

SOCIAL WORK & CHRISTIANITY

JOURNAL OF THE NORTH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
OF CHRISTIANS IN SOCIAL WORK

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ANOTHER WORD

NACSW ALLAN KEITH LUCAS LECTURE

CONCEPTUAL ARTICLES

Addressing the Inequality of Disasters: The Role of Faith-based Organizations in Disaster Response and Recovery

From Shame to Restoration: A Transformative Approach to Authentic Sexuality

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Insights from Pastors on Christian Mindfulness: What Social Workers Can Learn about Spiritual Integration in Mindfulness

Spirituality as a Protective Factor: A Multinational Study of 267 Adults with Care Experience

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Social Work & Christianity (SWC) is a refereed journal published quarterly in March, June, September, and December by the North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW). The purpose of SWC is to support and encourage the growth of social workers in the ethical integration of Christian faith and professional practice. SWC welcomes articles, shorter contributions, book reviews, and letters which deal with issues related to the integration of faith and professional social work practice and other professional concerns which have relevance to Christianity.

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To ensure the integrity of the blind peer-review process, before you submit your manuscript, please delete the name(s) of the author(s) anywhere they appear in the text, and remove the author identification from the “properties” section of your document.

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- Ordinarily books should be fairly recent (published within two years); if later, reviewers should provide some justification for why an older book has current relevance.
- Reviews should be about 600–800 words in length.
- Reviews should include an overview of the book's main points, especially those pertaining to Christians in social work.
- In addition to a descriptive summary of the book's content, reviews should provide some assessment, critique, and analysis of the book's strengths and weaknesses, and its contribution to the field of social work practice, especially to specific audiences such as subfields of social work practice, students, academics, administrators, and church leaders.
- Reviews should adhere to general guidelines for formatting and writing described in the general Instructions for Authors.

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The purpose of the Letters to the Editor section in *Social Work & Christianity* is to provide creative space for dialogue about complicated topics for Christians in social work. Our hope is that submissions in this form allow for the healthy exchange of ideas and perspectives. The Letters to the Editor section is grounded in our Christian values of humility, mutual respect, and generosity of spirit, as well as our professional values of critical thinking and integrity.

Letters to the Editor should be no more than 500–1,000 words in length and invite conversation as it offers the opportunity for readers to observe an open and civil exchange of ideas and perspectives. Letters which are a response to articles previously published in *Social Work & Christianity* will be shared with the article author(s), who will have the opportunity to respond to the letter. Such Letters to the Editor are encouraged to ask

clarifying questions in a spirit of curiosity (as opposed to a spirit of confrontation), model careful listening, and seek common ground where possible as it shares alternative points of view for readers' consideration. Letters to the Editor which include personal attacks or denigration of individuals or organizations will not be considered.

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Another Word

Peter Szto

IN MY OPENING REMARKS IN THE SPRING 2023 ISSUE OF *SOCIAL Work & Christianity*, I shared a word on becoming Editor-in-Chief. For this summer issue, I would like to build on those words with a brief reflection on Jesus of Nazareth and contemporary social work. What can social workers learn from the public ministry of Jesus? Are his responses to the vulnerable and social injustices of his day relevant to us? Was Jesus a social worker?

These three questions suggest theological and sociological inquiry on Jesus' trinitarian role, his moral teachings and use of miracles in salvation history, and how he dealt with the socially disenfranchised of his day. For the professing Christian in social work, and non-professing as well, how Jesus helped people challenges how social workers practice today around the world. Jesus approached human care and social injustices like no other – past and present. Jesus is an example of social work par excellence. Who and how he helped people was innovative and instructive. For example, his empathy with Lazarus (John 11) and his mercy towards the woman bleeding for twelve years (Matthew 9). His response to humans in need was remarkable, as was his use of parables to teach about human relationships. While professional social work did not emerge until the late nineteenth century in Western societies, Jesus modeled social care two thousand years earlier in anticipation of contemporary social work. Most significant, Jesus practiced as fully human and fully divine. His ethical practice was exemplary for us moderns. He exuded perfect cultural humility and compassion, whether people had insurance or not. And, by God's grace, he made possible salvation and assurance of pardon to redeem everyday living. Jesus respected human dignity and individual worth through an action-based spirituality.

The Gospel of John teaches that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). This is a key text for social work on our mission and purpose. Allow me to elaborate. God-taking-on-human flesh was nothing short of supernatural grace actualized. Jesus’ death and resurrection accomplished and applied salvation for us – freeing us from the eternal penalty of sin. He is our only means of grace to enter and serve the kingdom of God. Jesus did for us what we could never do for ourselves. His once-and-for-all sacrificial love is the basis and motive for us to serve others. Philippians describes this self-emptying divine act as “he humbled himself” (2:8). For the Christian social work student, practitioner, and scholar, following Jesus is a noble call to likewise protect the vulnerable, heal the hurt, and pursue social justice to advance societal well-being.

May this summer issue bring you refreshment and renewal in all your work as co-laborers in God’s Kingdom, wherever you are locally or globally.

Take care
Peter ❖

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“I am Sorry I Have Made Them: The Call for Reconciliation Competency”

NACSW Alan Keith-Lucas Lecture

72nd NACSW Annual Convention at Oak Brook, Illinois

October 28, 2022

Lawrence E. Ressler

The article is the Alan Keith Lucas lecture given at the 72nd NACSW Annual Convention at Oak Brook, Illinois by Dr. Lawrence Ressler. The presentation calls for Christian social workers to have four peace and reconciliation skills based on the Psalm 85:10 framework of mercy, truth, justice and peace. The competency skills include forgiveness support skills, truth-seeking skills, amends facilitation and reparation skills, and vision facilitation skills and mediation.

Keywords: peacemaking, reconciliation, shalom, conflict resolution, truth, justice, mercy, mediation

IT IS AN HONOR FOR ME TO GIVE THE ALAN KEITH-Lucas lecture this year. Keith, as he preferred to be called, was one of the most impactful individuals in my effort to understand the relationship between Christian faith and social work. I was drawn into Keith's orbit in 1987 when I heard him speak about poverty that would later be published in his book *The Poor You Will Have With You Always* (1989). I simply could not get enough of his thinking. In 1991, I was eligible for a sabbatical which involved reading through his 446 publications and speeches and interacting with him to glean what I could from his thinking (Ressler , 2010).

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The sabbatical included a trip to Chapel Hill, North Carolina where I stayed with Keith. While there, he gave me access to his files and boxes of materials in his large study with bookshelves that stretched from the floor to the ceiling. We also engaged in hours of conversation during that visit and the years that followed until his death.

Each summer after the visit to Chapel Hill, Keith would invite me and my three children to his summer home in Little Switzerland, North Carolina. For me, it was a time to talk about faith and social work. For him, it was a time to play mahjong and other games with my children and treat them to all the jellybeans they wanted at a local tourist gift store just off the Blue Ridge Parkway. I was chagrined at how many jellybeans they would take. He was delighted. I was visiting Keith in 1995 at his summer cottage when he was diagnosed with terminal cancer and was with him as he began processing his imminent death. He died a few months later, a man fully at peace, tempted in one conversation to take one last cruise, but then deciding that was not necessary.

I am Sorry I Have Made Them: The Call for Reconciliation Competency

Keith did not speak directly to the issues of peace and reconciliation, but he has shaped my thinking in several ways that are relevant to the topic I will address this morning. First, one of Keith's poignant faith tenets was his emphasis on grace (Keith-Lucas, 1994). Keith suggested there are three. I will call them theological paradigms: Christianity of Grace, Christianity of Law, and Christianity of Morality. Christians of Grace, his preferred theological paradigm, are those who "respond to the Good News of God's forgiveness with gratitude and can do nothing but try to emulate it in their dealings with other people" (p. 174).

I have been inspired as well by the challenge Keith made in his first published comments about the integration of faith and social work in 1958. His comments were a response to an article in *Social Casework* grappling with the relationship between religious and spiritual values and social work practice (Spencer, 1957). Keith's response included this challenge:

It is clear that unless we are to hold that traditional religious belief...is in error, the possibility of a synthesis must and can exist.... The task of beginning to make such a synthesis will not, however, be an easy one. It will require an exploration, for those willing to undertake it, of what theology really teaches and not what most people take for granted that it teaches or

remember from Sunday school. It may also involve some re-examination of the implicit values that lie behind our helping efforts. (Keith-Lucas, 1958, p. 237)

It must be intellectually rigorous, conducted by people who are amateurs neither in religion nor social work. It will have to deal with the “hard paradoxes” rather than the “easy correspondences.” (Keith-Lucas, 1958, p. 238)

This challenge is as important now as it has ever been, especially for the topics of peace and reconciliation and particularly as followers of the Prince of Peace.

I do not have the space to provide extensive evidence that we live in a world that is broken; nor do I need to convince anyone. It is depressingly obvious. The Black Lives Matter and the Me-Too movements remind us of the continuing impact of racism and sexism. According to the Gun Violence Archives, there were 692 mass shootings in 2021 with 45,000 people dying due to gun-related violence (Gould, 2021). The January 6 storming of the Capital and talk of civil war remind us of the extreme and potentially devastating effects of the polarization of our American society.

Our task, suggests Keith, is to bring together theological insights and social work theory. And so I want to begin with some armchair, but I hope more than Sunday School theology, as it relates to peacemaking and reconciliation.

Theological Insights Related to Peacemaking and Reconciliation

As we hear the almost continuous news breaks about the many problems in our world, it is tempting to believe that things are getting worse and worse. So, let's start there and put the troubled world that we see, feel, and hear about in a theological perspective.

My favorite Bible is the *Oxford Annotated Bible* that I bought as a freshman in college. This bible has 1,512 pages from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21. The scriptures begin on page one with this statement, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (*Oxford Annotated Bible, 1962, Gen. 1:1*). Chapters one and two record the unfolding of creation, including the creation of human beings, a high point. Genesis 1:31 ends with this statement, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (*OAB, 1962, Gen. 1:31*). Chapter two adds more details about the goodness of creation which, in my favorite Bible, takes us to page four.

But as we are all keenly aware, something has gone wrong with

the beautiful creation described in chapters one and two. Beginning with chapter three, Genesis pivots abruptly to the painful reality of the fall. More details about the years following the fall are presented in the next few chapters and then in Genesis six, just eight pages into my favorite Bible, there is this sobering passage of scripture:

The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.

So, the Lord said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds, and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them" (*New International Version*, 1978, Genesis 6:5-7).

As bad as things are, I rather doubt things are worse now than at that point. One of Keith's maxims from the more than 100 maxims included in the book *Essays from More than Fifty Years in Social Work* (1989) is this maxim: "A Christian ought never to be disappointed in another person. He or she should be more realistic than that" (p. 95).

1,504 pages follow this low point. They begin with a small but powerful word in Genesis 6:8: "but." As the *King James Version* (1611) puts it, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." As frustrated as God was, God did not wipe humankind from the face of the earth. God engaged us with his grace and began the work of reconciliation. That is the focus of the remaining 1,504 pages that begins on page eight.

God's grace and reconciling work begins with the person of Noah and winds its way through history through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the children of Israel, through the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth, his disciples, and the early church. and now to us.

Our call is to carry on the reconciling work that began with Noah. We are to be, suggested Keith, Christians of Grace. He states, "Those who are Christians of Grace will find not only that their religion and the helping process are compatible, but that there is a very close correspondence between the helping process of God and that of human beings" (p. 175).

I John 3:16 states, "This is how we know what love is, Jesus Christ laid down his life for us" (*NIV*, 1978). Verses 17 and 18 continue with what I believe is a more complete theological understanding of our task as Christians. It reads,

And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth (NIV, 1978).

“With actions and in truth.” Our task is to demonstrate our love with our actions to help make this world more like the way God intended it to be. Jesus offers these words to us in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew: “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God” (NIV, 1978, Matthew 6:8). The Psalmist and Peter offer this mandate: “Turn from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it” (NIV, 1978, Psalms 34:14 and I Peter 3:11). The Hebrew writer says, “Pursue peace with everyone, as well as holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (NIV, 1978, Hebrews 12:14). Paul puts it this way in II Corinthians 5:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. (NIV, 1978, II Corinthians 5: 17-18)

My question is this, do we know how to do it? Did your family model peacemaking and reconciliation? Did they teach you how to do it? Did it happen in your church? As our country struggles with so many difficult issues, do people turn to the church for guidance on how to bring about peace and reconciliation? Here is a very simple question – how comfortable are you with conflict? Do you have a good handle on what to do to help others who are in conflict?

As we consider the challenge of being peacemakers and striving to be ministers of reconciliation, it is good to be realistic. This is complicated territory. Romans 12:18 puts it this way, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” (NIV, 1978). There are several personal experiences I have had that have driven the complicated nature of peace and reconciliation home for me.

The first took place when I was about 13 when I had a lawn-mowing business. One day, I went to mow the lawn for one of my customers, and to my surprise, there was another boy about my age mowing my lawn. I confronted him about his trespassing and his response was to draw back and slug me on the chin with his fist, knocking me to the ground. Dazed, I stood up, turned my head slightly, and said to him, “Here do you want to hit this side too?” for that is what I remembered

Jesus telling us to do if someone strikes you on the cheek. Before I knew it, he hit me a second time knocking me to the ground again. I lay there in a state of theological and existential shock. What do you do when someone hits the other cheek? I am still searching for the answer to that question.

The second is the experience I had organizing and volunteering with students at the World Trade Center disaster in 2001 while at Roberts Wesleyan College in Rochester, New York. I don't have time to go into the details. I will simply say the experience made me keenly aware of the pain and suffering that international conflict causes and of the complicated dynamics that lead to terrorism and war. At one point, I went down to the foot of two I-beams in the form of a cross that had been set on a concrete berm amid the massive pile of rubble to meditate. How do we get this madness to stop, I wondered. I am still looking for an answer to this question.

While I was in my 20s, I was trained as a mediator. Even though I had grown up in a peace church, I realized there were things I could do to help people resolve conflict in constructive ways.

That is my premise this morning. There are things we can do, skills we can learn, and difficulties we can get involved in, to nudge things toward peace and reconciliation. "In the same way," Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (NIV, 1978). So, where do we start?

A Multidimensional Understanding of Peace and Reconciliation

First, let's start by defining some terms as they will be used in my comments this morning. *Reconciliation* is a complex concept that has many dimensions and applications. The focus of this presentation will be principally on the process of achieving interpersonal reconciliation. The term *peace*, which has numerous definitions and applications, will be used to refer to harmony in personal relations. The term *shalom*, often used as a synonym for peace, will be used when referring to the state of wholeness, completeness, or perfection (Ravitzky, 2022). *Competence* will refer to an individual's demonstrated ability to understand and do certain tasks appropriately and effectively (Kaslow, 2004).

So, in this presentation, reconciliation will be viewed as the process of achieving interpersonal peace as a part of seeking shalom in which everything is whole, complete, and perfect. A competent peacemaker and reconciler can understand and bring about peace and reconciliation appropriately and effectively.

Let me address the concept of conflict as well. In 1986, the activist and Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel (Investigator, 2022) stated “The opposite of love is not hate; it’s indifference.” I would suggest this morning that the opposite of peace is not conflict but brokenness. It is important to have a sound understanding of conflict as we move into the topics of peace and reconciliation.

Conflict, I suggest, is simply differences that produce tension. Some differences do not produce tension as would be the case when one person enjoys driving and the other prefers to not drive. This difference results not in tension but a wonderful trip together.

There are times, however, when the differences produce tension. And here is a critical point. The tension that comes from differences is not necessarily bad. To put the matter in theological language, conflict is not a sin. Consider the analogy of anger addressed in Ephesians 4:26, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger” (*English Standard Version*, 2008). Anger is not the problem; it is what one does in a state of anger that can be the problem. The *New International Version* (1978) puts it this way, “In your anger do not sin.”

Similarly, conflict in and of itself is not a problem. The tension we feel is a recognition that there is a gap in perspectives that it would be worthwhile tending to. Hunger calls us to eat. Thirst calls us to drink. Tension calls us to close a gap in the relationship. Without hunger and thirst sensations, as unwanted as they may be, we would die without them. Without tensions from differences, we would not be motivated to pay attention to a gap in our relationships.

I would go so far as to suggest that conflict was created by God. Human beings were created in the image of God as unique thinking, feeling, creative, social, and spiritual beings. Give each of us an unlimited amount of money and freedom to build our ideal house, we would end up with very different houses. Some of the differences we bring to the world will inevitably result in tension. I think it was so in the Garden of Eden.

There are five ways to resolve the tension that comes from our differences. The tension can be resolved by doing it your way, or my way. It can be resolved by a creative full agreement or with compromise. Or the tension can be resolved by agreeing to do nothing. Each of these options will work just fine if the two in conflict are willing to cooperate.

The problem is that we have the propensity as humans to resolve the tension in ways that create harm to others and our relationships. We can see this immediately when Adam and Eve disregarded God’s command and began to point their fingers at each other and the serpent. In Genesis 4, we find the tension between Cain and Abel resulting in the first murder.

Our negative understanding of conflict is the result of us having experienced painful solutions to tensions in the past be it verbal abuse, physical abuse, neglect, being silenced, or laws and policies that cause harm to people or relationships. Our goal should not be to eliminate conflict any more than we might try to eliminate the hunger and thirst sensations. Our goal needs to be to notice, address, and resolve tension in a way that does not harm others, and indeed brings people together. And it can be done.

Our challenge is to become competent in being peacemakers and in the ministry of reconciliation. Competence, as was noted earlier, requires that we understand what is involved in peacemaking and reconciliation so that we can do our work appropriately and effectively (Kaslow, 2004). As a part of this understanding, I would like to offer a multidimensional framework that I think will help guide the efforts to bring about peace and reconciliation. That is where I will turn to next.

A Multidimensional Reconciliation Framework

Psalm 85:9-10 is an inspiring passage of scripture that provides a multidimensional understanding of what it takes to bring about peace and reconciliation. I was first introduced to this scripture-based framework by John Paul Lederach (2014). John Paul was introduced to the framework by Nicaraguan Christians during the Sandinista war in the 1980s.

Here are the verses that provide a foundation for the framework: “Surely his salvation (shalom) is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth are met together; justice and peace have kissed *each other*” (KJV, 1611).

There are four elements in this framework: mercy, truth, justice, and peace. Interestingly, these four elements are very similar to those found in I Peter 3: 10-12. Psalm 85:9 states the ideal we are striving for as “glory dwelling in our land.” Peter speaks of the ideal as a “life to be loved” and “good days.” What beautiful descriptions of the world we long for: glory in the land, the life that is loved, and good days.

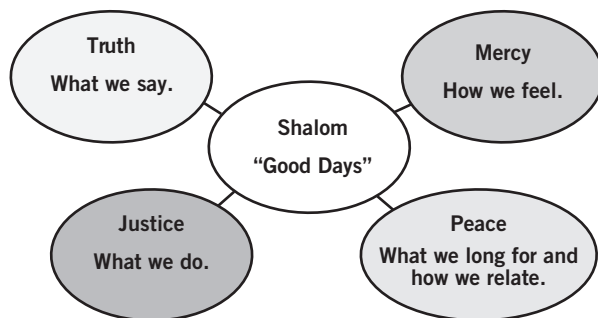
What does it take to achieve that? It takes mercy and truth, justice and peace; the four elements found in Psalm 85. I Peter 3 states “we must keep our tongues from evil and our lips from deceitful speech,” which is to say, we must be committed to the truth. It states, “We must turn from evil and do good,” which is another way of saying we must embrace justice. We are called, in the I Peter passage, to “seek peace and pursue it,” a parallel statement to the Psalms 85 element of peace.

Finally, Peter acknowledges the importance of mercy by reminding us that God is attentive to our prayers.

We, therefore, have in Psalms 85 a multidimensional model that suggests what it takes to have the shalom and good days reflected in Genesis chapters one and two. (See Figure 1) What does it take? A shalom world is one in which people are merciful when differences emerge and are forgiving. We need to be able to tell our stories, hear the stories of others, and seek to understand reality together, especially when our perspectives and experiences differ and tensions, even painful events, emerge. We need to act in ways that do not harm others, especially when we find ourselves in conflict. A shalom world is one in which people are in harmony and long to be with one another.

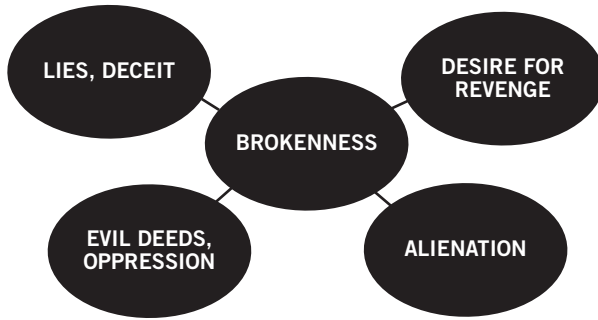
Another way to look at this multidimensional model is to see that “good days,” or a world of shalom, involves what we feel, what we say, what we do, and what we long for.

Figure 1: “Shalom, Good Days”



But while the shalom world and good days are what our souls yearn for and what we get glimpses of from time to time, that is not the world we frequently find ourselves in. (See Figure 2) Instead of feelings of mercy, we find a range of destructive emotions including self-centeredness, defensiveness, and the desire for revenge. Instead of a commitment to hear, share, learn, and seek the truth, we find lies and deceit; ignoring, silencing, or denying the perspective of others, especially if the truth causes us pain or discomfort. Instead of acting justly, we find behaviors that cause pain or do harm to others, denying them their rights, oppressing or suppressing them, even to the point of causing death. And instead of a longing to be in harmony, we find alienation, a desire to be alone, to be separated, and to eliminate those who disagree or are at odds with us.

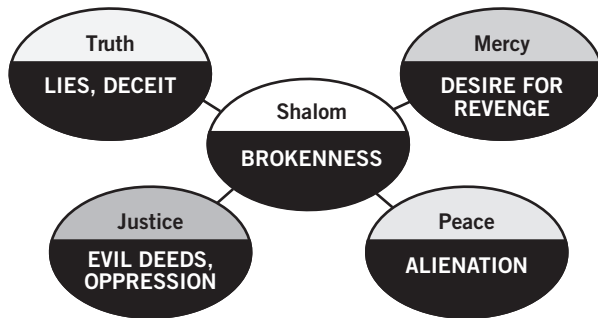
Figure 2: A Broken Land, Strife-Filled Days



“But.” “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (NIV, 1978, Genesis 6:8). As we know from Genesis 6:8, there is good news. Peace and reconciliation are possible.

