

KEEPING THE FIRE BURNING (WITHOUT GETTING BURNT):  
HELPING WORSHIP LEADERS MAINTAIN THEIR PASSION FOR  
MINISTRY THROUGH RESILIENCY TRAINING

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## ABSTRACT

### KEEPING THE FIRE BURNING (WITHOUT GETTING BURNT): HELPING WORSHIP LEADERS MAINTAIN THEIR PASSION FOR MINISTRY THROUGH RESILIENCY TRAINING

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Supposing that all people are inherently resilient as part of God's design, this project explores ways individuals and communities can nurture and strengthen the resiliency of their clergy through the use of modern research (the BASIC Ph model for resiliency training developed by members of the Community Stress Prevention Centre) and traditional rituals (prayer, worship and storytelling) in a workshop setting. Specifically, 'The Worship Renewal Experience', a workshop designed to help clergy maintain their passion for ministry while dealing with the many complex stresses of serving as a minister in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

First, the current context of ministry, the soil, is explored by examining how the context can both harm (the narrative of concern) and contribute to (the narrative of hope) the soil of ministry. Second, what is most helpful for sustainable growth and the prevention of burnout (theological and psychological resiliency models) in clergy is studied (the seeds). Third, Narrative Theory is used with the BASIC Ph model to create a holistic approach to resiliency training that focuses on the strengths, gifts and skills of clergy (participants). Lastly, insights into the benefits of resiliency training are shared.

## DEDICATION

Truly this project was a collaborative effort.

**For the members of the Lay Advisory Committee:**

**(Janet Ross, John Bird, Bronwyn Corlett and Khwaka Kukubo)**

we shaped, developed and implemented this project together and through our actions modeled the sort of faithful community that we hope to create. Thank-you.

**For my advisors:**

you taught me about the power of an idea, the richness of a story and the importance of authenticity. Thank-you.

**For my classmates:**

we are so different yet members of the same family. I am inspired by each of you and your ministries. Thank-you.

**For my friends and family:**

for your confidence, support, and endless encouragement, I am forever grateful.  
Thank-you.

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## CHAPTER 1

### GATHERING SEEDS: INTRODUCTION

With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.<sup>1</sup>

Humans tell stories. Our beings are story-telling machines. Our lives are filled with living stories that like old trees, age, grow and change with us; stories that were once saplings, and in their beginning, a seed in God's hands. The Bible is The Sacred Story. It's stories become the substance of our lives: how we define ourselves, how we define others, how we wrestle with meaning. We tell stories.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 4:30-32 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Consider the familiar story of the seed and the sower.<sup>2</sup> The sower goes out and sows seeds in many places and, not surprisingly, the seed that successfully bears fruit is the seed planted within good soil. This story, and similar stories like it, is powerful because of its simplistic and relatable imagery. Seeds and sowers are integral parts of church vernacular, because they are understandable yet spark our imagination. For instance, ministries are often referred to as seeds, and those in ministry named as sowers. Training facilities for ministers are called seminaries, meaning a ‘plot where plants are raised from seeds’.<sup>3</sup> This is fitting imagery as seeds are beautiful living things that can transform, change, bloom and grow—with luck in poor conditions and with care in fertile conditions. Seeds are resilient forces that move towards life. Clergy and seminarians are also resilient forces that move towards life.

The church is not producing the plants that it thought it would be. Is it a matter of where the seeds are sown or is it more to do with how the seeds are nurtured? In order for the church to produce the future harvest it desires, these factors and more need to be explored. Where seeds are planted addresses the complex issue of context; the environment and world that God’s followers are asked to plant themselves in. This is the messy and unpleasant soil of ministry. Within The United Church of Canada the predominant fertilizer is the pervasive narrative of decline. There is a decline in people entering mainline seminaries, a decline in people remaining in ministry, as well as an

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew 13:1-9.

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed\\_in\\_frame=0&search=seminary&searchmode=none](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=seminary&searchmode=none) (accessed September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014).



overall decline in the number of people attending and affiliated with mainline churches. The first section of this project will explore the soil of ministry by addressing this narrative of decline.

How the seeds are nurtured and cared for relates to how clergy are supported and encouraged in their ministry contexts. While the soil effects the seeds planted within it, even so, a seed must be cared for, it must have adequate water, sunshine and nourishment. A seed that is not cared for can wither even in the best soil. For United Church clergy, the current context of their ministry seems to be lacking in support for clergy health and retention. How can the institutional church better support and nurture clergy so they are able to bloom and flourish where they are planted? What can be done to help clergy reach their full potential? The second half of this project focuses on how to better nourish and support clergy to maximize their effectiveness and passion for ministry.

The soil of ministry has been the study of countless books and dissertations, and often in the context of burnout. After decades of such research into the development of prevention and intervention strategies for burnout—some of which are currently in use—it has become more and more apparent that there is no formula, system or preventative strategy that can protect clergy from the potential dangers of burnout. Common interventions for burnout include: time away, stress management, cognitive therapy and changes to one's lifestyle (eating habits, sleeping routine, physical exercise). These interventions are generally understood as good practice for all clergy.

Such preventions are helpful in the way that taking vitamins is a helpful preventative from illness, or how a good cast is beneficial in the healing and protection of a broken limb; it does an excellent job of preventing infection or protecting the injury as it heals, but it does not leave one immune to diseases and injuries. These strategies are coping mechanisms that can allow one to safely function while avoiding the root problem.

Ministry is a messy and relational vocation and, as a result, the potential for high stress situations is always present. This is part of the soil and context of ministry. If the context of ministry cannot be easily changed, the next logical step is to consider how ministers interact with their potentially harmful environment. What can be done to help clergy fully engage in their ministry while reducing their risk for burnout? One intervention that has had some success in helping professions such as Social Work and Nursing is the practice of resiliency training. Resiliency training is a proactive way to prepare clergy for the stresses of ministry by helping them: acknowledge the current context of their ministry (narrative of concern); understand why it is stressful (to find meaning and motivation to engage with the context through theology); and to claim and build on the resiliency tools they already possess (through a resilience training model based on a narrative methodology).

Useful Terminology:

Terms like 'resiliency' and 'burnout' are catchments for a variety of different understandings, beliefs and notions. Because these terms carry a multiplicity of

meanings it may be helpful to clarify and define how these terms are understood in this project.

## Burnout

The phenomenon of burnout in the helping professions, discussed by Dr. Herbert Freudenberger in 1974, is a generalized term for multiple negative responses to prolonged exposure to stress.<sup>4</sup> Experienced minister William Willimon argues that the metaphor of burnout is not a fully appropriate term for what happens to ministers who have lost their 'energy' for ministry, because it assumes that the minister has a limited supply of energy that they have already used.<sup>5</sup> It is possible, Willimon explains, for a minister to burnout who 'may never have left the launch pad'.<sup>6</sup> The miss-naming of this phenomenon is a contributing factor to preventative strategies for ministry burnout. For example, what if burnout is not a result of being overworked, as the metaphor often implies, but a result of feeling overwhelmed and overburdened by work? In this case burnout would be caused by a lack of meaning and passion not a lack of fuel and energy. Or what if burnout was a form of self-preservation and conflict avoidance? In this instance burnout could be a healthy response to situations that overwhelm or a fearful response to anticipated suffering. Regardless of how it is defined, in most cases burnout results in clergy disengaging from their ministry. For the purpose of this project,

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<sup>4</sup> David P. Mann "Preventing Burnout in Ministry – A Health and Wellness Approach" (*Ashland Theological Journal*, 2007), 51.

<sup>5</sup> William H. Willimon, *Clergy and Laity Burnout* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989), 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

burnout will be defined as a phenomenon where clergy feel so overwhelmed by elements of their ministry that it results in disengagement.

### Resiliency

Resiliency has to do with a person's ability to deal with adversity and stress in constructive and undamaging ways. It is a testament to how well someone is able to adapt and function (bounce back) when confronted by internal and external stressors. Langehough, et al, identifies two basic definitions for resilience that work well together and are consistent with other consulted works. Firstly, resilience is the "presence of positive coping attributes such as an active approach to solving life's problems, the knowledge that pain accompanies growth, an ability to find emotional support outside the family and the ability to use faith to make life meaningful".<sup>7</sup> Southwick and Charney add other personality traits to this list: optimism, an ability to face fears, a strong moral compass, religiosity, an ability to give and receive social supports, having resilient role models to emulate, physical fitness, mental and emotional intelligence, and cognitive and emotional flexibility.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen O. Langehough, Connor Walters, David Know and Michael Rowley, "Spirituality and Religiosity as Factors in Adolescents' Risk for Anti-Social Behaviors and Use of Resilient Behaviors." (*Annual Conference of the NCFR Fatherhood and Motherhood in a Diverse and Changing World*. Arlington, VA: November 7-10, 1997), 1-10.

<sup>8</sup> Steven M. Southwick and Dennis S. Charney, *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges (Ten Key Ways to Weather and Bounce Back from Stress and Trauma)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

The second definition of resilience provided by Langehough is “the absence of lower self-esteem, substance abuse, anti-social behaviour and other high risk behaviours”.<sup>9</sup> Although other works consulted did not explicitly name the absence of unhealthy behaviour as a determinant of resilience, the characteristics and attributes that each work uses to describe a resilient person could not healthily coexist with high risk behaviours such as addictions and regular drug use, or among people who have conditions that make it harder to self-regulate emotions. Furthermore, each definition required or implied that a strong and supportive social network further enhances a person’s resiliency factor (implying that a lack of such networks hinders resilience): “healthy adaptation to stress depends not only on the individual, but also on available resources through family, friends, and a variety of organizations, and on the characteristics of specific cultures and religions, communities, societies, and governments...”.<sup>10</sup> This is particularly important to note among clergy who are often moved away from their support networks for the first few years of their ministries.

All the research agrees that building resiliency is complex and requires a holistic approach which includes a person’s physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health.<sup>11</sup> Physical factors of resilience include physical health and activity: is the body working at its optimal level (well nourished, well rested, and well trained) or is it being pushed

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<sup>9</sup> Langehough, et al. November 7 - 10, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Southwick and Charney 2012, 48.

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Taplin, “Silent Sitting: a cross-curricular tool to promote resilience” (*International Journal of Children’s Spirituality*, 2011) 75-96.

beyond its physical limit? Mental factors include the ability to have clear thoughts, self-efficacy and the ability to negotiate and problem solve social situations and interactions. Emotional factors include the ability to manage, understand, relate with, and respond to personal feelings as well as the feelings of others. Lastly, spiritual resilience includes a belief in a higher power and some sense of meaning and purpose in the world.

The research indicates that people, in general, are resilient and while resiliency is mostly understood as a choice, 'some have access to resources that make it easier to do so'<sup>12</sup> This project agrees with modern researchers in defining resilience as an "'ordinary magic' that emerges from the ordinary processes of normal human adaption systems –a resource within an individual, family or community" or as, "the individual's spirit, quanta, chi – the inner being of an individual"<sup>13</sup> A theologian might refer to it as an act of the Holy Spirit, who is known to transform the ordinary into something extraordinary.

Various tests have been developed to measure (or foreshadow) a person's resilience and ability to respond to stress, such as the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale, the Dispositional Resilience Scale and the Response to Stressful Experiences Scale.<sup>14</sup> Many of these tests are self-evaluation tools that encourage people to reflect on how they have responded to stress in the past. The Dispositional Resilience Scale focuses on three main areas: "being fully engaged, having a sense of control over events, and being

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<sup>12</sup> Southwick and Charney 2012, 134.

<sup>13</sup> Eileen Grafton, P. Gillespie and Saras Henerson "Resilience: The Power Within" (*Oncology Nursing Forum*, November 2010), 700.

<sup>14</sup> Southwick and Charney 2012, 48.

able to view adversity as a challenge”.<sup>15</sup> For the purpose of this project, the areas represented in the Dispositional Resilience Scale are the best alternative to the self-testing resiliency scales. For instance, if using the Dispositional Resiliency Scale the following questions could be markers of potential unhealthy stress levels in a clergy’s ministry:

1. During times of adversity are you able to fully engage in your ministry?
2. Do you know what is in your control and feel able to change what is in your power to change?
3. Do you experience adversity as something that can be overcome, or is the adversity insurmountable?

The other forms of resiliency testing were not used because such self-testing methods can often lead to unspoken assumptions about preferred resiliency characteristics and informal ranking systems. The work of resilience is a radical shift from the self-improvement model that is currently prevalent within the narrative of concern. Current structures focus more on teaching skills and traits that build resilience, whereas resiliency training focuses on discovering skills and traits within a person. This study attempts to avoid the naming of specific personality based resiliency traits for people to aspire to. The assumption being tested is that all people have a natural ‘self-correcting’ resiliency that can be supported in community, thus, any judgment on someone’s resiliency, even if unintentional, would be more harmful than helpful.

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<sup>15</sup> Southwick and Charney 2012, 50.

## CHAPTER 2

### AWE-FULL SOIL: NARRATIVE OF CONCERN

When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”<sup>1</sup>

About three years ago two separate people came to my office (I am the national staff person for Worship, Music and Spirituality for The United Church of Canada on the same day, seeking to unpack uninspiring and somewhat depressive worship experiences. After exploring the elements of their worship experiences, both named the underlying problem as a lack of passion in the worship community and the worship leader. Ever since that day I have wondered about what generates this lack of passion and what can be done to prevent it in worship leaders and in congregations. Are there too many pressures on clergy? Are congregations disappointed with the work of their clergy? While discussing the current context of ministry with clergy, Pharoze (name changed to ensure confidentiality) made the realization that she was not ‘awesome’

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 3:4 NRSV.



although the church, her congregation expected her to be an awesome chaplain, evangelist, theologian, civil activist, mystic, financial planner, orator, and visionary (just to name a few). We need ministers who are burning-up with passion and enthusiasm for worship and the work of the church, yet somehow this need is creating ministers who too quickly lose their passion and even more who 'burnout' while trying to meet these great expectations. What is contributing to the high rate of burnout amongst ministers? And what can be done to help ministers maintain a burning passion for their work without being consumed? In this story there is both concern and opportunity.

Ministry is commonly understood as a high stress profession. The types of stress minister's experience tend to be intangible and hard to articulate, making it difficult to help those in ministry prepare for them. Reinhold Niebuhr once described it as such:

It is not easy to be all things to all people. Perhaps that is why people are so critical of us [ministers]. Our task is not specific enough to make a high degree of skill possible or to result in tangible and easily measured results. People can find fault with us easily enough and we have no statistics to overcome them and to negate their criticism.<sup>2</sup>

Though written in 1928, Niebuhr's observations are still accurate for today's minister, perhaps even more so due to numerous cultural shifts, declining resources and changes in congregational life. To thicken this narrative of concern, so aptly articulated by Niebuhr, let us explore some specific shifts in culture, resources and congregational life that have added to the stresses facing ministers and the need for resiliency training.

