and Biblical Scripture and this was probably a reason why it resonated with them and were willing to take this 'ownership' because of their Catholicism. Recently scholars have suggested that questions regarding musical enjoyment are often closely connected to issues of identity (Porter, 2017: 44). In the above case, the identities were forged because of a closeness to melody and word. These factors resonated with their own catholic identities and understandings. For the participants,

singing church music gave them pleasure. It gave them enjoyment and positive experiences and this in turn helped benefit their confidence through the pleasure of singing church music. Again, this links us to Seligman's theory of well-being offered in the PERMA model and the pleasure of singing providing purpose through positivity, emotion and learning experience.

#### **4.2.4 Singing as an educational journey in later life**

*Finding - Church Singing was recognized as an educational journey in later life.*

Angela was the first to comment in this regard regarding later-life education. She had taken up the activity of participatory singing when she retired, 'because I wanted to use my brain more'. Her husband suggested the idea and encouraged her also. This was not an uncommon trait as Martin encouraged his wife to do this also. Simon expressed that for him it was 'Something creative to do during retirement.' He was 'not a quick learner but... nice to have a challenge'. For those who had sung for most of their lives in a choir, such as Penny, Iris and Martha, it struck me that the practice of participatory church-singing became for them more important as time went on and as their lives progressed following retirement. This was the case for Simon:

I have difficult days. Choir is often that life-line for me...to escape the constant demands. I have my own interests and they are often over-looked by the family. Though I've never told 'em that... (Simon, March, 2020)

For the singers, once they had fully-retired, singing became integrated into their weekly routines both with Mass schedules and separate rehearsal evenings.

Many of the participants had other interests in retirement. For example, Martin was a carpenter, Simon a published author and expressed a desire to do more 'creative' things but was restricted because of his wife's health needs and family commitments. Martha increased her singing routine by being in other groups and church-based affiliations like 'Faith and Light' which acknowledged the work of disabled people. As a single person, this filled the voids in her personal life, and these were important activities alongside her walking groups. She had been in a number of singing groups but had dropped out for various reasons often she admitted because of poor relationships and lack of support.

Many of the singers enjoyed practising at home and felt comfortable in doing this. Martin was a strong example of this and discussed learning the repertoire in preparation for choir:

I enjoy practising the music at home. And I like the way that unexpectedly at various times, the words and music. Because music can pop into your head and recently, I find the Psalm we are learning, the words of that and the tune, so you know the way you practise music, you hear music in your head, it's very comforting! Especially the words you know. At the moment I find them really useful. But also, those in the Mass settings, those words will repeat in my head during the week. And I think that as I pray, because I wouldn't normally find a prayer because it's music because you keep going in your mind. And I like that. That's great. Your mind being full of useless thoughts or rubbish thoughts...whatever. It all starts in self-education at home anyway. (Martin, March, 2020)

Some took the discipline further, such as Iris, who along with Martha had regular singing lessons:

I'm a routine person. And I go to my voice coach every two weeks. So, I go and I say, 'I've got this piece of church music, can we go through it?' And we do. You know he's very good, but I'm missing that as well. We will be able to get back to that soon, I'm sure. (Iris, April, 2020)

Iris's comments here referenced the pandemic of 2020. The restrictions brought to many of the participants at this time were of huge mental consequence and deeply affected their regular routines as with her. The crisis caused the participants arguably to be more reflective within their interviews. The loss of routine and restricted weekly freedoms affected them to large extents.

For Catrina, singing was a wider extension of the acting out of her Christian faith, i.e., wanting to not only be in fellowship with others, but the singing also was an added dimension to her Bible studies each day. She was a deep thinker and has an academic disposition, so much so that singing provided a tool for further learning and extra education around this. She would find time to meet with other Christians and would have on-line meetings with friends in the USA each week. Music had become part of the discussion within these meetings.

Over half of the interviewed singers were in well-established local choral societies. Rupert, along with his wife, had re-joined as members of their local Choral Societies after a re-

location. Martha and Daisy were established members and held other voluntary roles within these groups. This association with other 'serious' singing groups, seemed to be a recurring theme. It was where many of the participants further used singing to exercise their mental and psychological well-being. Singing had been woven into many of their daily routines and associated interests. It seemed to reflect a desire to never be without purpose or even be free of an interest during retired life. For most, the interests of church had been important for many of the participants throughout their lives but their commitment was realized and more frequent during retirement. There seemed to be a fervent desire to further their involvement particularly through supporting the church with their singing. Indeed, a number of participants saw it as an extension of later learning and an extended education. This was touched upon by Angela:

I retired and I didn't get the balance right with what I was doing and I was dashing up and down to see my mum and my husband actually said to me at one point you're getting bored, I think you need a challenge. The two things I took up then were teaching the under privileged, which I really enjoy and joining the choir. I wanted to use my brain more than I was doing. Having been really busy at work at the start I didn't have a lot on, then it got tedious after a while. That's really why I started doing it. I had taught for many years. Now I could learn more freely myself (Angela, April, 2020).

The whole idea of singing as an education in later life was an important activity for the participants. Often depending on their circumstances, their commitment to the singing group attested to be the primary interest. Beyond this, their involvement in church life and the social interaction was an individual and a personal venture for them.

Church-singing offered new opportunities for the participants. It offered them as older intellectual stimulation and positive purpose. In doing this, any negative emotions, such as the constant issues of health, as in the case of Catrina, they learnt to stabilize and control negative emotions and assess subjectively their own positivity of emotion (Lonsdale and Day, 2020:1, Evans, 2015: 67). It further offered a time to escape sometimes the sad realities of later life in the ageing process, declining health or even loneliness. By engaging in this activity of 'flow' (Csikzentmihalyi, 1990), she along with the others were able to focus on new objectives afforded through choring. Flow is typically experienced in clearly structured activities in which the level of challenge and skill can be varied. Through it one can use it as

an opportunity to develop one's strength (Wu, 2014). Through this form of engagement the singers reflect core features echoed in the theory of well-being (Seligman, 2011: 27).

#### **4.2.5 A sense of Achievement**

*Finding - Participants gained satisfaction from singing.*

The sense of achievement involved experiences of having done something worthwhile and difficult as perceived by the participant. This resulted in feelings of satisfaction. Consideration had to be given to the fact that with the varying abilities, relatively small achievements can often demand a huge amount of perseverance and determination for success to be perceived. There were feelings experienced and reported by the participant through musical achievements.

Satisfaction referred to any occasion where the participant demonstrated feelings of contentment relating to something they had achieved either musically, or directly as a result of their music participation. Angela was an example of this:

I remember the first time I sang the Alleluia and verse about a year after I started attending. The nerves I had the night before! When it came, I did it, it went and people said nice things after. I don't feel as if people compete in choir they just help and they help me with kind comments. I have done it a few times now and I really feel I achieve something each time. Little me singing solos, who would have thought. (Angela, February, 2020)

Rupert was very clear in his thinking on the matter:

Singing is my way of making music but generally speaking music is an important part of my life and always has been. And the way in which I can express that very effectively is in participating music-making. Singing is really the greatest, the greatest satisfaction. (Rupert, February, 2020)

He had been involved with choirs for many years and for him he was very proud to talk about the different aspects of choir and where he had sung, with whom and how it still made him proud to sing regularly with his church choir.

In team sports there might be the desire to achieve by consistently winning (Uusiautti, 2017: 34) but one might regard the sense of satisfaction felt by older singers as being different. The desire to perform as individuals, with others for a shared purpose in liturgical performance.

There were high levels of satisfaction amongst those interviewed. Many were from a personal perspective. These feelings, as above, extended into providing a deep sense of accomplishment which provided a benefit to the participant and the wider choir. The different nature of how this was achieved was a reflection of their unique personalities, and how they each perceived and understood their own goals and expectations. A sense of Achievement is met through goals and expectations and often pursued even when it brings no positive emotion, no meaning, and nothing in the way of positive relationships (Seligman, 2011: 18).

#### **4.2.6 Conclusion**

Participants' backgrounds and early experiences often accounted for their perceptions regarding singing. All of their early backgrounds involved church music in some form, which was to be an important factor in shaping their return or continuation of singing in a choir.

Personal confidence appears to be positively impacted by church singing, especially participants with previous formal training who were overall the more confident musicians and singers with great levels of self-management and organization. Confidence came through being connected with the music and performing with others within the group. A few recognized that what they did was for a higher purpose and this partly drove their confidence levels.

Singing church music and its repertoire provided enjoyment and positive experience. Preferences for many included music with strong melodies and performing music by e.g., Handel, Parry, Stopford and hymn-singing. The trained musicians within the group, tended to dislike the more modern forms of 'worship' music and attributed their dislike to the less traditional use of wording and a perception that they were poorly written melodies.. It is important to bear in mind the institutional context with the choice of music 'determined by the nature of the church, and the nature of the church is determined by its mission' (Petty, 2010: 72).

For participants in this study singing was part of an educational journey taken up again in later life as part of their own routine and self-organization and management. Some had been encouraged to singing in the choir by spouses. They realized the challenges attached and some went further and would practice at home or were motivated to take difficult pieces to



formal lessons. The pandemic of 2020 amplified this importance to their weekly lives and heightened for them the lack of interaction, learning and practice. The education was seen as a personal motivation with the positive experiences suggesting clear indications of educational flourishing personally and collectively as a result of this later learning activity of singing in a church choir.

Participants gained satisfaction from singing. Though the abilities of the choristers varied, participants gained satisfaction and a sense of achievement from the experience of singing which was important. Through church singing participants have a chance to achieve in whatever ways suit their individual abilities and strengths. This creates confident musicians who live their musical lives at its full potential (Bradford, 2020: 319).

In the next chapter, I briefly discuss my other findings relating to the implications associated with well-being offered in the social and spiritual aspects of older peoples' church singing.

# **CHAPTER 5: WELL-BEING**

## **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I will put together ideas regarding well-being endorsed within this project. First and foremost, those regarding social and spiritual well-being. Similarly, I will report on further findings of well-being involving the mental and physical. This will be coordinated as follows with the findings:

1. Social well-being, camaraderie and connectedness were important factors amongst the groups researched. (5.2.1)
2. Spiritual well-being often depended on experience and support of others. (5.2.2)

As stated earlier, although mental and physical well-being are not the primary focus of the project they are still very much intertwined with other aspects of well-being (Hobbs, 2016). My primary concern appertains to that of the social and spiritual. Of course, with the social also comes the emotional (Sellars, 2014: 169). Singing can be an emotional activity. This is true of other participatory activities, such as sport (Uusiautti et al. 2017: 31). With singing, the attached intensity can often draw out the varying emotional sides of people (Noble and McGrath, 2008: 123). Explicated from this might be issues or values regarding cooperation, acceptance of differences, compassion, honesty, friendliness, and inclusion. These are shared aspects of learning and typical attributes of a Christian faith. Church singing can model these values as they benefit the social, as well as the spiritual. In a church setting these are linked and identified in the experience of choiring. For example, they might be identified in Camaraderie, connectedness/relatedness. Also, in spiritual well-being and support which are part of this striving for positive well-being. A church setting offers many opportunities both socially as well as spiritually for older people.

## **5.2 Social Well-being – Camaraderie and connectedness**

### **5.2.1 Camaraderie and connectedness**

*Finding - Social well-being, camaraderie and connectedness were important factors amongst the groups researched.*

Social Well-being, conceived at the heart of this thesis, is that which affects and pertains to the personal (Hobbs, 2016: 58; Haworth and Hart, 2007; Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky, 2007).

Social participation and support are a key area of social well-being (Ward et al, 2012). Participation and support are integral to relationships and offer a balance between dependence and independence (Allen, 2008; Ward et al., 2012). Research into this area has led to the conclusion that social well-being is often shaped by social connectedness and therefore determinant through the managing of one's own well-being (Allen, 2008).

Social well-being was displayed through camaraderie and social-connectedness in the choir members. Friendships, fellowship (Sarot, 1994), trust and bonding (Sixsmith and Boneham, 2007) were also very important to many of the participants. These were often both jovial as well as more sincere. This was typical with Angela:

I like the camaraderie, the challenge of it also. Especially as I am one of the newer people in the choir. I feel totally at ease now with people and feel like I've got to know people now. Feel like part of the team really. Erm, yea and I like it. I mean that was only initially. A lot of that was my insecurity and knowing that certain members of the choir were very, very proficient. And sometimes if someone caught my eye if I did something, I would take it personally. Not that it was probably intended because of my insecurity I would feel that. (Angela, February, 2020)

### **5.2.2 Routine social events supporting social well-being**

*Finding – routine and social events can help nurture and support social well-being, amongst the groups researched.*

For most of the singers like Angela who were practising Catholics, Sunday mass and the social regularity of choring was an integrated ritual. The discipline had been taught at an early age and the constancy of it was the most important thing for many in the group. The challenges of this did however resonate with some. Angela again was vocal on this matter:

...I like the fact that we organize bacon butty mornings now and again as I mentioned before. The social thing is important. When we have other socials like the meals, even once a year, we grow with each other. It's become a routine going to Mass. The singing is attractive. This is not only a prompt to be at choir but pushes me to attend Mass, even though I have reasons not to go. (Angela, February, 2020)

The regularity of routine and weekly social-connectedness was equally as important to others such as Iris. She was able to air her thoughts on this:

Everybody looks after each other. Simone looks after me when I'm struggling and not quite with it. People make that difference, especially when I get bogged down with life things. Singing and singing with others is my escape. (Iris, April, 2020)

Penny had found ways during the lockdown period of 2020 to adapt to life without regular choiring and singing:

Yea, it's my life. Both my husband and I were saying the same like, it's part of what we are. It's not music is over there, I'm this person, I think it is very much part of who we are. And yet I would hope it would go on for the rest of my life. You did mention social well-being briefly before. I think the other thing is, the people who we have been brought into contact with via singing and music-making has been a massive impact on our lives. It has brought us so much joy that has been an absolute wonderful thing, even in this crisis (pandemic). Getting together on Zoom every Tuesday night with Father, there was 21 of them turned up on Tuesday night! And they were just glad to be there and I said to them, just do it every fortnight, 'no, no, no, let's have it once a week'. And it's that social as well. It has given us a different dimension the singing and all that has given us a dimension to our lives and has really enriched it. And it has been a development of our skills I would say. (Penny, May, 2020)

This enriching was felt by others not just Penny and was present even before the pandemic crisis. Being single, Martha saw the social side as being important and it gave her a sense of belonging. The performance side too was of equivocal importance. Simon recognized that the social side was for him not the most important:

It's just nice to talk to people you sing with. In a social environment. But it wouldn't matter if that didn't happen. It wouldn't stop me. (Simon, March, 2020)

Evidently there were further benefits to the social well-being and connectedness in the many of the choir relationships. Martin for example expressed that as well as enjoying the choir pastime experience together with his wife and it was:

...really nice to be part of the choir, to be engaged in that, and it has helped my wife hugely, as well as giving her other challenges. (Martin, March, 2020)

This shared experience was the case for both Rupert and his wife Verity. It was a common interest and a very important drive within their relationship. Rupert recognized further

personal implications. He regarded himself as 'special', identifying he had a social-disorder and associated needs. For him the social-connectedness was important. This time of friendship, away from his family, enabled his self-worth and encouraged him personally:

Because, I'm sure we have discussed this before, obviously you are probably well aware that certain behavioural tendencies that I never realized, that to a degree I am on the Autistic Spectrum. I suppose I'm rather a solitary person in that respect. (Rupert, April, 2020)

Many of the participants had had very active social lives in their university days. This busyness had filtered into their regular routines during retirement. Many had close associations with their families and children such as Catrina, Martin and Simon. Those who were gregarious in character appeared to have better social- awareness and were more willing to engage with others. Because of this, there seemed to be a stronger demonstration of regularity and routine. Iris attested to this by commenting that she would always look forward to Thursdays and Sundays because she saw herself as part of that 'big family.' It seemed that having undergone this regular routine of social well-being enacted through camaraderie and connectedness, each individual was maintaining their personal wellness and furthermore, the choir group as a whole.

However, Catrina was of a different mind. She stated that the actual choir community wasn't that important to her and it was just 'certain people...and less social'. For her the matter was more of a spiritual connection with particular individuals, not the majority:

I've also spent some time with Sandra, Kate and Kaylynn. But I wouldn't count them amongst close friends or friends, more acquaintances. But they are more like acquaintances but we don't do daily life or weekly life together. But I love everyone in the choir. And we have fun. (Catrina, March, 2020)

Catrina concluded that she would miss choir if she 'wasn't doing it'.