Our task as Christians, and as Christian social workers, is to take the incarnational example of God and to help individuals and society be transformed from brokenness to shalom. (See Figure 3) It will require that we help individuals and groups move from a desire for revenge to being merciful, to help move communication from lies and deception to shared and cooperative truth-seeking; to move personal and institutional injustice to behaviors and systems that are rich in justice for all, to move people who are alienated and even have no hope or desire to be unified to long for and embrace others, even their enemies. This is no simple task, just as Keith challenged us in 1958, but it is the task to which we are called.

Figure 3: Returning to Shalom and Good Days From Brokenness and Strife-Filled Days

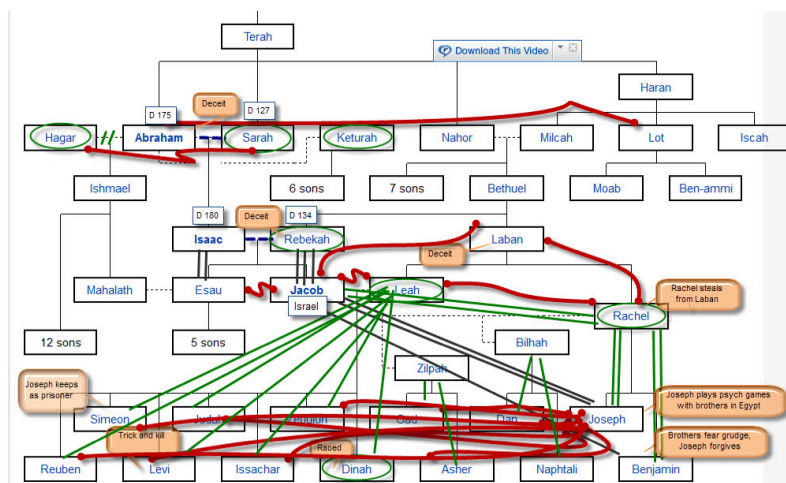


Applying the Multidimensional Framework

I would like to analyze three familiar situations briefly that illustrate the transformation of the four elements of mercy, truth, justice, and peace from negative to positive forms. The situations are the conflict between Jacob and Esau, the conflict between Joseph and his brothers, and our current state of national politics.

Broken Worlds and Strife-filled Days: Let's begin with a genogram of the family of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. (See Figure 4) The context in which conflict emerges and the history of the group contributes to the conflict that people experience. This is surely the case with Jacob, Esau, Joseph, and his brothers. The family of Abraham is a very complex blended family with many skeletons and dysfunctional relationships.

Figure 4



One of the most notable dynamics is the pattern of intergenerational manipulation, lies, and deceit. You can see it between Abraham and his nephew Lot, between Rebecca and her husband Isaac, between brothers Jacob and Esau with the help of their mom Rebecca, between Jacob and his uncle Laban, between Laban and his daughters Leah and Rachel, and between Joseph and his brothers to name a few.

First, let's look at Jacob and Esau. It is hard to know exactly what causes a broken relationship, but in the story of Jacob and Esau, the lies and deceit of Rebecca and her son Jacob played an important part. The outcome of the lies and deceit is the stealing of Esau's birthright by Jacob, a clear injustice in the inheritance customs of that time. Esau

was enraged to the point of threatening to kill Jacob. Out of fear for his life, Jacob ran off to live with his uncle Laban, Rebecca's brother. The relationship between Jacob and Esau was severed, and they did not see each other for decades.

You can see all four of the elements in this broken relationship story; lies and deceit rather than truth, injustice rather than justice, the desire for revenge rather than mercy, and alienation rather than peace between the two brothers.

Or take the story of Joseph and his brothers. It is again hard to pinpoint the exact beginning of this broken relationship. The dysfunctional family dynamics of this blended family were a setup for the broken relationship that developed between Joseph and his brothers. Rachel, wife number two, is Jacob's favorite wife. Leah, the first wife, is competing with Rachel for Jacob's affection. Rachel's son Joseph is Jacob's favorite child. Leah has six boys and a girl who feel less loved by their father Jacob. As if this is not complicated enough, there are two house servants with whom Jacob has four more boys, who are also less loved than Joseph. Eleven boys in all (twelve when Benjamin is born later) and one girl in the same family of which one is the favorite, two wives in competition with one feeling more loved than the other, and two house servants who had children fathered by Jacob. That is the context in which this story takes place.

The boys grow up with interfamily tension and emotional separation between them, at least in part, because of the favoritism of their father. The issue that seems to push things over the edge are the dreams Joseph told them and the coat of many colors he paraded around in. It seemed to the brothers he was taunting them. They got fed up, toyed with killing him, but ultimately sold him into slavery. Joseph ends up in Egypt.

The four elements of a broken family and strife-filled days are easy to see in these two stories. Hatred and revenge rather than mercy, taunting and conspiring rather than collaborative truth-seeking, injustice rather than justice, alienation rather than peace between the brothers.

Let's think as well for a minute about our current political polarization. I am not here to take any particular political side. It is again hard to know how the current polarization started. Each side seems to see the problem starting at a different time in history. What is clear is that the political arena is broken and strife-filled.

Collaborative truth-seeking, so important for a shalom world, is largely absent and has been replaced with political races that are designed not to tell the whole story and provide balanced presentations of facts, but to say what it takes to win the election, even if the message

is misleading and wrong. Rather than applying mercy and forgiveness in the political discourse, the most powerful emotion that seems to be driving the relationship between parties is revenge politics. And rather than engage in a process that stresses fairness and inclusiveness in decision-making, nasty actions are taken by the majority with power, and efforts to obstruct are used by the minority, be it using parliamentary procedures that cut the other side out, denying nominees for positions, holding the individual accountable for misdeeds, etc. The result is not peace and unity between the parties but a polarized political process in which the political leaders seem to be unable to work together or even want to be unified. These are indeed strife-filled days with a great deal of brokenness in our political process. It is so easy to get swallowed up in the brokenness. It seems so hopeless.

“But.” We need to be reminded of this. We are again at that point. God is in the reconciling business and we are called to participate in that process. It can and does happen. Let’s look again briefly at the stories of Jacob and Esau and of Joseph and his brothers which are inspiring stories of reconciliation.

Jacob and Esau are Reconciled. In Genesis Chapter 33, after decades apart due to the unjust actions of Jacob and the fury of Esau, we find the two estranged brothers coming towards each other. Esau has 400 men on one side and Jacob has his flocks and family on the other. Is it finally time for Esau to get his revenge? Jacob is afraid so. Jacob is ready to make amends, but he is fearful about how Esau is feeling. As they approach each other, Jacob goes into a protective, defensive posture, and divides his family and animals into groups. Jacob goes out front and bows to the ground seven times (Granberg-Michaelson, 2021) as he approaches his brother.

Esau’s surprising response is recorded in Genesis 33:4; “But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept” (NIV, 1984).

The next verses from Genesis 33:5-12 are precious:

Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. “Who are these with you?” he asked. Jacob answered, “They are the children God has graciously given your servant.”

Esau asked, “What’s the meaning of all these flocks and herds I met?” “To find favor in your eyes, my lord,” he said.

But Esau said, “I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.”

“No, please!” said Jacob. “If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing

the face of God, now that you have received me favorably. Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need.” And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.

Then Esau said, “Let us be on our way; I’ll accompany you.”

What a great demonstration of reconciliation – after decades of being estranged, one brother who took advantage of the other, and the other brother who was so mad he wanted to kill him; two brothers embracing and weeping together, how did they do it?

It began with a longing to reconnect on Jacob’s part. The story of Jacob wrestling with the angel is not insignificant. In this encounter, he came to grips with the truth of his past and committed to changing his ways, changing his name to demonstrate his commitment to do so. We see the remorse on Jacob’s part and a willingness to make things right with his offering of animals. We see Esau’s desire for revenge turn to mercy and forgiveness. He didn’t even want the amends Jacob offered but out of respect for Jacob, he accepted it. The result is being at peace with his brother. This is a beautiful story of a strife-filled relationship that turned into good days. It should give us hope.

Joseph and His Brothers Are Reconciled. Let’s look at the story of Joseph again. After several decades of being in Egypt, including time spent in prison, the reunification with his brothers begins with this passage in Genesis 42:6-8 (NIV, 1984):

Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the person who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph’s brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them.

“Where do you come from?” he asked.

“From the land of Canaan,” they replied, “to buy food.”

Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, “You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected.”

Things were not going well. It appears at this point that Joseph is not interested in being reconciled. He seems angry and unforgiving. Even after decades, Joseph’s brothers are feeling guilty about what they did to Joseph as we can see in this passage when they are feeling threatened by this powerful man who they did not realize was Joseph.

They said to one another, "Surely, we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come on us." Reuben replied, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you wouldn't listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood." (NIV, 1984, Genesis 42:21-23)

Interestingly, they did not know Joseph could understand them since he was using an interpreter. It appears the guilt the brothers are sharing begins to moderate Joseph's anger and resentment. Verse 24 says, "He turned away from them and began to weep" (NIV, 1984).

But Joseph is not yet ready to be merciful and forgive. He sends them back to Canaan to bring his brother back which pushes his brothers to the edge emotionally. In the process, they demonstrate to Joseph that they have changed, regret what they did, and are determined to act justly in this situation by protecting Benjamin and their father.

Joseph is still not ready to be merciful and forgive them. He pushes them more. There is this desperate plea on his brother Judah's part that seems to transform Joseph's feelings further:

Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord's slave in place of the boy and let the boy return with his brothers. How can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the misery that would come on my father." (NIV, 1984, Genesis 44:33-34)

Joseph's desire for revenge is now transformed into mercy and forgiveness and we have these moving scenes:

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it" (NIV, 1984, Genesis 45:1-2). You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly. Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward, his brothers talked with him. (NIV, 1984, Genesis 45:12-15)

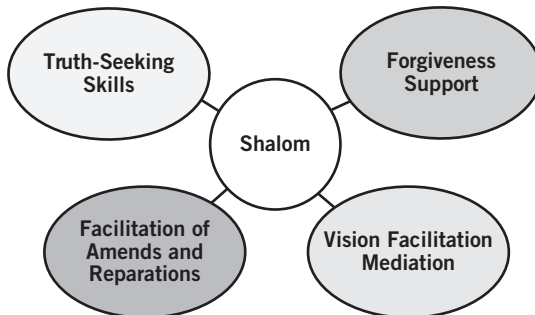
The family is reconciled. How did it happen? The re-engagement of the brothers in this case was more accidental than intentional. The brothers went to Egypt for grain. They had no idea Joseph was there or that they were talking to him. It is clear Joseph is bitter and maybe he was weighing taking revenge. The longing to be reunited took some time to emerge for Joseph. The reconciliation seemed to start with convoluted truth-seeking exercises. Joseph pushed them secretly and discovered the guilt they had. When he pushed them to make Benjamin vulnerable, he discovered their commitment to act justly, with Judah even willing to become a prisoner to protect others. Oddly, Judah's offer was the amends Joseph seemed to need. Slowly but surely, his bitterness and desire for revenge turned to mercy and forgiveness. His desire to be reunited, which was buried deep in his soul, burst forth with tears of joy as he embraced his brothers. Precious words in verse 14: "And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them." After decades of strife, good days have come. Truth, Justice, Mercy, and Peace.

What Can We Do?

One of the biggest changes in helping in the past few decades is the development of trauma-informed practice. It was not a part of social work knowledge and skills when I began social work. We now have a much better understanding of what trauma is, how it works, and what we can do in almost every helping situation to incorporate trauma-informed practice. At almost every conference, including this event, in almost every educational program, trauma knowledge and skills are offered. This is great and I find it very helpful. It is what we need for peace-making and reconciliation.

I would like to focus on five competencies based on the Psalm 85 framework that are needed to help those in conflict move from brokenness to shalom, to move from strife-filled days to good days as we have seen occur in the stories of Jacob and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers. (See Figure 5)

Figure 5: Peacemaking and Reconciliation Skills



To help individuals move from desiring revenge to mercy, we need forgiveness support skills. To help individuals move from telling lies and being deceitful to seeking and telling the truth, we need truth-seeking skills. To help individuals move from evil acts and oppression to acting justly, we need amends facilitation, and reparation skills. To help individuals move from alienation to peace, we need vision facilitation skills and mediation. Let me speak about each of the skills briefly.

Vision Skills: It is hard to know when entering into a broken relationship where to begin. Do you begin by helping people forgive first, do truth-seeking, find ways to make amends, or find ways to reconnect? I think it may differ from situation to situation. For Jacob, it was a longing to be reunited. For Joseph, it was the need to hear that his brothers had remorse and were aware of the pain they had caused him. I want to start with what I think is the most difficult part, helping individuals in conflict believe that peace and reconciliation are possible.

It is not uncommon for individuals in the throes of strife-filled days to see no way out. They may feel hopeless and may have buried the longing for harmony with those with whom they are in conflict. I suspect Esau and Joseph were too wounded and angry at first to even want to talk about reconciliation. It is probably a good thing they were separated in the early days.

The first skill we need is the ability to help people develop a vision for reconciliation, to nurture a longing for harmony. I have wondered about Joseph's change of heart. Where did the courage to forgive come from? What kept him from taking revenge? He certainly could have done so.

I offer this possibility. Joseph was just a baby when his father Jacob was reunited with his uncle Esau. I have a hunch that Joseph heard the story about the reconciliation of his father and Esau over and over again as he grew up. This story may well have been a seed that contributed to Joseph's longing to be reunited with his brothers and his family. The example of Esau may well have given Joseph the strength to forgive the painful actions of his brothers and transform the alienation into a harmonious relationship.

Longing to be reunited is essential to peace and reconciliation and it can be among the most difficult to achieve. Do we think this is not a challenging skill to develop? Imagine a political process where politicians work together in a unified manner, speak and seek the truth together, and extend mercy and forgiveness to the other side. It is hard at this point to imagine but is the work we need to do.

At least one part of this is to find and tell the success stories of reunification and harmony that have taken place in the past.

Truth-Seeking Skills: A second skill is truth-seeking skills. Truth-seeking skills empower those who were wounded to share their pain in a safe environment. It may also involve helping the perpetrators hear from victims about the incident that caused the pain and suffering. There is value in doing this in therapeutic settings with a counselor and many of you have the skills to allow that to happen on a one-on-one basis. We also need to learn to use circles effectively to allow people to tell their stories in the presence of others. Another skill is having the ability to bring victims and offenders together in a safe environment to understand and talk about what happened. Skills are needed as well at the macro level to allow the painful stories of oppression in our past to be told including the stories of slavery, the oppression of First Nations people, women, children, religious persecution, and so on.

As a part of the truth-telling process, we need to also learn to help people listen effectively and deal with the painful stories they hear. Those hearing the painful stories of the past may need help to know what to do with what they are hearing and to be offered strategies so that the stories do not overwhelm their capacity to hear. This may be a part of the pushback about critical race theory.

We have much to learn from the South African apartheid work of Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Tutu, 2000) as well as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2022). The road to reconciliation in these macro arenas began with truth-telling which included processes to allow stories to be told constructively.

Amends and Reparation Skills: We also need skills to help individuals and systems make amends and reparation. I am reminded of the NACSW plenary session in 2017 by Tanya Smith Brice, who told the story of a bully who stole a bicycle from his neighbor. After some time, the bully wanted to play with the neighbor who said, first I would like my bike back. Matthew 5:23-24 puts it this way:

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go. First, make things right with your brother or sister and then come back and offer your gift.” (CEB).

Notice that it says if your brother or sister has something against you, not if you have something against your brother or sister. The offender is called to take action...to go and make things right. We need skilled people who can help this happen.

We have much to learn from the Alcoholics Anonymous 12 Steps program in this regard. I will not go over all of the steps but will point out that Step eight in the recovery process is that a list is made of all persons that had been harmed with a willingness to make amends to them all (*The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous*; AA; 2022).

Making amends is an important part of reconciliation. It requires wisdom and skill and we need to get better at it. The mere mention of reparations causes powerful reactions. Injustices and possible amends or reparations are not easy to identify and talk about. As the AA step 4 acknowledges, it takes a fearless moral effort. It is exceedingly difficult to know how to make amends and to decide what reparations are appropriate, but it is necessary work to be done if we want to move to a shalom world and good days.

Forgiveness Support Skills: The fourth area in the Psalm 85 multidimensional model is forgiveness. I am reminded of the phrase in the Lord's prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Being able to forgive is essential to have good days and to live in a glorious land. The harmful effects of negative emotions such as resentment and grudges are well documented as are the benefits of forgiveness (Worthington, 2003). While the decision to forgive is relatively easy to do, letting go emotionally is much more difficult to accomplish. It takes more than will. It takes knowledge and skill to help people walk through the process.

Dr. Everett Worthington and his colleagues at Virginia Commonwealth University have done significant research on how to help people forgive emotionally. They have developed a forgiveness model to help people move from a state of what they call unforgiveness to forgiveness. The model they developed is called REACH. REACH is an acronym with five steps: recalling the hurt, increasing empathy, giving an altruistic gift of forgiveness to the offender, committing publicly to forgive, and holding on to forgiveness.

REACH is an evidence-based approach in which over 10,000 people have participated in workshops. Numerous studies have found that the REACH model has been helpful to those who have followed the steps. Whether it's this approach or another, the point is that there are skills we can develop and workshops we can offer to help individuals emotionally forgive others.

Mediation Skills: I want to end up where we started by looking again at skills we can offer to help people find peace. The skill that we can develop and offer is mediation. Helping people develop a longing for peace is critical but so is helping people find solutions to differences that are causing tension. Mediation is a powerful voluntary, collaborative process that does just that. When successful, it allows

individuals to reconnect. It is a skill we all should have and use.

Developing Competent Peace-Makers and Ministers of Reconciliation

As followers of the Prince of Peace, it seems that all of us as Christian social workers should make it a priority to become competent peacemakers and ministers of reconciliation. What can be more important than to have a clear understanding of what conflict is, to have the confidence to move into situations in which differences are producing tension, and to have the skills to help move people from strife-filled days to good days, to move from brokenness to shalom?

We need knowledge and skills that inspire and help people to move toward peace and reconciliation. We need knowledge and skills that will allow truth to emerge and be embraced. We need knowledge and skills to restore justice. We need knowledge and skills to move people from revenge to mercy. We need people who have the confidence, knowledge, and skills to move into areas racked by tension and help them find unity.

Our profession has made great strides in the past decades in understanding trauma and developing skills to deal with its impact on people. May we commit ourselves in the next decades to make equal gains for people desperately in need of peace and reconciliation. May we as followers of the Prince of Peace be those to whom individuals experiencing tension in their relationship turn. Is that not our central mission? ❖

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Addressing the Inequality of Disasters: The Role of Faith-based Organizations in Disaster Response and Recovery

Aynsley H. M. Scheffert, James Ellor

Disasters have a significant global impact every year and disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. Disaster response efforts are often inequitable leaving already vulnerable populations at risk. These inequities in disaster response represent a social justice concern for congregations and congregational social workers and must be considered in future disaster recovery efforts. As churches and faith organizations provide essential disaster response and recovery services, this article outlines a model for increased equity in provision of disaster response and recovery efforts. A case illustration using the COVID-19 pandemic is provided for further exploration of the equitable disaster response model in the context of congregations and congregational social work.

Keywords: disaster, COVID-19 pandemic, inequality, disaster recovery and response, faith-based organizations

DISASTERS HAVE A SIGNIFICANT GLOBAL IMPACT every year. On average, disasters account for 60,000 deaths annually and result in a cost of 116 billion United States dollars per year worldwide (Statista Research Department, 2021; Ritchie & Roser, 2019). A disaster is defined as an adverse event, either natural (ex. Earthquakes, hurricanes) or human caused (ex. train derailments, mechanical failures or mass fatality shootings) which cause significant, mass damage, hardship and/or loss of life affecting more than one system of a society (Bonanno et al., 2010). According to Bever & Weigel (2021) in 2020, 274 catastrophic

disasters were recorded resulting in \$202 billion in economic losses and 8,200 fatalities. These estimates do not include the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whether a disaster is natural, human caused, or represents the impact of a worldwide pandemic, it is important to note the impacts of disasters are not equal (Kammerbauer & Wamsler, 2017). Disasters disproportionately effect vulnerable populations (Kammerbauer & Wamsler, 2017; Pollock et al., 2019). Previous research surrounding the impacts of disasters has noted clear differences in the impacts of disasters based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and age with our elderly and children experiencing higher levels of negative outcomes following disasters (Arcaya et al., 2020; Benevolenza & DeRigne, 2019; Ellor & Mayo, 2018; Fussell & Lowe, 2014). The inequities in disaster response represent a social justice concern for congregations and congregational social workers and must be considered in future disaster recovery efforts.

In the United States, federal and state programming offers blanket programmatic responses to disasters and most of the governmental disaster response is managed through the FEMA program (Ellor & Mayo, 2018). These one-size-fits all approaches to disaster relief are not tailored to specific areas with specific needs (Arcaya et al., 2020; Ellor & Mayo, 2018; Rivera, 2018; Rivera & Nickels, 2014). In an effort to augment governmental disaster response, faith-based organizations have had a vital role in disaster relief and response historically and have been involved in disaster response at the individual and community levels (Ellor & Mayo, 2018; Muller et al., 2014; Rivera, 2018; Rivera & Nickels, 2014; Westfall et al., 2019). Faith-based organizations and congregations have offered counseling, housing resources, and programming to supplement government-based disaster relief and response following previous disasters (MHum et al., 2011; Rivera & Nickels, 2014; Sutton, 2007). For instance, in a study by Westfall et al. (2019), religious groups and organizations accounted for over \$211 million in charitable donations for relief following Hurricane Harvey and 526,000 volunteer hours.

Social workers within these faith-based organizations and congregation-based social workers, in conjunction with social workers working across social sectors, play vital roles in disaster relief (Ellor & Mayo, 2018; Kranke et al., 2020). Due to the call to promote and advocate for social justice and to address injustices where they are observed based on the social work Code of Ethics (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2017), it behooves social workers across the profession to reflect on the injustices identified in disaster response and seek out more equitable models for provision of disaster relief and response and promote justice for those effected by disasters.

However, frameworks guiding the provision of equitable disaster responses for faith-based organizations may be relatively inconsistent.

This article will seek to provide both the rationale surrounding the inequalities which need to be addressed in disaster work as well as ways for faith-based organizations to approach equitable disaster response and recovery efforts and promote just practices in disaster response through an illustration of equitable disaster response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Inequality in Disasters: Impacts of Disasters on Communities

Communities are directly impacted by disasters both in terms of the place and the people, whether the disasters are natural, human-made or results of disease (Arcaya et al., 2020). Disasters effect infrastructure, shifting social systems, economics and demographics (Benevolenza & DeRigne, 2019; Kaniasty, 2020; Koliou et al., 2020). Additionally, disasters have been shown to result in significant changes across community life, by disrupting community cohesion and social capital (Arcaya et al., 2020; Koliou et al., 2020).