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<sup>2</sup> Willimon 1989, 33.

## Cultural Shifts

The United Church of Canada has seen a dramatic decline in membership over the last fifty years. When asked, 'why is attendance and membership declining in The United Church of Canada?', common explanations include: the increasing demands on young and middle-aged professionals, (people are too busy to go to church); the lack of modern music and technology to attract younger generations; and lastly, the growing diversity in Canada (implying that people migrating to Canada, if Christian, would not affiliate with The United Church of Canada). Each answer names a cultural shift as part of our story of decline, however, each of these common assertions are hard to test because middle-aged professionals, younger generations, and immigrant populations are not well represented within The United Church of Canada even though they are prominent in the narrative.<sup>3</sup> While these concerns are of importance, the cultural shift most relevant to this study is the loss of religious authority in current society.

It is common for ministers to seek authority and validation of their call outside of their religious community, often through credentials and titles. Many ministers, including Moses, suffer from feelings of inadequacy (not good enough, hip enough, progressive enough or engaging enough) before accepting their call into ministry and during their ministry. As a result, ministers seek validation from as many people as possible. When God came to Moses in a burning bush (that was not consumed) to

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<sup>3</sup> Watch <http://vimeo.com/25079514>.

instruct Moses on how to free the Israelites from the Pharaoh's slavery, Moses had valid reasons why he felt he was unfit for the task. The first was a question of identity, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt".<sup>4</sup> Moses, although Hebrew, was raised by the Pharaoh's daughter and was an exile of Egypt; an unlikely person to lead the Hebrew people to freedom, but he was clearly who God needed him to be. It is interesting to note that God does not answer Moses' question by explaining why he is the right person for the task, rather God responds by telling Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you'.<sup>5</sup> It is common for people called by God to doubt their personal ability and worthiness. God does not diminish these doubts but directs those God has called to trust in God's ability instead of their own. God's statement to Moses implies that the important question is not 'who are you to complete such a task?', but 'who has sent you?' Moses' authority is not based in his credentials; they are based in his calling. The church helps to support and affirm the authority of a person's call through the process of ordination. Once a minister has gone through the discernment and ordination process they no longer have access to communities mandated to affirm their call, with the understanding that the title entrusted to them will continue to provide this support and authority. However, for many ministers in Canada, the title of reverend or pastor does not hold the respect or power that it once did. Today's ministers are in a similar position to Moses, they need

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<sup>4</sup> Exodus 3:11 NRSV.

<sup>5</sup> Exodus 3:14 NRSV.

to trust in the authority of who has called them into ministry, more than their credentials for the role.

Moses' second objection was a concern about how others would receive him: "but suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The Lord did not appear to you'".<sup>6</sup> Moses does not doubt that God is talking to him, he doubts whether others will believe him and his call. To ease Moses' anxieties, God equips him with spectacular signs. In modern society there is a very real skepticism on what are authentic signs from God, as there are so many people who claim to be God's agents in the world but have proven to do great harm.

Even after a series of miraculous signs Moses is still hesitant and explains "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue."<sup>7</sup> This is Moses' last objection before he asks God to send someone else. Often, the story of Moses' call (and all call story narratives) is told with some humour and levity, after all, Moses is complaining to the one who made and chose him. Moses is simply pointing out the obvious; surely there is someone better for the job. It seems, however, that all great call narratives have a modicum of doubt, otherwise no faith would be involved in answering, and people could rely on their own clever wit and skill instead of God's grace and love. Even in the time of Moses, clergy worried about not being good enough, and

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<sup>6</sup> Exodus 4:1 NRSV.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 4:10 NRSV.

God's response remains consistent, we are and we will become who God needs us to be.

The standards that God uses to call ministers are very different from the standards of society and not many people are interested in God's standards. Current society has lost some patience with religious authorities and is not as interested in investing in the future promise of leaders. Often, the goal is to invest in someone who will be able to provide immediate results. Trusting and being patient as a leader grows in God's time does not hold the same authority and clout in the public realm because the authority and reverence that God (and someone perceived to be acting on God's behalf), once held is no longer present. As a member of my Lay Advisory Committee explained:

The church (following the ways of society) looks for eloquent speakers while God calls tongue-tied Moses; the church looks for ministers with years of life experience while God calls a young shepherd (David) and fishermen (the disciples); the church looks for the theologically educated while God calls a Eunuch who has studied for one afternoon.

It is not uncommon for church and society to disagree.

Added to the prerequisite doubts around the authority to live-out and the ability to live into one's call, ministers now face new questions regarding the validity of their work. Previously, serving as a minister was a highly regarded and valued profession. As society has become increasingly secular the power of religious authority and the respect

for the office of minister has waned.<sup>8</sup> Clergy need both internal and external legitimization of their calling and profession, but for current leaders external legitimization is tenuous and often in the form of unhelpful comments and projections from congregants ('You are too young to be a minister', 'A minister needs to have lots of life experience', 'Why would you choose ministry?', 'What are your business skills?'). In the 1980s Willimon noted that a common cause of stress for ministers was due to the fact that "the church and its ministry \*were+ not valued by the surrounding culture."<sup>9</sup> In order to maintain a passion for their work, worship leaders in Canada must find ways to create stable and reliable sources of internal legitimization to counter the lack of reliable external legitimization; a skill that would not have been needed to the same degree during Niebuhr's ministry.<sup>10</sup>

Another complication is the logistical fact that for ministers of previous generations Sunday Worship was an acceptable and in many places an expected activity for members of the community. Clergy today have the added stress of competing for worship attendance, not just with secular activities and programs but with other church communities. It would appear that for many congregants, church attendance and religious affiliation is not as high a priority as it once was. This stressful competition that worship leaders face every week for worship attendance and attention is a tangible

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<sup>8</sup> Maureen Milner, Sam Sterland and Martin Dowson "Orientation to the Demands of Ministry: Construct Validity and Relationship with Burnout" (*Review of Religious Research*, 2009), 464.

<sup>9</sup> Willimon 1989, 36.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

example of a societal trend that moves people away from institutional religion towards religious autonomy, ('spiritual but not religious').

### Declining Resources

The declining respect for the office of ministry within Canadian culture and the shift towards individualism in religious expression has no doubt added to clergy burnout. Another significant contribution to clergy burnout is the narrative of decline that has been prevalent in The United Church of Canada for over fifty years. Likely every active United Church member is acutely aware of our scarcity story: we have fewer donors who are generously giving more, our membership is on a steady decline (in 1960 the United Church welcomed 66,226 people through baptism and 40,482 through confirmation of faith; in 2010 those numbers dropped to 9,733 baptisms and 3,847 professions of faith);<sup>11</sup> we have failed to reach the majority of at least two generations (in 2011 the average age of clergy was 56, only 6% of clergy were under the age of 30, and the estimated median age of active United Church members was 65);<sup>12</sup> we are closing churches at an alarming rate; we are shrinking support and program staff; and we will soon face a shortage of ministers as half of our current clergy will reach retirement age in 2019. An article in the National Post adds a sobering outside perspective to this narrative of decline:

In slightly more than one generation, according to a June study by the Pew Research Centre, the percentage of Canadians identifying as Catholic has dropped to 39% from 47%. Protestants have dropped to 27% from 41% and the "religiously unaffiliated" have climbed from a negligible 4% to nearly a quarter of the entire country. These statistics have translated into dozens of churches with boards over the windows and near-death congregations of only a few dozen who can hardly pay

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<sup>11</sup> The United Church of Canada *State of the Church* (General Council 41 Workbook, 2012), Info 4-16.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

their heating bills. At times in recent years, The United Church of Canada had been closing one church a week.<sup>13</sup>

Congregations are lamenting that the Church did not live into the vision set 90 years ago when The United Church was founded. Congregants carry a deep grief, sorrow and anger that we are in our current situation, and these feelings are often projected onto clergy.

Although United Church members are aware of how numerous cultural shifts have affected our decline, many still carry the hidden idea that if clergy could be more like celebrity preachers the church would not be losing numbers. Worship leaders who internalize these (often unrealistic) personas of who the congregation thinks would attract new members take on the nearly impossible task of trying to please an entire community of people by attempting to be someone they are not. All ministers must function at times in a ministry 'persona', what Willimon describes as a mask that clergy occasionally put on over inner feelings when they need to relate to others in a professional or formal way.<sup>14</sup> The persona can be extremely healthy and helpful, especially in creating boundaries with congregants; however, if a clergy always remains in character, there is a real danger that the minister could lose touch with their authentic self and be more susceptible to burn-out. The ability to live authentically while maintaining healthy personal boundaries is only possible when one has an understanding of their true self. It is the authentic self that God calls into ministry and it

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<sup>13</sup> Tristin Hopper "Protestant Megachurches Surging in Canada Even as Secularism Grows and Most Sunday Attendance Plummet" (*National Post*, Dec 27, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Willimon 1989, 36.



is the authentic self that helps sustain people in times of difficulty. If the clergy does not have a clear understanding of who they are and why they are doing what they are doing, they become like the seed planted amongst the thorns: vulnerable to being tangled into (and absorbed by) numerous issues that are irrelevant to their ministry.

### Congregational Life

Amidst all these cultural shifts that require careful navigation there are many responsibilities that have remained the same since the formation of the protestant church. The minister is still called to pastor the people: funerals, weddings, baptisms, pastoral visits, congregational meetings and community programming all need to be attended to weekly. Regardless of what happens during the week, Sunday is a persistent and constant guest that worship leaders are expected to prepare for and host with grace, joy and love. Worship is core to who we are as a church. It is in worship together that we are inspired at our weakest moments, we are comforted in our pain, we are challenged through ancient and modern voices, and perhaps most significantly, we are united together in seeking encounters with the Holy. Leading good worship is an expected requirement of protestant clergy. Often the negative effects of burnout are most evident in a clergy's ability (or inability) to effectively lead such worship. Poor worship is detrimental to the church, both for the congregants and for the recruitment of new church leaders. Our best recruitment tools are happy, thriving ministers.

Many current worship leaders around the country are reporting that they are tired, over-worked, and slowly burning-out. A recent United Church study looking at isolation in ministry reported that “ministry personnel experience a higher level of depression and stress when compared to other populations”.<sup>15</sup> For depression, respondents ranked in the 78<sup>th</sup> percentile and for stress in the 88<sup>th</sup> when compared with people from the general public.<sup>16</sup> The reasoning for these higher than average scores was attributed to role ambiguity, an overload of work and perceived persecution (for instance, victimization).<sup>17</sup> Ministers under the age of 40 who participated in the study (9%) scored the highest for depression, anxiety and stress. In a time when more and more energy is put into how to create meaningful and engaging worship, the demand for worship leaders burning-up with passion and enthusiasm for the ministry of worship is great; yet, many of our worship leaders are demonstrating that they are having difficulty keeping these fires burning under the stresses of modern ministry.

Unfortunately, there is no way to compare these survey results with United Church clergy ninety years ago or with the Methodist, Congregationalist and Presbyterian ministers who preceded them. Even so, the occupational hazards described by Willimon that can lead to burnout seem to be timeless. Such factors include: a never ending work load, muddled expectations, repetitive work with the same

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<sup>15</sup> Warren Shepell Research Group *The Survey of Ministry Personnel: Study of Isolation in Ministry for The United Church of Canada* (Final Report, Toronto: WarrenShepell, 2006), 6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

group of people, the churches' gift to attract people with great needs and who are in great pain, backfire evangelism (people who join the church prepared to receive but not to give), lack of opportunities to be one's authentic self, exhaustion from numerous failures, too much work in the head and not in the body, spirit or emotion, poor time management and administration, often inefficiency of church structures at the denominational level, and lastly the stress of pastoring on the pastors family (their support network).<sup>18</sup> These stressors are consistent with the feedback received from ministers and with the major stressors identified during the isolation in ministry study:

- Less than 40% of respondents feel they have clear, planned goals and objectives for their roles as ministers
- Almost 75% feel they have too much work to do
- Over 60% feel they do not have adequate time to think and contemplate their role as minister
- Nearly 60% feel that there are few people they can openly trust and confide in
- Almost 50% are not getting the spiritual support they need<sup>19</sup>

One additional stressor that was named and discussed by clergy was the pressure for younger ministers (in The United Church of Canada, younger ministers are

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<sup>18</sup> Willimon 1989.

<sup>19</sup> Warren Shepell Research Group 2006.

under the age of 56)<sup>20</sup> to be awesome and save the church! These ministers, lovingly referred to as ‘below average’, (as in below the average age of ministers within the denomination) feel pressure to save the church, recruit new members, change current structures, and build new bridges, regardless of their skill sets and vocational calls.<sup>21</sup> Many assumptions are made about younger clergy that need to be challenged if these clergy are to be authentically supported. Perhaps one of the most alarming assumptions, named in the 2013 Observer Identity Survey, is that the majority of people who completed the study do not believe that a UCC person under 30 years of age will still be a member of The United Church of Canada in 2025.<sup>22</sup> If the church community does not expect to retain people under thirty, how can the church reasonably expect to recruit, train, support and retain clergy under the age of thirty? The church knows that it needs to change, and in many ways has relied on younger generations of leaders to initiate the change process. This is an enormous responsibility for a very small percentage of the church’s population. It is not surprising that younger clergy in the church experience more stress and depression.

The narrative of concern facing 21<sup>st</sup> century clergy in The United Church of Canada is certainly unique, but it is not extraordinary. No vocation is without stress or periods of decline and there are certainly other professions that have the potential to

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<sup>20</sup>The United Church of Canada 2012.

<sup>21</sup> People belonging to this demographic often self-identify as BAMers (Below Average Ministers).

<sup>22</sup> Jane Armstrong Research Associates “Imagine: You and Your Congregation in 2025. The 2013 Reader Survey” (Toronto: The United Church Observer, 2013).

generate similar levels of depression, anxiety and stress amongst their employees. Stress is a natural and needed part of life, and a community with no stress and too much resiliency would also be problematic: “Too little stress and we will lack sufficient motivation to accomplish our calling; too much stress and we will likely feel overwhelmed leading to decreased effectiveness”.<sup>23</sup> It can be easy when laying out a narrative to fall into a trap of self-grandeur; this is not the intention of this narrative of concern.