Camaraderie, relatedness and connectedness are closely aligned (Gallet, 2016: 2; Joseph, 2014, Ryff and Keyes, 1995). Social well-being is enhanced through camaraderie and relatedness. Wellness is an indicator of good relationships (Wolbert, 2016). Angela talked about being the part of the 'team', Penny mentioned the value of being together as a group

in person and how the zoom meetings she had during the pandemic was not quite the same experience for her. The weekly gatherings were an important lifeline for Iris:

Everybody looks after each other, if you have lost something or you can't find something, or you don't know where you are up to, there is always somebody who is there to give you a hand. And that makes a big difference. I've missed all this recently. (Iris, May, 2020)

Without the relationship of being with people, social wellness (Gasper, 2010) and motivation is known to decline (Trenshaw et al., 2016: 1202; Winefield et al., 2012). In such social extras, the singers were able to build a rapport with each other and enhance their overall enjoyment of the activity. This facilitation of social well-being is concurrent with present scholarship (Lloyd and Little, 2010: 369; Soenens et al., 2012: 10) where participation in focused group activity for example in sporting activities, is effective in developing these elements.

Interestingly, a body of literature regarding the group-social and the workings of theories of well-being address ideas of social capital rather than social well-being (Putnam, 2000). The two are often linked through because of the value in relationship. Koyanagi et al. (2021: 129) talks about social capital as a 'social resource resulting from how well people in the community are connected 'through their network, trust, and norms of the society'. In realizing social capital/social well-being in being the same, the data can help develop teaching and learning strategies applying socially-driven motivations both for the individual as well as for the group. This might help issues within group activity such as reciprocity, trust, networking and nurturing good relations. An example of this could be through others within the group who are more able singers and good readers of music assisting the learning of weaker singers. This was witnessed in the behaviour of Rupert:

I suppose the other thing to mention is something is that you can actually take someone who is not really competent and you can actually teach them and make them really quite reasonable. If you know what you are doing. It takes a bit of patience and I think that is a bit of an insight, you know it's a bit of a challenge, we all want to produce the best music we can and sometimes it isn't as good as it could have been. Because that person who is not quite up to speed with it all yet. They are on a trajectory, they are improving and if they continue to put the effort in to making improvement, or why on earth not? We all had to start some-where didn't we? (Rupert, April, 2020)

Supportiveness and connectedness within the choir group was seen to give members such as Iris and Simon a sense of belonging through socially learning amongst others. This indicates a shared purpose and a collective effort. I suggest here that the wider benefits were not only to the individual, but also to the group where relationship and being in a team were necessary for relationship (Trenshaw et al., 2016: 1205). My participants' narratives focused on describing the relationships that they built through the learning of new singing projects for the liturgy as well as being together in this setting. Furthermore, as a result of working in a team, this was beneficial to them personally as well for the whole group. The camaraderie and connectedness motivated the singers to challenge themselves in an environment where it was safe to fail and try again during the process of learning knowing that the more able singers offered encouragement and support of their learning. Very little about the positive is solitary (Seligman, 2011: 20) and it is in the connectedness and sense of belonging through being a part of a church choir that most of my participants found positive relationship. Very little that is positive is solitary (Seligman, 2020: 20).

### **5.3 Spiritual Well-being**

*Finding - Spiritual well-being often depended on experience and support of others.*

Spiritual well-being as stated earlier, is not an easy topic to conceptualize. Bonet, (2009) and Moberg (1979) suggested that spiritual well-being is not a synonym for religion. We might regard spiritual well-being as more of a specific concept, but equally it is a very broad term and applicable to matters other than religion. Indeed:

Its functional definition pertains to the wellness or health of the inner resources of people, the ultimate concerns around which all other values are focused, the central philosophy of life that guides conduct, and the meaning-giver centre of human life which influences all individual and social behaviour (Moberg, 1979: 11).

The researcher must be aware of the context and interpretation of the phrase spiritual well-being in its usage (Hobbs, 2016: 46). In this project, the participants' assertion of 'spiritual well-being' and experience was personalized and dependent on their own perceptions.

These related to for example, 'a connection to the divine', or 'collective group spirituality'.

The term spiritual well-being has different connotations (Hobbs, 2016; Ryu, 2017). Catrina was very clear on her ideas regarding spiritual well-being. I questioned her about the ideas of music, singing and well-being and what it meant for her. She related her views to a more personalized form of spiritual well-being:

I love singing about God and I love being with other people. There's a real synergy you get. So, I love being a part of that and I love having anything of use. That I can use. For his glory, and for his Kingdom. (Catrina, March, 2020)

Daisy had had similar experience through singing more religious pieces and believed there were pieces that 'definitely had a spiritual side to them.' She gave this example:

A lot of our modern pop songs, they are actually love songs, and you can often sing love songs to God. So, depending on where your head is, it can feel like a love-song to God. And that can evoke a spiritual response, in me. (Daisy, April, 2020)

Contrary this, Rupert had a different approach and opinion and professed to not being particularly spiritually-led. He equated it to the following:

Spiritual experiences no. I mean, emotional experiences yes. Religious experiences, you know I think that's kind of slightly disquieting (he laughs nervously) through it... I wouldn't want to go there! Absolutely if you are talking about does one get some strong emotional response from having participated in the creation of beautiful music, absolutely without any question. When it goes well, it's fantastic and it creates, it gives you enormous feedback. You know, whether you think that's just some kind of physical reaction to, to what you have done. And at some level, some emotional response or whether there is more to it than that. I think that is a difficult question to answer. (Rupert, April, 2020)

Further to these reflections of Rupert was an interesting comment matched by Catrina. She observed that '...even in a beautiful place, the music can be somewhat unspiritual'. This had been her past experience serving as a church worship leader in the U.S.

Some of the participant's regarded themselves as 'less spiritual'. As individuals they recognized the worth of their own spirituality and well-being as a result of regular attendance at mass. Simon saw his role as being a support to the priest and other leaders. For him this duty was to support and sustain the provision of spiritual attributions for



others. He referred to the work of an older and respected priest whom he had done this for years before:

And that is down to the Canon. Like yourself that's the guy who is at the top and people take the lead from. And if they are positive, dynamic and supportive and all the other things they can be. People will go for that... And it doesn't matter what you do, music religion or faith, or just business, it's always the same. (Simon, March, 2020)

Iris, in a similar mind-set to Simon, realized she could offer her skills as spiritual service to the Priest in this way:

...I wasn't spiritual to start with. And using my talents for God, but as we have had this group of people that have come together it is a bit of both. Now, I miss them when I am not there. I always look forward to Thursdays and Sundays because we are a big spiritual family. And that is good for my health and well-being to know there are people there like you and people in the choir. If I needed anything, help or whatever, there is always somebody there. It's not just about going in the choir. There is more to it. (Iris, April, 2020)

This recognition of the spiritual, as well as social interaction is a reminder to us of how we are connected through faith and ritual. To be 'spiritual' (Boyce-Tillman, 2016) might be regarded as a process of growth, and this growth might come not only from one's self, but also from the experience and support of others (Gallet, 2016). I suggest this to be true of my participants and the experiences they had through singing and through this developed their own meaning and understandings. Relevant here is the writing of Bunt (1994). He suggests that music itself can quickly bring people together and provide a sense of group cohesion, a sense of immediate belonging. But it is about the deeper idea of growth whether we listen to music or make music together, the very structure of organized sounds themselves which provide a unique opportunity for such integration (Bunt, 1994: 27-8). I believe this experience to be heightened further in the context of church through being amongst others in the act of religious discipline and through singing.

Penny was also clinical in her thinking regarding spiritual experience. She recognized it was directed by the embodiment of God's presence and direction in a situation:

Exactly! It was like, little things. I can remember in that something saying you must really do this. And I could feel God's presence was in that. Everything...I just felt like being, the music is the way you serve God and that if you allow him, he will work through how he wants you to use your personal skills however he's has given you. (Penny, May, 2020)

We might view this idea of presence as an 'encounter'. It is through 'encounter' that links can be made with the strands of spirituality and with the domains of musicking experience (Boyce-Tillman, 2016: 340). Krippner and Welch (1992) say that the word 'spiritual' is used to describe aspects of human behaviour. The singers regularly came together in the setting of Church Mass. This would offer them a spiritual experience and support in being with others. I believe the spiritual well-being of the participants was enhanced by the singing. Noble and McGrath (2008) suggest that group work and routines can be effectively utilized as opportunities to promote positive relationship as well as meaning. Meaning is the bedrock of spiritual practice. Singing in a church setting 'elicits strong experiences of positive emotion as well as acting as a major facilitator of religious experience' (Miller and Strongman, 2002: 24). Because of this experience, meaning represents a positive force for life and its satisfaction. Experiencing life as meaningful seems to be a major component of human well-being, and a major source for human motivation (Croom, 2014: 10). It is in this that meaning serves as a vital block in the PERMA model and helps us understand the motivations of people.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

The first finding in chapter 5 established that social well-being, camaraderie and connectedness were important factors amongst the group researched. These social aspects were very important to the majority of the interviewees. For those who were single or on their own, the participatory singing was an important part of their week. This sense of belonging and inclusion provided a distraction for all including those who had illnesses or challenging family circumstances. Robert Putnam, talks of 'the importance of relationships, networks and norms [in society] that can be used to enrich individuals and communities' (Putnam, 2000: 22). I relate his findings to my own and suggest that social camaraderie and connectedness within my group of singers contributed to healthy relationships and a

bonding (Sixsmith and Boneham, 2007) between each other and this was important for the maintaining of networks and norms in the church the community.

The next finding established that spiritual well-being often depended on experience and support of others. For some this was more personalized in its form. Spiritual well-being was often represented through singing and experiencing the Divine. This caused them to feel a certain 'synergy' from it as Catriona described and akin to the 'cultural synergy' referred to in the work of Joseph and Human (2021). Others, who were unsure, because of their beliefs or non-beliefs, saw spiritual well-being as being linked to the physical and emotional as with Rupert. What was apparent in the finding was that spiritual well-being was recognized by the singers in the sharing of experiences and in the support of others. O' Sullivan and Flanagan (2012) discuss the deeper implications of spiritual well-being, expressing it as a capital that energizes 'by providing a theological identity and worshipping tradition, but also a value system, moral vision and basis of faith. It is often embedded locally within faith groups, but [is] also expressed in the lives of individuals' (2012: 12).

I next turn my attention to the church and religious context. It is associated with my findings regarding the church-community and the participants' opinions. Also, it discusses the idea of spiritual wellness and how this was demonstrated.

# **CHAPTER 6: CHURCH AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT**

## **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, as in the previous two, I wish to report on the subsequent findings. These are as follows:

1. Ideas relating to Church community were expressed in various ways and by joining a choir enabled the gateway to being a part of this. (6.2)
2. There were varied opinions regarding the importance of the Church and its leaders and these were both positive as well as negative based on personal experience. (6.3)
3. Spiritual wellness was an important factor to some participants and attending church was crucial in maintaining this. (6.4)

The sense of belonging to people might become more important as they grow older (Joseph, 2018, 2009). I identified through my practice that the church has much to offer its ageing community, hence this chapter and the attached practices relating to this. I wished to further explore the importance of this gained wellness – that is, *spiritual wellness*. Naturally, when people are involved in community life, they can be affected in relationships involving other people, socially as well as through the more spiritual. The participants were forthright in their ‘opinions’ (both negative as well as positive) regarding those leaders working within the church community and I was most grateful for this honesty.

## **6.2 Church Community**

### **6.2.1 Parish**

*Finding - joining a choir enabled the gateway to being a part of the parish community.*

As well as being choir members, participants also felt themselves as part of the parish. They identified their role as singers being important to the immediate church community. Simon felt it was important to give back because people were ‘genuine’ in the church community. The giving of time to their community through the work of the choir was an important aspect for many and closely related to the thoughts of participants such as Lyn and George echoed in the work of Joseph and Human (2021). The idea of parish community is relevant, it represented the playing out of ideas and identities within a community, of connectedness as

well as togetherness. Music in church is to be seen as a not only 'a social engagement but also part of a corporate community' (Millar and Strongman, 2002).

Almost all participants viewed mass and liturgical services as a collective obligation. Simon, for example, saw himself as part of 'the body of the church'. Some members of the choir, such as Martha and Simon, would take time occasionally to sit with the congregation when not 'on-duty' singing. This gave them the opportunity to hear the music from downstairs, where the choir often performed. This allowed them to sympathetically align their sensitivities from another point of view during the services. They would hear the music from the congregation's perspective and discuss their contributions with people not in the choir. Thus, the feedback was usefully shared between each other. For example, Martha was able to comment that Anna, an older member of the parish, and her friend, had hearing problems. She found the choir performances a bit loud on occasions and felt the choir a distraction during her time of quietness and reflection at communion. However, she did conclude that many people appreciated the 'meditativeness' of the singing and it contributed towards the worship. Music is said to prepare one's heart and mind for the joy you can receive through God and through his son Jesus (Vaught, 2009).

Simon, when moving back to the local area following retirement, wanted to be involved in the church community. He found it 'massively rewarding'. He saw opportunities through church community because of past positive experiences, and 'the kind of social aspect of being a part of something and... many opportunities to be a part of something in life.' Martin stated that when choosing to be in a new community and location, he felt it important to be drawn to join a choir that wasn't secular, in his words: 'I've always been part of the choir that we are in.' This for him was clearly a church choir and the idea of 'community' had an added importance for him and his wife. He summed this up as 'the call of the Catholic church always coming back to you'.

Catrina had been very community-minded in the past. She summed up nicely the idea of church and community, 'It's all about the communing – which is also part of the spiritual thing, the soul and body'. This corporate communion for her was a representation of the wider body and essence of community. Equally, Rupert saw the Catholic Community as 'like a family community within the congregation or within the choir.' Furthermore, the choir was for him,

‘only an extension of the congregation’. He posed the question, ‘we are all part of the family aren’t we?’ And concluded, that ‘the way which we get so much support from the congregation is really testament to that.

Iris also identified that the choir’s contribution in singing was of consequence:

And I know that what we’re doing is making other people happy. I mean I don’t know that but I was just thinking when people come up to us and say ‘this is amazing, we really enjoyed it’. And I have friends who come to church and they have said to me, ‘Amazing’. (Iris, April, 2020)

Daisy regarded church community as ‘vital’. Along with Penny, both as choir-leaders, they would link their choice of prepared music with the congregation needs, in order to involve them more in liturgical aspects of the mass on Sundays. Penny had used the congregational mass-music of the composer Ricky Manillo specifically to encourage the involvement of the congregation to sing and be a part of the service.

There was mention made of a decline in various aspects of the parish, partly to do with an ageing congregation. This had a knock-on effect with the willingness of people to be involved. Angela stated the reason to be that people were ‘reluctant to take part in things because they will be lumbered with things forever.’ The problem I will discuss later along with aspects regarding changes of attitude towards the role of the church.

### **6.2.2 Family relationships**

*Finding - Joining a choir provided opportunities to form other important relationships with members of the church community.*

Daisy was outwardly honest about the role of church community since her husband had passed away:

It’s very, very important. It’s vital. Especially as I have been on my own since my husband died. A huge part of my life is linked with doing for choir and church. I’m involved in so much. I am just involved with so many things and the Community as Chair of the Parish Council. In the last three years, our community has doubled in size, because we are now linked in a team of other churches. So that has been very good and I’ve really enjoyed it. (Daisy, March, 2020)

A community is a body of people and in its purpose can serve as a unified body. This is done through 'communing' and within the ethos surrounding the church and its associated groups such as the church choir. It is in this interacting of spirit, both in the mystical as well as the physical, that the participants were aided individually as well as when they were gathered. This fellowship (Sarot, 2004) and regularity of shared experience was represented through not only being in a choir but belonging to the Catholic church community as the representative body.