Impacts of Disasters on Housing

Given the impacts of disasters on both physical environments and social capital, it is not unusual to see significant migration or displacement of individuals impacted by a disaster. The impact of disasters on changes in population was first noted following the Buffalo Creek Flood disaster of West Virginia in 1972 and has continued to be observed following the more recent disasters of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita (Asad & Kay, 2015; Erickson, 1976; Hunter et al., 2015; Raker & Elliot, 2018). Several variables which may prompt this exodus and the corresponding outcomes associated with migration versus displacement have been noted in the literature relating to socioeconomic status and social and economic supports and represent inequities in the effects of disasters on vulnerable populations (Asad, 2015; Erickson; 1976; Hunter et al., 2015; Raker & Elliot, 2018).

During Hurricane Harvey, in addition to hitting the City of Houston, many of the retirement and annual commuting populations of person who winter in Texas were also hit hard. In a community where “Winter Texans” live, they have a second home in the north. Thus, after the hurricane, they simply went to their other home. In these communities their second homes in Texas are not covered by any FEMA support and not always sufficiently insured. This suggests that these homes were slow to be repaired, or in come cases sold for their land without repair. Older adults who were in nursing homes or on the verge of needing a nursing home prior to the storm were moved to different facilities. In cases of disasters such as this, the average age of these communities goes

down after the storm as the result of the removal of this portion of the population. However, low-income seniors who do not have the ability to relocate are still in these communities, but often with fewer resources to bring their homes back to livability (Ellor & Mayo, 2018).

Migration becomes an appealing alternative to individuals affected by disaster if they have the economic and social resources within a nearby unaffected region following a disaster (Asad, 2015; Raker & Elliott, 2018). It is important to note, migration tends to be a voluntary decision and requires a level of financial buffer in order for individuals to migrate or relocate after a disaster (Arcaya et al., 2020; Suar et al., 2017). This ability to relocate or migrate is also supported through preestablished relationships with current community members in the new, unaffected area and requires a degree of mobility and access to the unaffected region for these relationships to have been built prior to the disaster (Arcaya et al., 2020).

Conversely, low-income neighborhoods with higher percentages of income-based large apartment complexes are often disproportionately impacted in disasters (Suar et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2017). Individuals from these areas may not have the social or economic capital to rebuild, causing increased displacement following disasters (Suar et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2017). The economic impacts on individuals who are displaced are significant and research indicates individuals who are displaced may never financially recover (Arcaya et al., 2020; Suar et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2017). This forced displacement represents another area of injustice in disaster response disproportionately effecting vulnerable and marginalized populations (Suar et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2017).

Impacts of Disasters on Community Economic Health

In addition to the impacts on individuals' financial situations, migration or displacement has been shown to change the physical footprint and business demographic of disaster impacted communities (Arcaya et al., 2020; Logan et al., 2016; Fussell et al., 2017; Raker, 2020). Due to the impact of the disaster on the built environment, some areas of the built environment may be left in a state of disrepair following a disaster, especially in low-income areas (Elliott, 2015; Elliott & Clement, 2017). Areas which may have previously been undeveloped may suddenly be the focus for increased development, leaving low-income, developed areas with reduced resources and social capital (Elliott & Clement, 2017).

In other cases, communities experience a resurgence in development and revitalization following the displacement of some of the population. Further, disasters impact the housing market with a disproportionate drop in home values in low-income neighborhoods and increased housing costs

in mid-high income areas as new housing is developed (Elliott, 2015; Loughran & Elliott, 2019; Pais & Elliott, 2008). This process leads to gentrification of previously low-income areas which then prevents the former residents from returning due to the increased home values (Elliott & Clement, 2017; Loughran & Elliott, 2019; Pais & Elliott, 2008). In addition, the make-up of new businesses in these areas may also differ from the industries established prior to the disaster, potentially leaving residents at a loss for jobs in their previous industry (Elliott, 2015; Logan et al., 2016).

Impacts of Disasters on Families

In addition to the potential financial impacts of migration and displacement, an exodus following disasters may impact an individual or family's social groups, sense of community support and community belonging or integration (Kaniasty, 2020; Koliou et al., 2020). Following disasters, communities often come together with a sense of shared experience to develop a common identity (Andrighetto et al., 2015; Kaniasty, 2020; Vezzali et al., 2018). This common identity prompts increased shared social support and cohesion, as well as increased prosocial behaviors (Andrighetto et al., 2012; Kaniasty, 2020; Vezzali et al., 2018). Termed "hardiness" in the literature, this community support and cohesion becomes an important indicator of community resilience in response to disaster (Kaniasty, 2020).

A community's resilience to disasters has a direct impact on the health and coping of individuals and their long-term outcomes (Arcaya et al., 2020; Kaniasty, 2020. Suar et al., 2017). Individuals who received increased levels of emotional, material and informational support have been shown to experienced decreased rates of both PTSD and perceived distress (Bonanno et al., 2010; Hall et. al., 2016; Kaniasty, 2020; Koliou et al., 2020; Suar et al., 2017). One study conducted by Platt et al. (2016), highlighted the importance of social cohesion to long-term distress reduction following disasters. The authors noted social connections bolster emotional support which acts as a protective factor against the development of PTSD symptoms following disasters (Platt et al., 2016).

Social support and community cohesion, similar to economic and environmental support as noted above, is also subject to inequality in receipt of support (Fussell & Lowe, 2014; Lowe et al., 2018; Suar et al., 2017). Vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, children and adolescents, those with mental or physical disabilities and populations from low socioeconomic status are disproportionately impacted by community disasters and have fewer resources for coping (Arcaya et al., 2020; Benevolenza & DeRigne, 2019; Fussell & Lowe, 2014). One study

completed by Lowe et al. (2018) found individuals living alone, older individuals, and low education anticipated receiving less social support than their married/cohabitating, younger, and more educated peers while another study completed by Suar et al. (2017) noted individuals from low income received less material support while tending to experience higher levels of loss. This disproportionate response leaves individuals with already stressed resources in further deficit during a time when increased support is necessary for long-term recovery (Suar et al., 2017).

These high community needs following disasters may strain local and state governments (Rivera & Nickels, 2014). Due to the mass impacts of many disasters, federal and state responses seek to respond to the greatest numbers of needs, but are not able to address specific needs of certain populations or sectors affected by the disaster (Ellor & Mayo, 2018; Howell & Elliott, 2018; Jason D. Rivera, 2018). Due to the impacts of disasters across multiple sectors of communities, including business, healthcare, food, childcare, and other basic necessities, congregations and faith-based organizations have filled in the gaps created by large-scale government responses (Ellor & Mayo, 2018; Muller et al., 2014; Rivera, 2018; Rivera & Nickels, 2014). These gaps and disproportionate distribution of aid highlight the need for congregations and faith-based organizations to provide disaster response and recovery oriented in a justice-framework to reduce inequities in disaster response.

The Role of Congregations and Faith-based Organizations in Disaster Response

Religious and faith-based organizations have been heavily involved in the provision of disaster response services (Ellor & Mayo, 2018; MHum et al., 2011; Rivera & Nickels, 2014; Sutton, 2007). Past community research following disasters has shown the impact faith organizations have on fostering community resilience, as well as providing disaster relief (MHum et al., 2011; Rivera & Nickels, 2014; Sutton, 2007; Wilkinson, 2018). Several factors have been identified to explain the unique contributions of faith organizations to disaster response, including the ability to mobilize volunteers and tailor services to recipients (Ellor & Mayo, 2018; Rivera & Nickels, 2014). These strengths and assets of congregations and faith-based organizations in the delivery of disaster response and recovery aid can help to foster more justice-informed and inclusive practices to reduce inequities in disaster response.

A study completed by Sutton (2007) described the activities of churches in New York City following the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks and identified varied disaster response activities. Faith-based organizations and houses of worship provided services such as counseling, childcare,

and programming in order to meet the needs of their congregants. In addition, they provided for material needs such as financial resources, food, clothing, and housing. Similarly, in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, multiple studies noted local churches provided essential disaster relief and response services, filling in gaps in government responses (Adams, 2013; Persell, 2008; Rivera & Nickels, 2014).

In disaster preparedness and response models, governments and academic institutions partner with faith organizations to contribute to recovery (McCabe et al., 2012, 2014). McCabe and colleagues (2012) investigated a partnership between academic institutions and faith-based organizations that provided train-the-trainer sessions for disaster mental health first aid and disaster preparedness planning. Another model involved government agencies using faith communities to provide emotional support following a disaster (McCabe et al., 2014). Both models demonstrated that faith communities developed better skills in facilitating disaster preparation planning and confidence in ability to provide mental health first aid based on these partnerships (McCabe et al., 2012, 2014).

This research suggests that faith-based organizations, churches, and houses of worship have previously been able to provide emotional, social, physical, and financial support to victims impacted by disasters (MHum et al., 2011; Rivera & Nickels, 2014; Sutton, 2007). However, the role of equity in this disaster response provided by individual religious organizations is less defined. Increased focus on equity-based, justice-informed models can guide congregations and faith-based organizations in their disaster response efforts.

Equitable Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery

There are a variety of equity focused frameworks for public policy, disaster preparedness and decision-making strategies for disaster response. Disaster planning and response models use a three phased approach to addressing disasters: disaster preparedness, disaster response, and disaster recovery (Miles, 2018). This three phase approach is used to differentiate tasks which are needed at different times when considering disasters (Gebbie et al., 2013; Irohara et al., 2013; Oloruntoba et al., 2018). The phases are cyclical with examination of the preparedness plan and assessments for further development always following disaster response and recovery to continually improve processes (Irohara et al., 2013; Oloruntoba et al., 2018).

Disaster Preparedness

The first phase of disaster planning and response is the preparedness

phase (Irohara et al., 2013; Oloruntoba et al., 2018). The preparedness phase relies heavily on public policies and mechanisms at the state and local government levels (Oloruntoba et al., 2018; Pollack et al., 2019). In equity-focused models, the preparedness phase solicits feedback on community needs and barriers from key stakeholders in the most vulnerable areas of the community (Domingue & Emrich, 2019; Mayer, 2019). At this stage, key stakeholders include community members, leaders from varying areas of the community including religious and cultural leaders, educational leaders (such as teachers and principals), health-care leaders, and business leaders with a particular focus on vulnerable areas and populations (Mayer, 2019). This stage is meant to generate disaster preparedness plans and systems for disaster response. In an equitable model, focusing on enhancing protections in the built environment such as planting trees and building structures for mitigating impacts of natural disasters provides increased equity in the case of a disaster as it reduces the vulnerability of underserved populations (Mayer, 2019).

The disaster preparedness phase in an equity-based model seeks to increase involvement of the community, especially the areas of the community at the most risk, in disaster planning (Domingue et al., 2019; Mayer, 2019). Equitable models note those who are members of the community are often the most knowledgeable about community resources, barriers, and concerns (Pollack et al., 2019). Equitable models employ community development practices to increase community involvement which also serves to build social cohesion in the community and promotes resilience at a community level (Mayer, 2019).

A key consideration in disaster planning is developing systems for disaster response efforts (Irohara et al., 2013; Oloruntoba et al., 2018). In equitable frameworks, the involvement of community leaders can be leveraged to develop plans for distribution of essential resources such as food, water, and established a system for accessing essential services (Mayer, 2019). This, in turn, helps to disseminate knowledge regarding the disaster plan to the larger community. Public forums regarding the disaster response plan also enhances the equity of the model, especially if round table discussions for feedback are undertaken (Irohara et al., 2013; Oloruntoba et al., 2018).

Disaster Relief

Disaster relief is the phase which immediately follows the onset of the disaster (Irohara et al., 2013; Oloruntoba et al., 2018). This phase represents the task of stabilizing the community, addressing immediate community needs such as food, water, medical care, shelter, and safety

following the disaster onset (Irohara et al., 2013; Oloruntoba et al., 2018). In equity-focused models, disaster relief should focus most heavily on addressing the needs of the areas which are either 1) most impacted and 2) most vulnerable (Mayer, 2019). A critical task of this stage is to assess the needs of the community most impacted and the community most vulnerable through direct contact with community members or key stakeholders in the community such as business or cultural leaders (Mayer, 2019). Ensuring an understanding of community needs from the perspective of its members increases the likelihood of disaster response providing the needed resources. This response differs from mass disaster response in its provision of those resources or access to needed services based on the needs of the vulnerable population rather than providing a one-size-fits-all approach to disaster response, which is used for mass responses, for the larger community which may not address the needs of all populations (Mayer, 2019).

Disaster Recovery

The final stage of disaster planning and response is the recovery stage (Irohara et al., 2013; Oloruntoba et al., 2018). Traditionally, disaster recovery has focused on continuity of operations plans for organizations, reunification plans for families, and compiling disaster kits and resources (Pollack et al., 2019). An emerging trend in the literature focuses on building community resilience as an equity approach to the recovery phase of disaster planning and response and is a national public health priority (Mayer, 2019; Pollack et al., 2019). Community resilience is a community's ability to engage in "meaningful, collective action... to advance disaster response and recovery" (Pfefferbaum et al., 2015, p. 152). Community resilience is heavily influenced by social capital and this paradigm espouses investment in the local community and interventions to enhance community's ability to adapt to change and increase a community's capacity for resilience, especially related to disaster (Mayer, 2019).

One such intervention is the "Communities Advancing Resilience Toolkit (CART)" (Pfefferbaum et al., 2015) which utilizes a community development and equity-focused framework to include community participation and cooperation, communication with community leaders, stakeholders and members, and critical reflection (Pfefferbaum, 2015). CART utilizes the principles of participatory action research in four domains to build resilient communities. The first, connection and caring, involves community members in communication of shared experiences, values. This domain builds interpersonal support, nurturance, respect for diversity, equity, and promotes justice and hope. The resources domain

encourages the identification, sharing, and planning surrounding use of physical, information, natural, social, human, and financial resources. The third domain, transformative potential, focuses on the evaluation and assessment of current community disaster-related preparedness data and mechanisms, as well as engages communities in framing collective experiences, goals, and needs for skill development. The transformative potential is heavily influenced by concepts of community evaluation and assessment from the participatory action research lens (Pfefferbaum, 2015). The final domain, disaster management aids communities in disaster preparedness, response and recovery planning including focus on prevention and migration (Pfefferbaum, 2015).

Given the evidence of inequality in the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in areas of unemployment, housing, food security, and health, this paper will attempt to apply principles of equitable disaster response to offer suggestions for faith-based organizations to consider in their equity and justice-informed disaster response approach.

Applying Equity-Focused Disaster Response Principles: The COVID-19 Case Illustration

Although COVID-19 has been termed a health pandemic, its effects have mirrored those of a disaster. To compare the impact of COVID-19 to previous disasters in the United States, between 2010 and 2020 123 natural disasters were recorded resulting in costs of 825.4 billion dollars and 3,091 deaths. In contrast, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, estimates of the economic costs of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States are \$16 trillion dollars and counting, while the death toll related to COVID-19 is over 4 million (Culter & Summers, 2020; Karlinsky and Kobak, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on daily life for Americans and impacted societal systems from the economy to higher education. All fifty states declared a state of emergency related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Coleman, 2020). Schools, businesses, and churches were shut down and stay-at-home orders limited individuals' ability to travel (Secon, 2020). Individuals found themselves working from home or out of work with over 20 million workers applying for unemployment between April and June of 2020 with unemployment upwards of 6 percent in February of 2021 (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). The impact on individuals, communities, institutions and the economy were immense.

The massive job losses and high unemployment rates of the early pandemic had not been seen in the United States since the Great Depression (Kochhar, 2020) Nineteen million Americans were receiving

unemployment income in the United States at the end of November 2020 with climbing unemployment claims in early December 2020 (Iacurci, 2020). The rallying cry, “We’re all in this together” (Frieden, 2020) early in the pandemic hid a reality which became known to millions of Americans, even the pandemic was not equal (Birritteri, 2020). Women and minorities experienced unemployment at much higher rates than their white male counterparts, a fact which was hidden early in the pandemic due to the large-scale furloughs of workers related to stay-at-home and shelter-in-place orders (Karageorge, 2020).

In addition to the effects of unemployment on the financial status of millions, loss of income affected the ability of many to obtain basic necessities including food and housing (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021; Karpman et al., 2020; Nobari et al., 2021; Perry et al., 2021). Twenty percent of renters identified continuing to struggle with paying rent by March 2021 (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021; Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, 2021). Even higher rates of rent difficulties were identified in over 28% of adults with children. In addition, the effects of these financial difficulties left adults to choose between housing and food, with 15 % of adults with children identifying they had not been able to provide enough food in the past week (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021; Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey, 2021). In a recent study of the effects of financial insecurity in Indiana, Perry et al. (2021) noted the effects of socioeconomic hardships during the pandemic disproportionately affected vulnerable populations and those at lower socioeconomic levels, even after controlling for pre-pandemic status.

Adding to the complexity of the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of women left the workforce beginning in the fall of 2020 due to concerns related to childcare (Keogh & Brown, 2020). The added burden home-based schooling, closed childcare centers, and attempts to manage either telework or work outside of the home with rising virus counts, resulted in burnout for many women (Keogh & Brown, 2020; Scheider et al., 2020). Left to make decisions for themselves and their families, the continued gender-based income gap made female workers in some households the obvious choice to provide childcare, resulting in a dramatic inequality in gender-based analysis of unemployed workers (Birritteri, 2020; Madgavkar et al., 2020).

Unemployment is not the only area of inequality in the COVID-19 pandemic. Fatalities from the virus have been disproportionately affecting minorities, with a significant impact on Black/African American communities (Abedi et al., 2020; Basset et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2021). In addition to mortality, infection rates differ based on race, socioeconomic status, and health-care access (Abedi et al., 2020; Garcia et al., 2021).

Even more striking, evidence shows increasingly disproportionate effects for younger populations groups, with younger cohorts of racial or ethnic minority status reporting higher mortality rates (Garcia et al., 2021).

Further, minority racial and ethnic groups have also been disproportionately affected. Wright and Merit (2020) point out that disparities in access to and quality of health care make certain populations particularly vulnerable to the virus. This finding was further reinforced by the CDC which also reported increased risks related to COVID-19 among marginalized racial and ethnic groups because of systemic barriers in healthcare and chronic stress related to on-going racism (Center for Disease Control, 2021). Consequently, Black and African-American individuals, who make up 13.4% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019), account for 19.9% of COVID related deaths (Holmes et al., 2020). Additionally, Rossen and colleagues (2020) reported that the largest percentage increase of excess deaths between January and October 2020 was among the Hispanic and Latinx population. Excess deaths are defined as “the number of persons who have died from all causes, in excess of the expected number of deaths for a given place and time” (Rossen et al., 2020, p. 1522). Due to the social marginalization and increased health risk for these populations in the U.S., there may be fewer resources available during a disaster, which Benevolenza & DeRigne (2019) found affects coping mechanisms available for resilience.

In addition to the inequality of health-care access and health outcomes related to race and ethnicity, the pandemic has had a disproportionately high impact on the elderly population. Individuals over the age of 65 represent 79% of total COVID-19 related deaths but only 16.5% of the United States population (Gold et al., 2020; United States Census Bureau, 2019). Not only has the pandemic had an unequal impact on the mortality rate of elderly individuals, the social distancing and precautionary measures undertaken for elderly populations were also more stringent for the elderly in nursing homes or other group settings leading to significant social isolation of this population (Arcaya et al., 2020; Benevolenza & DeRigne, 2019; Fussell & Lowe, 2014).

While COVID-19 represents a unique historical event, the inequality of the COVID-19 pandemic mirrors that of previous natural disasters and highlights the need for equity and justice-informed frameworks for disaster response. As identified above, the impact of disasters on communities is not restricted to fatalities or the physical environment, but also affects social relationship, community support, sense of community, and economic variables (Benevolenza & DeRigne, 2019; Kaniasty, 2020; Koliou et al., 2020). A community's resilience to disasters has a direct impact on the health and coping of individuals and their long-term outcomes (Arcaya et al., 2020; Kaniasty, 2020). As faith-based

organizations play such a key role in disaster response, utilization of an equity and justice-focused paradigm for providing disaster relief is of paramount importance (Rivera, 2018; Westfall et al., 2019).

Equity-focused disaster response utilizes principles of participatory action research, as well as a community development framework to guide a tailored approach to disaster response (Mayer, 2019; Pollack et al., 2019). These approaches utilize key stakeholders to aid in fostering relationships with community members to increase participation in provision of disaster relief (Mayer, 2019; Pfefferbaum, et al., 2015). Utilization of community members increases not only the ability of groups to tailor their disaster recovery efforts to an individual's community's assets and needs, but also promotes community members participation in disaster response efforts, enhancing community cohesion and resilience (Mayer, 2019, Pfefferbaum et al., 2017)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, racial and ethnic minorities, women, and the elderly have been disproportionately impacted by the financial and health effects of the pandemic. To utilize an equity and justice-focused model for disaster response, a faith-based organization should seek to first build relationships with key stakeholders within these communities (Mayer, 2019; Pollack et al., 2019). Fostering these relationships will aid the disaster response by building the trust and communication necessary to engage the community (Mayer, 2019; Pfefferbaum et al. 2015).

Through development of relationships with community leaders and stakeholders, the faith-based organization may begin to ascertain the community's needs and resources through spokespeople among community leaders or through community-based assessments (Mayer, 2019). The identification of resources through community assessment should act as a bridge between local government, community organizations, community leaders and key stakeholders, as well as community members. Bringing together these community entities, not only aids in receipt of needed disaster relief resources, but also builds community resiliency and disaster response management systems (Pfefferbaum et al., 2017).

As vulnerable communities have been identified, equitable disaster responses will have enhanced focus on at-risk communities. In addition to the identification of needs, assets, and resources, engaging the community in assessment and evaluation of current disaster relief and response promotes transformative discourse among community members, as well as critical reflection. Community members will then be participants in noting areas of need, and mechanisms which worked well for disaster response (Mayer, 2019; Pfefferbaum et al., 2017; Pfefferbaum et al., 2013). Through this assessment and evaluation, shared collective experiences will be highlighted and aid in community support and communication (Pfefferbaum et al., 2013; Pfefferbaum et al., 2017). As community

members engage in dialogue and develop a collective experience, focus can then be turned towards developing a shared vision for the community and goals, as well as mechanisms for evaluation of goals and current needs (Mayer, 2019; Pfefferbaum et al., 2013). It is at this point in the disaster response when faith-based organizations may offer potential resources or interventions to aid in achieving collective community goals (Pollack et al., 2019).