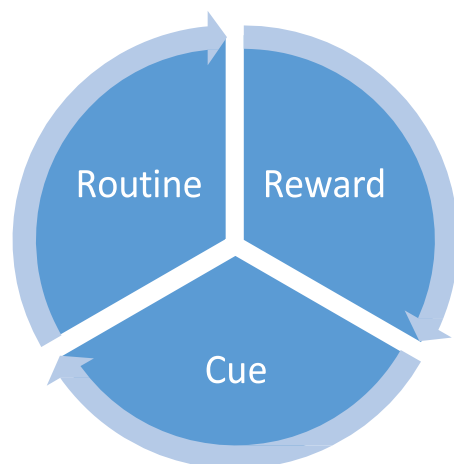
It does seem, however, that we are currently in a society ‘addicted to stress’.<sup>24</sup> In such a culture, seeking stressful situations and comparing notes on current stressors is a way to validate oneself and one’s work by insinuating that the amount of stress one is under is proportionate to how important a person is to society. For ministers seeking respect for their work from society, the allure of a busy, over-worked life is almost irresistible. The chart below demonstrates how this cycle can reward harmful behaviours such as procrastination or habitually neglecting loved ones.

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Todd Wilson and Brad Hoffmann *Preventing Ministry Failure* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 101.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson and Hoffmann 2007, 111.

Table 1: Habit Cycle



**Cue:** invitation from child to play followed by a realization that it is Saturday

**Routine:** Decline to work on sermon (followed by a late night of sermon writing motivated by the pressure of Sunday)

**Reward:** Completion of sermon!<sup>25</sup>

**Result:** Too busy to play (and ability to boast about busyness)!

The problem with such ultimately negative habits is that there always comes a point where the system no longer works (it is realized that the routine is not a constructive way to attain the desired reward), and the result is usually harmful not just for the clergy, but for the entire system that the clergy operates in (including their family, church, local community, presbytery and in turn their work in the wider church). When we use stress as a motivator we may find ourselves doing more in a shorter amount of time, but we may also find ourselves enjoying it less and less. Worse, it is easier to become self-reliant and forget that calls are not based on ability (what one does) but on identity (who one is). Habits, by definition, are instinctual and in order to change the current trend of stress-motivated work, healthier routines that lead to similar rewards of self-satisfaction and effectiveness and that protect against the stresses that lead to burnout need to be developed.

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Duhigg *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* (DoubleDay Canada, 2012).

Pharoze is right; we (clergy, ministers, and worship leaders) are not awesome and are not meant to be. But thankfully, we all have the potential to be awe-filled. Part of the call of worship leaders is to awesomely reflect God working through them; a beautiful, but difficult task.<sup>26</sup> This is true especially since the stress-addicted context of modern-day ministry often leads to routines that rely on our own authority, strength and wisdom, not God's. While today's minister may be more likely to experience burnout because of their current context, they also have the unique opportunity to testify to the power of God working through them. By completing an impossible task clergy can prove that they did not do it alone, but through the grace of God working through them 'for with God nothing is impossible'.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> This realization and wording came from participants of this project.

<sup>27</sup> Matthew 19:26 NRSV.

## CHAPTER 3

### FERTILE SOIL: A CAUSE FOR HOPE

And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.<sup>1</sup>

The good news in this story of decline is that there is always cause for hope and the possibility for a different narrative. Despite the story of decline, the church, through our Christian faith, is resilient. Fully understanding the narrative of concern provides the diversity and richness needed to foster new life. Remember the best fertilizer for seeds includes a lot of excrement! How can the church better care for passionate, grounded and confident leaders who minister in these soils? Some dream of creating super-resilient and passionate clergy who have: a Teflon-type coating that allows the negative projections of others to roll cleanly off; a bamboo-type flexibility where they can bend without being broken; and a rubber-type ability to bounce back when needed.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:3-4 NRSV.



Such passionate clergy do not exist and would not be effective. Passion and suffering are interwoven; anyone who is passionate about their work must interact with their context and is therefore vulnerable to pain. To be passionate is to risk not always 'bouncing back' and to endure both suffering and happiness.

Happiness or unhappiness is made wholly to depend on the quality of the object which we love. When a thing is not loved, no quarrels will arise concerning it – no sadness will be felt if it perishes – no envy if it is possessed by another – no fear, no hatred, in short, no disturbances of the mind.<sup>2</sup>

Congregations prefer, seek and need clergy with a passion great enough to lead them in ministry. Clergy without passion may have a lower chance of burning-out, but they also have a lower chance of being effective at their work.

If the church is seeking passionate leaders, then the church needs to expect that these leaders will endure suffering, often in the form of stress or burnout.

Dispassionate and indifferent leaders exude a level of disengagement that is more harmful than neutral to the church. As Ochs explains: "if we don't expend the time, effort, attention, investment of self, fatigue and pain needed to engage in the world, then aspects of the self atrophy".<sup>3</sup> Ministers are called to help lead Christians as we interact with God's world, regardless of how messy it is, and retreating or attempting to avoid the suffering around us is not an option. Ministers however, can learn how to endure their suffering with the help of their theological understandings.

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78. <sup>2</sup> Carol Ochs *Our Lives as Torah: Finding God in our Own Stories* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001),

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

Meaning and context have the power to change and transform our understanding of suffering. Ochs provides a poignant example of this: “Consider being told about Bob, who cannot walk and must be pushed from place to place, who has no control of either his bladder or his bowels, cannot feed himself, cannot even form words.” At first thought, one might conclude that Bob is at a significant disadvantage in our current society, and as a result is suffering greatly. “But if we are told that Bob is three months old, we regard his condition as perfectly natural and expected.”<sup>4</sup> How suffering is measured and understood is directly related to expectations and how well the context is understood.

Our ability to endure suffering is similarly linked to our ability to evoke meaning and to understand it. Viktor Frankl wrote in his book *Man’s Search for Meaning* that, “he who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how”.<sup>5</sup> According to Frankl, people are capable of responding to suffering if they can ascribe meaning to their pain. In seminary many hours are spent examining theodicy, why we suffer, in an attempt to ascribe theological meaning to our pain. Three popular models are: Unlimited Dominion (God is in control over everything and everything works towards fulfilling God’s purpose); Self-limited Dominion (God limits interaction to respect the freedom given to humanity); Limited Dominion (God’s power is always towards the good but there are

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<sup>4</sup> Ochs 2001, 84.

<sup>5</sup> Viktor E. Frankl *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959).

other powers as well).<sup>6</sup> Extreme stress can occur when a minister's reality no longer fits with their theological understanding. For instance, ministers are daily faced with questions of God's dominion: How could God let this happen? They are also exposed to a myriad of responses to suffering from their congregation, such as: suffering as punishment; suffering as tempering; suffering as an act of love; suffering as vicarious atonement; suffering as divine insurance (a reward will come in the afterlife); suffering as the price of free will; suffering as non-existent; suffering as mystery; and suffering as meaningless.<sup>7</sup> All ministers are surrounded by suffering, and all ministers are expected to help the suffering find meaning (hope). If ministers have not taken the time needed to deepen their personal theology of suffering, they are at a greater risk of emotional and theological crisis. Resilient clergy are not immune to such distress; rather, their strong theodicy helps them to endure it without losing hope.

Just as passion and suffering work together so do love and labour. Several researchers name that a passion for work and burnout are closely related.<sup>8</sup> Erich Fromm explains that "love and labour are inseparable; one loves that for which one labours and one labours for that which one loves".<sup>9</sup> Love easily becomes a driving factor that motivates us to give of ourselves to new extremes, but it also provides a new joy and

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<sup>6</sup> Burton Z. Cooper and John S. McClure *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2003), 13.

<sup>7</sup> Ochs 2001, 90-94.

<sup>8</sup> Mann 2007, 52.

<sup>9</sup> Ochs 2001, 68.

energy for the work acting like a spring of fresh water.<sup>10</sup> “We recall the waterhole that dries up in late summer. We too dry up unless we are fed by many streams.”<sup>11</sup> Work is a way to express love and concern for God’s world and how God’s love manifests itself through ministry. Work is part of our personal stories and therefore part of how meaning is to be found and connections made with each other.

Ultimately, no matter how much preventative work is done, clergy will experience suffering that has the potential to overwhelm, it is the price paid for loving something so completely. In developing a practical theology, clergy would ideally be able to articulate their beliefs on not only ‘why’ pain happens, but more importantly, ‘how’ their faith will help them work through it. If it is truly about meaning, then clergy need to reframe the problem of burnout and how it is dealt with. Changing the question from “why is this happening to me?” to “what should I do in response to the suffering around me?” would support resiliency and personal empowerment.<sup>12</sup> In many ways the ‘how’ becomes the pivotal question, because the ‘how’ is what remains in the clergy’s control. How we suffer and how we endure the suffering with the ‘magic’ God has planted in each of us form the beginnings of a theology of resilience.

In all parts of life, what we choose to feed grows. Supposing that we are gifted by God with natural resilience, resiliency training is about discovering, encouraging and

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<sup>10</sup> “There is no greater good for people than eating and drinking and giving themselves joy in their labour” (Eccl 2:24, NRSV).

<sup>11</sup> Ochs 2001, 75.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 94.

enhancing the skills that are already present. This is similar to how a gardener plants, nurtures and cares for new seeds. The seeds of resilience are already within us, they are an integral part of our garden, which crosses over many parts of our identity.

Stories are one of the most influential gifts and theological tools that we have (“stories are the central component of our informal theology”).<sup>13</sup> Nurturing personal theologies and stories of resilience is one way to care for and test these seeds in a safe environment. The Christian story is so powerful because it is firmly rooted and created in community.

Stories are neither created by oneself nor exist in isolation ... they are co-created in relationship with others who either share memory of these same meanings or who add information that a person uses to change or shift the story of her experience with herself and those around her.<sup>14</sup>

In seeking theology through story we seek to better understand who we are, why we are, and what God has to do with it.

Throughout the biblical narrative people encounter hardships that they are challenged to endure. Most of our biblical texts were written for people who were in exile or were actively persecuted (the Book of Daniel, under Antiochus Epiphanes). We learn through Scripture that suffering is an inevitable part of life’s journey. We also learn that we are to work through times of hardship and to seek joy in our labour. The prophet Jeremiah offers the following instructions to the exiles in Babylon:

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<sup>13</sup> Ochs 2001, 33.

<sup>14</sup> Susan Nienaber “Congregational Resilience, Conflict and Narrative Approaches” (In *Finding Our Story: Narrative Leadership and Congregation Change*, Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2010), 107.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.<sup>15</sup>

God tells the people to not only continue to work and prosper while in exile, but to pray for and be a blessing to the city that is holding them prisoner! God is asking people to be resilient and to continue being the people of God even when forcibly away from home.

A similar example of resilience during a time of high stress and persecution is found in the story of Paul and Silas in jail.

The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. ... About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened.<sup>16</sup>

After being publically humiliated and physically tortured, Paul and Silas still manage to show kindness, mercy and hospitality to their persecutors by remaining in jail, even though they had the opportunity to escape.

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<sup>15</sup> Jeremiah 29:4-7 NRSV.

<sup>16</sup> Acts 16:22-23, 25-26 NRSV.

In both stories, the faithful (the exiles living in Babylon and Paul and Silas in jail) are not gifted with any extraordinary powers, they are simply asked to remain faithful and to rely on the ordinary powers God has gifted them with. Interestingly, the reader is not lead to question whether or not the faithful will survive the ordeal, perhaps because the reader, as part of the story, has faith that the people will make it through whatever ordeal they face with (or because of) God. These stories of our faith not only support but help us to better understand how we are innately resilient as part of God's extraordinary design.

The Christian story in many ways is different from the stories of popular culture and society because in our Christian narrative we are active participants in the unfolding of the drama and while we may not be the heroes, the story could not happen without us. In a dialectical eschatology the great story that we work towards, the coming of God's kingdom is forever coming and has already come, is in heaven but is also here on earth. In the same way, like Moses, we are fully who God calls us to be and yet, like the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, we are not yet who we will be. With this theology there is great urgency to our work, as we are needed to bring about the Kingdom of God, while at the same time there is "no rush to get to the Promised Land, because the journey is the goal, and each step is an invitation to deepening intimacy [with God]".<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ochs 2001, 51.

## CHAPTER 4

### SOWING SEEDS: RESILIENCY TRAINING AND METHODOLOGY

Today we can be sure that the assumption that people are mostly resilient and strong is true.<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the majority of clergy care training and programs (such as retreats, Sabbath days and health and wellness programs) focus on stress reduction and energy renewal. These programs are in response to the common argument that “lack of skills for managing stress ultimately causes fatigue and burnout”.<sup>2</sup> All these programs are helpful and necessary to create well-rounded clergy. Such courses help clergy generate new physical and emotional drive for ministry. Still, interventions need to be used alongside programs that will help clergy enhance their theological understanding and intrinsic motivation for the work (resiliency). Without both approaches burnout interventions will continue to treat the most dominant symptoms (lack of energy) of a much larger problem (lack of motivation). As Mann explains:

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<sup>1</sup> Mooli Lahad, Miri Scham and Ofra Ayalon *The “BASIC Ph” Model of Coping and Resiliency: Theory, Research and Cross-Cultural Application* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2013), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson and Hoffmann 2007, 101.



Burnout is a phenomenon to which persons who are passionate about their work/ministry can become vulnerable if they are not careful. Symptoms of burnout can manifest themselves on multiple levels of our lives so we need a preventative approach that balances intellectual, physical, emotional, occupational, social and spiritual dimensions.<sup>3</sup>

Resiliency training has a different approach, rather than dealing with or focusing on the energy input and output, resiliency training focuses on the person, their experiences, their place in the Christian story and why they want to continue. Ideally, people will be able to gather more and more meaning and passion for their ministry with the use of resiliency training while also developing the tools needed to bounce back and adapt to the ever changing context of ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A breadth of scholarly information on interventions is available that has not been included in this analysis because the implementation of such strategies is outside of the scope and competency of this project. Basic resiliency training and popular resiliency tools can be introduced safely in a workshop setting, whereas interventions that work on a deeper psychological level need to be administered by trained professionals.

In resiliency training models, the popular training theories suggest that it is most beneficial to build from resilient characteristics with which people naturally identify. Originally, this project planned to work with four predominant resiliency factors: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. But it became apparent that in order to be most effective in a short amount of time, it would be advantageous to play to the strengths of the gathered clergy and to use a model that incorporated their imagination

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<sup>3</sup> Mann 2007, 56.

and creativity while remaining holistic. The Narrative Approach and the BASIC Ph resiliency training models provide the most balanced framework for this project.