In these formed relationships, other singers who didn't see themselves as fitting in easily, such as Rupert, who felt a sense of support and belonging within the group. He described the relationships he had built through being in choirs and the teamwork skills he gained through those relationships. This for him, was an experience which he would not easily gain elsewhere:

I'm a strange person. I don't fit in easily Damian. But in a number of choirs, like the one at present people are kind to me. Both my wife and I appreciate what these groups have done for us. But for me particularly just coming and doing for the team and church is what I look forward to. (Rupert, May, 2020)

The relationships offered happiness, friendship and encouragement for Rupert. Church environments often provide good foundations and help trusting relationships (Sixsmith and Boneham, 2007: 82), additional fellowship (Faull, 2012: 517, Sarot, 1994) and respect forged through choir members (Putnam, 2000). Often these starting out relationships merge and extend to those members of the wider church family – that is, the congregation. Martha had particularly found this extra area of relationship and relatedness through her musical participation (Joseph, 2014, 2018). Working together to create music in a group and for a group setting can foster community (Boyce-Tillman, 2019: 285). In this we might see matters to do with relationship. The relationship between choir members and other parts of the church community (i.e., the congregation) was important to the functioning of the church community as a whole. This sense of closeness with others fulfils a basic human need to feel a sense of belongingness (Maslow, 1943). Churches can serve a purpose and in identify this sense of closeness and belonging within its community. This can be done through knitting together the idea of community and relationship through its various forms of functioning and activities offered. Music can function as a useful means for positively influencing

relationships, and in so doing positively influencing the third characteristic of psychological well-being (the PERMA factor 'R' for Relationships).

### **6.3 The importance of leaders as well as Choral-Directors, the positives and negatives**

#### **6.3.1 Clergy as leaders**

*Finding – Personal experience influenced the various positive and negative opinions regarding the Church leaders*

I felt it important to mention the participants' opinions regarding their perceptions about the church, the priests and other forms of leadership. Their opinions on such matters impacted their routines and weekly habits. Angela stated:

You can be lonely at church. I mean certainly at the minute, say if I'm very honest the choir is one of the reasons why I'm very engaged in church. Yes, which hasn't always been the case. (Angela, February, 2020)

She cited the issues were deep and there were divisions because of poor relationships. This caused her mental stress and unhappiness and affected her decisions to attend Mass:

It would be a bit of a routine to go to Mass. This is something that I haven't always felt. It is just where I am at the minute. I don't know whether it is things that have happened that have made me feel like that. I don't feel as much engaged here I think I have to say. If I go to other Catholic churches say in Scotland, I do feel engaged. I feel it's the lack of feeling this big community we are in. We have got a community in the choir but I'm not sure if we have got an inclusive community in church. (Angela, February, 2020)

During the Covid crisis and national lockdown period in 2020, Angela missed being able to watch her own church's mass streamed online. In addition to this, she found herself watching other parish priests elsewhere saying mass. The divisions and disunity in her church at a parish level were evident, and for her to mention it, affected her deeply. She shared about the poor communications and relationships with the priests.

A few of the participants discussed the issue of an ageing and dwindling congregation. Also, the unwillingness of the young to do necessary parish jobs. Angela's thoughts were clear and she was honest about the situation in her parish:



Well, I feel in terms of a parish, the community element isn't as strong as it used to be. I feel that a lot of people have moved away or gone to different churches. It's the same few doing all the tasks. If you say yes to something that's it, I've been doing the [name of job] for over sixteen years now. I feel there is less engagement in general. There are a lot of people who go to church but don't get involved in any other way. Coffee after mass there's hardly anyone there, that there isn't that sense of inclusion that used to be there. I've been at this place a long time and it has changed with each parish priest. (Angela, May, 2020)

Simon cited that the changes were due to the past and although currently he had no particular issues, he has come across deep-rooted issues, particularly in the type of music offered, in previous parishes:

It was after Vatican Two. The wisdom at the time was that music didn't really have a place. It had to be focused on prayer and nothing else. Well, not nothing else! The bigger pieces (of music) stopped being done.....Well it didn't just affect me particularly. It affected the whole choir. By that time girls had joined rather than just men and boys. And my sisters used to go you know. But when they stopped doing anything in that way which was challenging, happy clappy I guess! People were just not interested. There was no challenge you see and it just fell away. And the choir disappeared as such. (Simon, March, 2020)

He admitted that even though he found the doctrinal changes hard, he continued to attend mass:

It's hard to tell you that. I can't recall. I didn't stop going. But there was no point in going. If you see what I'm trying to say I still used to go in the organ loft where the choir used to sing. I carried on singing but it wasn't the same. And it was just either stuff you either knew or you didn't know. You'd learn it from the playing and that would be it. And of course, most of the newer music they were doing were quite simple things. I mean we still do some of them now. (Simon, March, 2020)

Underpinning a lot of the participants views were attitudes towards the Priest. Angela amongst others was disappointed with the leadership:

I'm unimpressed now. I think that each parish priest has brought different things. A former Canon kind of galvanized the men and got the men more involved and sorted out the finance thing and when the next Priest came, he was appointed to enhance the music, the musical element of it. Each had

different gifts. Those different gifts become apparent when they are there. I think the Parish Priest has a huge influence on everything really. (Angela, February, 2020)

Simon's experience of a former Priest was positive:

He is a fantastic guy. He really is! .... But he's the most human person I've ever met. Certainly, within the clergy and probably anywhere. (Simon, March, 2020)

Rupert was similar and spoke of a Priest where there had been good relations. He had helped forge a good friendship through music and singing in a choir:

I have had a number of people with whom I have been quite friendly. And the context of the friendship has particularly been the music that we have made together. Because, for example when we sang in the local Catholic church choir, as I mentioned, the Junior Priest that came at that time, he sang tenor and came and sang with me. He was very good. So, we struck it up, we had a good friendship. He was ever such a nice bloke. And we got on really, really well and we did all kinds of crazy stuff. You know it's not so much about while you are there and the purpose of coming to the service is, it's more of the man who has got the right hat on. (Rupert, March, 2020)

Martin had similarly had positive experiences with priests. He found this when he had moved back to the local area. It was a time when his wife had been given difficult news from her consultant:

And I rang the Presbytery and the junior father was there. He said 'Come now!' (DH – Right). And we went and sat down in the little room, on the right-hand side where you walk in. My wife said 'Look you know, I've got this diagnosis. The Bible says, the Bible says (he's emotional now and slightly tearful at this point) to visit the Priest for that Blessing. He said, 'You've got that wrong! We come to you!', in a nice humorous way. And I said, you know you are blest. And that helped my wife to go and say 'you know what, this place isn't so bad!' So, yea, we were made welcome there. And then, we were further made welcome by others in the choir like yourself. (Martin, March, 2020)

Daisy shared that she had been influenced spiritually by a number of Priests:

There have been quite a few Priests in and out. Never for very long though, it would just be the odd, the odd time, the odd comment, the good sermon. Until I came north, we lived North of where we are presently, in the small town

where we lived, there was a Priest there, he was very influential. Another big influence would be Medjugorje because I went to Medjugorje in 1997. (Daisy, April, 2020)

It was interesting to hear the thoughts of on the relationships with the clergy particularly with Daisy and Penny, both of which were heavily involved with their churches music as well as other roles. In private they did express their frustrations with the clergy but were not prepared to share this on a recording. Martha was similar and agreed that where Priests were concerned:

Some are better than others definitely. I mean even people who you come into contact with who are not clergy people can have an effect on you. And people who are of other faiths as well, definitely. (Martha, February, 2020)

Martha had been involved in church choirs and groups for most of her life and was prepared to make comment on clergy.

Other choir participants drew their spiritual thoughts and opinions from the internet. Catrina was an admirer of the television evangelists and would watch regularly on digital Christian channels and YouTube. Catrina, like Martha, seemed cautious about being critical regarding the church leadership. She did however make a comment in the postscript. On one occasion, she had tried to spend time praying with a member of her Choir but this had not lasted because the person she had tried it with 'just wanted to talk'. When she started to pray with the other member, they had found it uncomfortable. Catrina put it down to her not being used to praying with others. Her experience had always been priest-led. But also, not having the experience or leader endorsed practice of praying with others. This might be understood and typical of the way in which Catholics of older generations and age had been schooled and taught to religiously behave (Blout, 2004; Gribben, 1994: 25).

For Angela, the disappointment of relationship with the priests meant that her relationship with the church involved only the choir:

I feel no warmth from the priests and this has affected the community spirit generally. This is proven when priests should not have to advertise jobs to be done. The choir provides the support I have needed. (Angela, February, 2020)

### **6.3.2 Other forms of leadership**

*Finding – for some parts of parish life there are benefits if others take on a leadership role, for example, Choral-Director for music*

Where musical leadership was concerned, Simon was forthright in his views. He felt that musical leadership should be taken away from the responsibilities of the priest:

Like yourself, that's the guy who is at the top and people take the lead from. And if they are positive, dynamic and supportive and all the other things they can be. People will go for that. If they are not people just stop going. And it doesn't matter what you do, music religion or faith, or just business, it's always the same. (Simon, April, 2020)

For Simon, good leadership was important and he had followed his friend the Choirmaster Paul to a new church and new choir because he admired his example:

That's the background of why we went to our church in North Yorkshire. He did get a very vibrant choir going there. It was fantastic. And it fell apart when he went. It just did. You know, that's how important the guy is running it. Well, he is. People will take a lead from people like yourself! If you get a choir growing, it's because of the guy at the top it's not because of anybody in it particularly. Because the lead comes from them (Simon, April, 2020)

Evident in this section were the strong feelings echoed towards leadership. Although many of the participants had had positive experiences in the parish work of the priests, they indicated that the role of the Priest was paramount in church life. A few had also witnessed poor governance in parochial leadership and guidance. Many participants felt that much of the priestly-behaviour displayed was representative of past church traditions and unspoken practices. The priests were felt to be not properly moderated and poorly equipped as leaders to carry the work of the Catholic Church within the Diocese. This unhappiness was matched by the knowledge of physical decline in the number of persons attending mass and of weekly numbers of communicants. The lack of awareness of the Priests to address these issues was felt to affect other levels of the church community and led to a feeling of stifling growth within the other areas of Parish work. Such repercussions might affect the workings of the choir.

Negativity has the effect of making people cautious and to hold back. It also has been found to limit and restrict engagement to exploration, to rebuff curiosity and to disallow feelings of hope that things could work out well or that improvement was possible (Sellars, 2014: 156). These 'disconnects' (Trenshaw et al., 2016: 1202) and the reduced sense of relatedness

revealed a greater focus on their external incentives and drive people's habits through new routines. These included connecting to other forms of mentoring and preaching available on the internet. Catrina spoke of how she reverted to this habit when she felt disappointed with the clergy leadership in her church.

The leadership of Choral- Director's is important in the support of church life. Simon spoke enthusiastically of his experiences in working with influential leaders in his choir. He also acknowledged, as did others that good leadership and governance was important within a church setting and it starts from the top. Where clergy leadership is seen to be weak or remote, the choral Director has a duty in their profession to lead the choir in a way which is supportive in relationship. Church Choirs can be a way of connecting people and leadership for the better. Positive psychology and emotions (both positive and negative) help us to understand that not all relationships are fruitful and this can extend to those who are in leadership. Good leadership matters to people. With supportive behaviour from those acting alongside, the off-set of motivations are likely to be more positive and beneficial (Trenshaw et al., 2016: 1205; Sixsmith et al., 2001). These in turn lead to a more pleasant life (Seligman, 2011: 16).

## **6.4 Spiritual Wellness and journey**

### **6.4.1 Spiritual wellness gained from participation in Liturgy**

*Finding - Spiritual wellness was an important factor for some participants, attending church liturgy was crucial in maintaining this form of wellness.*

Spiritual wellness relates to being connected to something greater than yourself and having a set of values, principles, morals and beliefs that provide a sense of purpose and meaning to life, then using those principles to guide your actions (Fisher, 2011: 25; Smith, 2016: 1). Wellness is in itself the practice and culmination of the efforts of well-being. For example, this might be seen in the attendance of weekly mass. Penny related opportune times in mass as aiding her spiritual wellness. She recounted those times which more meaningful to her:

If I had to pick, I would say Communion. I generally like very contemplative music at Communion. Definitely, because that is the deepest moment at mass. Obviously! For me as a Catholic that is the key part of the mass. So, yea, I would say that is the big weight that God has come into our souls and I need music

there that is not just giving him glory but makes me deeply aware that he is with us then. I like contemplative music then. (Penny, May, 2020)

The regularity of routine was also picked up on by Catrina. When questioned about which services resonated with her, she mentioned Holy Week, the week leading up to the day of Easter in the Christian calendar:

The Resurrection is focused on Christ and what he did for us. And the Resurrection is everything. Priceless or not it's more than that. It's Christ and the only reason we can receive Christ. It's so weighty. I also enjoy it because it's one of the Seven Feasts, the original Feasts. The Passover, Christ the Passover of the Lamb. I love the depth and meaning of it, the Passover and the three around it, the Feast of the First Fruits. And all these Feasts that are there. Choring enables me to experience this more deeply (Catrina, March, 2020)

It was clear her spiritual wellness came through a regular involvement in the participation of important church feast days. She identified her wellness as being connected with her Christian journey throughout the year. She marked these selected and heightened moments and in doing so, she was able to profess her Christian faith and beliefs. This also was an enablement for her spiritual wellness.

#### **6.4.2 Music as a source of spiritual wellness**

*Finding – participating in music as a member of the choir was for some participants a source of spiritual wellness*

Martin talked about acquisition of an 'Inner peace' through music at mass, this being perhaps another marking of the wellness of spirit:

There are some very moments you get inner peace. Sometimes the harmonies just move your mind to peace. It can really help to focus your mind. (Martin, March, 2020)

Singing and participating in the Mass gave him spiritual wellness. Catrina was deeply expressive in outlining the importance of wellness for her through the act of church singing. This was important to her because of her serious health condition:

I think there is no higher thing to do than is to speak the word and to worship. I think when you are worshipping it literally goes out of time and space. You know what I mean. (Catrina, March, 2020)

For her the regularity of spiritual practice contributed significantly to her weekly mental wellness and an escape for her against the uncertainty of her physical health driven by a positive motivation through music as worship (Porter, 2017: 62).

Participants experienced spiritual wellness expressed through routinised behaviour:

I have to be there on a regular basis otherwise I don't quite feel right. Being in church and with the choir. (Penny, May, 2020)

Penny's spiritual wellness came through her participation in the choir which was a central part of attending mass and in particular receiving communion. She further professed to 'never missing going to communion' even if she was playing. She would 'always go down' to receive the sacraments. It was for her 'always seen as a separate thing'.

In conclusion here, we might be drawn to theoretical associations once more. Wellness is of course a result of the expression and action of well-being. The constancy and regularity of routine in their spiritual discipline was important to most of the participants, and wellness was maintained through the regularity of mass and receiving the sacraments. This spiritual participation in communion ensured and maintained their wellness in body, mind and spirit. As a result of this, the singers were given added 'meaning' (Seligman, 2011: 27) and would 'generally feel that that what they did in their lives was valuable and worthwhile'. This in keeping with the theory of well-being and not the moment-to-moment theory of happiness (Michaelson et al., 2012: 6). Happiness often refers to how people are feeling moment-to-moment and does not tell us how they evaluate their lives as a whole or about how they function in the world. Well-being is a broader concept: it includes happiness but also other things such as how satisfied people are with their lives as a whole and things such as purpose (having a sense of purpose). Spiritual wellness came for the singers by the regular routines of Mass and liturgical singing. This was enhanced by regularly being in the choir and contributing to what they considered important in life and what it meant to them. Experiencing life as meaningful seems to be a major component of human well-being, and a major source for human action (Croom, 2014: 10). Seligman's block of Meaning in the PERMA model helps us further understand these human actions.

## 6.5 Conclusion

Finding one saw ideas relating to Church community were expressed in various ways and by joining a choir enabled the gateway to being a part of this. The participants wanted to be part of a church community and we witnessed this in some of the interviews e.g., Simon and Martin. They further wanted to be of use in their later years to both the church life and the choir. Added to, the benefit of regular interpersonal relationships. The positive experiences were many, and this extended to the participants expressing good relationships. This benefitted the church community.

Finding two revealed there were varied opinions regarding the importance of the Church and its leaders – these were both positive as well as negative based on personal experiences. There was a lot of positive feedback given about the practices and priestly leadership of individual churches as seen in the interviews with Penny and Daisy. A few participants such as Angela were critical. In some ways the failure of clergy to recognize such spiritual needs in older people is not uncommon or unexpected (MacKinlay, 2001: 16). Much depends on the relationships with priests and leaders. Some had found that they were attending church to support the choir and uphold the practice of liturgy, and a poor opinion of their priest did not stop them, but it did disappoint them. The participants often expressed the view that a priest's thinking was out-of-date. When this was the case, participants such as Catrina who explored new ways of churching, via the internet. Choral Directors were found be important to church work, relationships and in the role of leadership. Strong leadership was something that was clearly desired and appreciated.