The main concern related to equity-focused disaster relief is in building the relationships with a community to be able to determine what relief is needed. A one-size-fits-all approach tends to be more common and often does not provide adequate coverage for diverse community needs. For example, a community may not have food-access concerns, but they have a significant lack of access to low-cost health-care due to transportation. Opening a food donation center, while well-intentioned, would not provide equitable disaster relief for this community even if this has been helpful in other communities. Without adequate relationship building and community participation in the needs assessment, the barrier of health-care access would remain unknown.

The role of faith-based organizations in disaster response in the United States is crucial. Federal, state and even local governments seek to provide mass disaster response, but these types of overarching disaster relief programs are not equipped to tailor interventions to individual communities and may lead to inequality in disaster relief. Community-based and faith-based organizations can engage more closely with vulnerable communities to determine needed resources and assets (Ellor & Mayo, 2018; Pollack et al., 2019). Through this unique contribution, community and faith-based organizations can engage with the community and partner with community leaders and stakeholders to develop resilient communities through equity and justice-focused community development and participatory action models for disaster response (Mayer, 2019; Pfefferbaum et al., 2017; Pollack et al., 2019). ❖

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From Shame to Restoration: A Transformative Approach to Authentic Sexuality

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The Christian community at-large perpetuates a narrative that human sexuality is shameful rather than a natural, beautiful expression of God's created design. Christian culture's longstanding conflagration of shame and sexuality is also evident in its discomfort in discussing healthy sexual relationships and its promotion of resources that reduce sexuality to its procreative purposes. Promoting a false association between sexuality and shame also increases the risk of sexual abuse and the revictimization of abuse victims. In contrast, Scripture promotes the interconnectedness of sexuality and spirituality as equally holy to each other and fully redeemed by Jesus's death and resurrection. A biblical view elevates sexuality as a unique expression of love and the relational communion of the Trinitarian God. As the Church moves forward to recover a proper biblical understanding of sex, it must examine its disparate treatment of women in and outside the congregation, reclaim the gift of sex as God intended, and normalize discussing topics relating to sexuality. Removing the shame around sex by focusing on God's grace will diminish confusion, strengthen relationships, and foster a biblically authentic view of sexuality. Social workers can play a role in embracing a transformative approach to authentic sexuality as congregants and professionals.

Keywords: shame, restoration, human sexuality, spirituality, purity culture

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN NORTH AMERICA has an awkward, unhealthy, and often unbiblical response to human sexuality. Reports of the Christian community's mishandling of sex abuse allegations, among Catholic and Protestant churches, are a painful reminder of the devastating consequences of the Church's uncomfortable and unhealthy response to sexuality. As Winner (2005) expressed, "[s]o much of what we say about sex is wrong: deceptive, distorted, misleading...

Much of what we say about sex in public is simply false, and [when we] listen to falsehoods about sex, we wind up living falsehoods about sex" (pp. 63-64). Often the Christian community focuses on the consequences of not obeying sexual ethics and fails to address the benefits of sexual desire and how it can be appropriately incorporated into a godly marriage. Wheat and Wheat (2010) encountered some Christians in their practice who associated sexuality with shame and found that misconceptions about sexuality deeply wounded Christian marriages. As Balswick and Balswick (2019) expressed, sexuality is a natural and vital part of our spiritual lives, allowing us to recognize our incompleteness. The false narratives surrounding the Church's teachings on human sexuality have significantly impacted the Church, its community, and the people they shepherd. This conceptual paper discusses the common misconceptions in the contemporary Christian community regarding human sexuality and redirects the narrative on sexuality from shame to restoration. In addition, the authors will reflect on a social worker's role in embracing a transformative approach to authentic sexuality.

Christian Community's Narrative: Sexuality is Shameful

The Lingering Influence of Gnosticism

The common narratives presented by the Church about sex, sexuality, and sexual desire are primarily associated with guilt, shame, and sinfulness. Balswick and Balswick (2019) traced the shame narrative to the ancient heresy of body-soul dualism, and the repercussions of this separation are keenly felt today. The authors observed that the Christian community had missed the mark on teaching and leading brothers and sisters in Christ to develop a healthy and God-honoring view of sexuality. Gnostics perpetuated a false belief that human bodies are evil, insinuating that healthy physical acts, from dancing to marital intercourse, should be considered unspiritual (Rudolph & Wilson, 1983). Saint Augustine believed that sexual acts were rooted in the Adamic sin of lust and posited that the sole purpose of intercourse was for procreation rather than sexual pleasure (James, 1987). Harper (2018) also noted that historical church leaders such as Clement of Alexandria held a similar view that sex was meant for procreation, not enjoyment. Foster (1987) expressed that some theologians went as far as claiming that "...the Holy Spirit left the bedroom whenever they [the married couple] engaged in sexual intercourse" (p.101)

The historical Church's narrative of associating sexuality with a sense of shame continues to linger in the Christian community today. Throughout history and even in the present day, sexuality is often viewed in a negative light within the Christian Church. One example was the first author's

experience teaching a marriage Sunday school class in the Church's sanctuary. A pastoral staff member commented that talking about sexuality in the Church's sanctuary, where worship took place, felt wrong. Serving as a congregational social worker at the time, the first author recognized that a social worker has a vital role in challenging false narratives regarding sexuality in the Christian community.

The Pressure of Purity Culture

Christianity often considers and describes sexuality in terms of an individual's purity, with the practice of abstinence and virginity elevated as the primary indicator of whether one can be considered sexually pure (Looy, 2018). Purity pledges, which gained traction as a popular approach and a fear tactic in the 1990s, arose amid the height of the AIDS epidemic and awareness of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The purity pledge targeted teenagers, called for young people to abstain from sex until marriage, and became popular in evangelical circles (Haberman, 2021). There is an unspoken assumption and promise that one would have a fulfilling sex life if the couple entered a marriage covenant "untainted." The unhealthy association between shame and sexuality continues to solidify with a covert narrative that sex is to be feared and is an unwholesome aspect of human existence.

The gendered language of the purity culture promotes a strict gender divide where men are viewed as being entirely controlled by their sexual impulses, and women are viewed by their ability to procreate (Ligia, 2021). Additionally, women are often seen as gatekeepers of men's sex drive. Contemporary churches continue to host purity talks, focusing on defining modesty and explaining clothing standards for the young women in the Church. These purity conversations' implicit and explicit message conveys that women's bodies naturally cause men to lust and struggle with sexual temptation. Women are then taught to assume the responsibility to dress modestly, not to be a stumbling block for their fellow brothers in Christ (Gresh, 2002). The Purity culture has created a false narrative that women's bodies are shameful and that the only function of sexuality is to procreate. The focus on the body as the cause of sin echoes the ideology of Gnosticism. As Stiles and Ketcham (2019) said: "Modesty advocates intend to help women protect their bodies as valued treasures, and while this message can be interpreted in this positive light, the connection between the body and sin presents an especially destructive narrative for women" (p. 98). Klein (2018) processed the trauma she experienced from the purity culture, "We went to war with ourselves, our own bodies, and our own sexual natures, all under the strict commandment of the church" (p. 8).

The purity movement also negatively impacts men. Nouwen (2021) discussed the shame and self-loathing that are associated with men's sexual desire. A significant flaw in purity culture is the failure to teach boys self-control and how to separate women from their sexuality. In teaching boys how to delay sexual gratification, they are never taught to question the harmful practice of objectifying women. "For boys, purity culture left behind scars of masculine immaturity, male-centered relational dysfunctioning, white male entitlement, religious superiority, sexual compulsions, shame, self-loathing, and the moral justification for all kinds of abuse" (Nouwen, 2021, para. 4).

Looy (2018) pointed out that the expectation of purity seems to only apply to the area of sexuality in the Christian faith. As a result, there is little room for redemption or restoration once an individual commits sexual sin. The violation of sexual purity evokes a deeper degree of shame than other sin struggles under the pressure of the purity culture. Unfortunately, the misconception of sexual sins being irredeemable created an even more profound sense of shame that both abusers and bystanders can weaponize to silence victims of sexual abuse (McKnight & Barringer, 2020). It can also marginalize those in the Church who question their sexuality (Mason, 2021).

The Impact of False Narratives on Sexuality

Sanjakdar (2018) emphasized the importance of discussing and educating others on human sexuality in religious circles, arguing that someone's religious beliefs can impact their worldview and behavior when viewing their religious beliefs not only as subject matter but how they think about subjects. The creation story describes God's beautiful and perfect creation beyond the sun and the moon. God created man and woman and declared them good. God also created sexuality. Churches that view the body as sinful are still influenced by Gnosticism's false idea of separating the body (bad) and spiritual realms (good). The concluding verse in Genesis 2:25 (*New International Version*, 1973/2011), "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed," plainly shows there is nothing shameful about the human body. Sexuality is part of God's design, and there is no shame in embracing it. The Church's discomfort and false narratives about sexuality have robbed Christians of the joy and beauty God intended his people to experience in their sexuality.

Perpetuating Falsehood

The Church's teaching of associating human sexuality with shame has prevented the development of a healthy and biblical understanding

of sexuality. Balswick & Balswick (2019) made a keen observation on the impact of a shame narrative of sexuality on children's development:

How sad it is that parents so often give children negative messages about pleasure at a very early age. The genital area is either considered nonexistent or bad. This shameful message communicated during normal curiosity and inquisitive touch leaves children feeling that they have done something improper. What forms within children's minds is the sense that it is wrong to feel the slightest pleasure of a genital nature so they may begin to repress the sexual in themselves. (p.9)

The Church's avoidance of sexuality contrasts with society's hypersexuality. Society has ready answers for sexuality that are often counter to biblical teaching. The Church's silence on the topic of sexuality has failed to create a psychologically safe environment for children and youth to ask questions about sex and their sexuality. When the Church's response to the teaching of sexuality is silence, adolescents navigating their developing sexual feelings with no clear guidance and unanswered questions will struggle silently. Children and youth with natural curiosity who do not receive guidance about sexuality from trusted adults may seek answers from other sources. Society depicts a distorted view of sex that often promotes an over-acceptance of open relationships, the over-sexualization of women, and a lax attitude regarding pornography use. When young people have a safe space to ask natural questions about sexuality and receive honest answers from a trusted adult, they can develop a sound theology of sex, removing the need for secrecy. Navigating sexual feelings and curiosities with a lack of guidance evolves into a secretive exploration that could increase a youth's vulnerability to an unhealthy view of sex and sexuality.

Relational Confusion

The narrative of purity culture developed during the teen years that produced a connection of sexuality with shame could impact the navigation of dating relationships for young adults. The Christian community's negative view of sexuality resulted in the unhealthy repression of sexual desire and the association of sex with a sense of shame. Brown (2007) defined shame as an "intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of acceptance and belonging" (p.5). Natarajan et al. (2022) highlighted several false narratives that purity culture had conditioned the evangelical circles to believe, including that weight of a man's sexual urges falls upon the woman's shoulders and that men have no control over their sex drive. This harmful narrative robs both genders, men of their ability for self-control and women of their worth and egalitarianism.

The roles and dynamics that this narrative portrays build a destructive foundation for couples entering a covenant partnership. Shame induced by false narratives of sexuality could have a crippling effect on a married couple's intimacy and marital relationship. Suppose a couple is successful in inhibiting sexual desires until marriage; the switch in a woman's perspective from 'sex is bad, shameful, and wrong' to 'sex is a gift that I can enjoy with my partner' is challenging as the couple navigates sexual intimacy with a false understanding and shame narrative of sexuality. Likewise, the belief that a woman will fulfill all of the man's sexual urges in submission to her husband's desires within a covenant relationship despite her feelings at the moment can perpetuate marital rape, impacting the mental health of both parties long term (Natarajan et al., 2022).

Christian media have contributed to relational confusion stemming from unbiblical narratives about sexuality, sending conflicting messages on dating and marital relationships. Klement and Saragin (2017) studied eight popular Christian dating books with adolescent women as the target audience. These books include *And the Bride Wore White: Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity* by Dannah Gresh and *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* by Joshua Harris. This study explored the collection's contents and reported alarming themes that send harmful and sexually degrading messages to young women. A common theme revolved around the message that sexuality devalues and taints women and that sexual intercourse is a necessity for the purpose of procreation. Some of the identified themes presented a twisted view of submission, and women should fulfill and submit to their spouses' sexual needs to the point of accepting sexual violence as a normal part of life (Klement & Saragin, 2017). The Apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 7: 3-4 (NIV, 1973/2011) clearly stated the mutual fulfillment of sexuality between a husband and wife: "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife" (NIV, 1973/2011). The false narratives and teaching of sexuality in the Christian community harm a couple's relationship and hinder the development of a thriving marriage.

The shame and silence narrative that predominates the Christian community resulted in some Christian couples seeking to follow God's design for marital relationships uneducated and neglecting safe sex practices. The shame narrative prevents a young couple from asking pertinent questions relating to sexual health, such as STDs or the use of contraception, before entering a marital covenant. Foster and associates (2021) found that the sexual shame narrative contributed to women neglecting essential health practices such as receiving Human Papillomavirus (HPV) health screening that could prevent them from

contracting sexually transmitted infections. Crain (2020) noted that the state of Alabama requires an abstinence-centered education and limits information on proven contraceptive methods. The state has higher rates of cervical cancer, sexually transmitted infections, and teen pregnancies, which may be in part due to their limited sex education. The example of Alabama indicates negative health implications when the only solution for sexual desire is purity. Sexual addiction is another negative health consequence of the shame narrative. Nouwen (2021) pointed out that as many as 89% of Christian men occasionally watch porn, and over 50% reported having a pornography addiction (Shimer, 2022). In an effort to remain outwardly pure, behind closed doors, purity culture may increase an individual's vulnerability to sexual addiction.

The Risk of Revictimization

The Church's false teaching of the association between sexuality and shame could result in revictimizing sexual abuse victims. Mullen (2020) described the various tactics used by abusers to perpetuate and cover up abuse which aims to attack a victim's self-worth and self-identity, thus heightening a victim's sense of shame, fear, and isolation. Such fear and shame may stop victims from coming forward, twisting the narrative so that victims are blamed for their abuse. As Mullen (2020) stated: "Many abusers coerce victims into silence with threats meant to give the victim the impression that telling anyone will cause some kind of destruction" (p. 95). The most famous example of this type of abuse can be found in the long history of the Catholic church's clergy sexually abusing children, using their position of power and religious influence to perform illicit acts, misusing the biblical text to confuse and silence their victims (King, 2017, p. 121). The recent reporting of numerous evangelical churches, including the Southern Baptist Convention, highlighted the common occurrence of churches treating victims as aggressors and shamefully protecting the church leadership (Smietana, 2022). McKnight and Barringer (2020) identified different methods churches used to "control the narrative," all to protect the Church and the perpetrator and shame the victims (p.56). Some churches cut deeper into the hurt by adding to the victims' shame. These unhealthy churches accused the victims of not following the biblical mandate of Matthew 18:15 despite legal violations and power indifference between the abuser and victim.

Biblical Perspective: Naked and Unashamed

The discussion of sexuality should be integrated into the Church's teachings from a biblical perspective. One concept that must be presented

clearly is that the broken shalom impacted all aspects of our lives, including our sexuality. By Jesus living, dying, and resurrecting in the flesh, God underscored the importance of the physical bodies he had created, reaffirming his initial assessment in the Garden, where he said, "It is very good" (NIV, 1973/2011, Genesis 1:31). While Adam and Eve's connections to each other and God were hurt by their sins in the Fall, Jesus repaired our spiritual intimacy at the cross. This restoration into God's family will culminate in the marriage feast described in Revelation 19, where God and his people will consummate a perfect unity. The Church must emphasize the hope of the Gospel and Christ's redemptive love, including the redemption of our sexuality.

When explaining the biblical perspective of human sexuality, it is also essential to recognize the larger social context of the time when Paul's letter to the Corinthians discusses sexual immorality and God's design for marriage. In the first century, the Greco-Roman culture was filled with idolatry and paganism, and noncommittal sexual relations was a common practice (Harper, 2018). Therefore, Christian principles of sexuality were in direct opposition to the societal beliefs about sex at the time. Paul wrote, "I have the right to do anything,' you say – but not everything is beneficial. 'I have the right to do anything' – but I will not be mastered by anything" (NIV, 1 Corinthians 6:12). This verse demonstrates that humans possess free will, but some actions have negative consequences and will fail to bring us closer to God. Later in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul exclaims that our bodies are temples and that we should not commit sexual immorality against our own bodies. We are created as both spiritual and physical beings. Whatever a human being does physically directly impacts them spiritually.

Relationship Between Sexuality and Spirituality

Contrary to the unhealthy view of sexuality in the Christian community, Scripture presents sexuality as a good gift from God, and our spirituality and sexuality are intricately interconnected. From the beginning, God created us to be in relationships with one another. In Genesis, God stated that it is not good for a man to be alone. Therefore, He created Eve as a complementary partner to Adam and commanded them to engage in physical union and to be fruitful in multiplying the earth (NIV, Genesis 1:27-28). Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed. Their sexual desire moved them closer to one another and God. Their nakedness not only reflects their physical being but also reveals their profound spiritual connection (Meteyard & Alexander, 2012). Throughout Scripture, sex is portrayed as a response to love in both the Old and New Testaments (Proverbs 5:19, Song of Solomon, 1 Corinthians 7:3-5). Human sexuality is not simply about procreation, as evidenced by Song of Songs 1:2-4. The initial verses in this

book convey the physical pleasures of sexuality, describing love as more delightful than wine. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul tells wives and husbands that in the kingdom of God, sexuality is a mutual service between spouses that goes beyond physical satisfaction and builds spiritual resilience.

An essential aspect of the relationship between spirituality and sexuality is being known by another. It is imperative to recognize that sexuality and spirituality are foundationally about connection and communion (Meteyard & Alexander, 2012). As humans created in God's image, we can only be fully satisfied in our relationships with others, as reflected in the relationship of the triune God (Grabowski, 2010). The Trinity embodies the unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit as one while simultaneously being distinct. Sexuality in marriage reflects the Trinity as the individual spouses come together as one and are drawn into a deeper connection with each other (Selling, 2019). Reflecting the relational nature of the triune God, human sexual desire is meant to draw us into a relationship with one another (Ouellet, 2015). As Balswick and Balswick (2019) said, "Sexual desire helps us recognize our incompleteness as human beings and urges us to seek others in finding a fuller meaning in life" (p. 11). Wounds against our sexuality are thus keenly felt as a spiritual loss. As with any trauma, those wounds are healed in the context of a restorative connection within ourselves and others (Badgett, 2018). We are designed for a healing community (Thompson, 2021).

Moving Forward

The Church's narrative of sex has been skewed throughout history, harming the foundational teachings on authentic biblical human sexuality. A proper biblical understanding of sex must replace the message of guilt, shame, and silence. The Church must begin to discuss the interconnectedness of spirituality of sexuality and the beauty of sexuality as intended by our Creator.

Examine the Church's Perspective on Gender

The current approach to how the Christian Church discusses sexuality is partly rooted in the patriarchal value of Western society. As Colver (2020) keenly observed: "...sexism is a pervasive reality that has seeped into our global and local contexts spanning all aspects of community—including in our schools, neighborhoods, businesses, and churches, without abandon, and often without even being noticed" (p.22). Homan and Burdette (2021) examined the existing narrative that church involvement promotes one's health. The study found that women attending inclusive nonsexist congregations reported the highest self-reported health. This study pointed to the potential negative impact of sexism among female church attendees.

Women are often blamed for men's sexual struggles and are tasked with keeping men sexually pure. This overemphasis on women's responsibility in sexuality occurs in both Christian communities and mainstream society. Women who experience sexual assault are often condemned as instigators and suffer additional shame. One such example is the recent Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) abuse scandal report. An independent investigative report found sexual abuse victims and advocates of the victims were disparaged as "professional victims" and "opportunistic" with alternative motives, and the SBC leadership minimized the sexual abuse trauma (Guidepost, 2022, p.5). The Church needs to carefully examine its values on gender and express support and compassionate care to victims who have experienced sexual assaults. Another example is the Catholic church and the struggle that has presented to support the victims of sexual abuse. According to the report by Rashid & Barron (2018), the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) takes a self-defensive stance to protect the church at the expense of the victims. There is a history of secrecy and protection of perpetrating priests of abuse. Studies have shown that widespread sexual abuse "was due to an institutional acceptance of abuse on the part of Church authorities who played a willful role in ignoring both the problem of child sexual abuse and the support needs of victims" (Rashid & Barron, 2018, pp. 6-7).

Reclaim the Gift of Sex as God Intended

The core of Christianity's narrative of sexuality is grounded in the creation of Adam and Eve, as described in Genesis 2. This narrative is further strengthened when Christ describes the Church as his Bride, whom He loves and provides for (NIV, 1973/2011, Ephesians 5:29-32). This imagery culminates in the wedding feast of the Lamb in Revelation 19:6-8 when God finally celebrates the perfect unity of His beautiful Church. However, in attempting to protect this core value of faith, the Christian community has often withheld grace for those who experience deep pain around their sexuality, costing itself the potential for winsome public discourse and, in many cases, robbing sex of its sacred joy even when it is experienced the way it was designed. The Christian community's narrative and response to sexuality are far from the beautiful picture of sexuality described in the Bible. How the Christian community communicates and presents its narrative of sexuality is part of the narrative itself, and conservative Christianity consistently communicates discomfort and even fear in the face of others challenging their beliefs on human sexuality. Christian churches need to reclaim the gift of sex as God intended. As Balswick and Balswick (2019) said: "When we are bold enough to believe that God is at the center of our sexuality, we will discover ourselves anew and be responsive and responsible in our sexual relationships" (p. 12).

Normalize Sex Talk in the Christian Community

God designed humans to be sexual beings, and when this fact is accepted and believed, it is possible to begin forming authentic sexuality. Contrary to the taboo ideal the Church places on sex, normalizing sex allows the Church to teach the abovementioned responsibilities and could potentially keep young people from engaging in unhealthy sexual behaviors.

A biblical perspective of sexuality would normalize discussing sex and create an avenue to instill healthy boundaries for people to ask questions, thus developing a biblically sound theology and understanding of human sexuality. Balswick & Balswick (2019) provided an excellent depiction of this integration:

We must intentionally integrate our sexuality and spirituality by carefully assessing our attitudes and behaviors. The ongoing challenge is to promote authentic, person-centered sexuality where we are mutually building mature relationships that bring forth the best in both. Knowing whose we are helps us know who we are. (p. 13)

Balswick & Balswick (2019) also suggested that instead of adverse reactions to children's sexual curiosity, parents should convey the goodness of God's design for our bodies and emotions by affirming the delight of touch. Biblical sexuality should be openly discussed and introduced at an early age. A child should learn about the broad topic of love and its different forms. Healthy sexuality can be taught at an age-appropriate level from when a child is small, and discussion can be deepened as they mature. Young children should also be taught that God created our bodies and declared them good. Biblical sexuality can also be upheld by teaching children how their bodies reflect God's goodness and teaching them correct anatomical names for their body parts (Grabowski, 2010). These foundational building blocks of sexuality can be expounded upon as a child enters puberty. For teenagers and young adults, instead of messages that promote purity culture and often foster shame and guilt, the conversation should center on God's intention for our sexuality – deep, intimate relationships with one another. Normalizing the conversation of sexuality in the Church reduces the implicit message of shame and guilt that currently exists.