### Purpose of Project

Bronwyn and I both have a passion for worship: we believe it to be a transformational and counter cultural act that has the power to change lives and indeed the world. With such a passion for worship, we have an equal respect and love for Worship Leaders and want to develop new ways to support them so that we as a church can provide great worship. Current trends in Worship Leaders 'burning out', 'losing their passion' or changing careers concern us and we are looking for ways to stop this trend.<sup>4</sup>

Worship is core to the church's health. If worship leaders are burning out and the problem is not addressed, worshippers and congregations will surely follow. In an attempt to find ways to address the current soil of ministry a one-day worship renewal event was planned and developed to test the following assumptions (based on readings and discussion with the Advisory Committee):

- Resiliency can be strengthened through remembering the stories of our faith
- Resiliency can be strengthened by remembering stories of personal resilience and hearing them as sacred
- Resiliency can be strengthened by learning from the resilient characteristics of others
- Resilient characteristics can be discovered in community

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 2 Information Letter to Participants.

- Resiliency can be encouraged by identifying areas where we have the potential to feel overwhelmed
- Resiliency can be encouraged by expanding our imagination

Note this project did not attempt to teach resiliency or provide resiliency training tools, because such programs often presuppose that the participants require basic resilient attributes. Also, the advisory committee found that cognitive and physical strategies for both stress management and resiliency training dominated the 'clergy self-care' market. Many of these strategies also feed into the culture of stress that we hoped to move clergy away from. It was clear that people did not need another workshop on how to stay fit and manage stress. We found that if done poorly, such workshops can actually cause more stress by providing clergy with another list of things they should be doing, and by increasing stressors that could have been avoided. Problem-solving and cognitive-based activities were planned in the workshop, but were quickly dropped to incorporate more expansive learning modes such as storytelling and ritual. The project aimed to feed and nurture the seeds of resilience already present in the participants, with the hope that, in turn, these clergy would be able to share similar messages of resilience and self-confidence within their communities.

The first draft of the workshop, presented in the Prospectus, was improved upon for the actual project. Originally and as mentioned above, many problem-solving activities and tools were developed based on numerous resources and responses from clergy. It became apparent during and after the workshop that storytelling was the

approach that drew the most energy and that seemed to have the most empowering response – perhaps because it again emphasized that the solution and the strength at the core was already within the participants. In the end, the project relied more heavily on a qualitative research method and based most of its methodology in elements of Narrative Theory and the BASIC Ph model (which will be discussed shortly). These new methodologies were introduced to: affirm the resiliency already present in each participant; facilitate theological conversations; and develop a workshop that is holistic and easily adaptable.

#### Narrative Approach

At its core Narrative Theory assumes and affirms that people have the answer needed to solve arising problems within them. As Alice Morgan describes it, the hallmark of Narrative Theory is that it “views problems as separate from people and assumes that people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values, commitments and abilities that will assist them to reduce the influence of problems in their lives”.<sup>5</sup> The main aspects of Narrative Theory, coupled with similar features in resiliency training were used in combination to develop the workshop.

In Narrative Theory work is done to first identify a healthy story, second the story is reinforced with description and, third, the story is co-created with input from others. For example in the development of this project, a narrative of concern was first outlined by incorporating many sources together, then the story was reinforced with a

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<sup>5</sup> Nienaber 2010, 106.

theological exploration of suffering and how it relates to the narrative of concern. Lastly, the story was co-created with the Advisory Committee to develop the project. In the case of this workshop, each participant was: first, asked to create or identify a personal or biblical story of resilience; second, the story was reinforced by sharing it within a larger group and; third, the participants were asked to co-create stories together through an active listening process and the development of a 'sunshine wall'. The co-created individual story theoretically helps to build resiliency as it strengthens the individual's sense of self and thickens the overall narrative of hope. As Anais Nin states, "we do not see things the way they are. We see things the way we are".<sup>6</sup> By seeing things from different perspectives, suddenly different opportunities and alternative outcomes become available. It is critical to deepen the narrative by helping people see their situations from wider perspectives. For instance, once someone is able to see how cultural shifts are part of a larger narrative of decline in their church, it helps them better assess their accountability and responsibility; that is, to deal with and address what is actually in their control as opposed to the many elements that are not.<sup>7</sup>

Being aware of cultural shifts and the larger narrative [the narrative of concern and opportunity] is helpful in building self-esteem because it helps people to realize that those declines are not because they are inept,...but because of a larger narrative of decline allowing people to focus more on what they can do.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Nienaber 2010, 109.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 112.

Narrative Theory also informed the development of rituals used in the workshop. The concept of re-membering is significant in Narrative Theology and helps people deliberately choose and place aspects from their past they would like to be present in their current life (very similar to communion and other rituals that were used throughout the workshop as a form of re-membering).<sup>9</sup> Narrative Theory has observed that when people are faced with problems, rather than drawing closer to personal relationships, people will often disconnect. Re-membering is a resilience training intervention that helps participants to reconnect to the stories and people that uphold and uplift them during times of challenge.

#### The BASIC Ph Model

The BASIC Ph model of coping and resiliency is based on the research of Mooli Lahad, Miri Shacham and Ofra Ayalon, who are based out of the Community Stress Prevention Center<sup>10</sup> which trains staff for crisis intervention centres and teams working interculturally and internationally. The model was developed with the understanding that an attempt to help people in coping would take more than looking at the human psyche from the few dimensions often examined in schools of psychotherapy created by greats like Freud, Adler, Frankl, Erikson and Jung. Rather, an effective model would need a more multifaceted approach that examines how these many aspects work together. The BASIC Ph model looks at six different aspects that balance together to

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<sup>9</sup> Nienaber 2010, 117.

<sup>10</sup> For more information visit: <http://www.eng.icspc.org/About.html>.

help people 'survive and thrive': Belief (B), Affect (A), Social (S), Imagination (I), Cognition (C) and Physicality (Ph).<sup>11</sup>

The aspect of **Belief** and values draws largely on the work of Frankl and Maslow, and looks at a person's self-ideology and where they find meaning in life. This could include religion, political views and ideologies. During the workshop, we addressed the belief and values of our participants through prayer, ritual and sacraments, particularly the sacrament of communion. Because we were working with a group of clergy, it was assumed that belief through the discussion of theology would be an accessible entry point for all participants. This assumption proved to be correct as people responded well to the theological rhythm of activity by remaining engaged and often lingering after the completion of a ritual.

The **Affective** aspect deals with one's emotional response such as crying, laughing, and sharing feelings through talking, writing or drawing. Historically, this aspect is based on the work of therapists in the schools of Freud and Rogers. To address the affective aspects time was spent not only identifying stressors, but also asking participants to identify how they felt about these stressors. In-depth conversations on fear, guilt, stress and anxiety and how they were affected by these feelings as worship leaders were shared. Throughout the day people felt more comfortable sharing their emotions, and while there was a lot of laughter, there were also tears, anger, hurt and fear expressed throughout the process.

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<sup>11</sup> Lahad, Shacham and Ayalon 2013, 22.

The **Social** aspect looks at one's social skills and roles within any given system and draws on the works of Adler and Erikson. By purposely organizing activities to help create a safe space and build a strong group dynamic and by giving people particular roles to play within the group, we intentionally created a safe and engaging social environment. To illustrate, two participants were asked to take on the role of 'elder'. As elders, they were to spend some time in prayer before the event and be willing to offer wisdom and insights from their personal experiences of ministry. During the ritual of blessing and sacred storytelling, participants were placed into triads and each person rotated through the following three roles: Storyteller (shares a personal story of resilience); Listener and Time Keeper (does not speak until the end, provides a two minute warning and reflects back the resilient characteristics they heard and observed from the storyteller); and the Encourager and Blessor (supports storyteller, asks open-ended questions, helps the storyteller to dig deeper and provides an individualized blessing for the person at the end of the listener's report).

**Imagination**, either as a form of escape or as a form of creative problem solving, is a very useful resiliency tool predominantly sourced by the works of DeBono and Jung in the BASIC Ph model. To connect with participant's imagination guided imagery was used throughout the workshop, (which is explained later in this chapter).

The **Cognitive** aspect refers to one's knowledge and includes coping strategies such as gathering relevant information, problem-solving and positive self-talk (cf. Ellis, Lazarus and Folkman). Cognitive therapies are often popular strategies among those



who are uncomfortable with more affective forms of intervention. Some time was spent on developing interventions using this method. The deliberately cognitive section of the workshop was a self-testing mechanism designed to help clergy indicate and evaluate their stressors and how they felt about them.<sup>12</sup> Other cognitive activities were planned for the workshop but were left out to make more room for belief, affect, social and imaginative exercises that tend to be less prevalent in current intervention strategies.

Lastly, **Physiological**, drawing on the works of Pavlov and Watson, looks at action and practical applications such as exercise, body movement, eating and relaxation.<sup>13</sup> As mentioned, cognitive and physical coping skills currently oversaturate clergy self-care literature and practice so care was taken not to put too much emphasis on this section. Awareness of our physical bodies was an important part of the workshop however. A nutritious breakfast and lunch were prepared and participants had the opportunity to move and do various tactile activities throughout the day.

The strength of the BASIC Ph model is that it integrates a vast amount of scholarship and psycholinguistic modes into an accessible and easily transferable package. It is unlikely that someone would be comfortable in all six modes but everyone is likely to find comfortable entry points through at least one or two of the six.

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<sup>12</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>13</sup> Lahad, Shacham and Ayalon 2013, 16.

In the BASIC Ph method, resiliency trainers and practitioners have deduced that the most effective ways to enhance the resiliency of participants is to focus their objectives on having people develop their own strategies and language around resilience and to expose them to the resiliency language of their peers.<sup>14</sup> As a result of this research, the largest portion of the workshop involved telling personal resiliency stories and actively hearing the stories of peers and colleagues during the ritual of blessing and sacred storytelling. The storytelling framework used was loosely based on a traditional spiritual practice and “a psycholinguistic approach which proposes that the way someone describes his or her experience represents the inner structure of making sense by which that person perceives/absorbs and transmits communication inside and outside”.<sup>15</sup> While the workshop did not use the BASIC Ph model in a way that intentionally highlighted all six of the different approaches; the multi-model approach and the modes used were adapted from this model and inspired by other applications of it around the world.

Other works consulted continued to confirm that resiliency can be successfully strengthened in people through intervention strategies. Charney and Southwick (Authors of *Resiliency: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges*) learnt that the most effective way to teach and foster resilience in people is to “begin by choosing one or two resilience factors that align with their personal values, feel[s] natural to

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<sup>14</sup> Lahad, Shacham and Ayalon 2013, 18.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 12.

them, fit[s] well with their lifestyle, and that seem[s] doable”.<sup>16</sup> With this in mind the workshop was designed to be empowering and to play to people’s strengths. Because this workshop engaged worship leaders an assumption of strength in Beliefs and Imagination was tested by centering on rituals and the narrative approach. These assumptions would need to be modified if the workshop involved the general public as participants. Even so, a workshop that revolves around structured story telling allows people to naturally tap into their psycholinguistic language of choice in crafting a story. For instance, during the workshop some participants clung to the framework for crafting the story that was provided (cognitive), others felt free to do their own thing (imagination), while others went to a different spot in the room and took time to write their stories out (physical). In sharing stories, people also revealed their language of comfort: someone who uses facts and timelines likely functions in a cognitive modality, whereas someone who talks about their role in the community or system is likely working from a social mode.

The BASIC Ph model naturally lends itself to different therapeutic models including storytelling methods. In fact one of the practitioners of the BASIC Ph model researched also used the Six Part Story Making model (6PSM) in their resiliency interventions.<sup>17</sup> 6PSM is a drama-therapy tool that was helpful in both assessing and identifying peoples’ coping skills and techniques.

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<sup>16</sup> Southwick and Charney 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Lahad, Shacham and Ayalon 2013, 47.

The original six questions of the Six Part Story Making model are:

1. Who is (are) the main character(s) (hero/heroine)?
2. What is the task or mission of the main character(s)?
3. Who or what can help (if at all)?
4. What is the obstacle in the way or what prevents it from happening?
5. How does/do the main character/s cope with the obstacle?
6. What happens next or how does the story end?

The assumption of the 6PSM method is “that by asking the client to tell a projected story based on elements of fairy-tale and myth, we might be able to see the way that the self projects itself into reality in order to ‘meet’ the world”.<sup>18</sup> As discussed earlier, for people of faith stories are paramount to our personal theologies, so it made sense to use 6PSM during the workshop. In the 6PSM method an important part is the person who interprets the story and reflects it back to the storyteller. In the reflecting-back clues to a person’s dominant coping style, fears and personal strengths can be revealed. The stories shared in small groups helped participants explore their personal understandings of resilience and their dominant resilient characteristics.

Another story-telling section was done through a visualization process at the start and end of the day with the goal of gathering information on the emotional state of the participants and how they perceive obstacles.

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<sup>18</sup> Lahad, Shacham and Ayalon 2013, 48.

The BASIC Ph model, on top of ensuring balance, acted like a bio-degradable pot during this workshop. It created just enough structure so that each individual participant could get the nutrients that they needed to cultivate, primarily through storytelling. When the structure was no longer needed it broke away to create room for new growth!

## CHAPTER 5

### TENDING THE GARDEN: IMPLEMENTATION

What a great day we had together yesterday! Thank-you for the opportunity to participate. It was well-planned with a flexibility which accommodated people's needs. The space was comfortable, and the food was amazing! Best of all, though, was the rich conversation which occurred and which was such a blessing – and will continue to be!<sup>1</sup>

The project, titled Worship Renewal Experience, took place June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2014 at an urban church in downtown Toronto. There were a total of ten people, eight participants and two facilitators. The Advisory Committee invited people who demonstrated a passion for ministry and who seemed relatively stable in their identity and sense of call. Of the eight participants, six were ordained clergy (below the average age of ministers in The United Church of Canada) with two to ten years of ministry experience, and two were ministry personnel with many years of ministry experience. The selection of this group was intentional for several reasons.

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<sup>1</sup> Quote from a workshop participant.

Firstly, we wanted to ensure that there were younger clergy present because they may not have had as many negative experiences in the church and hopefully remain excited and passionate about worship. Ideally, if given the right preparation, these clergy will be able to maintain the joy and enthusiasm that led them to accept their call. Also, research shows that younger clergy are more susceptible to burnout and therefore may benefit most from such a workshop.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, we realized that those who may be currently feeling overwhelmed or stretched in their ministry may not be emotionally ready or able to share those experiences with others in a workshop setting. Such participants might require a more therapeutic space.

Thirdly, we tried to find people who represented some of the diversity of the church, realizing that people who have been marginalized in different ways may bring different insights to the discussion. Worship leaders from ethno-specific, racialized, ethnic minority and Aboriginal communities have particular insights and experience with resilience that would be extremely informative and helpful to this research. Worship leaders from marginalized communities also experience different stressors that could potentially put them at a higher risk for burnout.