Finding three revealed spiritual wellness was an important factor to some participants and attending church was crucial in maintaining this. We might see it as a form of nourishing and refreshment for those who attended mass through their choiring. They spoke of having an inner peace as a result of having this sustenance of spiritual form in the receiving of the body and blood given at mass. For some, such as Catrina, the expression of this wellness was marked by church calendar and season ie. that of Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and Festival days. For others, such as Penny she just had to be there regularly.

The data suggests that a church context is important to people. This is in the regularity of community, regular practice, to be learning and to be with others through activity. It is



through this that 'uniqueness of a flourishing paradigm on human well-being lies in its insistence that education and teaching is woven into the very fabric of flourishing' (Kristjansson, 2017: 29). In the learning activity of church-singing, my participants experienced these very essences of flourishing through the values of music, its happiness and shared creativity. I now move in the next chapter to the discussion of the findings through the theory of well-being (2011) and how it relates to flourishing in older singers and church choiring. It is through the recognizing and understanding of the blocks of PERMA that can lead to operationalizing and utilizing it.

## **CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

Chapter 7 comprises of two parts. The first half (Part 1), discusses the insights into how PERMA helps us understand the experiences of the participants. I do this by going through each block, in which I focus what it gives us in relation to church singing and its involvement of older persons. Concluding each block is a short section which suggests further discernment for Choral-Directors regarding its understanding. The second half (Part 2), looks at PERMA in practice, here I look at the practical implications of my research.

### **Part 1**

In Chapter 2's Literature Review I suggested the need for research-based activities to promote well-being (Uusiautti and Määttä, 2014; 2016). According to Martindale, Collins and Dabney (2005), the closer the different areas of team activity – e.g., tactical, psychological and social training – become intertwined, the more likely will they positively influence the individuals/groups training. Church singing is a skill where PERMA-based intervention in group activity could be met this is because it pays attention to the sense of meaning in doing (Uusiautti et al., 2017: 35).

The findings of this study conclude and support the idea that participating in church-singing can support the various components of the PERMA model for older adults. The mechanisms for how this was achieved through musicking were unique for each individual person and contextually-specific as can often be the case (Bradford, 2020: 366). The overall benefit of well-being offered through this socially and spiritually based activity of church singing was significant for the majority of my participants.

To make sense of these qualitative findings I have categorized and related them under the five PERMA blocks as overarching themes. This has been necessary in order to scrutinize, align and present them in accordance with PERMA theory of well-being and scholarship relating to the themes. The categorizing of the blocks corresponded with the writing of Seligman's own theory of well-being and his book *Flourish* (2011) and other PERMA inspired projects including Bradford (2020), Lamont et al., (2017) Ascenso, Williamon and Perkins (2016) and Croom (2014). They have been clarified through conversations with Professor Rosie Perkins of the Royal College of Music, London who has advised on matters related to positive psychology

and the PERMA model (2011). The themes are also closely linked with the key concepts of well-being (see chapter 2). The three previous chapters headed 'Personal Experiences of Participants', 'Well-being' and 'Church and Religious, Discussion and Context' I believe have served a purpose in collating the findings and prepare the reader for the subsequent discussion of theoretical context and the Overarching Themes of the PERMA model. It is hoped through a discussion of context that understanding, value and purpose will be gained when applying the theory of well-being alongside the overall findings.

## **7.1 Overarching theme 1 - Positive emotion**

The pre-dominantly overarching theme of positive emotion was present with all of the participants. This was evident in the data collection and a few spoke of negative emotions and experiences also. Three related sub-themes combined to generate the overarching theme, including; (1) Pleasure providing (2) Participants' backgrounds and early experiences and (3) The importance of the Church and its leaders including Choral-Directors the positives and negatives.

### **7.1.1 Pleasure providing (Chapter 4 finding 3)**

Singing church music and its repertoire provided enjoyment and positive experience. The participants were drawn to compositional works by Baroque composers such as Schütz and Handel, but equally by the more modern in Stopford and Meece. It was through the varied works, positive experiences and in the performance of this church-inspired repertoire and hymns (Harkins, 2012) that they were able to manage their understanding through a process of listening, critiquing, and discussing then eventually rehearsing and refining through practice and performance (Bradford, 2020: 127).

Further to this, we must perhaps recognize the ways in which an individual gains a 'heightened sense of control, efficacy or mastery' (Cohen 2009: 49) as a result of this pleasure. Peppin and Deutscher (2011) identified that older adults want to make choices about participatory tasks, and for them to match their interests to a greater level. As a result of this, we may link their preferences towards positive aspect of general health and well-being (Laukka, 2007).

As a Choral Director, the task of team building is made easier when the singer is able to notably enjoy performing church music. Their goal is to ensure that the experience is positive. There is a wealth of church music repertoire, be it hymns or select pieces motets and anthems. There are many beautiful melodies and harmonies to be found in the wealth of church music. It is in these traits of musical score that positive emotions and pleasure are found. Giving goals and managing people is important at whatever age or stage in life as Daisy and Rupert both testified. Learning church music repertoire can be a way of maintaining interest and this was found to be true as the accounts of Iris and Martha both outlined partly because the experience of church life and singing had been a constant throughout their lives. Older learners are more likely to be stimulated by something that brings them interest and seek to nurture their abilities. I believe this to be true because my participants were shown to be very committed to their interest in choiring. Positive Emotions expressed through the PERMA model is seen to support those challenging paths and nurture the different backgrounds of people. Because of this, positive emotion or pleasure experienced through activity increases the amount of happiness and sense of well-being (Seligman, 2011: 26). This of course is not always the case as negative emotions might become a barrier to one's learning (Kotter-Grühn, 2022).

### **7.1.2 Participants' backgrounds and early experiences (Chapter 4 finding 1)**

There is currently a lack of recognition and valued importance given to why older people take up participatory singing. The participants within this study were able to relate their early childhood and formative years in education as reasons for revisiting this interest after retirement. Hence the conclusion to the finding that it was in this study the participants' backgrounds and early experiences which often accounted for their perceptions about singing. This project has outlined the need for individuals to identify and rehearse past skills, whilst acquiring new skills, preparing the increased awareness of them to face the challenges of ongoing skills development. For many of the participants there was an almost nostalgic return to a youthful interest. This is not to be underestimated and could yield vital research because of the common trait of infant or school day recollections and this is in keeping with related research (Hallam, 2010: 269). Positive emotions are something that makes us feel good: activities that are enjoyed and looked forward to (Seligman, 2011). Positive emotions were clearly evident for the participants and therefore demonstrated that this component of

the PERMA model can be supported through singing. My project findings are in line with other British studies which have concluded that the arts and the cultural experience of children play a key role in what their adult lives will be like (Stone, 2017: Bradford, 2020: 175).

The implications of this are important for the Choral Director because in knowing such backgrounds of the older singer, they are then able to gain a good understanding of their choir member, their past and present abilities, forge a bond of trust with them and create a program of study for them. This in turn leads to the sharing of interests and reinvigorating those positive experiences with them and their colleagues leading to intrinsic development within the activity of church singing. Whilst alleviating negative experiences and creating more positives through choiring from an early age can only serve to enhance the individual in their learning. Remembering and reconnecting in this way offered 'some anchorage to life' (Joseph and Southcott, 2013).

### **7.1.3 The importance of the Church and its leaders including Choral-Directors the positives and negatives (Chapter 6 finding 2)**

In addition to the overall findings, there was an unexpected one. Identified within this study was the importance of the role of the leaders as in the priest and Choral-Director. The relationship to the individual mattered and viewed as either a positive or negative in their lives. At a parish level, some felt their priest was disconnected with them and not interested in their relationship. The participants desired a more direct and stronger relationship with their priest. Because of a lack of relationship with priest, some participants spoke openly how the community was unable to thrive and a negative experience. This opinion was expressed by a good number of participants for example in Catrina who spoke honestly about Ministerial failings at leadership level but also about the importance of 'communing'. We might put such negatives down to down to clashes of personality, training or an over-focus on administering the Sacraments (MacKinlay, 2001: 244). But in establishing such positive support, clergy and people are able to work for the good and better, thus moving away from a more traditional role and Catholic ministry within society (2001: 245). Negative interactions are perhaps to be expected in a sacred environment as well as those secular situations (Krause et al., 1998; Krause and Jay, 1991). Of course, it is in the positive ideals and in serving a collective purpose that growth is enabled having overcome such matters. Daisy's insights here were important

because of her involvement as both a practitioner (as a singer) and as an administrator in her parish (working with the clergy in supporting their office and parish role). Simon reminded us of how the Choral-Director can mold and create those positive experiences through active learning and clear direction.

This study established the role of the Choral Director, is important to such choirs and church communities. It is a valuable support to any church and parish network. I feel that the role particularly that of Choral Director is a position very much currently underestimated. Often the learning of music is the priority within such a position. But equally I recognize that with a strong sense of community and positive networking, the role can be further enhanced and used to support social as well as spiritual relationships not only through the priest but with others working within the overall church family. People-skills and matters relating to this can only enhance relationships all-round. Such positive experiences matter to people existing within the church family. Whilst we might criticize this and say it down to the subjective it is through a modelled way that people overcome the negative so they say “that was fun, that was wonderful” (Seligman, 2011: 17).

Good relations with priests and other leaders are important for the Choral Director. In the preparation of music and liturgy, being of similar mind can make the job easier. It may be recognized that not all clergy are comfortable with working with Choral Directors and choir persons. Good training and professionalism are required because of the importance of task and in representing strong and dedicated knowledge of the Christian example. Through this finding I also outline my own role as a Choral-Director and teacher in how it can be used to support the individual and group in their general well-being. Unity of relationship enables good general well-being and positivity between parties. The relationships reflected through Clergy as well as Choral-Director were seen to matter to people in this project and they looked for constructive leadership as Simon asserted.

## **7.2 Overarching theme 2 – Engagement/Educational Development**

The overarching theme of Educational Development was present for all the participants. Without the block of ‘Engagement’, the development of educational learning (therefore termed as Educational Development) and sourced in the strengths of curiosity, love of learning, and creativity (Seligman, 2011: 85) would not be possible. Through the data

collection, one sub-theme combined to generate the overarching educational development theme, singing was an educational journey in later life.

### **7.2.1 Singing as an educational journey in later life (Chapter 4 finding 4)**

For some of the participants, singing was recognized as an educational journey in later life. Though this engagement must be viewed as a unique combination of individually-specific aspects of the overarching themes (Bradford, 2020: 177). My singers were engaged in their practice and therefore developing educationally. The journey as a singer throughout their lives was often identified seen as an on-going education as with Simon and Rupert.

Those returning or taking up the interest again in later life agreed they had the time to appreciate this purpose in further learning and creativity (Maslow, 1967) and the experience of flow (Seligman, 2011: 11). This was often a highly specific and personal form of engagement contributing to their well-being. The levels of 'flow' differed and were spoken about in varied ways. Sometimes the activity was viewed as an opportunity to give-back to others, recognized in terms of time rather than financial purpose. Also, the singers were happy to use time away from the group meetings to practise or have additional vocal lessons for the church choir's cause. In doing this, they recognized the additional value in other ways; mental, physical and emotional (Hobbs, 2016). This was still something they acknowledged even though it carried a lesser importance. For the majority, the regularity (Heyning, 2010) and social side was a vital part of their chosen commitment to the group. Engaging in church singing based activities provides benefits to the well-being of older adults in later life learning. For me the idea of 'flow' is a strong reason to benefit use of time and purpose and relieve other stresses in life (Csikzentmihalyi, 1988).

If the Choral-Director ensures the singer has an individual programme or role within the choir, they will undoubtedly feel that their contribution is personally worthwhile and educationally beneficial to them through the 'engaged life' (Seligman, 2011: 11).

## **7.3 Overarching theme 3 – Relationship**

The overarching theme of relationship was present for all the participants. This was evident in the data collection. Three related sub-themes combined to generate the overarching

theme: (1) social well-being, camaraderie and connectedness and the formation of the (2) Church community.

### **7.3.1 Social well-being, camaraderie and connectedness (Chapter 5 finding 1)**

Regarding well-being in the context of this project, social well-being, camaraderie and connectedness were found to be important factors amongst the groups researched. The social well-being of the participants was desired in order to find a sense of contentment and a feeling of value and that being valued by others was important (Ascenso, Williamon and Perkins, 2016, 17; Ellis, 2018: 111). Camaraderie and connectedness with other singers were a necessary element to their lives (Gallet, 2016). It was maintained and regularly managed through the weekly routine in meeting as a choir and this ensured their connections through positive relationships. Being with others, bonding in a shared skill, is often a happy and uplifting experience (Keyes, 1998). I found this to be true though the experiences shared by Iris. At times, the habits and comments made by others could be irritating for some, such as Martin, but this was accepted as part of the overall group experience. Some participants expressed a wish for association between each other, and between themselves and the other singers, to continue after the formalities of mass and rehearsing. It offered the basis for impacting future friendships. It presented a sense of new possibilities to this end. Of course, these findings echo those of Bailey and Davidson (2002) where the choir gave participants a supportive context in which they could develop social skills and achieve collective goals. MacNaughton, White and Stacy note that 'good relationships are a major determinant of health' (2005: 334) and necessary for older people to have 'meaningful social engagement and interchange' (Stewart and Lonsdale, 2016; Cohen, 2009: 49). The resulting benefits contributed to their overall sense of well-being. According to the PERMA model, the ability to develop and maintain positive relationships with others is crucial for maintaining successful levels of well-being (Seligman, 2011: 19). But equally important is the fact that singing provided the opportunity for the agent of change (Norton, 2016: 76).

The stability of any team or group is important, so the role of the Choral-Director is to provide for the singers an atmosphere which is healthy and supports good camaraderie and connectedness. This was concurrent with the original research question regarding how the teaching of singing was approached and impacted on participants in terms of their social well-



being. The significance of this data suggests that creating a good and healthy environment in which to learn is of pivotal to the older persons' learning. Investing in both time and patience might be a consideration when adopting the use of this pillar. Church friendships are necessary for the activation of this process of growth for those involved (Olson, 1989). Other people are the best antidote to the downs of life and the single most reliable up (Seligman, 2011: 20).

### **7.3.2 Church community (Chapter 6 finding 1)**

Regarding church and religious context, the singers acknowledged they were doing something important not just for themselves in choring. It led to the finding of their ideas relating to church community being expressed in various ways. For some, involvement offered a gateway to being part of their parish and community as Martin expressed when he moved to the area having retired. The bond of being together and working together as a team to praise and worship God is important to people (Sarot, 2014). The notion of corporate worship and leading the congregation was an important aspect of serving (Joseph, 2015: 35) and attested to by participants such as Martha. In my work 'group singing has been shown to be good for ...building community' (Ellis, 2018: 113). Community arts and the singing may be capable of transformative work (Lamont et al, 2017: 15; Murray and Lamont, 2012). This idea of community and the sense of belonging gave added purpose to the individuals as practicing Catholics, it acted as a correlation with their spiritual connectedness (Billington, 2019; Southcott and Joseph, 2014). Active participation by older people in the community has many benefits and can improve their quality of life (Cohen, Bailey and Nillson, 2022) and can benefit others associated with this (Joseph, 2014: 125). Concurrent with other studies, my data concluded that 'positive social relationships and being a member of the choir group fostered pro-social behaviour. This impacted the individual's self-esteem, belonging, meaning, sense of purpose, control and efficacy in life' (Cruwys, Haslam, Dingle and Jetten, 2014). Martha, Daisy and Rupert spoke deeply about this. As a result of this, the church provided a place of support for these community relationships and behaviour. Developing in this way as an inclusive group, individuals acquire the skills necessary 'to successfully interact with others and therefore able to function within their own community' (Ryan and Deci, 2000) becoming active citizens.

A Choral-Director should be in no doubt that the work of church choirs and communities are closely related. Music has a way of touching people and opening windows of opportunity. For those who are lonely or seek to be a part of something, the church can be a necessary gateway to the lives of older people (Haddad, 2013). This inclusion through the church choir is important. Maybe it is in the taught attitude to learning that the facilitator can foster the rightness of mind in the learner. In encouraging this, the leader is able to capitalize not only on the musical work but also that which engages beyond the church walls (Gallet, 2016).

## **7.4 Overarching theme 4 – Meaning**

The overarching theme of Meaning was present for all the participants. Two sub-themes were found to present that generated the overarching theme of Meaning: (1) Spiritual well-being and (2) Spiritual Wellness.