Christian Social Workers' Role

Congregational social workers could take an active role in educating the congregation on biblically authentic sexuality (Dinse, 2022). Christian social workers who do not serve in an official capacity in the church could also engage in this vital endeavor of transforming the shameful

sexual narrative by normalizing the sex talk with fellow congregants. A foundational step a social worker must take is to self-examine and reflect on their understanding of biblical sexuality. In order to fulfill this vital role in changing false sexual narratives, social workers need to honestly examine the factors in their lived experiences that shape their sexual identity development. Here are some potential questions to guide the process of reflexivity:

- How did your parents explain sex to you (the "birds and the bees" talk)?
- Did you attend a sex education class in school?
- Did your church community discuss the topic of sexuality?
- Did any other sources, such as social media, books, movies, friends, or siblings, shape your understanding of sexuality?
- Do you have any unhealthy/false narratives of human sexuality?
- How do these narratives impact personal and professional relationships?
- What are the steps you could take to address these unhealthy narratives?

Christian social workers are uniquely positioned to advocate for a change in how the Christian church has traditionally discussed sexuality. The social work profession equipped practitioners to address change in micro, mezzo, and macro contexts. The skills developed from the profession mean Christian social workers, both congregants and those who serve in an official capacity, are ideally placed to lead the effort in dispelling false narratives and promoting biblically authentic sexuality.

Conclusion

The Church's approach to sexuality has been aimed at protecting the gift of sex God created for us. However, the Church has focused chiefly on the negative consequences if God's children misuse this gift. Instead of helping guide the body of Christ to learn how to navigate and appropriately handle this natural characteristic of human nature, sexuality is viewed as dirty and unholy, making it taboo and thus promoting the narrative of shame and guilt. What is more, sexual sin is viewed as irredeemable. The message that once our purity is soiled, it can never be made pure again does not align with biblical teaching and only promotes the misunderstanding of God's good gift of sexuality. The Christian community must do better, and Christian social workers can play an active role in the work of reframing the narrative of human sexuality from one that is associated with shame and guilt to one that is God-honoring. Openly discussing this natural aspect of human nature will diminish the confusion surrounding sexual development and health for those growing up in the Christian culture, strengthening the

foundation for healthy boundaries and clear communication in dating and marriage relationships. Erasing this harmful narrative will positively impact Christians in how they view themselves, their partner, and their Creator. Through normalizing the conversation of sex and sexuality in the Church and at an early age, the narrative of shame and guilt can be combatted, and a biblically authentic view of sexuality can be fostered. ❖

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Insights from Pastors on Christian Mindfulness: What Social Workers Can Learn about Spiritual Integration in Mindfulness

Regina Chow Trammel & Serena Lee

Social workers often work alongside community leaders, including pastors, especially in mezzo and macro practice (Garland & Yancey, 2014). Pastors, like social workers, also face high rates of burnout due to role stress (Adams & Hough, 2017). While mindfulness has been relatively well-researched in social work to address stress and burnout (Crowder & Sears, 2017; Leake et al., 2017; Trammel et al., 2021), it has not been investigated among the pastorate. Pastors may benefit from learning more about how mindfulness can improve well-being, while social workers may benefit from learning more about the spiritual practices that pastors use toward a religious integration of mindfulness. Social workers who incorporate spiritual practices that pastors use might increase fluency toward a more robust and effective mindfulness intervention in practice. Evidence of the efficacy of spiritually-integrated interventions are necessary and needed in our profession (Canda et al., 2020). This study focused on the descriptive and definitional properties of mindfulness, and pastors' experiences with, and outcomes of, spiritually integrated mindfulness. Results of this descriptive qualitative study of a majority-BIPOC sample of pastors suggest that spiritually integrated mindfulness practices improved pastors' attention and mood, and fostered their sense of closeness with God. The positive benefits these pastors experienced also motivated them to share and facilitate these practices with others.

Keywords: Christian Mindfulness, Burnout, Spiritually-Integrated Interventions, Pastoral Burnout, Social Work Practice

THE PURPOSE OF THIS DESCRIPTIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL study of pastors is to explore definitional properties of mindfulness, identify the spiritual practices pastors engage in that elicit mindfulness, and its impact. Studies on the contribution of Christian mindfulness are nascent (Garzon et al., 2022). Though the religious approach in Christian mindfulness may be truer to the theory and practice of mindfulness in general (Van Gordon & Griffiths, 2015), Garzon et al. (2022) make the case that clinicians identifying as Christian may find it more difficult to practice religious or faith-integrated mindfulness, given it is less known than Buddhist-based mindfulness. Hence, this study focuses on Christian spiritual practices used by pastors that may amplify or augment the concepts and practices of Christian mindfulness.

The first section of this paper discusses the rationale for learning from pastors about their spiritual practices, as well as the value of pastors learning about Christian mindfulness to address stress and burnout. Included in this discussion is the growing body of research on the efficacy of Christian mindfulness as an intervention, as well as identified skepticism within Christian circles around mindfulness. The second section of this paper contains the methodology and description of the philosophical orientation and method of analysis, as well as information on the social location and awareness of these researchers to further contextualize our analysis. Last, study results are shared, including a comprehensive table of mindfulness exemplars whom the pastors identified, spiritual practices the pastors use, and detailed themes, concluding with a discussion and implications for social work practice.

The Relevance of Pastors' Experiences of Mindfulness for Social Workers

Burnout is a phenomenon that is well-documented in the social work literature, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and cynicism, often associated with job dissatisfaction and stress (Leake et al., 2017; Taylor & Millear, 2016). Mindfulness in the Christian tradition is a useful tool in the prevention and treatment of burnout (Frederick et al., 2017), but is not as familiar to social workers as is mindfulness training from secular and Buddhist streams of thought (Trammel, 2017).

Social workers frequently use mindfulness-based interventions in practice to address stress and burnout (Birnbaum & Birnbaum, 2008; Crowder & Sears, 2017; Trammel et al., 2021). However, often these mindfulness-based interventions do not make use of spiritual language or practices. Social workers may benefit from learning how pastors integrate spiritual disciplines with mindfulness to bolster their clinical practice, and perhaps even practice these skills to advance their own self-care.

The more that social workers incorporate Christian spiritual practices in their mindfulness work, the more they may better support pastors, an often-ignored high-risk population negatively impacted in their emotional and spiritual well-being due to job demands (Terry & Cunningham, 2020).

Though mindfulness can be applied in a Christian context, many individuals who identify as Christian, including pastors, are wary of utilizing mindfulness because of its roots in Buddhism and secular culture (Focus on the Family, 2019). Though some attention to the benefits of mindfulness have begun to emerge more recently within Christian pastoral circles (Stone, 2019), it is not clear what adaptations of mindfulness practices are needed to be effective for Christians (Garzon et al, 2022). Therefore, a pastoral population can better inform the social work profession when using Christian mindfulness, giving social workers familiar language and ways to effectively use spiritual practices therapeutically in Christian contexts. Captari et al. (2021) synthesized current literature on spiritually integrated interventions, and the researchers argue that understanding how these interventions are applied—to whom, when, and to what effect—is an important aspect of culturally competent practice.

The Value for Pastors to Engage in Christian Mindfulness Practices

Like social workers, pastors are at an increasingly high risk for burnout from their profession (Adams & Hough, 2017; Dunbar et al., 2020). However, the spiritual dimension of care in addition to emotional support that pastors provide their congregants makes ministry work unique to the social work profession, which reinforces the need for contextualized interventions to prevent burnout among pastors. Hester (2017) defines pastoral burnout as a type of spiritualized burden with a cost to one's emotional capacity, a "suffering with purpose" (p. 40). Unfortunately, this high-risk population is often overlooked despite the multiple role-demands and conflicts in ministry work (Terry & Cunningham, 2020). Consequences of pastoral burnout often include depression, dissatisfaction with spiritual life, and fatigue, among other symptoms (Dunbar et al., 2020). As a result, pastors experiencing burnout may have difficulty connecting with others, face more familial conflict, and even exit ministerial work prematurely. Without effective interventions, pastors face stressors alone, which ultimately impacts the quality of congregational and organizational care.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened the stressors that pastors face, such as financial struggles, increased demand for pastoral care amongst congregants in crisis, and sheltering in place, which largely closed local churches and ministries (Johnston et al., 2022). Coinciding with

the pandemic, political tensions of 2020 spurred on racial injustice and community violence (Booker, 2021; Okuwobi, 2019), only adding to the intensifying stress pastors experienced as they helped their congregations navigate the most recent racial reckoning (Tisby, 2021).

Because social workers often work and serve in marginalized areas where pastors also serve (Placido & Cecil, 2012), social workers have a unique opportunity to provide support by increasing sensitivity to the spiritual concerns and emotional burdens that pastors carry. Assisting pastors in mitigating burnout will not only improve the overall well-being of these community leaders, but also benefit the congregations themselves as pastors may experience increased longevity in ministry, greater commitment to their vocation, and improved emotional engagement in relationships.

Christian Mindfulness as a Spiritually-Informed Intervention

Mindfulness-based interventions have been widely used by social workers in clinical settings because of the benefits of practicing “state” mindfulness, which is the temporary state of being mindful (Hanley et al., 2014). Benefits of mindfulness include decreased anxiety and depression, developed resilience, and greater capacity to engage in positive reappraisal (Garland et al., 2015; Hanley et al., 2014). Regularly engaging in “state” mindfulness contributes to the more stable construct known as “trait” mindfulness, or mindful living. What is important to know is that both state and trait mindfulness increase an individual’s use of mindful reappraisal, or in other words, a reinterpretation of a distressing situation in a more meaningful way, such as recognizing difficult situations as opportunities for growth or noticing delight amidst pain (Garland et al., 2015; Hanley et al., 2014). This reinterpretation of an experience is foundational to mindfulness practices, bolstering one’s ability to cope with distressing situations or events like burnout.

Definitions of mindfulness have been well-developed in the research, which is much attributed to Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn and his efforts to operationalize mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2005; 2016; Trammel, 2017). However, a majority of literature lacks exploration of the role Christian spirituality plays in mindfulness practices and more often focuses on mindfulness definitions that come from secular or Buddhist sources. Though there are similarities between Buddhist and Christian views on mindfulness, the definitions of Christian mindfulness are less understood because current literature lacks spiritual language and practices.

There is a growing body of work that includes Christian spiritual practices integrated in a mindfulness framework (Garzon et al., 2020; Knabb & Vazquez, 2018; Trammel, 2018; Trammel & Trent, 2021). One

such example of how this integration of spiritual practices can inform mindfulness is found in the Orthodox Christian tradition. Ware (2015) describes how a historical view of prayer is not merely found in the intellect, but also in the heart, which includes a balance among the mind, body, will, and emotions. This practice of “prayers of the heart” originates with St. Macarius of Egypt around 300-90 B.C.E (p. 62). Mindfulness as a secular practice contains an embodied element, whereby one can use the breath to coincide with observation and notice one’s cognitions in order to elicit a mindfulness state (Kabat-Zinn, 2016). This secular practice is limited in its focus on just the body and mind. Thus, these researchers speculate that the Christian tradition may inform the body of work in mindfulness to expand its definitional boundaries and include aspects that faith traditions offer. Including mindfulness research with pastors will increase awareness of what Christian mindfulness encompasses, what experiences it provides, and why it may be considered as a viable intervention in preventing and ameliorating burnout among pastors and other helping professionals.

Pastoral Well-Being and Mindfulness Practice

Though still an emerging area of research, existing literature reveals that clergy who engage in spiritual disciplines such as prayer of many forms, meditation, and other mindfulness-based practices more effectively improve or prevent pastoral burnout (Hester, 2017; Ruiz-Prada et al., 2021; Terry & Cunningham, 2020). Mocerri and Cox (2019) sought to explore the efficacy of mindfulness-based interventions among Catholic clergy, many who reported experiencing a myriad of chronic illnesses and prolonged stress exacerbated by the lack of preventative measures and education. Mocerri & Cox’s mindfulness intervention program promoted diaphragmatic breathing, relaxation techniques, and practices integrated with Christian spirituality to address the stress. Results of the study demonstrated a statistically significant reduction in blood pressure readings and self-reported stress levels of participants. Another study by Visker et al. (2017) indicated that religious coping mechanisms, such as prayer, seeking divine assistance, and positive reappraisal, had a statistically significant negative correlation with burnout among pastors.

These findings demonstrate that pastors benefit from Christian mindfulness practices, evidenced by improved physical, mental, and spiritual well-being and greater job satisfaction. Pastors who successfully reduce or prevent burnout using mindfulness practices have important insight to offer, not only to other clergy in need of coping tools, but also to social workers who seek to expand their understanding of mindfulness to include spiritual practices that pastors also consider as “mindfulness”.

Methodology

Study Design and Data Collection

This study focuses on the descriptive and definitional properties of mindfulness, and pastors' experiences with, and outcomes of spiritually integrated mindfulness. A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix) was used to explore these properties, experiences, and outcomes. The first set of questions posed was to attain descriptions and context of the pastors' familiarity and perspective of mindfulness and inquire about the symbols and figureheads that inform their definitions. The next set of questions in the interview guide explored the experiences and impact of the Christian mindfulness intervention for this group of pastors. In-depth interviews of 13 participants were conducted by telephone during the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited access to in-person interviews. Interviews were approximately 45 minutes to 90 minutes in length. They were all audio-recorded and saved on a password-protected phone voice recording application, and the interview data transcribed onto a password-protected computer. It is important to note that this study was reviewed and approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

Participants

A criterion-based sample of 13 pastors was included in this study. There were eight female-identified pastors (62%) and five male-identified pastors (39%). In terms of racial and ethnic background, four pastors identified as Latinx/o/a (31%); four pastors identified as White (31%); three pastors identified as Asian-American/Pacific Islander (23%), and two pastors identified as Black (15%). Thus, the majority of the sample identified as BIPOC (Black, Indigeneous, and People of Color).

Sample inclusion criteria for the study were as follows: participants self-identified as Christians in their faith because it is the Christian experience of this paradigm of mindfulness under inquiry. Additionally, participants should have formally held a position as a pastor in a church and/or similar ministry position for at least one year within the past five years. Exclusion criteria of the sample were as follows: any person younger than 18 years old, as well as persons who have held a ministry/pastoral title for less than one year.

The denominational affiliation of the pastors in this study were all within the Protestant Christian stream: five were Foursquare (39%); three were Non-Denominational (23%); two were Presbyterian (15%); one was Assemblies of God (8%); and two were unknown (15%). It is important

to note that the majority of these pastors identified the congregations they serve as multi-ethnic (85%). Two of the pastors identified that their congregations were mostly White (15%), though they themselves were not. It is important to note that during the duration of this study, the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the pandemic of racism, were both prevalent and had become sources of stress that these pastors were navigating in the foreground of their lives. Many of the pastors in this study who identified as BIPOC were uniquely impacted by this era of public health concerns and racial violence that have targeted communities of color.

Recruitment

Recruitment of participants came from community and professional networks, which included congregations within the local community and university contacts of the researchers. A recruitment email was sent to prospective participants with information about the study and aforementioned eligibility requirements. Participants were provided with an informed consent form detailing the nature of this study and the voluntary nature of their participation, including their ability to withdraw from the study at any time. A \$20 Target gift card was offered for participation in the interviews as they were between 25-50 minutes long. Participants emailed the signed forms back to the researchers, and interviews were scheduled. A verbal reminder was provided at the beginning of the interviews to inform and remind them of the voluntary nature of their participation.

Data Analysis

We used a descriptive phenomenological analysis due to the nature of the phenomena of mindfulness and its definitional properties and utility under investigation in this qualitative study. These researchers used Atlas.ti Cloud version (cloud.atlasti.com) to code the transcribed data independently as meaning-units. It is important to note that this phenomenological descriptive analysis was process-based. As we listened to the audio recordings, we compared the tone of the words spoken, listened carefully for meaning, and highlighted these meaning-units. In this listening and coding process, we were not discursive in our approach. We systematically labeled alongside the highlighted pastors' quotes, which were heavily reviewed, coded and analyzed as meaning units of face-value, using the cloud-based software in a linear way, moving down the transcript, listening to the audio, reviewing meaning units, experiencing the words and using the page as guide as we moved line-by-line.

The researchers' intentional use of the participants' own words follows the phenomenological epistemology that Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) indicates as true of this approach due to an emphasis on the "import of what the subject said" (p. 5). This approach to analysis elevates a salient sense of being in the experience, insofar as the experience is an inner sense, which is appropriate for mindfulness studies, as mindfulness is an inner phenomenon. Reeder (2009), points to Husserl's phenomenology in this experiential distillation. It is the experience of mindfulness that is the phenomenon under study, as Husserl's phenomenological epistemology posits, and the question we asked ourselves in the analysis was, "what is the essence of the experience of these pastors who use spiritual practices, and what is elicited in their experiences?"

This phenomenological analysis is likened to Creswell's (2013) concept of *horizontalization*, in which significant statements are gleaned from all the interview data. Themes, or clusters of meaning, from these statements are then made into a composite description that captures "the essence of the phenomena" (p. 82). This analysis approach is also based on Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological analysis, which informed the basis of the process we used whereby themes emerged from the data. It should be noted that to increase rigor, we highlighted and labeled meaning units independently, kept extensive independent process-based memos, and came together several times, for comparison, and process-based discussion, achieving consensus.

Social Location Awareness

In keeping with Moustakas' (1994) framework for phenomenological data analysis, we discussed at these times and acknowledged our shared ethnic and gender identity—female and Asian American—as it relates to the social location of our work and the research related to data collection and analysis. At times, we disclosed our ethnic and gender identity in our recruitment efforts, as well as during participant interviews for this study, particularly because female-identified and minority populations often face public and mental health disparities, as well as discrimination.

Thus, we were intentional in including participants from these groups, especially during the duration of the research period, which occurred from 2020-2021 in an area of the United States that had suffered great loss during the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts of the pandemic were disproportionately absorbed amongst these racial and ethnic groups (McKinsey, 2021).

In addition, the inclusion of BIPOC pastors in the sample was important to us due to the impacts of aforementioned events on us personally, and, we also surmised, in the lives of our participants during

movements toward racial justice that were taking place throughout 2020, sparked by the death of George Floyd that resulted from police brutality and rising anti-Asian hate and violence in 2021. Our social location thus informed our study, beginning at recruitment, to the end of interviews, through the data analysis process, and the writing of this article.

Increasing trustworthiness

As part of the analysis, we bracketed our social location and other potential presuppositions through the use of reflexive memos that were detailed and specific, as recommended by Tufford and Newman (2010). This bracketing was done in the analysis only. We used our social location in the interview process to help support participants' experiences through the various stressors that we were hearing, including the racial violence that we collectively experienced at the time of the interviews. The bracketing during the analysis was important due to our own experiences of stressors around these topics during the heightened time of pandemic and racial violence coinciding with the data collection and data analysis phase.

We also completed a member-check with each participant by email to ensure we were capturing their experiences accurately. We shared themes and structures of experience with all participants, and we asked if the themes were accurate and representative of their experiences. According to Rodwell (1998), member-checks enhance authenticity, trustworthiness, and rigor whereby participants have the opportunity to correct or clarify data.

Results

The researchers found a linear progression of three major themes of pastors' experiences with Christian mindfulness in this study. Each theme predicated on the former. Thus, one process was foundational to the next theme. The first theme was that Christian mindfulness improved pastors' attention and mood, which led to the second theme of a sense of intentionally drawing closer to God once they were aware of these improvements. Pastors experienced this closeness and improvements as positive, which led them to the third and final theme, of pastors facilitating mindfulness practices so others could experience similar benefits. The categorical results will precede comprehensive descriptions of the aforementioned themes in order to provide helpful, specific context on definitions of mindfulness and practices that pastors offered and engaged in, respectively.

The categorical descriptors contained in Tables 1 and 2 convey the breadth of mindfulness practices identified by these pastors that provide background for these results and help provide historical context of spiritual practices used by these pastors, including the time periods from which these practices originated, or to which they were attributed. Figure 1 identifies symbolic understandings of Christian mindfulness that are grounded in the pastors' religious meaning and faith. Thus, identifying categorical descriptors help contextualize the meaning of pastors' experiences and corresponding themed results, providing a deeper understanding of the emotional and spiritual worlds of these pastors when they practice mindfulness from a Christian framework. These categorical descriptors also demonstrate that saturation of the data was met.

Categorical Results

The first categorical descriptions present a variety of spiritual disciplines that the participants identified in their practice of Christian mindfulness (Table 1).

Table 1
Christian Mindfulness Practices Identified By Pastors

Spiritual discipline	Subcategory of spiritual discipline	Outcomes	Formal practices
Prayer	Communicating with God in relationship	Process with God Ask God questions Listening to God	Prayer of examen Receiving words, phrases, or images Prophetic pictures Prayer language
	Meditation	Scripture meditation Emotional scripture	Ignatian contemplation <i>Lectio divina</i> Read scripture (together) Slow reading of scripture Imagine self in story
		Silence Stillness and quiet Solitude	Set intention Silent retreat Centering prayer Breath prayer Sabbath Prayer Walks

		Remembering Self-Reflection	Christian remembrance of exemplars (Cloud of Witnesses)
Worship	Liturgy	Clarity	Reading Scripture
	Music worship	Worship & Devotion	Singing songs
Creation Appreciation	Prayer walk	Feel God's Presence Enjoyment	Prayer walks in nature Observing nature
Christian living	Physical health	Improving health	Prayer walks as physical care Yoga
	Art	Creativity	Painting Journaling Listening to music
	Discipleship	Collective/ Community	Reading Scripture with others

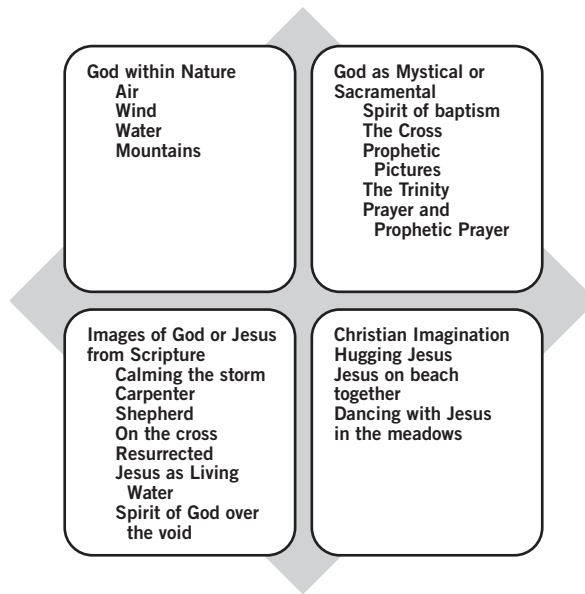
The second set of categorical descriptions was collected in response to the semi-structured interview question: "Is there anyone you might use as an example (theological or historical) that you draw from for a Christian version of mindfulness?" This question was posed to identify those from whom the pastors draw theological inspiration, particularly those persons and figures who exemplify mindfulness. These persons and figures can be understood as sources who inform the pastors' view and practice of mindfulness, with most being related to Christian thinking, theology, and praxis. It is important to highlight two distinct figures, Malcolm X and Mahatma Gandhi, though neither figure identified as Christians. Nevertheless, these persons were discussed similarly to those figures directly from the Christian tradition (See Table 2).