Fourthly, although worship is increasingly lay led as the number of ordained ministers within the denomination continues to decline, we decided to limit this day to clergy or paid accountable ministry personnel so that we would not have to spend time

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<sup>2</sup> Milner, Sterland and Dowson 2009, 463.

addressing the unspoken competition and ambiguity of roles among the different streams of ministry currently in The United Church of Canada. To have some commonalities between participants at the start helped to build collegiality.

Lastly, the resiliency research also indicated that hearing the stories of others who have successfully demonstrated resilience is helpful in re-membering and building imagination. As a result, two participants were asked to be elders in order to share wisdom, insights and motivation from their own experiences.

Selecting a date and getting participants to attend the gathering proved challenging as several tentative dates were cancelled due to the participants' shifting schedules. There were several people invited who we could not accommodate due to repeat scheduling conflicts. Once people committed to a specific date they were excited and honoured to be asked and looked forward to the event.

Since this project originated from a desire to help improve the self-esteem and effectiveness of worship leaders it made sense for the project to be rooted in worship. Worship has the ability to be both deeply contextual and deeply aspirational; while examining where we are we look towards the future we would like to create. Integrating worship into the workshop served to: model and test the effectiveness of integrating worship into resiliency training, provide worship leaders with spiritual practices that they can draw upon and refer to when needed, share the theological context and rationale for the workshop material, add depth and imagination to the



symbols used, and provide leaders with practical resources that can be recycled within their ministry settings.

Originally, this project suggested a three hour workshop with other tools available online. After consultation with the Advisory Committee we decided on creating a full day program without an online component in order to allow time for community building and a shared meal. We realized that an additional website may not be as helpful to clergy, as people would not likely visit a stand-alone site. Instead, we decided to create a Facebook page after the event to help keep the group connected and to offer any new insights that were not shared during the workshop.

The development of the workshop was truly a collaborative effort. The liturgy for the workshop was created after the Advisory Committee worked on developing an overall arc to the day. It was clear what elements needed to be included to meet our outlined goals and which elements might not be necessary. Whatever happened in the workshop, we wanted to ensure that it built community and was grounded in ritual, storytelling and our Christian tradition; all three of these things are lifted up and celebrated in the act of worship. The workshop was then centered on ritualistic acts of worship with various activities that could be prepared in advance and changed as needed according to the flow of the day. The main rituals were: A ritual of earth, a ritual of re-membering, a ritual of blessing (which included a ritual of planting), and a ritual of hope. This clarity and flexibility in planning proved to be extremely effective.

The one piece of the workshop that seems different in tone and language from the ritualistic elements is the ‘assessing your ministry context’ survey (appendix 2). It is clearly a cognitive exercise, but the committee felt it an important piece to maintain because it would allow people to truthfully name the stressors that they are currently dealing with thus grounding the day in their current reality.

The committee’s suggestions matched the research. Psychologists teaching resilience to families dealing with particular problems (such as depression) have found that clearly identifying the problem and its potential consequences helps to reduce anxiety and build more positive coping strategies.<sup>3</sup> In ministry personnel, studies have demonstrated that a poor understanding of what ministry truly entails is a significant predictor of burnout, depression and anxiety amongst clergy.<sup>4</sup> It became clear to us while planning that if we did not honestly and truthfully allow space for people to name their ministry contexts, the joys and the challenges, we would not be able to have the deep level of storytelling and sharing needed for participants to fully engage in the workshop and encourage increased resiliency.

In order to clearly identify and name the stressors, we informally surveyed ministry personnel from across the country by asking them on Facebook to share stressors in ministry that they did not expect. The responses included:

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<sup>3</sup> Anne W. Riley., et al. “Development of a Family-Based Program to Reduce Risk and Promote Resilience among Families Affected by Maternal Depression: Theoretical Basis and Program Description” (*Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Milner, Sterland and Dowson 2009, 463.

Table 2: Ministry Stressors

Responsibilities	Funerals Weddings Baptisms Confirmation/ New Member Classes Sermon Preparation
Mental and Emotional Health	Accumulative Grief Traumatic Events Mental Health Issues (within community) Personal Grief and Loss Balancing Social and Professional Life Maintaining Professional Relationships Maintaining Personal Relationships
Dealing with ...	Harassment Abusive Behaviour and Bullying Theological Conflicts Church Polity and Procedure Being Scapegoated Conflicts with Colleagues
Working through and leading ...	Church Visioning and Planning Church Restructuring Church Downsizing and Closure Reconciliation Processes Staffing Conflicts Conflicts within Congregations Power and Leadership Struggles Finding Support
Personal Areas ...	Fear of Failure Guilt of Success Asking for and Finding Help Discussing Differences Job Security/ Finances Staying Fresh/ Gathering New Ideas Prioritizing Balancing Various Expectations Maintaining a Personal Spiritual Life This List ...

This list of responses was then discussed with a few people in active ministry and tested against the experiences and assumptions of the Advisory Committee. To help workshop participants deepen their understanding of how certain stressors affect them, we asked participants to apply numerical values to the level of competency they felt regarding each of these potential stressors and how content they were with their competency levels (on a scale from one to ten). The exercise was designed to help participants identify areas of potential stress and to realize that their greatest competencies could also be their greatest stressors. Having this conversation about ministry stressors at the start of the workshop set an open tone for the rest of the day. A sense of collegiality grew once the participants realized that they shared similar fears and stressors.

Clarity around the goals of the workshop allowed for flexibility on the actual day. As a result, the planned and actual agendas for the workshop were quite different. A high level of trust and commitment formed quickly within the group so deep conversations occurred sooner than anticipated. The discussions were rich and spirited, so we adjusted the day accordingly to facilitate more discussion and deeper worship.

#### Workshop Outline

<b>9:45 - 10</b>	Breakfast, Welcome and Gallery Walk
<b>10:00 – 10:15</b>	Group Norms, Opening Prayer, Welcome and

	Introductions
<b>10:15 – 10:35</b>	Concentric Circle Exercise
<b>10:35 – 10:45</b>	Visualization Exercise
<b>10:45 – 11:15</b>	Naming our Stressors/ Defining the Context for our Ministry
<b>11:15 – 12</b>	Ritual of Earth
<b>12 – 1</b>	Lunch (soup, cheese tray and salads, sorbet)
<b>1 – 1:30</b>	Ritual of Re-Membering
<b>1:30 – 2:45</b>	Ritual of Blessing
<b>2:45 – 3:00</b>	Ritual of Planting and Watering
<b>3:00 – 3:15</b>	Visualization Exercise
<b>3:15 – 3:30</b>	Ritual of Hope and Communion

#### Website

Originally a website was envisioned as a supplement to this project. This website was to contain: an overview of resiliency and its importance in ministry; an outline of the narrative of concern, the emergent narrative of opportunity as well as some practical reasons why worship leaders should engage in resiliency training; areas of resiliency, stories and anecdotes; and lastly, worksheets on how to build resiliency in

these areas. Additional pages were to consist of bibliographical information, links, worship resources and websites for further reading. After having initial Facebook conversations with worship leaders, the Advisory Committee decided that a website would not be a helpful addition to the project. First, ministers appeared unlikely to visit an extra website regularly. It seemed more feasible, practical and user friendly to link into social media that participants were already using. Second, it became evident that many did not think they needed 'resiliency training'. Such work may even be perceived as remedial instead of preventative and empowering so many may not self-select to visit or interact with the website. Third, the website ran the risk of being too cognitively based which could undermine the goal of empowering the resilience within participants. We would not want clergy to assume that if one subscribes to a set of self-care habits and takes the following steps that they will be impervious to stress. Or, even worse, we would not want a clergy to believe that they are somehow weaker or less capable because they are currently feeling overwhelmed in their ministry.

Instead of a website a closed Facebook group entitled "Awe-full Ministry" with nine of the ten people who participated in the study has been created. Participants named that they would be interested in hearing feedback and the results of the study, but their time and schedules do not lend them to frequent interaction.

## Assessing Growth: Evaluation

The commitment to narrative form means we believe that revelation evolves over time – that is, we know more at the end of a story than we knew at the beginning.<sup>5</sup>

The long term effects of this project will be difficult to measure using quantitative tools, such as satisfaction surveys and inventories. Since the project dealt with a subjective and individually specific topic, a narrative evaluation tool was used: participants were asked to produce images, descriptions and stories in order to glean information regarding the effectiveness of the workshop in meeting its goals and objectives. The prospectus introduced an evaluation tool that would be able to assess the following from participants (likely from an interview):

- Do participants feel more empowered at the end of the workshop?
- Are they excited to provide meaningful worship experiences?
- Can they clearly articulate their passion for worship leadership?
- Do they feel comfortable sharing their call story with others?
- Do they have the needed tools to appropriately deal with negative feedback and criticism?
- Can they effectively separate themselves from the projections of others?
- Are they able to identify healthy and unhealthy stresses?
- Are they fully aware of the possible stresses of the call that they have accepted?
- Do they understand what resiliency is?

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<sup>5</sup> Ochs 2001, 39.

- Do they have a practical and realistic plan to work on building their personal resilience?

By the conclusion of the workshop, many of these initial questions were informally answered or no longer relevant. Furthermore, the nature and tone of the workshop did not lend itself to such formal evaluation. For the workshop to be successful it had to be about supporting and caring for the clergy gathered. Taking minutes or notes with the possibility of participants' stresses recorded in an academic paper did not feel like a way to genuinely be present to the group and to model the holistic training that this project aspires to. During the opening covenant we agreed not to take any minutes of the event and asked that we respect confidentiality by not sharing any information or anecdotes from the day unless the person gave permission. The queries developed by the Advisory Committee for the final evaluation were:

- Do participants feel more empowered at the end of the workshop?
- Do participants feel supported and part of a larger community?
- Can they clearly articulate resilient qualities that they have?
- Are they better able to articulate the possible stresses of the call that they have accepted?
- Do they understand what resiliency is?

Three main evaluation tools were used during the course of the workshop to informally answer these questions: a visualization exercise, the 'Sunshine Wall', and the ritual of planting and watering.



The dominant evaluation tool was a visualization exercise used at the beginning and the end of the day. What people described and the changes in their descriptions from the beginning to the end provided critical data on how participants were feeling and how these feelings changed over the course of the day. The remarkable difference in how people experienced the exercises proved that the workshop successfully helped people feel more supported and empowered for their work of ministry.

The following words were used with participants at the start of the day:

You are invited to shut your eyes and get comfortable ... this is not quite a guided meditation, but an imagination process ... imagine you are on your way ... now you are not alone on the way ... now you are alone again ... now you see a wall ... you are on the other side of the wall ... you hear water ... you go to the water ... stay at the water a while... now you are somewhere restful, relaxed and at peace ... when you are ready take a moment to jot down anything that you would like to remember from this journey.<sup>6</sup>

At the end of the day this meditation was repeated followed by a Jungian style analysis.

Participants were encouraged to compare and contrast the differences between the two journeys, how they felt, and the difference in what they imagined and experienced.

Table 3: Imagination Exercise

<b>Location</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<b>On your way ...</b> What did you see?	<b>common options:</b> walking a path in the forest, or in a nature setting <b>less common:</b> driving in a car, being in a city	this is how you currently see life
<b>You are not alone ...</b> Who was with them?	<b>common options:</b> family member, Jesus, pet, friend	this is someone you trust, or a place you are comfortable

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Advisory Committee conversation and the words of Janet Ross (Advisory Committee Member).

	<b>less common:</b> in a crowd (no individual with them), a stranger	in (if in a crowd)
<b>You are alone again ...</b> How do you feel?	<b>Common options:</b> back to where they were before someone joined them	
<b>You see a wall ...</b> What kind of wall?	<b>common responses:</b> stone wall, most often high, very wide, usually no doors or windows or openings <b>less common:</b> brick wall, cement	the types of obstacles barriers in your life
<b>You are on the other side of the wall ...</b>	<b>common responses:</b> climbed over, a door appeared (somewhat magically), just appeared on the other side (really magic) <b>less common:</b> break through the wall, drive through forcefully	how you see problems in life, and how you think they get solved (problems are insurmountable, you can see over them or around them-- so a detour, but not a deterrent, problems take force to solve, problems are magically solved, etc.)
<b>You hear water and stay there ...</b> What is the source of the water?	<b>common responses:</b> rivers, creeks, waterfalls <b>less common:</b> oceans, lakes, water pipes dripping (or city settings)	
<b>You stay at the water ...</b> What did you do there? Jump in? Drink? Put feet in? Not touch the water at all?	<b>common responses:</b> sit by the water, put in feet <b>less common:</b> jump in, drink, (willing to engage relationships rather quickly) or turn their back to the water (very cautious about relationships)	this is how you see relationships: do you dive into relationships? Are you very reserved? (not touching the water) Do you test the relationship? (put in feet?) Do you risk? (jump in or drink?)
<b>You are somewhere relaxed and at peace ...</b>	<b>common responses:</b> stay by the water (especially if they are somewhere by water that is familiar), in one's home or room	where you feel safe and secure

The most significant changes include the walking companions who for several of the participants changed from a few to many (or changed from animals to people). The wall took on more accessible and permeable forms in the afternoon compared to in the morning. For instance, a few participants saw a handle or even a door appeared in the wall where there was not one before. For one participant the wall shrank to a size that they could simply jump over. One of the most dramatic changes was how people interacted with the water. In the morning people sat by the water and at most put in a foot, but by the afternoon participants reported that the water was flowing, some swam, some played and some even splashed in it! A sense of trust, companionship, peace, calmness and the ability to overcome obstacles was evident in the responses of participants by the end of the day.

The ritual of blessing that concluded with the 'Sunshine Wall' also helped to monitor if participants were able to identify and affirm resilient characteristics in themselves and others. The 'Sunshine Wall' was created by writing all of the resilient characteristics that participants heard and saw demonstrated from colleagues during the listening time of the ritual. The wall proved to be a fruitful and affirming exercise. From reviewing the wall, it was clear that participants knew what resiliency was and could name and identify resilient characteristics in themselves and others. Resiliency themes among the participants included: strong emotions (mostly anger); meaning (from stories, a sense of call and finding purpose); boundaries (including the ability to say yes and the ability to say no); faith and spirituality (spiritual disciplines, rituals and

prayer); reflection (particularly the ability to look back); and lastly the importance of community as a factor that aids in resilience.

Another built in evaluation tool came from the planting and watering ritual at the end of the workshop. Participants were asked to plant a seed while naming something that was budding in them, and to water it while sharing how they plan to nourish this budding thought in the weeks and months to come. In the responses participants shared deep understandings about their needs and the needs of their particular ministry contexts in the midst of their stressors. From the discussion it was clear that participants not only took something away from the event that was empowering and affirming, they also had the outlines of an action plan.