### **7.4.1 Spiritual well-being (Chapter 5 finding 2)**

Meaning is concerned with leading a purposeful life; experiencing a meaningful existence (Bradford, 2020: 305). The participants' well-being in regard to their spiritual lives was an important factor relating to the project. Their spiritual well-being often depended on the depth of experience and support. In other words, the participants' assertion of 'spiritual well-being' and experience was personalized, contextualized (Hobbs, 2016: 33) and dependent on their own perceptions (Dowson and Miner, 2016). These related to for example, 'a connection to the divine', or 'collective group spirituality'. The deepness of their religious experiences and churchmanship was explored personally and through the support of others. This was evident in for example Daisy sharing her ideas regarding spirituality and music through singing and what it meant for her. She related her views to the collective experience of singing and this was mirrored by Catrina who reflected on the more personal forms of this. As Catholics, their spiritual practices were realized each week in attending Mass and this impacted their understanding and what it meant for them as musicians within this, Penny spoke deeply about this. On the other hand, Rupert felt the experience was attributable to emotions and not spiritual means. For him his spiritual well-being came purely from the music and was not dependent on other matters.

The project underlined the importance of spiritual well-being for the majority of the participants. In this project I suggest the singers were further spiritually nourished by their participation because of their involvement in church-choiring. Catrina, Martha and Daisy both talked about the way in which the sung music affected them through the regularity of being exposed to the melody, harmony as well the lyrics. This contributed to their positive sense of meaning and understanding of what they did. Meaning contributes significantly to well-being (Seligman, 2011: 18) and examples of this were plentiful in evidence.

It is important that any Choral Director working in a church related atmosphere encourages spiritual growth or certainly does not impede it within an individual. This is because it would be contrary to the ethos of the institution and therefore negative in its outlook and development. The data suggests older singers found meaning through their spiritual practice and through regularly attending Church Mass. Iris was a prime example of this and she referred to the need to be with her 'big spiritual family'. The PERMA model itself recommends that a meaningful life is central to experiencing a satisfactory level of well-being. The evidence in this project supports this theoretical finding that all the participants in this project experienced a high level of meaning through their church singing and church practices. This routine might be encouraged by the Choral-Director where singers might become disillusioned or discontented in such practices. Spiritual fellowship is at the heart of any church choir and affects individuals regardless of their churchmanship. The Choral Director's role is of encouragement to faith and spiritual well-being. Choiring serves as a support to a greater enhancement of spiritual well-being in the lives of older people. Music might serve to reaffirm faith because of its affiliative powers (Norton, 2016: 83).

#### **7.4.2 Spiritual wellness (Chapter 6 finding 3)**

Spiritual wellness was an important factor to some participants. It was a demonstration of the singers' commitment to their regular church life and involvement in the activity. What struck me was the importance of communion to them. In this project, both the spiritual embodiment and physical partaking for the individuals was a necessary factor for attending church and choir. The regularity of this act signified their commitment to faith as well as to the group. This was directly referred to by Penny and Catrina. They spoke about their 'communing' with others and gave them further meaning and purpose (Smith, 2016). Martin referred to it as

'harmonies moving your mind to peace'. Being in that place and with others of a similar mind drove this wellness and the participants felt the activity they did in their lives was valuable and worthwhile (Seligman, 2011: 27) and significant to life (Bradford, 2020: 242).

Choral Directors might view spiritual wellness as important simply because without it the regular attendance of singers at church might be affected and change the overall status of the choir. Catrina talked about the 'synergy' offered through wellness and I suggest this might be the essence of atmosphere and learning adopted by the Choral Director. Synergy is the interaction and cooperating of a number of agents to produce greater effects. These effects might be viewed as the preparation for operating PERMA. The intrinsic drive of a strong faith can often motivate people to act out their faith in varied and creative ways. Regular routines aid this drive.

## **7.5 Overarching theme 5 – Achievement**

The overarching theme of Achievement was present for all the participants. Two sub-themes were combined to generate the overarching theme. The data collection revealed that these were: (1) Satisfaction and (2) Confidence.

### **7.5.1 Satisfaction (Chapter 4 finding 5)**

From the sub-theme regarding satisfaction, I was able to conclude that through regular involvement and performing in a church choir, the participant's satisfaction was positively impacted. Their satisfaction was gained through singing. The accounts of Rupert told us that it gave him a sense of fulfilment and self-satisfaction and spoke about how it was not 'just a technical exercise.' In voluntary leisure activities, such as singing in a choir, achieving goals is important to human beings' well-being and quality of life (Joseph and Human, 2021; Seligman, 2011). It is crucial to provide small goals as well as long term ones (Uusiautti et al., 2017: 34). It is important in how to achieve these goals as well as regular support and feedback about performances (Weinberg and Gould, 2007). Goal setting is important in any kind of training as is monitoring. Whilst rewarding progress might not be something usual for older singers, clear expectations, mindset, grit, perseverance, reliance, self-control, positive feedback, praise and support are all factors contributing to healthy achievement (Uusiautti et al, 2017: 35). These factors relate heavily to issues involving confidence.

### **7.5.2 Confidence (Chapter 4 finding 2)**

From the sub-theme finding regarding confidence, I was able to conclude that through an active and regular involvement in church singing, the participant's confidence was positively impacted. Their confidence was positively impacted through singing. The accounts of Angela and Simon testified to the challenges but inherent rewards from the activity. The regularity of this activity gave them a renewed vigor in this skill each week and heightened their individual and collective growth as voluntary musicians working in church circles (Bonshor, 2014). Added to this the performance of varied types of church music repertoire gave them new found knowledge through their skill and added to their confidence levels (Ascenso, Williamon and Perkins, 2016: 16). They were able to express this development of further gained contentment and self-satisfaction. This confidence was further built through the desire to practice more out of choir time. Martin's lovely comment was that he did not like to get it wrong and stated that 'it's got to be good, it's for the Lord!'

In monitoring these routines and behaviours the Choral Director is able to make a more personal and professional judgement regarding the singers' educational learning. This undoubtedly can forge a stronger bond of trust with them. This is achieved by constructively critiquing them and refining their objectives and goals. The PERMA theoretical model I believe is a way to achieve this objective in helping the Choral Director make sense of the experiences of the older person in church singing. This is offered as 'a building material involving the self through the learning (DeNora, 2000: 62). The Choral Director has the capacity to reinforce the levels of confidence perhaps sought through their self-identity, self-efficacy and self-esteem (Reed et al. 2010). It ultimately leads to fulfilling the sense of achievement desired. This finding is in line with other associated studies regarding older people creativity and music (Habron et al., 2012: 6; Creech et al., 2013).

In conclusion to part 1, we must remember that the PERMA model is little more than 12 years old and the true credibility of studies on music have not yet been reviewed and integrated under the PERMA framework from positive psychology to further explore and explicate this possibility. Recent scholarship (Hendry, Lynam and Lafarge, 2022: 13) to date suggest that not all situations are transferable regarding well-being research and often requires clear 'insight

of a typical community singing group presented from a rich and reliable data source.’ There are many less than obvious factors for well-being involving for example the association of the singing group membership and self-actualization, personal and social identity and social connectedness.’ These are very important in the overall contextual assessment of good mental and physical well-being (Haslam, 2018). For this reason, there is still a gap in the literature, regardless of my own work, and due caution must be given to any presented knowledge and assumptions made.

Through insight, positive leadership, strong and focused guidance of a Choral-Director, the PERMA theoretical model can be unlocked to build an educational program and establish a positive-relationship individually as well as collectively. My work consequently and empirically supports the grounds for the main claims made that church-singing positively contributes to one’s cultivation of psychological well-being through the social and spiritual. It therefore offers a more flourishing life and demonstrates the value of the positive psychology framework in explaining why church choirs can promote the importance of well-being for older persons. Having called to action the implications of PERMA within the field of study, I next suggest ways in which the PERMA model might be used and operationalized.

## **Part 2**

### **7.6 PERMA in practice**

In this section, I offer a few thoughts in ways to deliver PERMA through the practice of church singing. The PERMA model is an evidence-based approach and I believe workable in a church environment because of what it offers through the maintaining of health and well-being offered through the social and spiritual (Fancourt and Finn, 2019) and such related aspects of learning. There is no one right approach or formula, as the practice depends upon the context and intentions of those applying it (Kern, 2020: 13). My experiences are purely qualitatively based through working with people in a church setting and observing how PERMA is relevant to them through choiring. It is through each block that we find use and ways to operationalize them (Uusiautti et al., 2017/see thesis Chapter 2 p.39 and Chapter 3 p.83).

I have mentioned already the lack of papers that suggest ways to operationalize the PERMA model. This is perhaps because of the personal nature it implies to each and every scenario

or situation. I claim that PERMA can be a useful way to help Choral-Directors and older singers develop well-being skills and the associations of learning connected to it within the church setting. Each block aligns with specific activities that support the block. Begin by choosing and focusing on one block. Get to know what the block means, consider some of the research and strategies that support the pillar. My table below provides some detail (see McQuaid and Kern, 2017 for additional details and examples). Different activities will fit different people, so it is useful to experiment with different activities, seeing which activities work best for the assigned person/s. The process may be enhanced by using clergy or other leaders to give it a more spiritual stamp, particularly the blocks involving meaning and relationship.

**Example of an introductory activity for a Choral Director when working and advising a new choir member (less confident and less able as a singer) that supports the PERMA blocks.**

### **P**ositive emotion

<b>Block</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Example activities</b>
<b>Positive emotion</b>	Promote Positivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write down a list that of positive musical experiences you have had.</li> <li>• What has created these moments of joy?</li> </ul>
	Decrease negativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are often our own worst critics.</li> <li>• Listen to a piece of music you don't care for and write down how it <i>might appeal to others</i>.</li> <li>• <i>What is it that makes it so distinct?</i></li> </ul>
	Growth gratitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to other pieces of music which make you feel positive What is it within the music that you most appreciate and Enjoy?</li> <li>• Jot them down and revisit them in those times you</li> <li>• Have felt less confident as a result of musical experience.</li> <li>• How have you overcome these?</li> </ul>

**Table 2: PERMA: Positive emotion block of introductory activities**

## Engagement

Block	Strategy	Example activities
<b>Engagement</b>	Discover and use your strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are your talents and strengths in music/other activities?</li> <li>• What energizes you and gives you a sense of life?</li> <li>• What are your flaws and weaknesses.</li> <li>• Complete a quick survey, such as the values In Action (<a href="http://www.viacharacter.org">www.viacharacter.org</a>) to help to get to know your strengths.</li> <li>• Then consider how you can use your strengths in relation to the choir,</li> <li>• Draw on these strengths to bring out the best in yourself and possibly others.</li> </ul>
	Reduce distractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you give full attention to things?</li> <li>• What makes you calm in your learning environment?</li> <li>• What helps your focus?</li> </ul>
	Engage in mindful actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindfulness involves being present in the moment, not dwelling on the past or worrying about the future.</li> <li>• Engaging in simple, mindful activities can help focus attention and be more centered.</li> <li>• Try singing along to a few favourite song/s for a few minutes each day</li> </ul>

**Table 3: PERMA: Engagement block of introductory activities**

## Relationships

Block	Strategy	Example activities
<b>Relationships</b>	Cultivate a new friendship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify someone from the choir who acts as a support with the new member within rehearsals they can answer questions and thus cultivates a further network of support.</li> </ul>
	Be available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience suggests that a Choral Director must be available. This may mean leaving your door open to new members of the choir.</li> <li>• Be available to spend the first few sessions with them as a guide.</li> <li>• Ask others how they are <i>really</i> going on and listen if not. Suggest ways they could take simple role to feel included (e.g., making drinks).</li> </ul>

**Table 4: PERMA: Relationships block of introductory activities**



## Meaning

Block	Strategy	Example activities
Meaning	Find your story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is your story as a musician? If not, how has participatory activity featured in your life?.</li> <li>• What successes have you had. What failures, how were they overcome.</li> <li>• What lessons have been learnt along the way. How has your faith/ beliefs helped?</li> </ul>
	Gain perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We get lost within the worries and activities of everyday life. Use singing to enhance the faith.</li> <li>• Take time to think how the skill of singing might be used to enhance your strengths and bring you closer to your faith. How can those leading help this journey?</li> </ul>

Table 5: PERMA: Meaning block of introductory activities

## Accomplishment

Block	Strategy	Example activities
Accomplishment	Take one small step	When things seem impossible, it is helpful to take one small step. What do you perceive will be your first few challenges? What actions might You/ We take to overcome this. Make a record of the challenges and these can be discussed.
	Personal Study Plan	This does not need to be formal unless chosen to be. Let's keep in mind a plan of how you are progressing in your singing and how to maintain your motivations. We can revisit these overtime and adjust your learning plans/goals.

Table 6: PERMA: Accomplishments block of introductory activities

I have been using the model for nearly a year and a lot of how I have informed my own practice with PERMA has been through sourcing relevant literature and cautiously implementing these into my own ways involving strategy and activity. Seligman's own language I find motivating in itself. I also find this positivity in sharing and discussing issues to do with PERMA important with my work colleagues. Communicating this intention with the older singers is very much part of the practice. The easily identifiable structure, motivates me to motivate them. I believe the working of each block is approachable and stronger as a shared process between myself as the Choral-Director and older singer. In this, it gives both of us a sense of ownership in the approach, thus working towards the ultimate improvement of well-being through church singing. I find this way of working interest and excites them in the quest of finding new ways they have not considered within their learning. As a teacher I believe in the pursuit of musical excellence at all levels realistically achievable for people. The

thought process offered behind the PERMA model enables these standards to be met and further provides a safety net for more deliberation if something is not working for both myself as well as the student.

### **7.6.1 Positive emotion expressed in warm-ups**

An example of practical use might be helpful here. Making singing more a more positive experience might be done simply. A few of the singers noted that they enjoyed singing hymn based warm ups. I have found using popular hymn lines or verses as ways to begin rehearsals fun and creative. I also use notable extracts from recent motets or anthems, the singers might choose their own lines which resonate with them. In Iris's words, 'they make me feel good.' Creative fun and joy are ways of aiding the positive learning experience. Where appropriate individuals or groups might use this process to bond in singing through their assigned vocal parts, Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass. In liturgical performances, I find that hymns are sung in a more positive and understood way as a result.

The subtlety could come in practical solutions to difficult and challenging lines within chosen repertoire. Where people have expressed negativity about the music score (often because of dissonance or the challenges in the musical melody/harmony, the Choral-Director could use related pieces or those difficult passages or phrases to warm up with. In using these negative emotions problems can be overcome by restoring confidence through the resumption of detailed challenge in a light-hearted environment. It also enhances the learning of repertoire so that when music is repeated there are positive processes of learning remembered and used to counter-balance those difficulties encountered within the past learning scenarios.

Equally, Rounds are a good way to warm up singers and encourage positive emotions. I have found Rounds are fun and creative. Quite often creating one's own rounds using hymn tunes such as the chorus of 'Seek Ye First' or 'All People That on Earth Do dwell' can evoke positive feelings and reactions because of familiarity. Additional resources may be found in Clive Walkley's (2013) '100 Warm-Up Rounds'. The Choral Director may remember a selection of these feel-good exercises. Over a period of time, they may be incorporated into a program of study individual singers or even collectively as a choir can benefit from. Further examples of warm up books might be found in Tina Reibl's (2019) 'The Ultimate Book of Warm-Ups and Energizers: Turbo Charge your Choir'. A more sacred music centered approach can be found

Jay Althouse's (1995) 'The Complete Choral Warm-Up Book: A Sourcebook for Choral Directors.' Also, 'How to Train Your Choir' (Hill, Parfitt and Ash, 2009). Arguably, the possibilities of utilizing positive emotion through the practical sense of melody and harmony is boundless. Though using PERMA might not always be evident or obvious in this way, one must seek out the pedagogies and excellences in their route (White and Kern, 2018).

### **7.6.2 Other ways of using PERMA**

Breathing Exercises are useful in warm up procedures. Such practices are common in sport (Uusiautti et al., 2017: 6). They are referenced as mindfulness procedures teaching athletes to be present, focusing on performance. In a similar way, church singers might enter into prayerful atmosphere and focus their preparation for rehearsals or Mass. Whilst breathing Exercises for some it may be regarded as being a more physiological approach, it again uses aspects of the PERMA model through engagement and the activity of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) in the act of engaging liturgical mind-set i.e., in prayer and concentration. Quietness and calm offered in the aspect of hearing and utilizing 'Flow' individually and collectively can be very effective. This form of togetherness is something workable and reflected in learning to build team strength (Uusiautti et al., 2017: 6). I find it is transferrable skill in choiring.