Table 2
Theological and Historical Exemplars of Christian Mindfulness

Historical Time Period	Exemplars
Biblical figure	Elijah Jesus Paul
Patristic era (early church fathers) 1st to 8th centuries	Saint Ignatius, bishop of Antioch
Pre-Renaissance through Renaissance 1350 CE - 1650 CE	Jean Guyon du Buisson, <i>France</i> St. John of the Cross, <i>Spain</i> Teresa of Avila, <i>Spain</i> Martin Luther, <i>Germany</i> Catherine of Siena, <i>Italy</i>
Industrial revolution 1750 CE - 1900 CE	Charles Spurgeon, <i>Britain</i> Father Damien, <i>Belgium</i> Oswald Chambers, <i>Scotland</i>
Victorian age and Modernism Age of Imperialism, 1700 - 1950 World War I, 1914 - 1918	Dietrich Bonhoeffer, <i>Germany</i> C.S Lewis, <i>Ireland</i> Mahatma Gandhi, <i>India</i> Thomas Merton, <i>United States</i>
Modernism and Postmodernism 1940s - present	Dallas Willard, <i>United States</i> Francis Schaefer, <i>United States</i> Henri Nouwen, <i>Netherlands</i> Martin Luther King Jr., <i>United States</i> Malcolm X, <i>United States</i> Richard Foster, <i>United States</i> Mary Oliver, poet, <i>United States</i>

The last set of categorical descriptors exhibits Christian images and allegories the participants have used in their spiritual practices to elicit a mindfulness state, indicating yet again the breadth of symbolic meanings within the context of Christian mindfulness (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Symbols or Images of Christian Mindfulness



These organized categorical descriptors of Christian mindfulness practices, exemplars, and symbols or images of Christian mindfulness provide context for the ways these pastors think about and engage in Christian mindfulness. As a result, the themes of this study introduce a linear progression of one process that flowed into another: improvements in attention in mood were elicited with Christian mindfulness, which led to more intentional spiritual integration to draw them closer to God once they became more aware of these improvements. This closeness to God was then experienced as a gift that the pastors seemingly couldn't help but share with others, facilitating mindfulness practices so others could experience the same.

Pastors Experienced Improvements in Attention and Mood With Christian Mindfulness

The first theme of this study was that Christian mindfulness improved pastors' attention and mood. The pastors discussed how mindfulness practices rooted in Christian themes helped improve awareness of their own mood, most commonly regarding feelings of stress due to work demands. Several pastors acknowledged interpersonal conflict as a source of their work stress, while others identified the anxiety, stress,

and emotional overwhelm in attending to all the myriad roles and daily tasks of a pastor.

Once they were able to acknowledge what they were feeling, these pastors sensed a shift in their attention away from their stressors and towards a more relaxed and grounded state. Awareness of mood, therefore, led to the acknowledged need to move away from stress and negative mood states to more grounded and peaceful states of mood. They were better able to positively reappraise their circumstances.

A pastor described this shift from feeling anxious and stressed to more relaxed when in a mindful state:

...When you get silent and all of your issues come up...you realize like, Oh! I'm like really tired—I have been pushing myself...I find [that mindfulness] is the only thing I know to recalibrate me in that same sort of critical way...

Another addressed how practicing mindfulness settled their thoughts and connected them with more positive emotions about their congregants or themselves:

...your thoughts are like wild horses you can think of in every which way. But, being able to learn how to focus on quieting the mind would allow me to have a deeper sense of empathy for people, I always felt like it did. I could really sit down and listen to people and really feel for them...

Another pastor described the impact of mindfulness as moving their mood toward more joy, finding clarity, and bringing emotional relief:

I just think [about] the joy that comes out of it! Like, there's so much clarity you can get from it—from being mindful—like something as small as closing your eyes and focusing on something can bring, like, another dimension of relief. I think that's why I try to engage in it and try to practice it because I always find comfort in it. I always feel like I leave better.

One pastor even stated, "The most surprising is [mindfulness] just brings peace and contentment. Even though situations do not change, they remain the same, but just practicing mindfulness—in God's word—it just brings peace, and the stress diminishing [*sic*]." Thus, it was not the stressful circumstances that shifted, but the experience of that pastor's stressors that were diminishing after practicing Christian mindfulness.

Pastors in this study also described how mindfulness as a practice helped them detach from negative mood states, which enabled them to

support their congregants—to move their focus away from their feelings and more toward an intentional positive response even in the face of conflict. This pastor described this movement toward the congregation this way:

Well, there was some surrendering for myself as well...I needed to make sure that what I was feeling was not anger towards [a congregant]...there was a pond behind us where we could sit, and just look at the pond...I would try to focus in on those things and not on [congregant]. I would try to focus on the water, the reflections of the sun on the water and feel the warmth...try to bring myself back to just feeling at peace with the Lord. And when I found that peace I feel like I could speak to him in peace and bring that to him....But being able to learn how to focus in on quieting the mind would allow me to have a deeper sense of empathy for people.

Mindfulness Led to Pastors Integrating Spiritual Practices That Furthered Their Relationship with God.

The second theme of this study was that pastors' experiences of mindfulness prompted them to integrate spiritual practices that led to a closer relationship with God. Some of these practices were embodied, including breath work, prayer, and openness to listening to God. The pastors discussed their internal experiences during these kinds of spiritual practices they used (see Table 1 and Table 2). These internal experiences of such mindful moments were described as hearing from God, drawing closer to God, and relying and depending on God for answers. The mindfulness skills they developed included greater awareness of the present moment, their bodies, and thoughts, leading them to connect more deeply with God. For example, many of the pastors described somatic experiences when connecting with God, such as less tightness in their hearts and bodies. Others described how they intentionally addressed medical health issues after this mindful awareness when drawing close to God. The pastors who discussed their medical health identified awareness of their mood, emotions, and bodies as a sign to draw closer to God. This awareness developed in Christian mindfulness has also been described as the Holy Spirit at work.

One pastor shared openly about how they relied on God to make meaning of their health condition after mindful awareness helped them acknowledge stress building up:

...I was like one-click away from a heart attack...I feel like God was orchestrating these things because he helped me

realize what I was going through in my community, as I was praying, and being intentional about dealing with this area of my life. Literally I had emotional blockage you know? And I wasn't really even aware, though when I was meditating, being mindful and [being transparent with my] community I wasn't handling my emotions in a way that was good, and this all comes out where God is taking you through it...And that itself is a different story. But immediately after I found that out, I couldn't physically stuff my emotions....I asked God to reveal what was happening.

A pastor described the experience of body-awareness due to these internal experiences with the Holy Spirit in mindfulness, which elicited a change through an embodied response: "So when I am triggered by something, and then when I do a mindfulness-thing, I change it; I change my body temperature. I change my breath rhythm, and I have control over my body again."

Pastors also disclosed that they leaned on the Holy Spirit to clarify their thoughts, reveal truths, question beliefs, grapple with unanswered questions, and actively bring all their needs to God. A pastor conveyed the Holy Spirit's work in their mindfulness state as this: "[I] take it to God, like, what are your thoughts on this?"

Their expressed needs were rooted in their dependence on the Holy Spirit to clarify insights, needs, and truths, questioning their own motives and weaknesses in the process. These poignant quotes exemplify this theme of connecting with God.

What is that, Lord?... You know—and it begins to expand, and expand, and expand. And I'm just kind of allowing it to expand until I understand and [see] what I'm seeing. And then I ask the questions, like, 'What is this—what am I seeing—what are you saying, God?' Yeah, that happens a lot [in mindfulness].

Pastors relied on the Holy Spirit to question motives past and present:

What are my motivations? What are my reasons? So really, just practicing of—you know—going through [mindfulness] internally, and inviting God into that and [saying], 'Hey God—you know my thoughts better than I do—show me what are my blind spots, and why I'm feeling really torn up about this'...

When pastors experienced some improvements, they listened for God to move closer spiritually or emotionally, and to find clarity in their next steps and purpose in their lives. This closeness with God elicited

an acceptance, and accepting stance.

Just really, really having to let go of what I want this answer to be. ‘Whatever God your answer is I will accept it—I will do what you ask me to do’. And some of that was hard. Like, what needs to be done? But that was a first step of the healing that I needed. I got that rejection of myself. I would call that a very mindfulness retreat for me, that really put me back on a path [where] I was able to move forward feeling strong in my convictions of why I made the choices I was making.

Many pastors described finding that mindfulness practices helped usher in emotional relief amidst stressors they carried, whether financial or job-related. This relief led to an intentional practice of movement toward God, at times using the arts, movement, or music (see Table 1 for more examples). This pastor talked about using music as a way to center on God, an active movement toward God that was predicated on relief from stress:

Yeah, I think [mindfulness] is something that I practice every day. If there’s a stress about—I mean, it’s very common, so it’s hard to think through one specifically. But I think even when my [spouse] and I talk about finances, we’ll take a break. If something’s getting stressful, we’ll take a break. We’ll put on a worship song, and not a song that’s overly verbal (chuckles) or with a lot of words. But with something where we can just rest in the presence of God and focus on his heart and get centered on him, and return to what we were doing before. So, I think we practice that a lot within our marriage, you know, just getting centered within the spirit of worship when we’re talking about something tense or stressful. And it helps us a lot when we approach it with grace, compassion, and understanding.

Pastors Experienced Closeness to God in Mindfulness that Flowed Toward Others

The third and final theme of this study was that Christian mindfulness practices fostered pastors’ connection with God in a personal and relational way whereby they relished in God’s presence, prompting their desire to bring this experience to others. In other words, the pastors’ closeness with God flowed toward those they served, meaning that they intentionally facilitated this connection to help their congregants experience this same closeness with God.

The motivation for their intimacy with God and outward flow of mindfulness to others, it seemed, is because of experiencing God's goodness in those moments, enjoying communion with God, and drawing closer in that relationship. This meaningful relationship fostered greater intimacy with God, helping the pastors feel in those mindful moments that God was with them and would care for them and their needs. A pastor described this connection with God this way:

We don't always understand how they lead us to God or the way that God is speaking to us. When we submit those faculties to him, the meaning for me is just hearing from God, really at the core. It's just hearing from God, communicating with him, communing with him on a deep level, and it all leads towards union with God.

Another pastor described how Christian mindfulness practice cultivated connection with God, who affirmed them, their roles, and provided care and peace amidst stress.

But, when I am practicing mindfulness, I have a part of a connection with God, or this is when it feels like I am...it sounds super mystic (laughs)...like I am one with myself. I feel grounded. I feel whole. I feel like...even when there's chaos in my life, chaos meaning busyness, just so many demands in my life, I feel contained and I feel like it's okay. Like everything is okay. So I experience a lot of benefit[s] from practicing mindfulness.

Mindfulness practice helped pastors feel seen and heard as not just pastors, but as people loved by God in their relationship. A pastor shared in this way:

I've experienced Jesus do a lot of healing in my life through mindfulness of inviting him into a problem I have, or I have had in my past... I'm just inviting him to show me what he wants to do with that pain. I feel like I've experienced him heal things from my past. I feel like I've heard him speaking to [me] in my current situations. And there is just this sense of feeling known, and seen, and loved by Jesus.

A pastor discussed how important the relational bond with God was in providing comfort amidst racialized tensions this particular pastor was carrying:

And I just get to be me basking in the presence of Jesus, and just living into that...I don't get the privilege to not care about the world's greatest issues in regards to social justice issues...I'm not afforded that privilege as a Christian and as an educated and conscious Black (gender identifier removed for confidentiality)...But in those moments of being with Jesus--just me and God, I am just me without all those things--without all the weight and responsibilities I'm carrying on my shoulders. I'm just me basking in his presence...

As pastors reflected on their experiences in this close relationship with God, they also discussed how they bring this closeness to their congregants and other populations they serve. They desired this same experience of a deepened connection with God for others, hence facilitating opportunities for Christian mindfulness with others. A pastor described their experience in this way:

I actually take the time to teach my students this, where I tell them to spend some time in quiet and try to hear the voice of the Lord. So that, like, all their thoughts are brought up and expressed so there's room now for a little bit of silence, and a little bit of listening. And I just tell them to ask the Lord what he is saying. And then we'll spend, maybe like 2-5 minutes in silence, knowing that all of their thoughts are before the Lord. And trying to hear him out.

Another pastor expressed delight in helping a congregant meet with God in a sacred space, sharing:

To me I felt like she remembered a moment where she heard from God that she hadn't thought about and has doubted [God] and has resentment towards [God] in the past few years. But, in that moment I could see her recalling a moment where she felt like she was spoken to clearly. And I wanted her to remember that. ... But they are not used to being taken to "sacred places." And so, for me to tell them and invite them, and for me to create a safe place and a sacred space and to say "Stop. I'm putting cones around this moment now. Let's stay here for a little bit"... I think it's like such a yummy moment.

The pastors in this study therefore shared common reflections of their experiences in Christian mindfulness that they fluidly shared with others—deliberately and intentionally using what they learned to support others.

Discussion

In this study, pastors identified using spiritual practices within a largely Christian historical context when asked about their experiences with mindfulness as a whole. There was no one definition that these pastors described when asked about mindfulness or Christian mindfulness. Instead, this majority BIPOC sample of pastors expressed a diversity of spiritual practices they identified as mindfulness, along with a myriad of exemplars as mindfulness practitioners in history, and present day (see Table 2). Moreover, the diversity of spiritual practices they used conveyed parallel concepts of awareness, stress-relief, meditation, and attention, with these benefits indicating how much wider the definitional property of mindfulness truly is (see Table 1).

These shared concepts highlight the practices and figures that help expand the definition and practices of Christian mindfulness. Because mindfulness is more commonly known as a secular or Buddhist intervention, it is important for social workers to become more familiar with mindfulness interventions contextualized within the Christian framework. The benefits of that pastors experienced seem consistent with studies on the benefits of mindfulness practices that come from more secular or Buddhist frameworks. For example, the pastors described common experiences of positive reappraisal to reframe their perspective and approach to current hardships in their roles in a more positive and meaningful light. They also expressed greater connectedness in their relationship with God after experiencing improvements in their attention and stress-levels. Pastors who benefited from these Christian mindfulness practices also engaged in directing their congregants or others in their ministry setting to adopt the practices themselves. It is this connection with not just the self, but the self and higher power/God, and self-improvement of mood leading to showing others the practices that differentiate this experience with a self-care or self-help approach to mindfulness.

A perspective of mindfulness from these pastors that differs from a secular or Buddhist definition of mindfulness is at core about the self. The latter emphasizes deconstruction (and therefore, liberation) of the concept of a self (McWilliams, 2012; Trungpa, 2013). In contrast, Christian mindfulness is practiced in fellowship with God, with self in light of needing to reframe the self, or subsume the self for the sake of others. There is more to be discovered in these differences in religious meaning of the self, however, that is beyond the scope of this paper.

However, the results of the study seem to highlight that the experience of mindfulness within a Christian context is highly dependent on the presence of God and the religious meaning of this connection. Inherent

in this theme of connection with God is a concept of a retained, not emptying, sense of self in this relationship. Social workers who use mindfulness in practice may benefit from this expanded definition of mindfulness as receiving from a higher power, such as God, to help meet one's needs. This filling up thus leads to a greater capacity to give more. As the Bible states, their "cup runneth over" (*King James Version*, 1611, Psalm 23:5). By providing language for social workers to describe these pastors' experiences as mindfulness, social workers can more effectively offer support to pastors and Christians at large using Christian-based mindfulness interventions.

Additionally, the themes reveal that pastors' decreased stress and improved attention after engaging in Christian mindfulness give credence to further research into how a multitude of spiritual practices in the Christian stream might facilitate a mindfulness state. What is noteworthy is that these pastors were interviewed during the COVID-19 pandemic when many of their houses of worship were shut down. In addition, as many of the pastors in this study were people of color, protests after the death of George Floyd were still occurring or had taken place at the time of the phone interviews. Nonetheless, themes from this study highlight how engagement in their Christian mindfulness practices helped pastors navigate these issues personally and professionally with aplomb, it seemed.

The most poignant phenomenon of these pastors' mindfulness experiences is an outward flow of their mindfulness. In other words, rather than using Christian mindfulness to purely improve one's spiritual and emotional health, the pastors interviewed have observed that their practice increased their capacity to be mindful of their congregants' needs as well. Because pastors have a platform that is highly respected, they also can provide these tools of Christian mindfulness to their congregants, especially those who are underserved or have limited access to resources. Therefore, Christian mindfulness is an extension of this connection with God that then benefits a larger community of congregants by way of the pastor's connection with God

Limitations

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the option to interview this sample of pastors in-person was not possible due to the local state-wide mandates that prohibited gatherings with persons outside of one's household. The phone interviews, therefore, limited the data to audio only, making it more difficult for the researchers to get a sense of these pastors' emotional tone, especially as they detailed their stressors. It is possible that some of the emotional experience of the data is missing in the results of this study.

In addition, the ability to recruit pastors for this study was challenging as recruitment efforts for this study were done by email. While there was some word-of-mouth, we had a limited sample due to time constraint availability, as well as inability to be active in our communities that would have potentially fostered connections in our recruiting efforts. Thus, this study is limited and may not be generalizable to a broader pastorate group.

Practice Implications and Recommendations

Pastors are a high-risk group for burnout. Because social workers often work alongside the pastorate, it is important for social workers to consider the stressors and role burdens of these community leaders. Congregational social work, as described by Garland and Yancey (2014) requires a “weaving” of self into community, whereby the authors indicate that social workers must connect and build relationships over time (p. 109). The lessons we as social workers have learned in our own practice and research on mindfulness to support our often stressful and constraining work situations can be passed along to the pastoral community. Particularly, we admonish social workers to build and weave the community nets that include pastors of color, who find themselves in this season with two pandemics: COVID-19 and racial hate and injustice within the communities they serve.

Pastors need social workers for their own well-being, as well as development in their role professionally. Pastors, therefore, can learn more about how they are impacted in their work, affecting the congregation. Social workers can offer training in Christian mindfulness practices, and it is an aim of this study to help to bolster such interventions. Many of those practices are identified in Table 1 as spiritual disciplines and formal practices that the pastors in this study have used. These practices are practical and can elicit a mindfulness state, and perhaps even a mindfulness trait when incorporated into regular rhythms of a pastor's life.

In turn, we as social workers can learn from these pastors about how to use mindfulness from a Christian framework, especially those social workers who also experience high burnout, and to perceive how those stressors manifest in their minds, bodies, and souls. Early identification of stress and intervention can possibly prevent burnout. Helpful spiritual resources for building capacity to attune to stressors and intervene in such stressful situations can be found in pastors' identified Christian mindfulness practices, as indicated in Tables 1 and 2.

Social workers should also become familiar with the language of religious support. As social workers, we do not often seek spiritual or religious solutions to our vocational stress; however, pastors show us that we might greatly benefit from doing so, and those under our care may

benefit as well. The presence of God in Christian mindfulness speaks to the religious nature of these spiritual practices that social workers can use in practice to help others experience its benefits.

For pastors of color, Christian mindfulness is a practice-skill that can buttress their understanding of themselves and of others. For social workers, we can help adapt a Western Christian mindfulness framework to culturally relevant practices and perhaps draw from traditions that are more communal in nature to inform mindfulness practice skills. For instance, Eastern Orthodox ecclesiology, or theology of the Church, “is above all else a theology of communion” (Ware, 2015). In Eastern Orthodox liturgy, the relationship between God and congregation is prominent. Thus, practices of silence, such as the Jesus Prayer, are often experienced collectively, not internally and limited to the individual self. These spiritual practices within the Eastern Orthodox tradition can be theoretically considered as a mindfulness practice that can theoretically elicit a mindfulness state (Trammel, 2017). This collective tradition is found in other non-Western expressions of faith and worship that need to be further explored. Social workers, therefore, ought to consider how faith communities can be a source of furthering one’s own experience of mindfulness.

Research Implications and Recommendations

Further studies on Christian mindfulness with pastors would assist in expanding clinical skills contextualized for Christians among social work practitioners seeking to serve this population. In addition, greater awareness and fluency of religious faith integrated into mindfulness-based interventions adds to the study of mindfulness, as discussed earlier, which are arguably, still in its infancy.

Further research may explore what a Christian mindfulness practice might look like in light of cultural difference, meaning, and relationship with the self, God, and others that are more community-facing. As Asian American female researchers, we are both personally familiar with the collective cultural practices that are embedded in Asian American church life. For instance, is Christian mindfulness more effective done in community rather than in solitude? Does the support of others in the room, so-to-speak, allow silence done purposefully together to help foster increased benefits of Christian mindfulness in the body, mind, or soul? We posit that it is perhaps likely that Christian mindfulness may ultimately benefit a whole community, as pastors of color, in particular, might see themselves as part of a “we” rather than an “I”, as part of a collectivist identity (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Thus, fostering mindfulness in one individual can multiply to the many, which gives way to opportunities for

social workers to fashion Christian mindfulness skills training in mezzo contexts in addition to micro, individualized practice and settings.

Future studies can measure the impact of Christian mindfulness intervention on stress and burnout levels of pastors in order to determine if it can be effective with this population, similarly to aforementioned studies on Christian mindfulness with social workers using stress-related biomarkers, as well as reliable and validated scales to determine efficacy.