#### Self-Evaluation

The project has had a significant impact on the candidate, largely because of the depth and nature of the project. This project asked “what level of nourishment do we need in our life to sustain transformational ministry?” This is a complex and encompassing question that requires commitment, energy and depth to handle well. Alydia was able to do this especially well, not only by her research and preparation, but more significantly by modeling what she was hoping to encourage through the project. In addition, this was an opportunity for Alydia’s compassion and concern for the church, as well as her skills and abilities to meet the place where the church has great need.<sup>7</sup>

Similar to the project evaluation, the prospectus outlined several questions for the basis of my self-evaluation:

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<sup>7</sup> Site Evaluation, Lay Advisory Committee.

- Am I able to clearly articulate the biblical and theological foundation for the project?
- Have I been able to work collaboratively with the Advisory Committee, and create a co-operative learning experience?
- Have I been able to implement the goals set-out in the prospectus? If changes have been made can I explain why and how these changes were made?
- Am I able to directly apply my learnings from this project to my current ministry context? Has it changed the way that I support worship leaders? Is my project relevant to my ministry?
- Have I been able to maximize my strengths and minimize my weakness in the implementation of this project?
- Is my final project report clearly written and does it demonstrate a wide breadth of scholarship?
- Am I passionate about the work? Do I feel like the project has contributed to the discipline of ministry, specifically worship leadership?
- Have I addressed the presenting narrative of concern? Can I clearly articulate a preferred future narrative and can I share a clear action plan to help move the church towards this preferred narrative?

These questions have been addressed in this paper and in my site evaluation. The site evaluation examined some of these questions specifically. In the site evaluation I named that the project surpassed my expectations for the workshop, for the Advisory

Committee and for myself. We were all amazed at how much could be accomplished within a short period of time. It was also acknowledged that the effectiveness of the workshop was possible because of the dedicated work of the Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee was a diverse group of people (an educator, a ministry recruitment officer, a journalist and a refugee program coordinator) that quickly formed into an effective team:

The committee became a collegial and collaborative community bounded by our mutual desire to support Worship Leaders. This deepened sense of community benefited the committee and also—by extension—all those with whom the committee interacts.<sup>8</sup>

The project has had a significant impact in my professional and personal life. Consequently, I now spend more time supporting the creation of collegial spaces for clergy, encouraging personal storytelling and theological reflection, leading educational events that are experiential and avoid right or wrong solutions, intentionally praying with clergy and worship leaders and creating spaces for prayer and spiritual renewal. Personally, the project has helped me to tap into my own resilient traits and has reminded me of the importance of maintaining a spiritual discipline that fosters my imagination and sense of wonder.

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<sup>8</sup> Site Evaluation, Lay Advisory Committee.

## CHAPTER 6

### AWAITING HARVEST: PROJECT FINDINGS

It is here, in the muck, that the brave little seed sheds its protective casing, and trusts that miraculously in the depths of the crap God will unlock the fearless hope and abundance lovingly planted in each seed. So that out of the good soil, generations of blessings will bloom.<sup>1</sup>

This project started as a seed of an idea to support worship leaders and has spread in some unexpected and surprising ways into my personal and vocational life. It has been an incredible blessing, which I pray will continue to be fruitful as it is shared with others.

I have always considered myself a resilient person, thanks to the strong and courageous people who have acted as role models and guides in my life, particularly my parents and family. From a young age I was taught to love and believe in myself, even if others (including society) did not. I was taught not to rely on the praise of others, for they might not have my best interest at heart. And I was taught that how God made me

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 5 Sermon: Awe-fully Good Soil.

is not perfect, but just right. The stories my parents tell of me as a child are all stories of resilience and perseverance. I am told that when I was three, I was losing a tricycle race because my pedals were not working, so I picked up my tricycle, ran ahead of everyone, and sat back down in front of the child in first place and pedaled to the finish line. Being resilient is part of my identity.

I went into ministry with this same perseverance, passion and resilience. Five years later, I was shocked at how deflated and discouraged I felt about ministry and my experiences (particularly experiences of discrimination and racism). I may not have been 'burnt-out' but I certainly felt 'used-up' and considered leaving the church several times. My commitment to my call (and perhaps my stubbornness) caused me to stay in ministry, but I did not feel like the resilient, optimistic woman ready to bounce back from anything that I was when I started. I was hurt and deeply affected by my experience of ministry, as one of my friends described, "I lost some of my sunshine". I believed that God called me into ministry to offer my best, and although I was doing my best, I did not feel that I was able to offer my best, because I was not my true self.

Luckily, my situation was such that I am able to persevere in ministry. I have since reclaimed much of my sunshine, but I am haunted by the prospect of colleagues and friends who may go through a similar hardship. I wanted to find a way to help support my colleagues so that they could offer their best selves to God's service. Earlier, Moses' call was used as a reminder that clergy are called into ministry for who they are, not what they can do. A classic role of the church is to 'equip the saints' to be



fully who they are for the work of ministry. My experiences tell me that this role needs to again be lifted up in the church. As discussed in the theological section, pain and suffering cannot be avoided when passion is involved, as it is often said, 'you cannot work with a red hot gospel without getting burned'. All clergy can expect to be burnt, but can all clergy be expected to bounce back (especially in the current 'over-fertilized' context of their ministry)? I was motivated to do this project because I worry about these clergy, but I also worry about the health of our church and the church's ability to equip these saints who have accepted the call to serve. A dispassionate minister (particularly a worship leader) can still be on fire, but instead of a purifying and cleansing fire, it is a fire of pain and destruction that inevitably spreads.

My ministry is to support, enhance and resource the worship and music life of The United Church of Canada. Worship is a broad term to describe various ways of offering praise and prayer to God. Within The United Church of Canada, the term worship is often used to describe a corporal event when praise is offered in a traditional format that loosely follows the pattern of gathering, listening or proclamation, and responding. United Church people often talk about worship as a time of connection, ritual and praise. While not always practiced, the church tries to hold the idea that "worship is not ours; [but] a gift from God".<sup>2</sup> Liturgy during worship (the words and rituals that we use) is understood to be the work of the people of God for God's glory. One minister explains: "The congregation knows that it is not just their efforts \*the

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<sup>2</sup> This quote was shared during a Worship Conversations held with Worship Leaders across the church that I held in 2013.

ministers], but it is the work of their brothers and sisters”.<sup>3</sup> Worship is the action that unites The United Church’s extremely diverse community of believers.

As part of my ministry I have participated in numerous worship services, and fielded many complaints and inquiries about worship. I have learnt that words and creative liturgies, no matter how brilliant and inspired, are not what makes a moving and transformational worship experience. The passion and authenticity of the presider is what brings life to the words used in worship. If the presider is not passionate, no matter how wonderfully crafted a worship resource is, it will fall flat. In order to support good worship in The United Church of Canada, time needs to be spent in supporting good and passionate worship leaders. The response and willingness to engage that I received from the clergy who participated in the Worship Renewal Experience support that this is the correct track to be on, especially in the current climate of The United Church of Canada, where the narrative of decline is being constantly fed.

The narrative of concern is taking-up much of the churches soil and resources; however, the seedlings of a new story of hope where clergy work together to share the gospel is starting to emerge. As a cognitive-type person, I was hoping to develop easily transferable tools, resource sheets, and strategies to help clergy build resilience. I am pleasantly surprized to learn that my biggest learning is that the tools needed to help feed and nurture this new narrative are already with us, (and a part of our identity),

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<sup>3</sup> This quote was shared during a Worship Conversations held with Worship Leaders across the church that I held in 2013.

tools such as ritual, sacred story and community. Our task is to reclaim these practices of deep listening, sacred storytelling and community building as part of our roles and responsibilities as a caring Christian community who attempts to support and uphold each other for the sake of the gospel.

The research outlined in this project has proven the effectiveness of Narrative Theory and a holistic (BASIC Ph) approach to resiliency training. Our faith tradition and culture have added a deeper layer of meaning and urgency to these findings; it is not just a good or logical theoretical idea to spend time participating in ritual, sacred storytelling and community building with peers, it is a good spiritual practice and resiliency tool.

Remember the comrades who spoke intimately with each other on the road to Emmaus.<sup>4</sup> While discussing their concerns, fears and questions around the death of Jesus and the rumours of his rising, they listened deeply to each other and invited a stranger to journey with them. This stranger reflected back what they had heard and what they had perhaps forgotten. Once the comrades returned home they shared in a ritual with this stranger and their hearts burned within them for surely Jesus was there among them, bringing a different story to life.

Taking time to be together, to support each other, and to share sacred stories in community is one of the strongest and most cost effective resiliency tools and models that we have as a church (it just happens to be thousands of years old). During times of

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<sup>4</sup> Luke 24:35-49 NRSV.

scarcity it is easy to become competitive with our colleagues as we fight to hold seemingly limited resources. The irony and great learning from this study is that our potentially greatest resource and support are our fellow colleagues. A recent United Church study revealed that more than half of the respondents felt they do not receive the level of support they need within the United Church.<sup>5</sup> This study also revealed that “ministry personnel may experience higher degrees of depression and stress but there is a level of commitment to the United Church that remains strong and stable”.<sup>6</sup> The United Church of Canada is blessed with clergy who are committed to the church despite the lack of support they feel. This inconsistency is supported by the conclusion of the researcher that:

While the psychological well-being of ministry personnel may not be directly affected by systematic factors, it is likely affected indirectly by a lack of organizational support to enable this population to deal with stressors associated with their roles and experiences in the pastoral charge.<sup>7</sup>

Narrative-based resiliency training workshops are a tangible way that the General Council Office (the organizational support) can effectively support ministry personnel while supporting good worship.

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<sup>5</sup> Warren Shepell Research Group 2006, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 7.

## First Fruits: Conclusions

The committee sensed that the project created an experience of authentic community among participants that “is not just rain once but the rain for the year”. Additionally, the project created possibilities for new ways of supporting and caring for clergy. One participant described how the care and concern shown in the follow-up letter brought them to tears. Other participants highly recommended that the workshop be done with clergy across the country.<sup>8</sup>

The Worship Renewal Experience proved to be a highly successful way to support, encourage and build resilience in clergy in a collegial environment. Before this project is further developed and hopefully shared with clergy throughout the church further research into ways to help people identify their ministry stressors and working through fears, particularly a fear of failure, would be helpful.

During the workshop, the headiest task, identifying their ministry context, was also the most challenging, although it led to a very fruitful discussion. The hardship was in the scale that was developed to help people identify their stressors. The goal of the ranking system was to help participants identify their personal stress points and to reflect on how these stress points are not necessarily linked to their learning edges and competencies. For instance, if a person knew that they had poor administration skills and this did not bother them it would not be identified as a stressor (even if it was something that they should be working on). However, if they were dissatisfied with their poor skills it may be identified as an area of potential stress for them. The problem

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<sup>8</sup> Site Evaluation, Lay Advisory Committee.

with the numerical system was if someone was equally incompetent and dissatisfied in their skills in the same area, the two numbers would cancel each other out. Some would argue that the lack of discrepancy would show a greater self-awareness and possibly less stress, even if they are not skilled in and unhappy with the task. Others would argue that anything to work on is a potential area of stress.

A more helpful system might be one where participants are able to self-identify stressors (perhaps from the created list) and visually represent how the stress affects them (emotionally, physically and spiritually). In this way participants are still guided through a process that helps them to identify and interpret the stressors in their ministry, but in a method that works best for them and their learning style.

One of the most passionate conversations had at the workshop was around fear. Interestingly, this fear was not addressed as a fear of the unknown, unfamiliar or even a fear of not being good enough (although this conversation was had). The predominant fear discussed was largely around failing at something that they knew they were competent at (for example, funerals). Another fear that was discussed in great detail was a fear for the future. Many of the participants talked of the lack of balance in their work, (for instance a few had performed more funerals than weddings and baptisms combined). Furthermore, many of the weddings that participants performed during their ministries have since ended in divorce. It is very hard not to buy into the narrative of decline when the context speaks so strongly to it. During future workshops, it may be

helpful to have a ritual that acknowledges and honours the various fears and grief clergy carry.

Keeping the Fires Burning ...

Burnout has been the topic of countless books, dissertations, studies and projects for three decades. It has been referred to as 'an epidemic', a 'disease' and a 'farce'.

And even though it is discussed in every seminary, until each seminarian is made painfully aware of all the warning signs and precautions, burnout is still prevalent in church culture. The *Clinical Handbook on Pastoral Counselling* has a comprehensive summary definition of burnout:

Most authors have developed their own unique list of burnout causes. There is much overlap though, and all of them seem to point to the problem as being a lack which produces frustration. It can be a deficiency of such things as: education, opportunity, free time, ability, chance to ventilate, institutional power, variety, meaningful tasks, criteria to measure impact, coping mechanisms, staff harmony, professional and personal recognition, insight into one's motivations, balance in one's schedule, and emotional distance from the client population.<sup>9</sup>

This list demonstrates how the potential for burnout is omnipresent; no work environment could safe guard against all of these variables at any given time, especially jobs that work directly with people! It is easy to identify what is lacking. The next step is to identify and celebrate what is present.

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<sup>9</sup> Robert J. Wicks, Richard Parsons and Donald Capps *Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counselling Volume 1: Expanded Edition* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 91.

In The United Church of Canada there are three thousand, nine hundred and forty four ordained and commissioned clergy.<sup>10</sup> That means that there are nearly four thousand people who choose to engage with the church and accept their call into ministry. In the Ministry in Isolation study, 90% of The United Church ministers surveyed reported that they were satisfied with their vocation as minister, and “both dispositional optimism and the resilient coping style measures were manifested at high levels among the respondents”.<sup>11</sup>

The church cannot afford to ignore the great potential for clergy burnout that is currently prevalent. Equally so, the church cannot afford to ignore the great potential for resiliency and passion in their clergy. All clergy have within them the potential to produce a harvest larger than we (the church) could ever imagine on our own, but in order to do so, we must care for and nurture them. The church must make the decision to invest and nurture the stories of hope, new life and resilience that are abundant if one digs beyond the narrative of decline.

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<sup>10</sup> For current statistics visit: <http://www.united-church.ca/organization/statistics>.

<sup>11</sup> Warren Shepell Research Group, 2006, 6.



## APPENDIX 1

### WORKSHOP OUTLINE

#### **9:45 – 10:00 Refreshments and Gathering**

##### **Gallery Walk Questions:**

1. What do you need for this to be a safe space?
2. Imagine that we are at the end of our day together, how do you feel?
3. What are your fears for this day?
4. What do you need for this to be a place of Worship and Renewal?
5. What are your expectations of ...
6. What are your prayers for our time together?