Another exercise building up the more social and relational aspect of PERMA through singing is through the use of working with others. A very simple way of doing this is in an exercise I call 'Love the sound of thy neighbour'. This is very simply getting the singer to face a partner. Sing *ee* at an agreed pitch straight at each other and listen to how the sounds begin to merge. The process naturally improves listening but with older persons it creates not least a conversation because of social interaction and togetherness (Hendry et al., 2022: 6). PERMA focuses down on the intention in a highly stylized and formatted way and because of this the learning I think is more valuable. This is because of the detail in the preparation which might normally be missed but also in the perspective given (Seligman, 2011: 248) and the consideration of contextualization (Kingfisher, 2013, 68). In this way I find I critically engage with the learner because of the process allowed for by the PERMA model. The varied nature of the model allows me to be inclusive in the wideness of participation and the varying of abilities within the singers. Also, in the overall drive to process these skills through confidence

finding aspects relating to the social and spiritual are to be found through networking and workings of PERMA being operationalized in such ways.

Regular conversation is important. Quite often I have found that when discussing my work with fellow professionals, Choral Directors might be very good at creating liturgical music lists and very little is done to look at the needs of individuals or the choir as a group. I believe that learning through the PERMA model in this way gives a necessary and constructed guide to older peoples' learning. The church setting almost demands it because of the drive of the liturgical year.

Beyond drawing on the blocks to shape activities and interventions, I have found PERMA as a guiding framework for embedding well-being within church singing and its setting. It gives a wider perspective to the intention and expression of learning. The choice begins with determining whether the PERMA model is appropriate to the context of the church. The question being ever present in one's mind - To what extent does PERMA align with these values and interests?

The activities considered must be aligned with the blocks, identifying and communicating a clear purpose and intention for those activities. Carefully planned activities identify which skills are being developed, their underlying intentions, and communicate the purpose, rationale, and learning process for those older students. Activities should focus on quality rather than quantity, emphasizing pedagogical aspects (White and Kern, 2018). Quite often a block of PERMA will naturally lead to another whilst it is being utilized within an activity. It is through the combination of these blocks that the levels of learning are met and progressed.

As a practitioner, I might encourage others to incorporate PERMA into taught curriculum where possible as others agree (White and Kern, 2018). Often Choral-Directors are in part-time church leadership roles. They may share this role as a Music Teacher in school or peripatetically. Through using the PERMA example in taught curriculum, I have become more aware that the practice of using PERMA process is a personalized journey. There is very little to assist the musician with professional development, resources and support. It is helpful that in the role of teacher, you get to know the ideas underlying PERMA, try activities in your own life, and consider what resonates with them (Norrish et al, 2013). Various resources and

curricula supporting the PERMA elements are available, through organizations such as the Positive Education Schools Association (<http://www.pesa.edu.au>) and the education division of the International Positive Psychology Association ([www.ippanetwork.net](http://www.ippanetwork.net)). In my mind, PERMA is both a 'theory for inclusion' as well as a 'theory of consideration.' This is because it can be utilized whilst supporting other means but requires additional thinking whilst planning. The PERMA model provides a framework for advisors to intentionally cultivate these qualities through varied mediums such as portfolios, projects, self-reflection/assessments, and exercises (Ward, 2008). I call for more research regarding the application of the PERMA model and fresh approaches to its operationalization within participatory music-making.

However, I must report a few issues which might be considered as flaws to the working of the theory of well-being expressed in the PERMA model. Firstly, I have alluded to the fact that a lot of the operationalization of it depends on the operator. This will of course impact the effectiveness of delivery. Without a strong musician, communicator and arguably someone who has worked for a while within a church environment, the whole ethos and applicability of the PERMA model might be questioned and its effectiveness. Secondly, when considering emotions, negativity has been found to be a major barrier to the learning of older people (Freidmann and Robbins, 2012; Kotter-Grühn, 2022). This state and mindset are not always won over as a result of using the PERMA model. I have personally found this regularly when trying to adopt PERMA with the education of older persons. I contest that not enough research identifies with this issue and cites a more balanced approach to positive and negative emotions. Rather, 'Where individuals tend to see failures as opportunities to grow and are more likely to dissect mistakes to grow in order to avoid similar situations in the future (Tang et al., 2019). For this reason, it is wrong for scholars to only have a one-sided debate. Thirdly, we might remind ourselves that the theory of well-being and PERMA (2011) is little more than twelve years old. It might still be considered as a relatively recent theory (Croom, 2014). Furthermore, the writing of Music practice and participation within this cause is yet to establish itself in terms of scholarship. One certainly feels like a voice crying in the wilderness on this issue. I have found also that there is a dearth of material critiquing the PERMA model and this I believe to be a barrier to the model's success.

There will always be counter arguments especially regarding matters to do with health and well-being and the alternative involving people's health and this plays into related arguments

involving the advantages of quantitative research (Koelsch, 2009). This is not my purpose, desire or intent, indeed quite the contrary. I have argued that the health and well-being come in the form of choiring and through the social and spiritual aspects of this endeavour. The PERMA model is for me a gateway for my student's learning. This is embarked upon through positive strategies and steps towards learning. The health and well-being provided for through a process of social and spiritual integration and the involvement in the process of the church choiring and the experience offered. As echoed earlier, it is 'a means whereby individuals can seek hedonic and eudaimonic outcomes, which are not detrimental to the rest of society' (Bradford, 2020: 12).

Thus, by embedding PERMA within the strategies, policies, and structures of church practices regarding music, the process and activity of singing gains stability in the lives of older people. In the appearances, norms, practices, cultures, and modelled behaviour, there is then an embedding of well-being being sustained. These broader elements impact the extent to which PERMA is simply a fad versus a more permanent part of the culture (Kern, 2020; 17). The broadness and flexibility of PERMA is advantageous and its benefits are often unseen. It is a model which generates ideas if you are prepared to be creative. I have begun to use PERMA in my planning and my older singers report the positives (and negatives) of their church singing experiences to back to me. This two-way process is good and reflects how relationship is critical at all levels here when deploying the theory of well-being through PERMA. For me, it strengthens the value in the learning of this cost-effective tool (Hendry et al., 2022: 13). I think more about the value of what I am delivering and how I can cement learning in a productive and structured way. PERMA can help strengthen my understanding of older people's learning and the ways I go about this task of incorporating and supporting well-being practice. Through the use of appreciative advising, there can be a discovery of strengths using discussions about past achievements, design of further educational plans, overcoming of hurdles and a raising of ambitions instead of being content with the status-quo (Pulcini, 2016).

This study concludes also that theoretical aspects of psychological well-being are important to church singing as expressed through the PERMA theory of well-being. This in itself was part of the overall intentions decided upon in the research questions which were:

- What are the benefits to the well-being of older people through performing church music and being in a choir?

I have found that there are many benefits to the well-being of older people through performing church music and being in a choir. This is through the findings highlighted in the early experiences of the participants gaining musical knowledge and a basis for learning offered through choral and liturgical repertoire. Also, in the social well-being offered in regular choiring through learning, friendship, camaraderie and connectedness displays routine and familiarity. These are strong measures for the older person affecting their positivity for life and purpose. This undoubtedly, impacts other areas of well-being, the mental, the physical, but also through the spiritual which enables routines and gives a further zest for later life.

- In what ways might church singing impact older participants in terms of their social well-being through PERMA?
- In what ways might church singing impact older participants in terms of their spiritual well-being through PERMA?

I believe that I have achieved this by bringing about a further understanding of church community and the singing of sacred music as a theoretical (and practical) tool to understand and validate particular behaviours and lifestyle choices acted upon through the social and spiritual means. These means are represented in the blocks of the PERMA model; positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning and achievement. These relate to the participants' purpose and motivations to learn in later life education and learning. Each participant provided a rich and detailed account of what participating in church singing meant for them and how it supported their well-being. We might identify the social and spiritual implications through the overarching themes in their content.

The use of Seligman's theory of well-being in his PERMA model has been taken further to establish the concept of flourishing in older people's church singing. His model here was born out of initial and early scholarship of positive psychology (2011: 27). In using this theory, my study is perhaps unique in this regard and furthermore the project does not seek to give answer to every question. Merely, to propose more scholarly thinking and reporting.

My final chapter provides Conclusions and Recommendations to those wishing to further involve themselves with church-singing and working with older persons. Also, in the study, I suggest ways to gain knowledge and develop the use of the PERMA model within this capacity and remit.



# **CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **8.1 Introduction**

The scholarship drawn from the findings of this study have been discussed in the previous chapter. This is now followed in this by my formal recommendations for older singers, inexperienced as well as experienced choral directors working in church-based institutions, those implementing singing programs for older people, and those wishing to enter into and provide music education and training in higher education. My work would be of interest to professional bodies such as the Royal School of Church Music, National Music Colleges and Educational Foundations engaged in the training of Choral-conductors and singers at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. I conclude the chapter with a personal reflection of my experiences in undertaking this study.

My observance as a Choral-Director is that, at parish levels choir members desire more ways to enhance the practice of singing and educational forms linked to this. Participants such as Iris and Martin expressed the need for regular choiring and thus wished for new opportunities and ways in which to improve their skill. The PERMA model offers a gateway for this. This insufficiency amongst older persons participating in Catholic church choirs might also be an issue at national levels and therefore a concern for other Dioceses. I observe that the current systems operating within parish levels within my own Catholic Diocese are insufficient and are not being addressed as a unit. A key conclusion of conducting this study is that more research needs to be carried out in relation to older singers working/volunteering in church-based Institutions. I contend that there is a need for higher education institutions to adopt programs which help build an awareness of the importance of singing to the lives of older people, improving both their personal, as well as collective as a result of the ideas expressed through the knowledge of well-being and PERMA. Such interventions can serve as a help and support through the framework offered. But in this must be acknowledged a need for the furthering of understanding the theory of well-being through the PERMA model, in its applicability, workings and practices (Tang et al., 2019).

This is important because when older people actively participate in group activities, they show high levels of well-being and lead more healthy lives (Biddle and Asare, 2011). I have found

through my study that church singing can be pleasing and interesting. For many of my participants it represented 'satisfaction, commitment and achievement' (Joseph and Human, 2021: 89). If PERMA-based methods are used to make singing appealing, we can then take an important step toward in making learning useful. Especially through the form of more meaningful and creative activity. By widening participation, a well-being drive for older persons for example who have few hobbies, low confidence, social networks or perceived skills, might surely benefit from this model. The theory of well-being as represented in PERMA I believe to be an educational friendly model suitable for Choral-Directors but also those older adults wanting to learn about something new and enhancing to their learning.

## **8.2 Recommendations for Older Singers**

Following analysis of the findings and subsequent presentation of the conclusions of this study I offer recommendations to older singers. The recommendations that follow are to:

1. Regard your singing as a continued education and in building personal goals such as confidence and further knowledge of church music repertoire. This fits the achievement side of the PERMA model.
2. Be aware of the intrinsic (personal) value of your social and spiritual development. Relationship and meaning are key parts of Seligman's model.
3. See the Choral-Director as an important tool for your music education and for the development of your discipline of singing and the flourishing offered through the PERMA model.
4. Research and enquiry regarding the PERMA model as a tool for improving personal well-being. A good understanding of its background and aims are important to enable personal development through positive outcome. Coming together to sing offers a gateway for positivity through enjoyment and being with others who are like-minded and share commonalities of interest.

## **8.3 Recommendations for Choir Directors and Leaders**

It is accepted that those musicians who desire a move into the field of church music and its education prepare for this. The more generalized recommendations offered here should be considered on an individual basis:

1. Acknowledge that working with older people requires specialist related study and knowledge where singing and well-being is concerned. Adaptability is necessary.
2. Patience and kindness are required when working with older people as they acknowledge professional leadership qualities. These are part of the workings of positive experience.

3. Undertake adequate preparation for working within this discipline as it is different to working with children and younger adults. There are benefits in appropriate academic qualification and gaining experience of the teaching and administrative duties associated with this.

In lieu of the preceding study, present Choral Directors should:

1. Current Choral Directors might attend Positive psychology programmes and modules offered by Higher Education. Universities and colleges enable maintenance of standards and explore new models of learning. Positive Psychology and well-being courses are offered by some U.K. Universities such as Liverpool John Moores and Buckingham. Abroad these are more intensive such as those courses offered by University of Pennsylvania who work directly with Martin Seligman.
2. Consider carefully the needs and limitations of each individual when considering the PERMA tool. This is important as I found within my study the depth of music knowledge and ability levels of singers. This could be utilised as an operationalisation for later learning programmes. The reading of literature related to positive psychology and the writings of Seligman (2011), Seligman et al., (2009), and Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990; 1988; 1975) is a recommended.
3. Further to this it is advisable that Choral-Directors have adequate piano skills and strong vocal abilities to match what you aspire to through the positive psychological learning. This aids the operationalisation process and adds to the positivity in learning. For example, my own Conservatoire training at B.Mus. (Hons) level has helped with keyboard abilities and two years as a Cathedral Organ Scholar working with choirs has offered tremendous insight and training. So having a strong understanding in church ways and knowing its music repertoire (hymns and liturgical repertoire) is helpful if you have chosen to lead.
4. To use national church organisations such as Anna Chaplaincy for Older People ([www.annachaplaincy.org.uk](http://www.annachaplaincy.org.uk)) and Churches Together ([www.CTE.org.uk](http://www.CTE.org.uk)) to further encourage the singing and well-being of older persons. With this support Catholic Diocese' might be able to support older adults' learning in the form of church singing in training days and courses which support this. Music is an important tool in supporting their work in 'promoting standards of excellence in the spiritual care of all older people' (CTE online advice). This could be useful at Parish levels and support also the role that clergy offer.

It is important that those leading within church institutions and organisations have clear and workable plans for future development. Russell comments, 'In every organisation, you've got processes, you've got structures, you've got people... but leadership is the ingredient which gets the best out of all the other ingredients' (Russell, 2022: 45).

#### **8.4 Recommendations for future practice/ further research**

At this point I would like to offer the following more detailed recommendations based on the merits of the PERMA model and findings related to my own work involving older people and church singing.

## Positive Emotion

Positive emotion should be at the heart of any educational learning. Church singing provides enjoyment and positive experience in the hands of those who really understand it. Church music repertoire can be used in a constructive way where the success is not only enabled in the support of the liturgy, but also in the ways in which the delivery of repertoire is provided. This involves sensitivity to those learning and delivering to strengthen the growth process through positive involvement and pleasure providing but also in how to deal with the negatives, frustrations and failures. We must remember Positive emotion is the cornerstone to the overall working of all the other elements in Seligman's theory of well-being (Seligman, 2011: 16).

More research needs to be done linking the participants backgrounds and early experiences to bring about a greater understanding of how church singing can be used to enhance later learning. Knowing the backgrounds and experiences of the singer helps one prepare accordingly and systematically when considering the operationalization of positive emotion. I recommend that the Choral-Director learn of their older student's backgrounds. Unlocking this might be vital in order for the student to flourish through their experiences of church singing.

Undoubtedly will involve both Church leadership both in the form of Priests and Choral-Directors. Their role is crucial in the development of new forms of learning for example that offered in the use of the PERMA model. My recommendation here is for Diocesan Bishops to be involved in the process and dialogue here as they represent ultimate accountability and authority at parish levels. This is in the preparation for the operationalizing of strong leadership and positivity reflected within clergy leaders as well as Choral-Directors.

I further recommend that having had sufficient professional musical training that Choral-Directors attend courses provided by eg. [PositivePsychology.org.uk](http://PositivePsychology.org.uk) or the Positive Psychology Center (University of Pennsylvania). The awareness in learning to coach having been coached I believe is central to the skill of delivering the PERMA model successfully. Professional Practice is then sufficiently met as well as pioneered. One might further consider Cognitive coaching - this is a person-centered intervention model that helps coaches develop into self-

directed learners with metacognitive skills that optimize professional practice. Great skill is required in delivering positive driven singing sessions and to maintain this takes creative awareness, energy and dedication. Indeed, this desires sensitive vision (Gallet, 2016).