Finally, we hope this study highlights the need for continued training and research in the area of Christian mindfulness, as it may be more palatable at first-glance to the pastorate and ministers who may eschew mindfulness due to unfamiliarity with the theological and historical background and practices within the Christian stream. We recommend continued studies that include a diverse sample of pastors, including gender, racial and ethnic identity, and socio-economic level. Studies on the efficacy of Christian mindfulness practice is warranted to evaluate whether these practices are supportive of improved emotional states, reduced burnout in this population, and beyond. ❖

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Appendix

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. Would you talk a little about what you know about mindfulness?
2. How do you define mindfulness?
3. Is there anyone you might use as an example (theological or historical) that you draw from for a Christian version of mindfulness?"
4. Do you mind talking about one recent stressor where mindfulness might be helpful to you?
5. Please tell me of a recent experience in which you used a form of mindfulness, meditation, prayer, and/or contemplative practice to help yourself cope with a difficult or stressful situation?
6. Please tell me a recent experience in supporting a congregant (e.g. Christian counseling, lay counseling, spiritual formation, emotional support, visitation, blessing, etc.) in which you integrated a form of mindfulness, meditation, prayer, etc. If comfortable, please describe it like a story with a beginning, middle, and end. I would like to know your thoughts and/or internal process regarding what helped you be able to provide mindfulness in your Christian ministry.
7. If applicable, what have you experienced internally—spiritually, or emotionally when you use mindfulness as a spiritual discipline? For instance, please talk about any feelings, thoughts, worries?
8. If applicable, what has been the most surprising to you about integrating mindfulness into your spiritual and emotional life? What has been the least surprising about integrating mindfulness into your spiritual and emotional life?
9. What is the meaning for you when you use Christian mindfulness practices? Why do you use Christian mindfulness?
10. Sometimes mindfulness practitioners use imagery such as a beautiful lotus flower, or statue of a Buddha, to symbolize their mindfulness work. Please talk about any symbols or images of your Christian faith that you may think about when you practice Christian mindfulness.
11. Is there anything else you want to talk about that relates to mindfulness, Christian faith, definition and impact?

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Spirituality as a Protective Factor: A Multinational Study of 267 Adults Separated from Parental Care as Children

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Adults who were separated from parental care as children and resided in alternative care settings often experience difficulties throughout their lifespan. Thus, it is important to explore factors that lead to better outcomes. Spirituality is one protective factor that has received attention in academic literature in recent years. However, little work has examined spirituality in this population or the specific ways it impacts wellbeing in adulthood. Using thematic analysis, the current study explored the specific ways spirituality serves as a protective factor in a multinational sample of 267 individuals with care experience. Data revealed six spirituality-related themes: 1) relationship with God, 2) spiritual community support, 3) spirituality as a component of identity development, 4) a belief in a higher purpose, 5) spirituality-motivated servanthood, and 6) access to spirituality-based teachings and teachers. Based on these findings, we propose data-informed recommendations to improve services for children separated from parental care.

Keywords: spirituality, care leavers, alternative care, faith, religiosity, adults with care experience, protective factors

MILLIONS OF INDIVIDUALS AROUND THE WORLD have experienced separation from parental care as children (Desmond et al., 2020). They reside in a variety of alternative care settings, including kinship care, foster care, and residential care centers (Kakkar, 2019; Martin & Zulaika, 2016). As children in these settings become adults and leave care, outcomes are often poor (Ellis et al., 2017;

Gilligan, 2010). A small body of work has suggested that spirituality might serve as an important protective factor for adults with care experience (Makanui et al., 2019; Scott et al., 2018). However, the specific ways that spirituality might support well-being for this population remain unclear. The current study sought to investigate the ways that adults with care experience believed that spirituality impacted their well-being in adulthood.

Adults with Care Experience

Research suggests adults with care experience are more likely to experience negative outcomes. On an individual level, adults with care experience frequently struggle to maintain employment, housing, and stable relationships with their families and communities (Boldiř, 2014; Sulimani-Aidan & Melkman, 2018), have fewer assets (Frimpong-Manso, 2018; Sulimani-Aidan, 2017), exhibit lower rates of educational achievement (Boldiř, 2014), and have fewer forms of support in their compressed transitions to adulthood (Frimpong-Manso, 2018). On a societal level, adults with care experience exhibit higher rates of criminal activity (Boldiř, 2014), are more likely to experience poverty (Berejena Mhongera & Lombard, 2016; Diraditsile & Nyadza, 2018), and are over-represented as biological parents of adopted children, continuing a pattern of separation from biological parental care (Roberts et al., 2017). This has led to a growing body of research investigating the role of protective factors that might improve long-term outcomes (Refaeli, 2017).

Resilience and Protective Factors

Definitions of resilience vary, but it has been described as an adaptive response to serious adversity (Lee et al., 2013), the factors and processes that prevent risks from leading to maladaptive behaviors or psychopathology, resulting in reasonable outcomes despite adversity (Rutter, 1985), and an adaptive, effective performance of the person confronted with adversity (Herta et al., 2016). Refaeli (2017) suggested that resilience is the outcome of the interplay between risk and protective factors. Lou et al. (2018) posited that protective factors are “moderators of a risk or stress situation that enables an individual to adapt more successfully than would be the case if the protective factors were not present” (p. 107). Researchers have identified both individual (positive coping skills, optimism, self-efficacy; Boldiř, 2014; Frimpong-Manso, 2018; Gough & Gulliford, 2020; Matheson, 2016; Meng et al., 2018; Sulimani-Aidan, 2017) and communal (spirituality/faith, cultural practices/traditions, social support within the community; Bauer & Campbell, 2021; Gough & Gulliford, 2020) protective factors that seem to support better outcomes in adults with care experience. Understanding

protective factors may serve to improve outcomes for children currently receiving alternative care services.

Spirituality as a Protective Factor

One protective factor with a growing body of evidence is spirituality (Bauer & Campbell, 2021; Polson et al., 2018). While the terms faith, religiosity, and spirituality are distinct research concepts (Lunn, 2009), many assert that the concepts themselves are overlapping and intertwined (Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Scott et al., 2018). Indeed, even in the academic literature they are often used in tandem (i.e. religion/spirituality) or interchangeably (i.e. religion or spirituality). In line with previous research on protective factors (Makanui et al., 2019; Scott et al., 2018), the current research will define spirituality, religiosity, and faith in a broader sense to encompass belief systems, an individual's relationship with God, a person's sense of higher purpose, and spiritually based practices or behaviors viewed as powerful and helpful. As such, we will use the term spirituality to encompass religiosity, spirituality, and faith.

Previous studies have documented spirituality as a protective factor in a variety of contexts where individuals have experienced adversity, such as natural disasters and domestic violence (Ager et al., 2015; Bryant-Davis & Wong, 2013; Ginesini, 2018; Korang-Okrah, 2015; Ögtem-Young, 2018; Polson et al., 2018). Research has suggested that spirituality may serve as a source of support for individuals with care experience in general (Gusler et al., 2020). However, spirituality is often discussed as a general construct and the specific ways that adults with care experience believe spirituality influences their wellbeing remains unclear. By understanding the specific functions that spirituality is serving, professionals can better identify services and practices to support individuals with care experience.

The Present Study

The objective of the present study was to investigate how spirituality acted as a protective factor for individuals who were separated from parental care during childhood. Specifically, we sought to better understand the ways that participants believed their spirituality positively influenced their wellbeing in adulthood. The function of spirituality was assessed by analyzing spontaneous references to spirituality made by participants in response to a survey examining outcomes for adults with care experience. This knowledge can allow for a better understanding of how spirituality may be a source of support and can inform better care for children currently receiving alternative care services.

Methods

Data presented here were collected as part of a larger initiative focused on healthy development in adults with care experience (n=1,119). All participants completed an online survey consisting of demographic items, 15 open-ended questions regarding their time in care, and several validated measures. The research team noted a robust pattern of spontaneous references to spirituality and decided to further explore how adults with care experience discussed this topic. Although this is a non-traditional approach, the references to faith despite no direct question may indicate a particular importance. The current study reports on this subset (n=267; 23.9%) of the larger sample who made spontaneous positive spirituality-related references in their open-ended questions (see Table 1). Of the 267 participants, 123 made one SFR and 144 made two or more SFRs in their responses. Although there were some negative SFRs, the overwhelming majority of the SFRs (542 SFRs out of a total 578 or 93.8%) were positive. Therefore, the negative SFRs (2 SFRs out of a total 578 or 0.35%) were excluded from analysis in this study. Initially, the study began with a geographical focus, with an intent to examine the data for differences between geographic regions. However, after preliminary qualitative analysis, it was found that spirituality-based themes were similar amongst the geographic regions within the study, so the study's focus shifted towards examining positive spontaneous faith references amongst participants overall.

Table 1. Open-Ended Questions with Spontaneous Faith References (SFRs).

Question	# of SFRs
"What is your proudest achievement?"	41
"What do you hope for the future?"	48
"What are your three greatest strengths?"	79
"Thinking of your time in care, what do you think had the most positive impact on your functioning as an adult?"	84
"Thinking of your time in care, what do you think had the most negative impact on your functioning as an adult?"	6
"What is one thing that helped you transition to adulthood?"	69
"What has been your greatest challenge to overcome in becoming an adult?"	5
"As you think about your time in care, was there a place or a time in which you felt you belonged?"	29
"During your transition to adulthood, who or what was most helpful to you? Tell us about this place or person and how they were helpful."	77

“Think of an adult who was especially helpful to you during your time in care. What role did that person have? How were they helpful (please give specific examples)? When were they most helpful?”	43
“What do you think is the most important thing for supporting children separated from their biological parents?”	28
“If you could change one thing about care for children separated from their biological parents, what would it be?”	12
“What do you want people to learn from your experience?”	71
“Is there anything else you would like us to know?”	19

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the author’s Institutional Review Board. Participants were recruited using a combination of convenience and chain referral sampling. Recruitment notices were posted on the website of a coalition connecting non-government organizations serving vulnerable children and families, distributed by email through relevant professional networks that serve adults with care experience, and emailed to potential participants using organizational and professional networks’ distribution lists. The recruitment information was further disseminated via chain referral sampling. Data were collected between October 2020 and May 2021. All measures were completed using an online survey platform, and items were presented in random order. Informed consent detailed the purpose of the study, procedures, risks, benefits, privacy, and confidentiality. All participants provided informed consent before completing the survey and were free to end the survey at any time. Completion rate was 74.0%.

Participants

Participants were 267 individuals with care experience who were separated from biological parental care and resided in an alternative care setting for at least six months during childhood (defined as ages 0-17). Participants ranged in age from 18 - 89 ($M = 32.65$; $SD = 13.25$). Slightly more than half of participants were female (56.9%). The majority reported being either married (33.0%) or single (52.4%). Most frequently reported current nations of residence were the United States of America (25.8%), Kenya (16.5%), Uganda (5.9%), Democratic Republic of the Congo (5.3%), and Zimbabwe (5.3%). See Table 2 for additional demographic data. Participants reported residing in 35 nations during childhood (i.e., the nation in which they were separated from their biological parents). Frequencies, percentages, and Human Development Index (Roser, 2014) scores for nation of residence during childhood can be found in Table 3. Age at initial separation from biological parents ranged from 0 - 16 ($M = 5.71$;

$SD = 4.66$). Participants reported a range of reasons for the separation from biological parents, with the most common being parental death (31.5%), abandonment/relinquishment (27.0%), and poverty (20.2%). More than half of participants reported having more than one placement (60.7%) after being separated from their biological parents. Total number of placements ranged from 1 - 18 ($M = 2.61$; $SD = 2.66$). Participants also reported a variety of placement types, with the most commonly reported being residential/group care (59.9%), kinship placement (36.3%), and foster care (26.6%). Participants were broadly reflective of the larger study.

Table 2. Participant Demographic ($N = 267$), Including Frequency and Percentage

Category	F	%
Gender		
Female	152	56.9
Male	115	43.1
Education		
Less than high school degree	25	9.4
High school diploma or equivalent	75	28.1
Some college but no degree	50	18.7
Associate degree/Trade	8	3.0
Bachelor's degree	62	23.2
Master's degree	35	13.1
Doctoral degree/professional	12	4.5
Employment		
Not working (looking for work)	62	23.2
Not working (other)	52	19.5
Not working (temporary layoff from a job)	6	2.2
Working (paid employee)	147	55.1
Marital Status		
Never married	140	52.4
Married	88	33.0
Divorced/ separated	19	7.1
Widowed	3	1.1
Other	17	6.4
Children		
No	161	60.3
Yes	106	39.7

Table 3. Frequency, Percentage, and Human Development Index for Nation of Residence During Childhood for Nations ($N = 267$).

Nation	F	%	HDI
United States of America	69	25.8	.926
Kenya	52	19.5	.601
Uganda	21	7.9	.544
Democratic Republic of the Congo	19	7.1	.480
Zimbabwe	18	6.7	.571
India	11	4.1	.645
Philippines	9	3.4	.718
Rwanda	9	3.4	.543
Romania	8	3.0	.828
Sierra Leone	6	2.2	.452
Ethiopia	5	1.9	.485
Other Nations (< 5 participants)	40	14.8	--

Measures

General Demographics. Participants answered a series of questions regarding their current age, nation of residence, gender, education, marital status, whether they have children, and employment status.

Care Experience Demographics. Participants were asked a series of questions regarding their experiences when separated from their biological parents. Items included nation of residence during childhood (i.e. where the separation occurred), age at initial separation, reason(s) for the separation, type(s) of placements, and total number of placements. It is important to note that many individuals with care experience report there being multiple reasons for their initial separation from their biological parents and that they experience multiple types of placements during their separation. As such, they were allowed to select as many answers as necessary.

Care Experience Survey. All participants completed a survey containing 15-open ended questions regarding their experiences surrounding their separation from parental care. All items were included in the analysis for the current study. Topics covered included participants' perceptions of supports and barriers to transitioning to adulthood, if they ever had a sense of belonging while in care, and their greatest strengths and challenges. No questions explicitly referenced faith, spirituality, or religion. As such, all spirituality-related responses were spontaneously generated by participants.

Translations

All survey items were translated from English to Spanish, Hindi, Thai, and Bulgarian. Languages were decided based on locations where English was not spoken and where the research team was connected to translators with knowledge of alternative care systems. For qualitative items, participants responded to survey items in their native language. Guidelines proposed in the literature on cross-cultural methodology (Brislin, 1980) were followed as closely as possible. Specifically, independent (blind) back-translations and educated translations were conducted. For each language, two bilingual content experts translated all survey items and participant responses. At least one translator for each language was a native speaker. Discrepancies were minimal, and translators came to consensus through discussion for any divergences.

Data Analysis

This study used a mixed, concurrent, equal status design, in which qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed separately and combined at the stage of interpretation (Creswell et al., 2007).

Quantitative Analysis. Quantitative data primarily consisted of frequencies and percentages regarding participant demographics and care experiences.

Qualitative Analysis. The 15 open-ended items were examined using qualitative thematic data analysis (Table 3). Two researchers manually coded all open-ended questions and analyzed every question independently. Themes within the questions were clustered, and the coders developed a directory of operational definitions and keywords corresponding to the major themes. A description of relationships between the themes and individual items was written and considered before drafting the final qualitative results. Quotes, including both full sentence and sentence fragments, were used to support the results.

Results

References to Spirituality

Raters coded each of the 15 open-ended questions for references associated with faith, spirituality, and religion. Only the 267 participants who made spirituality related references were included in the current analysis. A total of 578 spirituality-related references were identified. Most of these spirituality-related references were positive (n=542; 93.8%). However, it is important to note that the data did yield some neutral (n=34;

5.9%) and negative spirituality references (n=2; .35%). As the focus of the current paper was on spirituality as a protective factor, negative and neutral references were excluded from analysis.

Qualitative Thematic Analysis

The responses to the open-ended questions clustered into six primary themes regarding the role of spirituality in the lives of adults with care experience: a personal relationship to God, spiritual community support, identity development, higher purpose, spirituality-based servanthood, and spirituality-based teachings and teachers. Discussion of each theme consists of 1) a description of the theme, 2) representative quotes that highlight the subtheme, and 3) a brief summary of the data and contextual details needed for interpretation.

Theme 1: Relationship to God

The most frequent theme in the data related to the participants' personal relationships with God and how this relationship empowered and supported the participants. Participants frequently reported they felt the supportive presence of God, that they felt listened to by and connected with God, and that their spiritual relationship with God was transformative in their lives. Participants also reported that demonstrations of their relationships with God (ex., prayer) were beneficial to their wellbeing and strengthened this relationship. The following quotes highlight the various ways that the relationships between adults with care experience and God were transformative and beneficial to their well-being:

I felt lost when I became an adult. I didn't know how to navigate adulthood. As an adult, I found myself trapped in an earlier stage of development. I was filled to the brim with bitterness and hurt and anger. But my anchor in Christ from my previous years of studying the scriptures and my wide experience in books greatly helped me deal with the crises.

I think God, my parents didn't really helped [sic] me on this transition and I never really [sic] had that many friends and those I had were younger than me so they couldn't help me. God may not have teached [sic] me how to do taxes but I felt like I was not alone, that was more than enough.

The most helpful person was God because every time...my poor heart broke due to all the disappointment I would cry out to him and I always felt better because even though I could

see him I always knew that he's listening.

My personal relationship with God - He gave me love... I belong to Him.

Considered collectively, data suggested that adults with care experience felt their relationships with God were comforting and transformative. Moreover, the ability to rely on God made participants feel supported, especially when these individuals felt they had no one else to support them. Further, data highlight that a relationship with God can be a source of comfort and support, especially for those lacking a robust social support network.

Theme 2: Spiritual Community Support

A second theme in the data encompassed the ways that spiritual communities provided social and emotional support for adults with care experience. Participants reported receiving this support from congregation members (ex., fellow church members), spiritual leaders (ex., pastors), and studying spiritual scriptures (ex., the Bible). Respondents reported that the support received from these spiritual communities had a significant impact on their lives. The following quotes demonstrate the various sources of support from spiritual communities reported by adults with care experience:

Despite being atheist [sic] I found a mentor in a priest at the Catholic church I would crash at some nights. To this day he's like a father to me and we get together like family would during the holidays. He still helps me when I need it and I help him and other children he's taking care of.

My spiritual mom. She never gave up on me & was the only one who loved me unconditionally.

In one of those my reading phases, [sic] I encountered the Bible. It was a children's Bible written in adult type language. It held me spellbound. My encounter with that Bible and a Host of other books helped me, in ways I never understood as a child, to go through all the horrors I've experienced and impacted significantly on my values and everything I've become as an adult.

God put many people in my life in each domain I was in. There were always people there who accepted and embraced me and encouraged me. Acceptance. Belonging. Being loved and valued. Supported. Being part of a faith community.

I also had a large community of people in my church who were interested in me. There were really good men living their lives in front of me. There were healthy families around me. What I didn't have as a participant, I had as an observer.

Considered as a whole, data suggested that spiritual communities, including spiritual congregations, leaders, and manuscripts, were abundant sources of social and emotional support for adults with care experience and that this support had significant impacts on their lives. As such, results indicated the important role spiritual communities can play as a source of emotional and social support for children and youth separated from care and those with care experience.

Theme 3: Identity Development

The responses of adults with care experience also revealed a theme involving the relationship between their identities and their relationships to God. Indeed, many participants reported that their spirituality was a core component of their identity during this time. More specifically, respondents spoke of “finding themselves” and defining their adult identities within the context of their spirituality, positively developing identities through a relationship with God. Centering one’s identity around spirituality was almost always a positive experience for the adults with care experience. Further, some responses suggested a link between their identities and their purposes in life. Some also reported they felt called to share their spirituality and evangelize to others. The following quotes reveal the reported benefits that adults with care experience received from centering their identities in their spirituality:

I had to really work on understanding my identity and who I was. The most helpful thing was when I realized my identity in Christ and that I had been made for a purpose and I wasn't a mistake.

Making sure they know they are not a mistake or unwanted. A loving God created them, and He doesn't make mistakes. They are valuable in His eyes and have a devine [sic] purpose.

That our identity is found in God. That there is no perfect person/circumstance and life.

(Spanish Translated Quote) To help them to find their identity in Christ, to know that they are not a mistake and that he loves them.

Teaching them that their identity lies in the one true King.

And that the truth of their value lies in God's complete love and not that which perishes.

Taken together, data suggested spirituality was an important facet of identity for many adults with care experience. Data also suggested these adults with care experience wanted to share these benefits with others and encourage them to find their identities in the context of spirituality as well. These results indicated the role of spirituality in positive identity development and that finding identity related to spirituality might mitigate negative identity sentiments for youth separated from parental care.

Theme 4: Higher Purpose

Data also revealed that participants found purpose in their spirituality and relationships to God. Respondents reported beliefs that God had a specific, designed purpose for them or someone close to them. These sentiments about purpose were sometimes related to notions of identity centered in spirituality, possibly revealing a believed relationship between identity and purpose for adults with care experience. The following quotes call attention to the importance of believing in designed purpose for the lives of adults with care experience and how this belief influenced perception of outcomes:

I am the product of an unplanned out of wedlock pregnancy however I also am the answer to a couple's deepest prayer to have a child after suffering several miscarriages. Every life has a God ordained plan. We all play a part in His plan and are all needed. I know God has used me and will continue to do so for His Kingdom! Grace, forgiveness, love, compassion, redemption... We never know where God will take our story but if we are willing to lean into Him and trust His plan.

Life is so good and God has a plan and a purpose. I would go through it again 100 times if it meant leading someone to Christ.

Important for them to understand they are not a mistake, but God has a purpose. They are loved and valued and special.

My greatest and excellent hope for the future is that I have hope for eternal life, which God who never lies promised before the world began. Whether I advance in my career, Whether I hope to become a great mother for my children and a homemaker for my family (God willing, I will get married and have kids). All that I hope for in this life, especially

those mentioned above, will depend on God's providence and sovereignty.

Even though it was a difficult time, but today I believe that it was for a reason and when I became a Christian and got to know the Lord, many things fell into place. I am a different person now and my relationship with my mother is good. So, if we help children well and also lead them to their eternal father, their life story doesn't have to have a bad end because it starts bad.

Considered collectively, data suggested that adults with care experience believed there was a specific, designed purpose for their lives. Further, this belief served as a mitigating factor and source of future hopes. As such, this sense of higher purpose appears to have a two-fold impact, providing both reason and hope for future lives and buffering the impact of past and current struggles or suffering.

Theme 5: Spirituality-based Servanthood

Another theme revealed within the data was the importance of servanthood. Specifically, participants reported that spirituality was a motivator to serve others or to serve God by serving others. Some responses had evangelistic undertones, where individuals were motivated to serve others in order to encourage that person toward spirituality. The following quotes highlight the use of spirituality as a motivating factor to benefit and serve others and God:

To love others in a way that points them to Christ.

Having the ability to champion and support individuals who are participating in Foster Care and Adoption by being a leader of a church group focused on this.

To be a positive voice using my story to encourage others! To continue to raise my children to love the Lord and use their gifts to love others.

I hope to finish Seminary and work for a church or organization helping others know the truth of the Bible, live it out in their everyday lives and help people overcome past hurts!

Empowering young women to do better and to live for Christ.