#### **10:00 – 10:10 Welcome**

##### **Lighting of Christ Candle**

##### **Overview of the Day**

##### **Review of Safe Space** (What do you need to make this a safe space?)

##### **Opening Prayer:**

Acknowledging our fears of ... (3)  
 And our prayers for ... (6)  
 We will commit to ... (1)  
 So that this may be a space where ... (2 and 4)  
 Amen.

#### **10:10-10:30 Concentric Circles**

- If you were a piece of Holy Hardware, what would you be and why?
- Explain and demonstrate a gesture that represents you?
- What is home? Where do you feel most at home?
- What is a metaphor for your life?
- I feel most like myself when?
- What are you most passionate about in ministry?
- What songs speak most to your heart?

##### **Sung Response**

### 10:30 – 10:45 Stress/ De-stress

#### Stress Survey

Ask participants to fill out survey and to identify their two or three main stressors (biggest disparities)

#### Visualization Exercise

You are invited to shut your eyes and get comfortable ... this is not quite a guided meditation, but an imagination process ....

- Imagine you are on your way...
- Now, you are not alone on the way ...
- Now you are alone again ...
- Now you see a wall, it is blocking you ...
- You are on the other side of the wall ... \*longer pause]
- You hear water ...
- You go to the water ...
- Stay at the water a while ...
- Now you are somewhere restful, relaxed and at peace

Ask participants to take a moment and jot down things they would like to remember from this journey.

### 10:45 – 11:15 RITUAL OF EARTH

*(Adapted from and inspired by Nancy Cocks<sup>12</sup>)*

In order for a seed to 'bloom where it is planted'<sup>13</sup>,  
it must immerse itself first into the dirt;  
it needs to be covered by dust, earth, mulch, soil ...  
It is neither good nor bad- dirt- it just is.  
Just as we are.

We are connected to the earth:  
we share destinies, (the circle of life)  
we share homes, (the earth)  
we share parents, (our creator).

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<sup>12</sup> Nancy Cocks, *Invisible We See You: Tracing Celtic Threads Through Christian Community* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2006),174-176.

<sup>13</sup> Often attributed to St. Frances de Sales.

*Let us listen to Jesus.*

*“Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies,  
It remains just a single grain;  
But if it dies, it bears much fruit.  
Whoever serves me must follow me.”*

“A seed must surrender its individual existence  
in order to produce its fruit.

A seed gives life

by dying to its hard, smooth, perfectly packaged beginnings<sup>14</sup>  
and plunging into the dust, earth, mulch, and dirt.

“When the plant emerges from the soil,  
the original seed has disappeared.

It has transformed to give birth to its crop of fruit,  
and the next generation of seed.

*Jesus dares his followers to live by this pattern of paradox.*

*If we dream of life and ministry as a perfect package,  
smooth, neat,  
encased in a solitary shell of home and church arranged for our own enjoyment,  
We are like the seed that withers on the shelf.*

*Jesus challenges us*

*To plant ourselves in the common ground of God’s world”;*<sup>15</sup>

*The context for our ministries:*

*A place where we sometimes play and often wrestle;*

*A place where we grow in beauty and battle scars.*

*Here, in the dirt, is where God plants us,*

*To feed the gospel to the world.*

What does your context look like?

What makes up the dust, earth, muck and dirt

that you currently find yourself planted in?

Grab it. Name it. And drop it into the bucket either silently or out loud.

*[allow time for people to fill the bucket with their context]*

We are not planted in the earth to feed our own desires,  
we are not planted to remain as a perfect package.

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<sup>14</sup> Cocks 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

“If we love life as a perfect package  
and set our hearts on achieving it for ourselves...  
we will know only the sterile loneliness  
of a seed stuck in its own shell.  
But when we plant ourselves deep into God’s world,  
when we give ourselves to others, for others,  
our lives are enriched beyond measure.

It is a promise that only makes sense  
once we have taken the risk and committed ourselves”<sup>16</sup>  
To the messy soil of ministry –  
    of interpersonal conflicts;  
    of presbytery meetings;  
    of grief;  
    of complex group dynamics;  
    of hard reconciliations;  
    of loving our neighbours and our enemies.

Our fruitfulness,  
our beauty and purpose,  
our passions  
are discovered in the midst of giving our perfect outer-casing away  
and trusting that a miracle will happen in the depths of the soil  
that will lead to abundant life.

A seed cannot see the results of its growth  
when it surrenders itself to the ground.

We will not always see the results of our ministry.

*But if we would see Jesus,  
we would see the fearless and hopeful generosity held in each seed.  
We would remember that God’s love produces abundance  
    from tiny grains of generosity.  
We would hear God’s call to bloom where she has planted us.*

*And to glean what nutrients we can from the muck around us.  
This muck will help to seed new life.*

### **10:45 – 11:00 Re-Membering Our Story<sup>17</sup>**

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<sup>16</sup> Cocks 2006.

*[Tell the story of Elijah a prophet who lived in muck  
and make story books with everyone!]*

1. **Meet Elijah:**  
Meet Elijah, faithful prophet of the Lord. In a time when being a prophet was cool (but a prophet of Baal, not a prophet of the Lord) and miracles happened quite often!
2. **Elijah's Mission:**  
Convert King Ahab and followers of Baal.
3. **Elijah's Allies and Helpers:**  
God and prayer. Prayer always seemed to work for Elijah, it was his main power; whenever he prayed, God answered.
4. **Elijah's Obstacle:**  
Except for the time when Jezebel was trying to kill him, then, God did not answer right away. The passionate Elijah became tired and scared when he saw how serious Jezebel was and when his help did not seem to be helping. He wanted it to be over. He was burnt out.
5. **What happens?**  
God sends Elijah, some food, *'bread for the journey'* and then sends Elijah on a retreat, to take a break, reconnect and to re-group. I think this annoys Elijah who would prefer to see Jezebel 'dealt with' and Ahab converted. And I am certain Elijah is even more annoyed when God finally shows up after a 40 day pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain with **"What are you doing here, Elijah?"** If I were Elijah I would be expecting a "Thank-you, Elijah" or a "Well done, you are a good and faithful servant, you earned a break!" or even a "Poor Elijah, I get it, you feel lonely, but thanks to you there is a growing community that you could be in contact with".

If I was Elijah, I would be pissed. I mean, he has been a zealous messenger for God while most Israelites have forgotten about the covenant. And he has been a highly successful messenger for God so much so that God has performed miracles through him and he has defeated prophets of Baal!

So God tells Elijah to wait for further instruction, and Elijah waits, and waits, and waits. Perhaps God was waiting for him to simmer down a little. Because what seemed like it should have been God, passed through a few times (wind, earthquake, fire all that was missing was a flood)! But instead God comes in the quiet silence of waiting and gives Elijah instruction, advice and a succession plan. His work was and is important, God is saying, so important that God will not let it end with him. Elijah is needed to teach his skills to a new generation. God was not done with Elijah yet, but God is done with Elijah like this!

6. **Why retell the story?**

It reminds me that huge missions need to be group missions and that even the best and the brightest can feel overwhelmed from time to time.

### **11:00 – 11:20 Re-Telling Stories**

- Think of a biblical character that you relate to and that you think had a particularly stressful time.
- Write our draw out the story in a progression similar to the example

### **11:20 – 11:50 Sharing our Stories**

- Ask the two mentors to share their stories
- In small groups share/ retell the stories

### **11:50 - 12:05 Seeds of Hope and Challenge<sup>18</sup>**

- Invite each participant to share what the story seeds or challenges in them and to plant something in the soil in response.

#### **Blessing of our stories:**

(Include a blessing of the water)

#### **Grace:**

May the blessing of the 5 loaves and 2 fishes be ours also.

May we be counted among the 5 thousand who ate and drank their fill, and yet found enough to share beyond. Amen. (Celtic Grace)

### **12:05 – 1:05 Lunch**

*During lunch ask people to reflect on a personal story demonstrating resilience that they will be sharing in small groups after the meal.*

### **1:05 – 1:40 RITUAL OF BLESSING AND SHARING**

Introduce afternoon sharing time and the idea that we all have natural resiliency tendencies. Break people into groups of three. Invite them to grab a coffee or tea before they start.

1. **Listener/Time Keeper:** Does not speak until the end, provides a two minute warning, reflects back the resilient characteristics they heard and observed and jots them down to be added to the wall.

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<sup>18</sup> This exercise was moved to just before the closing ritual of communion. People shared what was growing in them/ or what they would like to further nurture as they planted a seed. They were then asked to water the seed while sharing what they would do to nurture this seedling and naming what other support this seedling might need to grow.

2. **Encourager/Blessor:** Supports speaker, helps them dig deeper, asks open-ended questions, and provides an individualized blessing for the person at the end of the listeners report.
3. **Story Teller:** shares their personal story of resilience.

### **1:40 – 1:50    Sunshine Wall**

Groups are asked to add their resilient characteristics and coping skills to the wall and to read the notes of others (even jotting down or taking a few) before going back to their seats.

Discuss:

- What was that experience like?
- Did anything on the resiliency wall shock or surprise you?
- Is there anything on that wall that you need? Take it.
- Is there anything there that you don't understand?

### **1:50 – 2:10    Journaling/ Private Reflection<sup>19</sup>**

- Go back to the stress indicator sheet and pick an area with the greatest disparity
- On one card (A) write the stressor, and on another card (B) write an ideal outcome, and on the remaining cards write what you will do to get from A to B

#### **Second Gallery Walk:**

- One thing you will do to nurture your passion
- One thing you will do to avoid becoming overwhelmed
- One thing that you will do to support someone else
- One thing that you think would be helpful moving forward

### **2:10 – 2:35    Seeking Help<sup>20</sup>**

Starting with an example we will take the stressor bridge exercise and do it as a large group activity across the room, seeking feedback from each other.

***Example stressor:** You and the music minister disagree on hymn selections. Even when the musician agrees to play a hymn you have selected, they do not play it correctly and fail to rehearse it. You are receiving pressure from a group in the congregation who want new music and new musical styles and push back from another group in the congregation who support the music minister's apprehension to the musical selections on Sunday. The split in the congregation is becoming more and more evident.*

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<sup>19</sup> This section did not happen during the actual workshop, more time was given to group discussion on the context of participants' ministries, storytelling and prayer.

<sup>20</sup> This section did not happen either, instead we debriefed the Sunshine Wall and the time spent in Blessing and Sharing.

In smaller groups those who are comfortable are invited to repeat this process with one of the mentors being in each group.

Questions to ask and explore could include:

- What obstacles might you face in reaching this goal?
- Which step would be hardest?
- What would this step look like? Feel like?
- Can you imagine this possible outcome?
- What will happen if this goal is deferred? What would defer it?

## 2:35 – 2:45 Debrief

### Visioning Exercise and Explanation<sup>21</sup>

You are invited to shut your eyes and get comfortable ... this is not quite a guided meditation, but an imagination process ....

- Imagine you are on your way ...
- Now, you are not alone, someone has joined you ...
- Now you are alone again ...
- Now you see a wall, it is blocking the path that you are on ...
- You are on the other side of the wall ... \*longer pause]
- You hear water ...
- You go to the water ...
- Stay at the water a while ...
- Now you are somewhere restful, relaxed and at peace

### Interpretation:

Location	Responses	Meaning
<b>On your way ...</b> What did you see?	<b>common options:</b> walking a path in the forest, most are in a nature setting <b>less common:</b> driving in a car, being in a city	this is how you currently see life
<b>You are not alone ...</b> Who was with them?	<b>common options:</b> family member, Jesus, pet, friend <b>less common:</b> in a crowd (no individual with them), a stranger	this is someone you trust, or you are in a place you are comfortable (if in a crowd)
<b>You are alone again ...</b> How do you feel?	<b>Common option:</b> back to where they were before	

<sup>21</sup> This section took about 10min longer than anticipated.



	they joined someone	
<b>You see a wall ...</b> What kind of wall?	<b>common responses:</b> stone wall, most often high, very wide, usually no doors or windows or openings <b>less common:</b> brick wall, cement	the types of obstacles barriers in your lives
<b>You are on the other side of the wall ...</b>	<b>common responses:</b> climbed over, a door appeared (somewhat magically), just appeared on the other side (really magic) <b>less common:</b> break through the wall, drive through forcefully	How you see problems in life, and how you think they get solved (problems are insurmountable, you can see over them or around them--so a detour, but not a deterrent, problems take force to solve, problems are magically solved, etc.)
<b>You hear water and stay there ...</b> What is the source of the water?	<b>common responses:</b> rivers, creeks, waterfalls <b>less common:</b> oceans, lakes, water pipes dripping (or city settings)	
<b>You stay at the water ...</b> What did you do there? do they jump in? drink? put feet in? not touch the water at all?	<b>common responses:</b> sit by the water, put in feet <b>less common:</b> jump in, drink, (willing to engage relationships rather quickly) or turn back to the water (very cautious about relationships)	this is how you see relationships -do you dive into relationships? are you very reserved? (not touch the water) do you test the relationship? (put in feet?) do you risk? (jump in or drink?)
<b>You are somewhere relaxed and at peace ...</b>	<b>common responses:</b> stay by the water (especially if they are somewhere by water that is familiar), in one's home or room	where you feel safe and secure

*This is based mostly on Jungian analysis.*

**2:40 – 3:00 RITUAL OF HOPE<sup>22</sup>**

<sup>22</sup> The actual end time was 3:30pm.

### **Breaking the Bread:**

We started the day remembering the messiness of ministry  
and the things that daily break us open,  
that make us vulnerable yet oddly accessible.

When we break the bread together we remember that Jesus was strongest and most  
powerful in his weakest moments.  
For us, this broken loaf, is the bread of life.

### **Blessing the Cup** (adapted from M.T. Winter)

We thank-you,  
God our Creator,  
for all the blessings of our living.  
“For the blessings of our traditions, the gospel, the community, our faith.  
For all the blessings this cup represents,  
    the life within,  
    the love poured out,  
    the promise of Christ.

We give you thanks and praise forever. Amen.  
(pass around the chalice and as people offer a thanksgiving they fill the cup a little)  
Thank-you God for...  
Thanks be to God.  
(once the cup is filled)  
For us, this is the cup of blessing.”<sup>23</sup>  
Let us drink then a blessing to one another and a blessing to the world  
when we partake together in this cup.

It takes many different plants to make a garden:  
    different in colour and shape,  
    different in texture and smell,  
    growing in different places  
to create something beautiful.

It takes many different spices to make a good curry:  
    different aromas and flavours,  
    different strengths and heats,  
    blending together  
to create something strong and poignant.

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<sup>23</sup> Miriam Therese Winter, *Woman Prayer Woman Song: Resources for Ritual* (Oak Park: Stone Books, 1985), 201.