### Engagement/Educational Development

The use of time spent in 'flow' and learning might be further considered in relation to older singers. How this is developed personally and as a group is important and I believe that working with older persons should be documented – recorded entries in a notebook or e-learning device. Participants in my own work such as Daisy and Iris in my work reported an interest in the use of flow time. This is an area which might be explored further and the ways in which it might be benefitted within choring time. Management of time in a structured and disciplined way for example in proposed rehearsal session is an important component to the singers' creativity and well-being. The singer ultimately wishes to experience the singing activity as being intrinsically rewarding. The sharing of such experiences within this 'flow' time I think is very necessary when developing PERMA programs. It gives reason to share with others internally as well as externally i.e., those out of the immediate work area. Furthermore, this enables new ideas and thinking in relation to the 'theory of well-being' as well as merging action with awareness. It also represents thought to one's own proximal goals. So, my recommendation is for Choral-Directors is to take time to document these experiences whether they be recalled in rehearsing or even in rehearsing. I further recommend that any documenting of such work be reported to dedicated Flow inspired projects as in Leadership and Flow, a Global Research Program and Network. The purpose of this program is to integrate ideas and research linked to the Flow concept with other theories and applications of leadership development. Also, to match managerial and leadership skills and effectively learn how to handle them through the state of Flow. Equally the work of the Flow Centre based at the University of Sydney, Australia, offers courses and Flow Coach Accreditation. Although noted for its research connected to sport development, it has asked me to report on my work older persons singing with the intention of research-based activity promoting the knowledge of Flow in the participatory activity of choring. This recommendation is in preparation for the operationalizing of engagement and educational journey.

### Relationship

Relationships can only be built through regular routines and weekly meetings as a group. In this way social camaraderie and connectedness can thrive. This regularity helps the understanding of those wishing to understand and deliver models of learning. Ensure that clear advice is provided to singers on the appropriateness of undertaking good practice. Social awareness, inclusion and cultivating friendships are an important aspect for older people. A church environment often supports social benefit through being in a choir. I recommend that the Choral-Director knows of the values of social well-being, camaraderie and connectedness in order to operationalize aspects of relationship as discussed in the PERMA modelling.

Similarly, the corporate experience of being in the church community can serve as an encouragement to positive behaviour and interaction. Not only this, older singers are volunteers and often have the attitude of serving their church community by being involved the parish choir. These are all routes to communities working together fit for purpose because unity is central to development as my study has shown. So, my recommendation here is for Choral Directors to look beyond what is in their immediate circle and consider the wider implications of learning here for the community as a whole. Being in the field and actively learning and beneficial in learning about relationship and the ways in which it might be experienced.

### Meaning

Spiritual well-being is very often personalized and contextualized. Being aware of this I think can help the role of the Choral-Director. There are often many unanswered questions when trying to understand people. Having the attitude of not always being able to answer questions where people are concerned is perhaps helpful here. Equally, being knowledgeable about the Catholic faith and liturgy has been for me a great help and knowing the basics in such faith helpful when working in such circumstances. I recommend here learning about the environment that the Choral-Director has chosen to work in. I hasten to add that this can only be learnt by spending time and being immersed in situations within this environment regardless of whether one is Catholic or not. This is how Meaning is enabled, honed by both professional skill as a musician and an immersing in the awareness of positive psychology.

Spiritual wellness is important to older people. This is often played out in the routine and habits of attending church and through the involvement of choiring. My recommendation here is for Choral-Directors to encourage such routines because wellness can come through regularity in the learning and the development of the PERMA model because of the encouragement of good habits and gaining perspective. For older people, Meaning can often be found in this way through regular spiritual routines and operationalized through their weekly/daily routines and habits.

### Accomplishment

Achieving is important to older people as it is for those younger. I recommend here that Choral-Directors give their older students targets and goals. Further I recommend that they be praised often and often affirmed where necessary. I would recommend that the Choral-Director have short-term as well as long term goals in the individual as well as collective learning process. This I believe to be good preparation for the operationalization of short and long-term task/project satisfaction in those participating in church choiring and learning to sing.

Finally, confidence I believe to be a major hurdle to older people's learning. Past learning experiences can often affect the quickness in their learning. The Choral-Directors task is to build up confidence through creative ways of learning. In order to prepare for the operationalization of Achievement, my recommendation here is to be resourceful, think out of the box and do not be afraid to try new ways even if they might fail. Study plans are a good way of recording achievements both small and great steps. Above all else, be patient and kind to the singers in their learning and in due course the rewards will be evident. Teaching strategies used in a non-threatening environment are known to help older persons thrive (Joseph and Human, 2021: 89).

Further issues identified for future research projects might be the links between health and well-being and older peoples' church singing. The interviews outlined that church and music were valuable and they could be utilized further to demonstrate how positive mental well-being is maintained as a result of regular choiring, attendance and routine (Heyning, 2010). This may support Mass attendance also. Of course, such suggestions should not be limited to

just Catholic practices (Lazar, 2018) but extended to those of other Christian denominations as other research has suggested (Haddad, 2013; Vaught, 2009).

I have sought to outline the benefits of social and spiritual well-being to the older singer through the pastime and occupation of church singing. At present the PERMA research is only in its infancy and therefore more follow-up projects are required involving the use of the model. Volunteer-based settings (as in church choirs) could be extremely useful in adding to the body of PERMA research not least because they often involve smaller financial budgets. Future applications of PERMA might operate through both Community Health organizations and Catholic Church institutions. Thus, in syncope there are surely benefits of working together towards this goal. In this way, people are not only educated in terms of managing their health but also their social and spiritual learning offered within a church environment. Even for those whose orientations are not particularly religious but still spiritually or non-spiritually inclined. Being with together socially has its merits regardless of place or space. Identified within this thesis might be the opportunities for PERMA research in other church institutions and denominations.

I have found in my study that a developmental route for Choral-Leaders working with older people and volunteers is often unclear. My findings here, agrees with previous scholarship (Ferrell et al., 2010; Beaty, 1997) that this is still the case where music participation and singing is concerned. Academic administration is recommended and use of university systems and pedagogies in education would be of great benefit to future-proof this area of expertise. Supporting Choral-Directors in undertaking doctoral level study would confirm the status and usefulness as a profession and ensure the sustainability of an educational workforce capable of meeting the increasing demands of music education and becoming effective facilitators (Creech et al., 2014: 86). Effective facilitating I believe is enhanced through learning about positive psychology and the PERMA model. Older people and singing offers a pleasant platform for learning and the goals of higher Education. Equally, I believe the current work offered by the Association of British Choral Directors Foundation (ABCD) exists for promoting, improving and maintaining opportunities for professional development of everyone leading singing amateur and professional and within the community. The choral resources offered is wide-ranging and age related and actively welcome participation of older people in selected courses as part of ways in which Choral-Directors are instructed. Training programs and



courses are geared to those in varying musical fields. Combining both the field of music with positive psychology I think is necessary to the ongoing learning of Choral Directors and the benefits of the PERMA model should be explored more widely.

## 8.5 My Reflections

The purpose of this study was to explore the journey that I have been on since beginning a career in music education. In collaborating with older persons through the activity of singing has enabled me to progress the knowledge necessary to improve my own practice as a Choral Director and teacher. My take home message is that church singing benefits older adults. This is informed and impacted through a further knowledge of matters relating to well-being. I was privileged to learn of the participants' social and spiritual contexts where the research was involved and hear their stories and perceptions within the in-depth interviews. Muncey (2014) and Sellars (2014) suggest that there is no distinction between doing research and living a life, and this I found to be true. I acknowledge the influence of my relationships with the participants and I feel that this has enhanced the study rather than compromised it.

Undertaking this professional doctorate has given me my own confidence to engage in a world far wider than any I could have foreseen when I became a music educator. It reaches beyond the confines of any university and higher education. I trained as a professional performer and gained awards for my organ playing and for my choir-training. I never really considered a role as an academic. Often those who are good performers often find it hard to explain their art and practice. My conscience desired this act of further study as a responsible Choral Director and Teacher should (Swan and Fowler, 1987; Grace, 1928) and to gain a wider perspective through researching the lived experience (Van Manen, 1997). Through the personal narrative (Du Preez, 2008) and learning I am able to become a more critically reflective teacher (Del Carlo, 2010; Brookfield, 1995). But also having the purpose of wanting to inspire through teaching and learning (Harvey, 1999). I have found that *Being* with the person and listening to them on this journey are 'vital components of pastoral care' (MacKinlay, 2001: 72) and this is a provided suggestion for other associated groups to embed within future projects. It is through inspiring we mold better singers and people in this way of deliberation and activeness.

I now consider this doctoral journey to have been a journey of discovery, not only about the research process but also about myself and the doctoral process. As I look back over the last five years, the focus of my research has widened. I have considered carefully my initial research questions but have also engaged in exploring the development of the doctoral identity, self and being. It is hoped that my findings will enable Journal publications in the field of; music education, health and music, church practice, choral-directing, gerontology as well as prospective teacher-training within the classroom. But in this journey, as my participants have shown me, that despite the many personal hurdles, the complexities of academic-writing, and the confusions of the mind, continually musicking impacts ones-own personal confidence. Collectively, further benefits are activated through the social and spiritual when chosen. I am reminded here once more of Hobbs definition of social well-being where it is said to be 'that which affected and pertains to the personal' (Hobbs, 2016: 58; see also Haworth and Hart, 2007). Working with older persons involves a practice of the social as well as the vocational. Within a church setting, a discipline of patience and understanding is needed to invoking the spiritual work required to support Church initiative. Ensuring older people flourish is everyone's responsibility (Ruyter, 2015: 2004: Bowling, 2008: Bowling et al., 2003; Bruhn, 2012; Bright, 1997), but those who lead have a particular charge in this area. Future developments to their benefit must involve careful 'scaffolding' (Wenger, 2003: 271; Schön, 1983: 268). Indeed, we may remember here the thoughts of DeNora (2000: 63):

Music can be used as a device for the reflexive process of remembering and constructing who one is, a technology for spinning the apparently continuous tale who one is.

My research has shown how the PERMA model helps you understand the way older people's wellbeing is intertwined with their involvement in the choir. I have also enhanced the value of the positive psychology framework in explaining why church choirs can promote levels of well-being in their members through the PERMA model. It is hoped that those reading my work will use these suggestions and operationalize them in accordance with their own purposes. Participatory church-singing is about 'well-being' and 'being-well' for me has been realized within a course further enabled by Seligman's model pertaining to; positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning and accomplishment. Through these five-fold pillars, one's educational-learning *can* be met and *will* continue to be met in the journey of new discoveries and possibilities. These are explored in the knowledge, motivations and

understandings of positivity offered not only in the art of scholarship and learning but also in the creativity of church singing and the joy of being in a choir.

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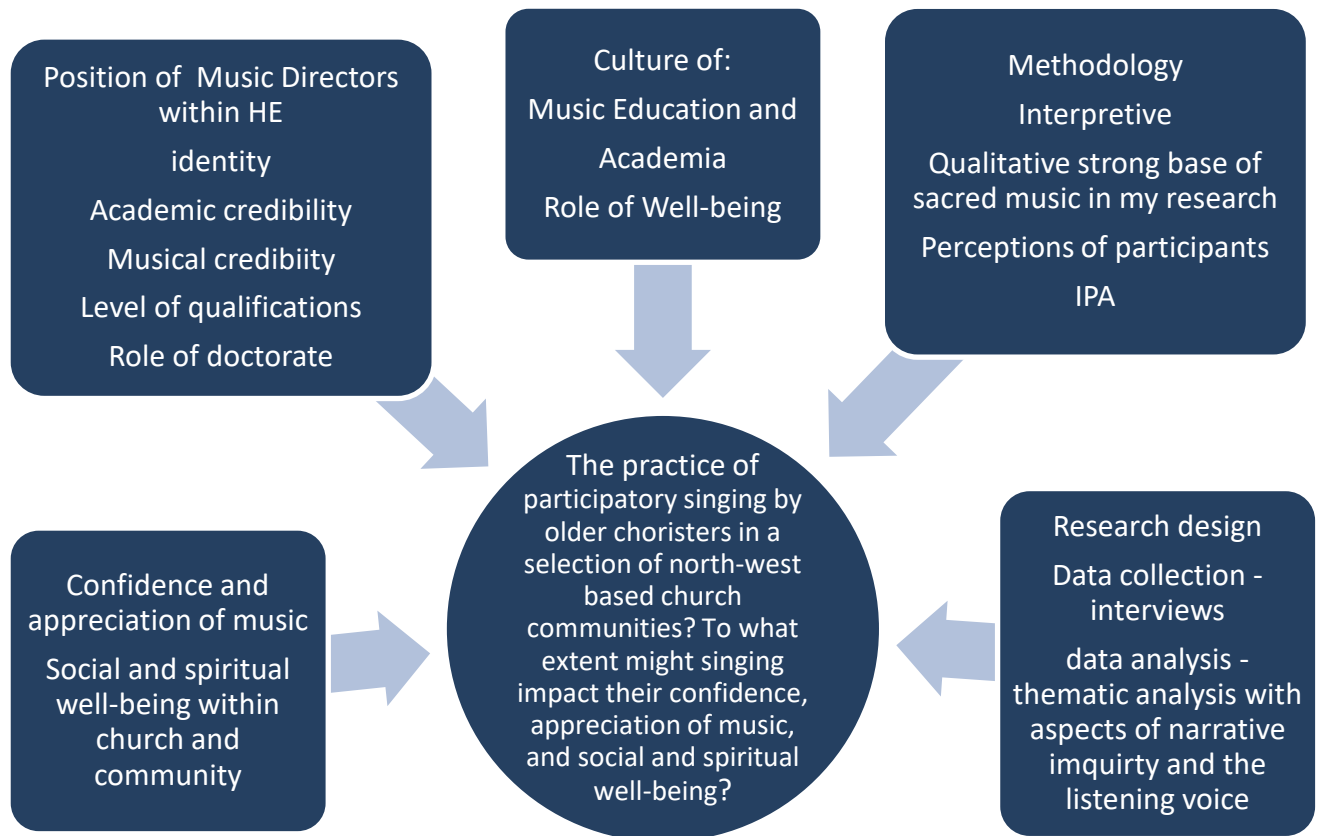
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### **Telephone/Facetime Conversations regarding research into the project**

Dr Rosie Perkins, Professor of Music, Health and Social Science, Doctoral Supervisor.  
September 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, and December 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

# Appendix 1 Conceptual Framework for Study into Skills and Knowledge required for Music Directors and Educators



## Appendix 2 – Participant Consent Form



### **Sacred Choral Singing in Older Adults – what are the social and spiritual effects as a result of regular participation in choral singing.**

#### **Participant Consent Form**

Please answer the following questions by circling your responses:

I have read and understood the information sheet about this study? YES NO

I have had the opportunity to ask further questions? YES NO

I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study (up to 4 weeks following the Interview) and without having to give a reason for withdrawal. YES NO

Your responses will be anonymised. Do you give permission for members of the research team to analyse and quote your anonymous responses? YES NO

Do you understand that anonymised data will be kept for no longer than necessary as per institutional guidelines (minimum of 5 years)? YES NO

If you leave the study within the 4 weeks of Interview date, your data will be removed from the findings and securely destroyed. YES NO

Do you understand that after this date, your anonymised data will remain part of the findings and cannot be withdrawn? YES NO

Please sign here if you wish to take part in the research and feel you have had enough information about what is involved:

**Signature of participant:**..... **Date:**.....

**Name (block letters):**.....

## Appendix 3 – Ethics checklist

### UNIVERSITY ETHICS CHECKLIST

Version: 2; updated August 2019



All activities involving projects by undergraduate students, postgraduate taught and research students and staff whether they are undertaking projects focussing on research, commercial, knowledge transfer, evaluation, audit or teaching and learning, need ethical consideration.

Undergraduate students and postgraduate taught students will follow the process outlined by their School by their Course/ Module Leader

This checklist will identify whether a project requires an application for ethics approval, and to which Ethics Review Panel (ERP) it should be referred to. **No field work, experimentation or work with participants can start until approval is granted.** The questions should be completed by the Principal Investigator or Supervisor of the proposed project. Where projects are those of students, the Principal Investigator is always the Supervisor/Director of Studies and never the student.

Principal Investigators, or Supervisors/Director of Studies, are responsible for ensuring that all activities fall within the principles set down in the [University Code of Conduct for Research](#) and the [University Ethical Principles for Teaching, Research, Knowledge Transfer, Consultancy and Related Activities](#). They are also responsible for exercising appropriate professional judgment in undertaking this review and evaluating the activity according to the criteria laid down in this checklist. If you are uncertain about any sections of this document, or need further information and guidance, please contact the Research Governance Unit in Research Services ([EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk)).