Considered as a whole, data suggested that spirituality and spiritual beliefs were strong motivators to serve others and to serve God through

serving others for adults with care experience. These results suggested that servanthood plays an important role in the lives and spiritual journeys of adults with care experience.

Theme 6: Spirituality-Based Teachings and Teachers

Participants also revealed a theme involving the importance of the role of spiritual instruction and spiritual instructors. These responses centered around many kinds of spiritual instruction (Ex., reading stories in the Bible) or learning from an array of spiritual instructors (Ex., listening to preachers). Spiritual instructors were not necessarily professional spiritual leaders and often included other individuals, such as family members, who acted as spiritual instructors. Respondents also reported desires to spiritually instruct future generations. The following quotes highlight how adults with care experience learned and grew in their spirituality, either from spiritual instruction or spiritual instructors, and their desires to pass on these spiritual beliefs to future generations:

My family and church community. They taught me biblical wisdom and discernment. They taught me self-control, gentleness, compassion, and strength.

I had the privilege of working with the maintenance man who was a good Christian and he showed love and compassion and taught me so very, very much about how to be a good person.

Teach the children God is their personal defender and show them the words. Teach the children to pray.

The parents helped to nurture me into a resilient boy and always taught me how to pray and believe in God.

Taken together, data suggested adults with care experience often grew in their spirituality due to spiritual instruction or spiritual instructors. Data also suggested adults with care experience thought it was important to teach future generations about their spiritual beliefs. These results indicated that spiritual instruction and instructors could be important sources of spiritual growth for adults who were separated from parental care during childhood.

Discussion

Findings from the current study indicate that spirituality can play an important role as a protective factor in both children currently in care and adults with care experience. Participants noted the power of spirituality within care, during the transition to adulthood, and within adulthood.

Indeed, the current findings suggest that having a sense of spirituality may be related to other factors that improve wellbeing (Ellis et al., 2017; Gilligan, 2010). For example, a personal relationship with God can serve as a stable relationship and elicit a sense of safety and security when other relationships may be unavailable. Spiritual community support can bolster social networks, enhance a sense of belonging in the community, and increase involvement in community activities. Having spirituality as a component of identity may lead to a more positive identity and sense of self. Feeling of higher purpose, commitment to servanthood, and spirituality-based teachings and teachers may increase future orientation and improve self-confidence. All of these factors have been associated with better outcomes (Ellis et al., 2017; Gilligan, 2010). When taken as a whole, these findings suggest that professionals should consider the possible importance of spirituality for children and youth separated from parental care and adults with care experience. As such, opportunities for cultivating spirituality should be considered when providing services to children and youth separated from parental care.

Recommendations for Social Workforce

Social workers and other service professionals have a vital role to play in supporting children and youth separated from parental care. Learning from adults with care experience can provide guidance for practices that may lead to improved outcomes in children and youth currently in care. Building on the data, and in alignment with current literature, the following recommendations were developed by the research team to aid social workers providing services to this population.

1. Affirm the Role of Spirituality

Findings from this study and others (Ager et al., 2015; Bauer & Campbell, 2021) suggest that spirituality is a protective factor that can lead to better outcomes. Spirituality should not be ignored, but rather considered as an important domain of development (Heywood, 1986). Social workers should support and affirm the beliefs of children and youth who self-identify as engaging in spiritual practices. When possible, they should also consider the role of spirituality in program decisions such as activities and care plans for these youth (Center on Applied Research for Vulnerable Children and Families, 2020). More generally, social workers can create opportunities for youth in care to explore and be curious about spirituality.

2. Offer Access to Spirituality-Related Practices

Data from this study suggest that access to practices such as prayer and

spiritual instruction were important components of spiritual development for adults with care experience. Providing access to spirituality-related practices can assist individuals by improving mental health and increasing well-being (Francis et al., 2018; Rafiei, 2011; Rainville, 2018; Roh et al., 2018). Routines of prayer, traditions around teaching and holidays, times of Sabbath rest, corporate worship, and reading scripture are all practices that may provide a sense of consistency and may serve as protective factors for children in alternative care. When possible, social workers should make efforts to offer access to spirituality-related practices for children and youth who wish to participate.

3. Consider Spiritual Communities as a Source of Support

Participants in this study reported that spiritual communities, including congregations and spiritual leaders, were viewed as a valuable source of support. This is in alignment with past research that suggests involvement in a spiritual community can lead to a sense of belonging (Carter, 2016; Taylor, 2019). Social workers should consider collaborating with local spiritual communities when providing services for children and youth separated from parental care. Ideally, youth would be able to build and maintain safe, supportive relationships with individuals in the spiritual community over time if they desire to do so. Further, for children and youth in residential care, attending gatherings such as faith services may serve as an opportunity to connect with the broader community outside of their alternative care program (Wilke et al., 2020).

4. Provide Opportunities to Serve

Also clear from data was the importance of spirituality-motivated service. This is in alignment with past research that affirms service as having important benefits for health (Bang et al., 2020; Schreier et al., 2013; Yeung et al., 2018). It also has been shown to have a positive relationship with resilience (Llenares et al., 2020; Williamson et al., 2018). As youth in care have often experienced significant adversity leading to a need for services, it may seem counterintuitive to guide them to serve others. However, creating developmentally appropriate volunteer opportunities to use the skills and abilities they have can place them in a role of agency rather than need (Martikke et al., 2019; Melkman et al., 2015; Webb et al., 2017).

It is clear from the data that spirituality is a powerful protective factor for adults with care experience. It is likely that affirming the role of spirituality, offering access to spirituality-related practices, considering spiritual communities as a source of support, and providing opportunities to serve may improve outcomes for youth receiving services after separation from parental care. However, it should be noted that even

though spirituality is related to better outcomes, it is a highly personal decision. Although the authors encourage consideration of and access to spirituality-related activities and relationships, service providers should avoid any coercive behaviors, including tying service provision to a profession of spirituality.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The current study has several limitations that can serve to catalyze future research. The larger study, from which these data have been drawn, did not explicitly measure spirituality. Further, the nature of the references to spirituality did not allow for separating the constructs of religion, faith, and spirituality. Future research with this population should utilize validated spirituality-related instruments to further assess the importance of spirituality, faith, and religion, as well as related practices. Although themes in the data may apply to multiple spiritual beliefs, the specific beliefs to which they apply are unclear. Some quotes were vague references to faith or “God.” Some were specific to Christianity. Future research should address whether similar themes are noted by adults with care experience who follow other spiritual beliefs. This study looked at spiritual references, but it did not focus on detailed analysis of who made these references. Future research should examine patterns and themes in faith references.

This study also had methodological limitations. The current multinational sample provides a broad overview of general themes from adults with care experience globally. However, given the heterogeneity of this population, it is impossible to generalize findings to all adults with care experience. Future research should involve more representative samples to better illuminate the perspectives and experiences of adults with care experience. The current research also utilized convenience and chain referral sampling to recruit participants for a one-time, online survey. It originated from a network of faith-based organizations, meaning it is possible that participants were more likely to be spiritually inclined than the general population. These methods were chosen to execute a large-scale, multi-national study efficiently. However, this approach limited the generalizability of findings, as most participants need to have access to the internet and be literate. This eliminated large portions of the population from sampling and biased the current sample toward those with higher levels of education and socioeconomic status. Future research should employ different methods to access elements of the population not represented in this sample. Longitudinal research, as well as focus groups or interviews, should also be considered.

Although the researchers followed guidelines for cross-cultural

research (Brislin, 1980), several limitations remain. First, the current survey was only translated into a few languages, due to time and financial limitations, which limited the participant pool. Future work should increase the number of languages available. Second, though all responses were translated and back-translated from the participants' native languages, they were coded in English. The general themes likely remained the same, but it is possible that the nuances of the responses were impacted as a result of translation. Future research should obtain larger samples in each nation and focus on culture-specific themes.

Conclusion

Listening to the voices of adults with care experience can help improve outcomes for youth separated from parental care. Participants in this study indicated that spirituality served as an important protective factor. Moreover, they identified the specific facets of spirituality, including a personal relationship with God, spiritual community support, spirituality as a component of identity development, a belief in a higher purpose, spirituality-motivated servanthood, and access to spirituality-based teachings and teachers, that were influential to them. By understanding the ways in which spirituality may have served as a protective factor for care-experienced adults, we can consider spirituality as an avenue for supporting development and improving outcomes for youth currently separated from parental care and adults with care experience. ❖

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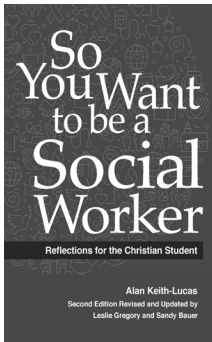
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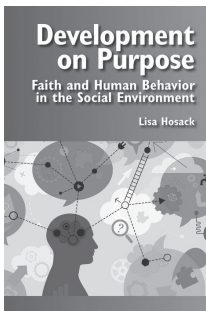
PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FROM NACSW



SO YOU WANT TO BE A SOCIAL WORKER: REFLECTIONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN STUDENT (2ND EDITION)

Alan Keith-Lucas, Leslie Gregory, and Sandy Bauer. (2021). Palos Heights, IL: NACSW. \$14.95 U.S. (\$11.95 for NACSW members or orders of 10 or more). For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

So You Want to Be a Social Worker is an invaluable resource for both students and practitioners who are concerned about the responsible integration of their Christian faith and competent, ethical professional practice. It is a thoughtful, clear, and brief distillation of practice wisdom and responsible guidelines regarding perennial questions that arise, such as the nature of our roles, our ethical and spiritual responsibilities, the fallacy of “imposition of values,” the problem of sin, and the need for both courage and humility.



DEVELOPMENT ON PURPOSE: FAITH AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR IN THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

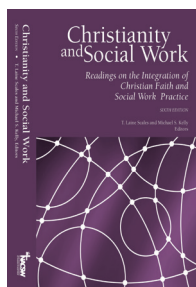
(2019) BY LISA HOSACK, MSW, PH.D.

NACSW. \$25.50 U.S., \$22.95 for NACSW members or orders of 10 or more copies. For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

Development on Purpose provides both students and seasoned professionals with a coherent framework for considering human behavior in the social environment from a Christian perspective. It was developed to be a companion text for HBSE and related courses at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

Courses in human behavior and the social environment raise important questions about the nature of persons and our multi-layered social world. The Christian faith offers compelling answers to these deep questions about human nature and our relationships with one another and the world by providing a defining purpose for human development. Steeped within the Reformed tradition, Development on Purpose describes how this grand purpose informs our understanding of the trajectory of our lived experience and sustains our work on behalf of those at risk in the world.

To support the use of this book in the classroom and training environments, NACSW has developed a collection of online teaching resources for your use, which can be found at: www.nacsw.org/teaching_resources/hosack_developmentonpurpose.



CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL WORK: READINGS ON THE INTEGRATION OF CHRISTIAN FAITH & SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE (SIXTH EDITION)

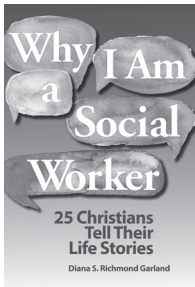
T. LAINE SCALES AND MICHAEL S. KELLY (EDITORS). (2020). BOTSFORD, CT:

NACSW. \$64.95 U.S., \$51.96 for NACSW members or orders of 10 or more copies. For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

The 6th Edition of *Christianity and Social Work (CSW6)*, edited by T. Laine Scales and Michael Kelly, and is written for social workers whose motivations to enter the profession as well as their approaches to helping have been inspired and informed by their Christian faith.

The 19 chapters and over 400 pages of *CSW6* address social welfare history, human behavior and the social environment, social policy, and social work practice from a faith perspective at micro, mezzo, and macro levels. Four decision cases and an accompanying online instructor's manual provide rich teaching tools for the use of this material in a variety of social work and related classes. Especially useful in the classroom or social work trainings, *CSW6* supports several major curriculum areas outlined by the Council on Social Work Education's Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards.

NACSW has also developed an extensive electronic resource tool, *Instructor's Resources for Christianity and Social Work: Sixth Edition (2020)* by Tammy Patton to support the use of the *Christianity and Social Work* in classroom and trainings environments, which can be found at: www.nacsw.org/Publications/CSW6/CSW6thInstructorsResourcesFinal.pdf.



WHY I AM A SOCIAL WORKER: 25 CHRISTIANS TELL THEIR LIFE STORIES

Diana R. Garland. (2015). Botsford, CT: NACSW. \$29.95 U.S., \$23.95 for NACSW members or orders of 10 or more copies. For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

Why I Am a Social Worker describes the rich diversity and nature of the profession of social work through the 25 stories of daily lives and professional journeys chosen to represent the different people,

groups and human situations where social workers serve. *Why I Am a Social Worker* serves as a resource

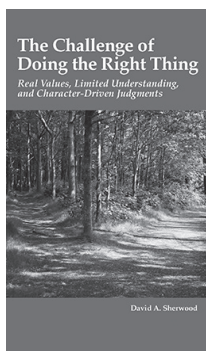
for Christians in social work as they reflect on their sense of calling, and provides direction to guide them

in this process. It addresses a range of critical questions such as:

- How do social workers describe the relationship of their faith and their work?
- What was their path into social work, and more particularly, the kind of social work they chose?
- What roles do their religious beliefs and spiritual practices have in sustaining them for the work, and how has their work, in turn, shaped their religious and spiritual life?

The stories in *Why I Am a Social Worker* have strong themes of integration of faith and practice that will

both challenge and encourage students and seasoned practitioners alike.



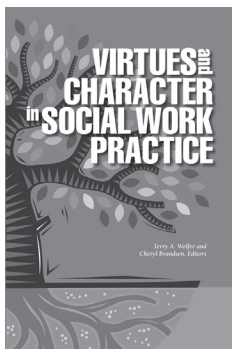
THE CHALLENGE OF DOING THE RIGHT THING: REAL VALUES, LIMITED UNDERSTANDING, AND CHARACTER-DRIVEN JUDGMENTS

David A. Sherwood. (2018). Botsford CT: NACSW. \$21.95 U.S., \$17.55 for NACSW members or orders of 10 or more copies. Available as an eBook only. For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

The Challenge of Doing the Right Thing: Real Values, Limited Understanding, and Character-Driven Judgments is a 450-page collection of 44 editorials and articles

written by David Sherwood for *Social Work & Christianity* and for the North American Association of Christians in Social Work between 1981 and 2017 focused on integrating Christian faith, values, and ethics with competent

professional social work practice. In this book, Dr. Sherwood argues that in ethical decision-making, decisions frequently involve making judgments that functionally prioritize legitimate values that are in tension with each other. He contends that the mission of NACSW and *Social Work & Christianity* has been to walk the difficult middle road—clearly committed to both Christian faith and competent social work practice, not presuming to have the final answers in either, and helping members and readers to come as close to faithfulness and competence as possible.



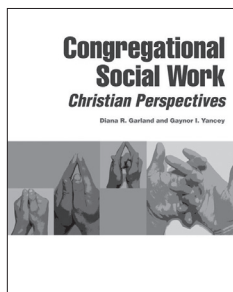
VIRTUE AND CHARACTER IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Edited by Terry A. Wolfer and Cheryl Brandsen. (2015). Botsford, CT: NACSW. \$23.75 U.S., \$19.00 for NACSW members or orders of 10 or more copies). For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

Virtues and Character in Social Work Practice offers a fresh contribution to the Christian social work literature with its emphasis on the key role of character traits and virtues in equipping Christians in social work to engage with and serve

their clients and communities well.

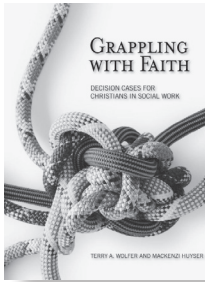
This book is for social work practitioners who, as social change agents, spend much of their time examining social structures and advocating for policies and programs to advance justice and increase opportunity.



CONGREGATIONAL SOCIAL WORK: CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES

Diana R. Garland and Gaynor Yancey. (2014). Botsford, CT: NACSW. \$39.95 U.S., \$31.95 for NACSW members or orders of 10 or more copies). For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

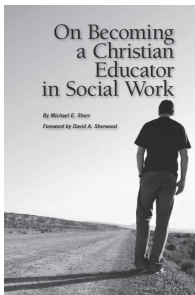
Congregational Social Work offers a compelling account of the many ways social workers serve the church as leaders of congregational life, of ministry to neighborhoods locally and globally, and of advocacy for social justice. Based on the most comprehensive study to date on social work with congregations, *Congregational Social Work* shares illuminating stories and experiences from social workers engaged in powerful and effective work within and in support of congregations throughout the US.



GRAPPLING WITH FAITH: DECISION CASES FOR CHRISTIANS IN SOCIAL WORK

Terry A. Wolfer and Mackenzi Huyser. (2010). \$23.75 (\$18.99 for NACSW members or for orders of 10 or more). For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

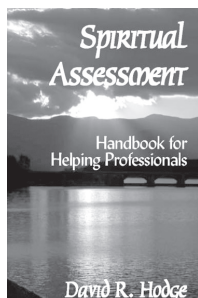
Grappling with Faith: Decision Cases for Christians in Social Work presents fifteen cases specifically designed to challenge and stretch Christian social work students and practitioners. Using the case method of teaching and learning, *Grappling with Faith* highlights the ambiguities and dilemmas found in a wide variety of areas of social work practice, provoking active decision making and helping develop readers' critical thinking skills. Each case provides a clear focal point for initiating stimulating, in-depth discussions for use in social work classroom or training settings. These discussions require that students use their knowledge of social work theory and research, their skills of analysis and problem solving, and their common sense and collective wisdom to identify and analyze problems, evaluate possible solutions, and decide what to do in these complex and difficult situations.



ON BECOMING A CHRISTIAN EDUCATOR IN SOCIAL WORK

Michael Sherr. (2010). \$21.75 (\$17.50 for NACSW members or for orders of 10 or more). For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

On Becoming a Christian Educator is a compelling invitation for social workers of faith in higher education to explore what it means to be a Christian in social work education. By highlighting seven core commitments of Christian social work educators, it offers strategies for social work educators to connect their personal faith journeys to effective teaching practices with their students. Frank B. Raymond, Dean Emeritus at the College of Social Work at the University of South Carolina suggests that "Professor Sherr's book should be on the bookshelf of every social work educator who wants to integrate the Christian faith with classroom teaching. Christian social work educators can learn much from Professor Sherr's spiritual and vocational journey as they continue their own journeys and seek to integrate faith, learning and practice in their classrooms."

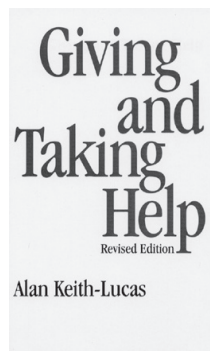


SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT: HELPING HANDBOOK FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS

David Hodge. (2003). Botsford CT: NACSW. \$20.00 U.S. (\$16.00 for NACSW members or orders of 10 or more). For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

A growing consensus exists among helping professionals, accrediting organizations and clients regarding the importance of spiritual assessment.

David Hodge's *Spiritual Assessment: Helping Handbook for Helping Professionals*, describes five complementary spiritual assessment instruments, along with an analysis of their strengths and limitations. The aim of this book is to familiarize readers with a repertoire of spiritual assessment tools to enable practitioners to select the most appropriate assessment instrument in given client/practitioner settings. By developing an assessment "toolbox" containing a variety of spiritual assessment tools, practitioners will become better equipped to provide services that address the individual needs of each of their clients.



GIVING AND TAKING HELP (REVISED EDITION)

Alan Keith-Lucas. (1994). Botsford CT: North American Association of Christians in Social Work. \$20.75 U.S. (\$16.50 for NACSW members or orders of 10 or more). For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

Alan Keith-Lucas' *Giving and Taking Help*, first published in 1972, has become a classic in the social work literature on the helping relationship. Giving and taking help is a uniquely clear, straightforward, sensible, and wise examination of what is involved in the helping process—the giving and taking of help. It reflects on perennial issues and themes yet is grounded in highly practice-based and pragmatic realities. It respects both the potential and limitations of social science in understanding the nature of persons and the helping process. It does not shy away from confronting issues of values, ethics, and world views. It is at the same time profoundly personal yet reaching the theoretical and generalizable. It has a point of view.

To order a copy of any of the above publications, please send a check for the price plus 10% shipping and handling. (A 20% discount for members or for purchases of at least 10 copies is available.) Checks should be made payable to NACSW; P.O. Box 121, Botsford, CT 06404-0121. Email: info@nacsw.org or call 203.270.8780.



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Thursday-Sunday
November 9-12,
2023



“Leading the Brokenhearted Towards Healing.”
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*For I will restore health to you,
and your wounds I will heal,
declares the Lord,
because they have called you an outcast:
“It is Zion, for whom no one cares!”
-Jeremiah 30:17*

**Opening Night
Plenary Speaker:
Saleem Ghubril
Executive Director
The Pittsburgh
Promise**

**Thursday evening,
Nov 9 at 7:00pm**

Presentation:
“You are Loved,
Empowered, and
Deployed”



**Featured Speaker:
Shane Claiborne**

**Saturday evening banquet,
Nov 11 at 7:00pm**

Shane Claiborne is a prominent speaker, activist, and best-selling author. Shane worked with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, and founded *The*

Simple Way in Philadelphia. He heads up *Red Letter Christians*, a movement of folks who are committed to living “as if Jesus meant the things he said.” Shane is a champion for grace which has led him to jail advocating for the homeless, and to places like Iraq and Afghanistan to stand against war. Now grace fuels his passion to end the death penalty and help stop gun violence. Shane’s books include *Jesus for President*, *Red Letter Revolution*, *Common Prayer*, *Follow Me to Freedom*, *Jesus, Bombs and Ice Cream*, *Becoming the Answer to Our Prayers*, *Executing Grace*, his classic *The Irresistible Revolution*, and his newest book, *Beating Guns*. Shane speaks regularly at denominational gatherings, festivals, and conferences around the globe.



**Alan Keith-Lucas
Lecture Series
Speakers:**

**Sandy Bauer, PhD
& Leslie Gregory,
LSW, MSW**

**Friday morning,
Nov 10 at 11:30am**

Academic Discussion:
the timeless tenets of
*So You Want to be A
Social Worker* and
how it shaped the 2ND
Edition.





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NORTH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIANS IN SOCIAL WORK

NACSW's mission is to equip its members to integrate Christian faith and professional social work practice.

Its goals include:

- Supporting and encouraging members in the integration of Christian faith and professional practice through fellowship, education, and service opportunities.
- Articulating an informed Christian voice on social welfare practice and policies to the social work profession.
- Providing professional understanding and help for the social ministry of the church.
- Promoting social welfare services and policies in society which bring about greater justice and meet basic human needs.