Just as it takes many different workers to build the kingdom of God:  
 different skills and abilities,  
 different callings and different passions,  
 all working together as one body  
 to attempt to live out God's mission in the world.

Our God, creates such diversity:  
 A grand party  
 A holy mix.

And our God sends Christ,  
 to bind diverse and sometimes random things together in order to create  
 something stronger and new.

On the night Jesus died,  
 - I think it might have been a party -  
 a party of different people  
 gathered together by Christ.  
 A party where they remembered and celebrated  
 stories of God and God's people,  
 and how God released the enslaved and set the people free.

I bet that party gave them extra strength,  
 bread for the journey  
 food for the long road ahead.

We are told that at this party they ate.  
 And while they ate, Jesus took some bread, thanked God for it,  
 broke it, and gave it to his friends, old and new,  
 saying:  
 "Eat, this is my body broken for you. Do this and remember me."

And while people were drinking and chatting  
 Jesus took a full glass, thanked God and offered it to his friends,  
 saying:  
 "drink, this is my blood, spilt for us all, for humanity, for this broken world"

And to this day we take the cup and eat the bread in remembrance of Jesus,  
 and his parties  
 and his teachings  
 and his passion  
 and his resilience  
 even death could not stop him.

We pray that the spirit touches these elements  
so that when we share in them, we might taste hope  
and foretaste the Kingdom of God.  
Amen.

**Sung Blessing/ Benediction**

## APPENDIX 2

## MINISTRY STRESSORS SURVEY

On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) please rank **(A)** how competent you feel you are in dealing with these situations in your day to day ministry (i.e. do you feel that you have the skills or supports needed to be able to manage these stresses effectively) and **(B)** how content you are with your competency level. For instance, you may find dealing with accumulative grief a 6 on the competency scale, but a 1 on the contentment scale (i.e. you are not happy with your ability to deal with such situations even though you are competent at it).

Please feel free to add more detail and specific situations to this list.

<b>Stressor</b>	<b>(A) Competence</b>	<b>(B) Contentment</b>	<b>B-A</b>
Funerals			
Weddings			
Baptisms			
Confirmation Class/ New Members			
Worship Leadership			
Sermon Preparation			
Accumulative Grief			
Traumatic Events			
Mental Health Issues within your community			
Personal Grief and Loss			
Balancing Social and Professional Life			
Maintaining Professional Relationships			

Stressor	(A) Competence	(B) Contentment	B-A
Maintaining Personal Relationships			
Dealing with: Harassment			
Dealing with: Abusive Behaviour and Bullying			
Dealing with: Theological Conflicts			
Dealing with: Church Polity and Procedures			
Dealing with: Being Scapegoated			
Dealing with: Conflicts with Colleagues (ex. ministerial)			
Church Visioning and Planning			
Church Restructuring			
Church Downsizing and Closure			
Leading Reconciliation Processes			
Staffing Conflicts			
Conflicts within the Congregation			
Power and Leadership Struggles			
Finding Support			

Stressor	(A) Competence	(B) Contentment	B-A
Fear of Failure			
Guilt of Success			
Asking For and Finding Help When Needed			
Discussing Differences			
Job Security/ Finances			
Staying Fresh/ Gathering New Ideas			
Prioritizing			
Balancing Various Expectations			
Maintaining a Personal Spiritual Life			
This List ...			
Other:			
Other:			
Other:			

## Areas to watch for:

Which section are you least content with and what specifically would you like to work on in these areas?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## APPENDIX 3

### INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear (insert invitees name),

I am writing to invite you to a worship renewal experience designed to help worship leaders maintain their passion for ministry, while dealing with the many complex stresses of serving as a minister in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (This could be an excellent use of a study day!) This will be a small gathering--under 12--of passionate ministers who have worship leadership responsibilities. You are invited because you have been identified as someone with a passion for worship.

Our day together will begin at 10:00 a.m. and end at approximately 3:30, with lunch and coffee breaks included. The purpose is to help worship leaders:

- Identify the differences between resiliency, coping, and stress management
- Create and strengthen personal support networks
- Identify areas of natural resilience and to further develop these traits
- Better understand and become more grounded in our mission/goal/ purpose in ministry and to feel renewed/ refreshed in our call/ vocation
- Develop a deeper self-awareness of situations we thrive in and situations that have the potential to overwhelm
- Experience and strengthen ways to spiritually nurture ourselves
- Connect with other worship leaders

All within the context of an interactive worship experience!

This pilot experience is part of my doctorate of ministry project at Drew University (Madison, New Jersey) entitled, "Keeping the fires burning without getting burnt, helping worship leaders maintain their passion for ministry". I am exploring ways to further build resiliency in worship leaders, with the knowledge that the many stresses which ministers face often reveal themselves most publicly in worship. The hope is that the learning and insight gained will be beneficial to a wide range of worship leaders across the continent.

Participants will be asked to commit to the following tasks:

- Attend the one-day renewal event
- Complete a brief and anonymous entrance and exit survey
- Spend some time in prayer and reflection in preparation for the event



The event will be held at a church in the Greater Toronto Area that is accessible by both public transit and car. Unfortunately, we are unable to cover transportation costs, though lunch and snacks will be provided.

If you are interested please fill out this doodle poll <http://doodle.com/mvuims8byba6tzsp> and respond with any dietary or accommodation needs by May 5th. Feel free to call or email with any questions. (See contact information below.)

If you are unable to attend the renewal experience, but would like more information, please let me know. If on Facebook, you are invited to join our Facebook page which will include more information on resiliency, links to resources and additional information on the project.

Thank-you for your consideration and many blessings on your ministry,

Alydia Smith, (Doctoral Candidate, Drew University)

Bronwyn Corlett, (Advisory Committee Member)

## APPENDIX 4

## INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participants,

Bronwyn and I are so excited that you are able to join us on **June 3<sup>rd</sup>, from 10-3:30** at St. Andrew's United Church (Yonge and Bloor). We are praying that this day will help to ignite and sustain your fire for ministry and worship leadership.

Here are the key details:

**Location:**

**St. Andrew's United Church, 117 Bloor Street East (also accessible at 54 Hayden Street), <http://standrewsunited.com/>.**

**Parking:** There is no parking available at St. Andrew's during the day, during the week. There is a "Green P" on Hayden, street parking on Hayden, Church and Charles.

**Warning - Parking may be limited and costly.**

**TTC Directions:** It may be easier for those driving from out of town to park at Kipling, Finch, or North York (Parking is less than \$10/day) and take the subway. St. Andrew's is at Yonge-Bloor Station.

**\*Please get directions from St. Andrew's website:**

**<http://standrewsunited.com/directions-to-st-andrews/>**

**We will provide bus tickets/ tokens for people who are coming via transit or from a station.**

**What to expect:**

- Praising and Singing
- Storytelling and Listening
- Digging and Planting
- Reflecting and Planning
- Eating and Sharing

In other words, expect to engage in a series of worship rituals and spiritual practices designed to help sustain you in your ministry (we will try to not make it too United Churchy – not that there is anything wrong with that). The day is for you, so you will in many ways shape it. There will be lots of space for conversation, reflection and eating.

**What to bring:**

- Yourself
- And a favourite bible (if you wish, there will be lots of bibles there)
- We will provide everything else

**How to contact us:**

If we are missing something and would like to talk further please feel free to give me a call at (\*\*\*)\*\*\* - \*\*\*\* (this is my cell), I will also have it with me on the day.

**Needs or Restrictions:**

If you have any dietary or space needs please let us know.

We will provide gluten-free and vegetarian options, but please let us know if there are any other dietary restrictions.

**Why are we doing this:**

Bronwyn and I both have a passion for worship: we believe it to be a transformational and counter cultural act that has the power to change lives and indeed the world. With such a passion for worship, we have an equal respect and love for worship leaders and want to develop new ways to support them so that we as a church can provide great worship. Current trends in worship leaders 'burning out', 'losing their passion' or changing careers concern us and we are looking for ways to stop this trend. As a result, I (Alydia) am doing doctoral work on how to build resiliency in worship leaders so to avoid symptoms that often lead to burnout. We are looking at informal resiliency models that have been successful in other settings and re-working them for life-in-the-church.

***Bottom Line: we care and we want to support you in your ministry because we know that it is tough and ohh so worth it!***

Sincerely,

**Alydia Smith and Bronwyn Corlett**

## APPENDIX 5

## SERMON AWE-FULLY GOOD SOIL

Scripture: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

**AWE-FULLY GOOD SOIL**

(Alydia Smith, July 2014)

How many of you have heard today's story before? Some of you, I imagine, have heard it more times than you can count? Which retelling of the story do you remember most? *Perhaps it was a passionate Sunday School teacher ... or an angry parent lamenting that their wisdom-filled words are left wasted, scattered on the ground like seeds to be randomly picked at by bored birds looking for worms ...*

The Bible is filled with so many living stories that like old old trees, age, grow and change with us; stories that were once saplings, and were once long long long before that a seed in God's hands. These stories are sacred; they are the substance of our lives: how we define ourselves; how we define others; how we wrestle with the nebulous **why** and **how** of it all: we tell stories, some factual, some not so factual...

I remember telling my nephew the old old story of King David. As he was falling asleep he asked:

***Is that a real story or did you make it up?***

*I didn't make it up, I responded, it's from the Book of Kings.*

***Did it really happen like that?***

*I don't know, I said. But people have been telling this story for more years than I can say, I am not sure if anyone knows what really happened, but thankfully that has not stopped us from sharing it with each other.*

For him, that was a pleasing answer; if the story lived for so long in the lives of people then the story was not only real, it connected us to the people who have been retelling the stories of David for millennia.

*The story was and is fruitful.*

*But even a fruitful story can yield a toxic crop depending on how it is fed, nurtured and cared for.*

In nature, danger comes when we remove diversity, the same is true in the stories we tell. When we try to create a single story; a right story as opposed to the wrong stories, the story will often grow into a strong enough tree, but it will become malignant. It is human nature to simplify, consolidate and to force things into binary packages, creating the illusion of order and understanding. The classic tale (or saga really) of Jacob and Esau reminds us of this tendency (and in its biblical wisdom warns us against it).

Esau is strong	Jacob is weak
Esau is dark	Jacob is light
Esau is hairy	Jacob is smooth
Esau hunts	Jacob cooks
Esau is loved by Dad	Jacob is loved by Mom
Esau loser	Jacob winner

*This binary way of thinking inevitable leads to suffering.*

In binary thinking somebody has to be the loser because binary thinking does not leave room for the ambiguity of a win-win or lose-lose, it does not leave room for the

possibility that both Jacob and Esau could be strong and worthy in their own way. It ultimately leads to suffering and produces bad fruit; things like fear, hate and prejudice.

If we subscribe to one story by denouncing the value of others; if we cannot allow for the diversity of multiple stories and versions living together; if we fail to realize that **“we don’t see things the way they are. We see things the way we are.”** We run the dangerous risk of arrogantly believing that we have a monopoly on the truth. We run the risk of nurturing and yielding bad fruit that future generations will have to make reparation for.

As a church, for over half a century we nurtured and supported the story of what it meant to be a Canadian as truth, neglecting and at times aggressively rejecting the stories of others, particularly the stories of Aboriginal and First Nations people. None of us have, or ever will have, a monopoly on the truth. **“We know only in part ...”**

I think that Jesus spoke in vague, sometimes perplexing stories (often in the form of parables) to avoid the dangers of such all-or-nothing rationale that inevitably leads to a single story. Parables challenge us to move beyond binary thinking; they are purposefully ambiguous, despite the best efforts of many scholars, and despite the very occasional and reluctant interpretations by Jesus himself. Binary thinking is not conducive to the pluralistic life that Jesus calls his followers to. It does not allow for the diversity that God calls us to.

*Hear again the parable of the seed and sower.*

Imagine that you found yourselves as a hard, smooth, beautiful and perfectly packaged seed in a sowers hand. Where would you choose to plant yourself? If you had a choice.

1. Some seeds cling fiercely to the dream of maintaining their perfect package, smooth and neat, encased in a solitary shell of home, church, work or school arranged for their enjoyment and edification. *They chose not to be planted.* Instead, some are shellacked and worn as jewellery or decoration and others are left on a shelf. These seeds slowly dry up and eventually become hollow, losing the life within them, but at least it is still pretty – right?

**You could choose to be a seed that is not planted.**

2. Some seeds decide to sprout, but to avoid the messiness and the gunk of good soil, plant themselves in one of those fancy terrariums filled with rocks that you find in care facilities and doctor's offices, usually in a pretty glass vase where all of its attractive roots and leaves are on display. As long as its beauty lasts it will be watered and cared for, but as soon as some yellow appears on the leaves, or a prettier plant is spotted, it will be thrown away or worse left to die. After all, it was planted to scratch an itch, to aesthetically complete a space; it was meant to be a quick fix. **You could choose to be planted among the rocks.**
3. A few well-intentioned little seeds start out for the good soil but, turned off by the smell of fear, abandon the plan, ending up in the thorns.

No one blames these seeds for being afraid of the Good Soil, because good soil is awful really, because it is literally **fertilized by feces**. It is filled with the bad things of society that conventions would tell us to forget about, ignore, and discreetly flush away. Things like colonialism, racism, sexism, homophobia and the many other forms of systemic oppression; the nasty fruits of binary systems. **You could accidentally be planted among the thorns.**

4. And then there are the brave little pristine seeds, all nice smelling and well-manicured, who take the terrifying plunge into the dirty good soil, defying the conventions of society that tell them that the good soil is awful, messy and not a good place to grow-up in. This seed understands the call to avoid the desire to live life as a perfect package, a Pleasantville-type-of-black-and-white story. Instead the seed has accepted the call to plant itself deep into the scary, stinky and ambiguous soil of God's world. It is a world that is indeed filled with awe...

**You could choose to plant yourself in Good Soil.**

It is here, in the muck, that the brave little seed sheds its protective casing, and trusts that miraculously in the depths of the crap God will unlock the fearless hope and abundance *lovingly planted* in each seed. So that **out of the good soil, generations of blessings will bloom.**

Herein lies wisdom.



Good soil. Real soil. This is where Jesus asks us to plant ourselves for the sake of the world. This is where we are to loosen our protective casing, our comfortable single stories, and ***be nurtured by the stories of others***. Especially stories that break open the messiness of our world: the poverty, the loneliness, the grief, the alienation, the greed, the hatefulness, the hardship of human relationships; the crap.

How will you do that? How will you open yourself to really hear and take in the stories of others? Stories from people not at all like you? Stories that threaten to break your shell a bit?

It may be scary, it may even hurt, but growing hurts sometimes (remember puberty) and we can take comfort in the promises of Jesus: the seed planted in good soil bares fruit some one hundred, some sixty and some thirty fold. Amen.

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