If, on completion of the checklist:

- **any** question is answered '**Yes**', then an application for ethical approval is required:-
  - For **undergraduate** and **postgraduate taught** projects, students should in the first instance discuss the project and ethical issues with their Supervisor. Unless the project is considered to be ethically complex or of a sensitive nature (e.g. involves vulnerable populations) submission for ethical approval should be sought through the relevant School Ethics Committee or process.
  - For **research, commercial and other projects**, use the questions to help compile suitable evidence and submit an [application](#) to the [Relevant Ethics Review Panel](#).
- **all** questions are answered '**No**' and you (the Principal Investigator) are not concerned with the ethical nature of the activity, then it is unnecessary to apply for

ethical approval. However, it is still incumbent on you to observe the University's Ethical Principles in the conduct of the activity and to record that:

- a review has taken place of the ethical aspects of the activity; and that
- *either* no ethical issues have been identified *or* ethical issues have been identified but that these have been addressed satisfactorily.

All **postgraduate research degree student registration proposals**, irrespective of the outcome of the Ethics Checklist, need to be submitted to the [Relevant Ethics Review Panel](#) to be dealt with either by Chair's Action or full review. See specific guidance for research degree students at <https://www.uclan.ac.uk/students/support/research/index.php>

Further details on the Ethics process, including an electronic version of this checklist, are available at <https://www.uclan.ac.uk/students/support/research/ethics.php>

1.1 Project Title	The practice of participatory singing by older choristers in a selection of north-west based church communities. To what extent might singing impact their confidence, appreciation of music, and social and spiritual well-being?						
1.2 Project type	Staff research	Research degree (including Prof Doc)	/	PG taught		UG taught	Commercial
1.3 Short description in layman's terms [no acronyms or jargon]	<p>Music is at the very essence of our humanity (Blacking, 1995). For many thousands of years singing has had an important role to play in society and has played a central role in maintaining well-being amongst humans of all ages, across cultures and contexts. In this current project I wish to investigate the role of older singers (60 plus) and their contribution within church based choirs in the community. I intend to further the exploration of how participatory singing impacts the confidence of the individual, and the well-being of choral groups.</p> <p>Through this study project, I will seek to explore the experiences and perceptions of the participants, exploring the learning experience and its impact on their well-being, with a focus on social and spiritual aspects. This will be looked at in terms of the educational learning in performance of music and how this is expressed further through their activity within the group. I currently work with older singers regularly in an ecclesiastical setting. This involves regular preparation of music for services and its associated liturgy. Most are retired or semi-retired, volunteers and provide music for weekly services. The singers come from diverse musical backgrounds instrumentally and vocally. I aim to understand the reasons for them engaging in this educational journey and understand their challenges and expectations. Eventually, having gone through this exercise, I want to know how I can improve my practices as a result of this experiential learning.</p> <p>During the study the following research questions will be addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How might the practice of singing improve the individual's confidence and appreciation and how might any benefits be assessed as a result of performing sacred choral music?</li> <li>• How can my role as a Choral-Director and teacher be used to assist the individual and group in their general well-being within this educational journey?</li> <li>• In what ways might the teaching of singing impact the participant in terms of social well-being?</li> <li>• How might an individual and church community benefit in terms of spiritual well-being as a result of this regular participation?</li> </ul>						
1.4 Dates	Start November 2019			End December 2021			
1.5 School of .....							
1.6 Project supervisor /principal investigator: name, position	Dr Carl Morris (HSS) and Richard Dr Davies (CELT)						

and original signature	
1.7 Co-workers/Co-Researchers / Postgraduate Research Student: names and positions	Damian Howard
1.8 Declaration	<p>I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this checklist is required by the Ethics and Integrity Unit within Research Services, on behalf of the University, for the purpose of ethics review, and to evidence that the appropriate level of ethics review has been undertaken. Such data will be stored and managed in accordance with the principles established in the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. Please indicate below if you consent to your University Ethics Checklist, Ethics Application and other documentation being shared for training and review purposes. All forms and documents will be anonymised.</p> <p>Yes</p>

Read any associated procedures and guidance or follow any associated checklist link, and delete, 'Yes' or 'No', for each characteristic. If you respond 'No', then in your judgment you believe that the characteristic is irrelevant to the activity. You may only tick 'No' to the main question (i.e. A, B, etc) where none of the statements in that section apply to your activity. If you are unsure whether to answer 'Yes' or 'No' to a question, you should answer 'Yes' and submit details to relevant Ethics Review Panel for initial review.

**A) Does the activity involve human participants, data or [material](#) e.g. as research participants including the use of their data or using human tissue/fluid/DNA samples? Yes**

If Yes, and

The research is being conducted in a low or lower-middle income country as [defined by the World Bank](#)

UCLan have signed up to the Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings (GCC) which must be applied when conducting research in these settings. This includes the following:

- Ensure that the research incorporates the values of the GCC and consideration has been given to satisfying each article within the code.
- Researchers are required to submit an ethics application for full review at UCLan prior to applying for local ethical approval.

A copy of the code of conduct can be found on the below link:

<http://www.globalcodeofconduct.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Global-Code-of-Conduct-Brochure.pdf>

For any assistance or queries on application of the code please contact

[EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk)



Where the activity involves any external organisation for which separate and specific ethics clearance is required (e.g. [NHS](#); school; any criminal justice agencies including the Police, Crown Prosecution Service, Prison Service, Probation Service or successor organisation) *seek and gain external ethical approval before submitting for UCLan ethical approval. Submission may be just the external organisation ethics application paperwork – email details to [EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk) to check.*

Where the activity involves the use of human tissue / DNA samples or body fluid seek and gain relevant external ethical approval before submitting to the relevant Ethics Committee. Submission can be just the external organisation ethics application paperwork (e.g. Brain Tissue North West) – email details to [EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk) to check.

For all other activities involving human participants, their data or materials\*, complete and submit UCLan Ethics Application Form to relevant Ethics Review Panel – BAHSS; Science or Health.

\* such as:-

- (i) requiring participants to give informed consent;
  - (ii) potential imbalance of power and authority which might compromise the validity of participants' consent;
  - (iii) researchers and/or participants in the potential disclosure of any information relating to illegal activities; the observation of illegal activities; or the possession, viewing or storage of any material (whether in hard copy or electronic format) which may be illegal
  - (iv) potential risk of physical, social, emotional or psychological harm, distress or discomfort to the researchers or participants (*Please note also the University's Policy and procedures on Safeguarding and Prevent*);
  - (v) deception of the participant be necessary during the activity;
  - (vi) aim to shock or offend (e.g. art)
  - (vii) invasion of privacy or access to confidential information about people without their permission;
  - (viii) excavation and study of human remains
- B) Does the activity involve isolation and culture of micro-organisms, genetically modified micro-organism or cell lines?

No

If so, process via [UCLan Biological Safety Committee](#) before submitting to the relevant Ethics Review Panel

C) Does the activity involve scientific procedures<sup>1</sup> being applied to a vertebrate animal (other than humans) or cephalopods<sup>2</sup>?

No

If so, please email [EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk) requesting application form and submission deadlines for AWERB (Animal Welfare and Ethics Review Board)

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<sup>1</sup> Including interrupting an animal's natural environment (e.g. tracking or observing wild deer)

<sup>2</sup> Cephalopods are an active predatory mollusc of the large class Cephalopoda, such as an octopus or squid

D) Does the activity involve collection of rare plants, endangered species or work in the natural environment?

No

If so, please submit this checklist together with outline details of the activity / UCLan's role to [EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk)

E) Does activity relate to military/defence/weapons or the Defence industry, including excavation of battlefields, military installations, etc (i.e. site with unexploded bomb)?

No

If so, please submit this checklist together with outline details of the activity / UCLan's role to [EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk)

F)

**Does the activity involve or accessing Security-Sensitive Research Material or proscribed terrorist materials?** e.g. Will you be viewing or accessing data / prohibited material (digital or paper) that can be interpreted as contravening counter-terrorism legislation under the Terrorism Act (2006)?

No

If so, please submit this checklist to the [OfficerforEthics@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:OfficerforEthics@uclan.ac.uk)

G)

Are there any potential other ethical and political concerns?

**e.g.** Are you aware of any

- potential ethical concerns or political concerns that may arise from either the conduct or dissemination of this activity, e.g. unethical practices of companies funding this research; results of research being used for political gain by others; potential for liability to the University from your research?

ethical concerns about collaborator company / organisation, e.g. its product has a harmful effect on humans, animals or the environment; it has a record of supporting repressive regimes; does it have ethical practices for its workers and for the safe disposal of products?

Yes

If so, please submit this checklist together with outline details of the activity / UCLan's role to [EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk)

H)

**Is your study Research?** Research is generalizable and generates new knowledge or adds to current knowledge. To decide whether your project is research or service evaluation. The National Research Ethics Service (NRES) has published the following guidance to help decide: [NRES Guidance PDF](#). A decision tool provided by the Health Research Authority and Medical Research Council is also available to help decide whether

your project is research <http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/>

Yes

**Note:** The links above have been designed to help researchers decide if ethics approval is required within the NHS, however this information can be used as guidance for other research areas.

I)

**Is your study Service evaluation?** - "What standard does this service achieve?" Usually involving analysis of existing data but also includes interviews and questionnaires. The HRA have published a table defining research categorising research, service evaluation, audit and usual practice [http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/docs/definingresearchtable\\_oct2017-1.pdf](http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/docs/definingresearchtable_oct2017-1.pdf). This can help decide the correct classification of your project.

Yes

**Note:** The table has been designed with NHS research in mind, however this is useful guidance for other research areas.

J) **Are the results of the Service evaluation to be disseminated beyond those who commissioned it?** If the results of the service evaluation are confined to those commissioning the evaluation then ethics approval is not required. However if you intend to disseminate more widely the findings of the evaluation through conference or paper publication then ethical approval is required.

No

If so please submit this checklist together with outline details of the activity / UCLan's role to [EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk).

#### UCLan Ethics Review Panels

The Ethics Review Panel for **Business, Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (BAHSS)** has responsibility for the following Schools:

- Art, Design and Fashion
- Journalism, Media and Performance
- Humanities and the Social Sciences
- Language and Global Studies
- Lancashire School of Business and Enterprise
- Lancashire Law School
- Sport and Well-being (Coaching)
- Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT)

- Social Work, Care and Community

The Ethics Review Panel for **Science** has responsibility for the following Schools:

- Engineering
- Forensic and Applied Sciences
- Physical Sciences and Computing
- Psychology

The Ethics Review Panel for **Health** has responsibility for the following Schools:

- Dentistry
- Medicine
- Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences
- Nursing
- Community Health and Midwifery
- Health Sciences
- Sport and Well-being (Allied Health Research Unit – AHRU; Sport Exercise and Nutritional Science – SENS and Centre for Applied Sport and Exercise Sciences - CASES)

Please contact the Research Governance Unit in Research Services ([EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk)) regarding submission of applications involving animals or cephalopods.

Please contact Biological Safety Committee Chair ([jasmith@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:jasmith@uclan.ac.uk)) regarding submission of applications involving Microbes, Genetically Modified Organisms & Cell Lines.

### External Ethical Approval

Where a project involves the NHS, either staff or patients, please email [IRASSponsor@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:IRASSponsor@uclan.ac.uk) to determine requirements for both IRAS Sponsor sign off and UCLan ethics review.

Where other external ethical approval is required, e.g. another university or organisation, the standard process is to gain the required external ethical approval, followed by submission for ethical approval at UCLan using the external ethics application documentation and approval notification. If in doubt, please email [EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:EthicsInfo@uclan.ac.uk) for advice.

#### Helpful Tips :-

Please note that ethical approval is not required for the following, but evidence is required that relevant approvals have been gained where appropriate:

Where an activity involves collecting, obtaining, accessing, viewing, holding or any other kind of processing of personal data please refer to UCLan Data Protection

Guidance/GDPR/[Checklist](#)

Where an activity involves fieldwork, travel (e.g. overseas) or lone working please refer to your School Risk Assessment procedures.

Where Health and Safety clearance is a requirement of the activity (e.g. lab work) please check all relevant [COSHH forms](#) and/or Safety clearance/approval are in place

Please consider the University's requirements and procedures under Safeguarding and Prevent.

## **Appendix 4 – Proposed Questions for In-depth Interview**



### **Questions for Individual Participants regarding Singing, Spiritual and Social Well-being**

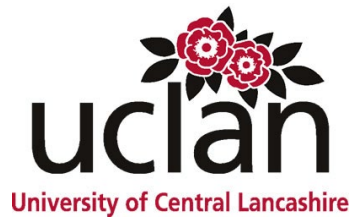
#### **IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. On a personal level,
  - a. What meaning does singing in a choir have in your life?
  - b. What purpose does singing in a choir have in your life? And,
  - c. What value does singing in a choir have in your life?
2. How and in what way is your spirituality reflected in your involvement in your singing in a choir?
3.
  - a. Have you ever had any deep/meaningful experiences whilst in church/ sacred place as a result of singing in a choir?
  - b. Through your singing how aware of a higher being/cosmic force are you and in what ways do you feel connected with it?
4. If you have never had any connection or spiritual encounter, in what ways do you perceive a change (or growth) to your general well-being as a result of singing?

#### **Additional Questions**

1. Why do you come to sing?
2. How do you feel when you sing?
3. Do the words of the music have any impact on you?
4. What impact does regular participation have on you?
5. Has singing in the choir affected your spiritual well-being in any way?
6. Has singing in a choir affected your social well-being in any way?

## Appendix 5 – Invitation Form



### **Invitation Form**

Sacred Choral Singing in Older Adults – what are the social and spiritual effects as a result of regular participatory singing

Hi!

You are cordially invited to take part in my study looking at the perceived benefits attached to singing. The study, approved by the University of Central Lancashire, is a unique project looking into the physical and spiritual attributes of participants aged >60 years and based in the North West of England.

It would be really good if you could help in the study as the results will be reported back to our University's work and will have an impact on the health and well-being of future generations of singers.

Yours Sincerely,

Damian Howard

## **Appendix 6 - Participants Information Sheet**



### **Participant Information Sheet**

The practice of participatory singing by older choristers in a selection of north-west based church communities. To what extent might singing impact their confidence, appreciation of music, and social and spiritual well-being?

#### **About the study**

The research is investigating participatory choral-singing in older adults. The purpose is to investigate the impact of singing on your confidence, your appreciation of music and its possible effects on your spiritual and social well-being as a result of regular performance and practice.

Some questions you may have about the research project:

#### **Why have you asked me to take part and what will I be required to do?**

You have been chosen to take part because your views matter. You have kindly agreed to do this. I will be visiting you once to conduct a narrative interview with you. I hope to find out more about singing and well-being. I'm researching older adults ideally 60 – 85 years of age. The study is aimed at identifying the values and effectiveness of singing in a sacred environment and its links with spiritual wellness and social well-being (ie. belonging to a choir). The interviews will be digitally recorded.

#### **What if I do not wish to take part or change my mind during the study?**

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study up to 4 weeks following the interview without having to provide a reason for doing so. This can be done by email or by telephone.

#### **What happens to the research data?**



The data will be kept in secure storage. You are free to ask to see your data to ensure you are happy it cannot be used to identify you in any way. Anonymous data will be preserved for no longer than necessary as per institutional guidelines (minimum 5 years). You are free to withdraw for up to four weeks following the date of the interview taking place. After the completion date, your data will remain as part of the findings. Your data will be securely anonymised using pseudonyms and you will not be identifiable in any way. The electronic data data will be purged of all details that could potentially identify you personally and only members of the research team will have access to it. I wish to inform you that details regarding the interview are treated very seriously, the research team is bound by confidentiality regulations set out by the University of Central Lancashire.

### **How will the research be reported?**

The research will be reported as part of my Ed. D thesis and will potentially be used in articles. Anonymity and confidentiality will be ensured. If you want a copy of my thesis please request a copy from the researcher, Damian Howard, Director of Music, St. Peter's RC Cathedral, Balmoral Road, Lancaster, LA1 3BT.

### **How can I find out more information?**

Please contact the researcher [damianhoward29@gmail.com/](mailto:damianhoward29@gmail.com) 07870 119473 (Mobile telephone).

### **What if I want to complain about the research**

Initially you should contact the researcher directly. However, if you are not satisfied or wish to make a more formal complaint you should contact the Ethics Information Officer ([OfficerforEthics@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:OfficerforEthics@uclan.ac.uk)) or Dr. Carl Morris ([CJMorris2@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:CJMorris2@uclan.ac.uk)), University of Central Lancashire, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, PR1 2HE, U.K.

