

**A Theology of Disability Toward Faith & Healing**

**A project submitted to the Theological School of  
Drew University in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree,  
Doctor of Ministry**

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## **Abstract**

Ministry often has to address the needs of those who are vulnerable, those in pain and suffering, including people with a range of disabilities. The aim of this current project is to study how Scripture views the issue of disability in the context of ministry. This project focuses on the invisibility of the disabled and probes how the theology of ministry and pastoral care, through the development of spirituality and healing, supports persons with a disability. The project also promotes the notion that ministry for the disabled should never be allowed to rest on the principles of marginality but should shift towards comprehensive inclusivity. The research questions how understanding suffering, healing, and spirituality can be properly integrated into the practice of ministers' daily life and work.

First, the project narrates the author's personal journey in the context of ministry and invisible disability, clarifying the terms of disability and invisible disease syndrome. Second, the work provides a theological reflection on living with a disability, discussing the question of the ministry of healing and faith in theology. In doing so, faith, spirituality, prayer, and healing are discussed in the context of issues raised by a variety of disabilities. Wholeness and transformation versus curative treatments are discussed. Disability is viewed from perspectives of the church and its leadership together with the position and perceptions of a disabled minister. The Book of Ruth is employed for understanding the issue of mental disability from the position of a Biblical narrative.

The work does not address the question of disability, focusing on types of disabilities found in the biblical-historical narratives, dealing with physical impairments, chronic illnesses, mental, and emotional disabilities. Rather, the work covers crucial theological and psycho-spiritual issues that exist in the ministry of the disabled as well as aspects of living with

conditions such as IDS (Invisible Disease Syndrome}. This research clarifies how theology, ministry, and Scripture are able to positively influence these issues. The final outcome of this project is the development of the workbook, *Specialized Ministry*, that offers a paradigm for dealing with cases of disability in any church or denomination.

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**Thesis:** Ministry always involves being present to the pain, suffering, and vulnerability of our parishioners. The issues of disability are very important to anyone in leadership or ministry. How one treats people with disabilities and how a parish includes and welcomes them says a great deal about how we live out the Gospel message. If we are afraid of our own vulnerability and limitations, then we will be uncomfortable and unavailable to the experiences of others. Thus, this project is not about a marginal ministry for the disabled; rather, it is a significant shift to a paradigm of ministry “which is comprehensive, without exclusion.” Wrestling with the issues of disability, suffering, and healing is a struggle with the deeply human questions concerning the meaning of life.

**Narrative:** While this project can be seen as a focus on "specialized ministry," my intention is to highlight the central questions and issues within ministry and for leaders in general. I wish to interface broader issues of ministry with a more particular concern with issues of disability. These issues will be placed within a specific theological context for the purposes of understanding suffering, healing, and spirituality for those who minister. Theological reflection will be used as a means of integrating this understanding in daily life; that is, the reader should expect to gain more than a purely intellectual understanding from the content of this project. It is my hope that it is transformational.

Due to the brevity of this project I will not be dealing with a specific *disability*. The readings I have chosen will cover the experiences of people with a variety of disabilities. When I refer to *disability* I am being inclusive of persons with chronic illnesses, physical, mental, and emotional disabilities, and vision and hearing impairments. I am not referring to people who are

alcoholics, drug users, obese or dealing with phobias. This is not meant to minimize in any way the seriousness of those issues. Rather, this project is designed to deal with disabilities as understood in the biblical-historical context, as well as disabilities that can be recognized but are sometimes ignored within the scope of the church and community. Not all disability is visible, and writing this paper and presenting this project is truly a passion that I hone within.

**Focus:** I will focus on (1) the roles of faith, spirituality, prayer, and healing as they relate to issues of disability, (2) the theological and psycho-spiritual issues of living with disability, (3) how theology, ministry, and scripture impact these issues. Areas to be examined also include: the cycle of grief and depression as stages of death and resurrection; healing in the spiritual journey; mental illness, id, ego, super ego, finding God's strength in weakness; healing, wholeness and transformation versus curative treatments.

**Content: “Specialized Ministry”**

This project focuses on resources drawn from the biblical witness, theology, disability theology, and faith healing. Engaging these resources will help to reference the practical aspects of ministry while concentrating more closely on the invisibility of the disabled. Some of the prominent themes involved are:

- A theology of ministry with people with disabilities
- Pastoral care with people with disabilities and their families
- Spirituality and Healing with disability
- A theology and suffering versus curative approaches



## **Purpose: Project Objectives**

- A. To understand the healing texts of the gospels from a faith perspective that embraces healing and views people with disabilities from the spiritual lens of Christ's love.
- B. To be able to incorporate ideas and strategies for ministry that will enable clergy to develop inclusive and welcoming faith communities where they serve, thus allowing people to find meaning and purpose in life, as they deal with loss and suffering.

## **Scholarly Resources and Materials:**

Augsberg, David. *Caring Enough to Confront*.

Barrette, Gene. "Spiritual direction in the Roman Catholic tradition." *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 30

Blythe, Teresa A. *50 Ways to Pray: Practices from Many Traditions and Times*

Cone, James H. *God of the Oppressed*

Creamer, Deborah Beth. *Disability and Christian Theology: Embodied Limits and Constructive Possibilities*

Creamer, Deborah. "Finding god in our bodies: Theology from the perspective of people with disabilities, part II." *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 2, no. 2

Eiesland, Nancy L. *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability*

Herzog, Albert A. *The Social Contexts of Disability Ministry: A Primer for Pastors, Seminarians, and Lay Leaders*

Kidd, Anthony. "Disability Makes a Church Strong." *DesiringGod.com*

King Jr., Martin Luther. "Acceptance Speech." *Nobelprize.org*

Law, Eric H.F. *The Word at the Crossings. Living the Good News in a Multicontextual Community*

Leong, Elaine. *A Christian Approach to Overcoming Disability: A Doctor's Story*

Miller J.E. *The Art of Listening in a Healing Way*

Newell, Christopher. *Voices in Disability and Spirituality from the Land Down Under: Outback to Outfront*

Nouwen, Henri J.M., Michael J. Christensen, and Rebecca J. Laird. *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*

Rohr, Richard. *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*

Rohr, Richard. *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*

Schuele, Andreas and Günter Thomas. *Who is Jesus Christ for Us Today*

Sullivan, Winnifred Fallers. *A Ministry of Presence: Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care, and the Law*

Tataryn, Myroslow and Maria Truchen-Tataryn. *Discovering Trinity for Disability: A Theology of Embracing Difference*

United States Census Bureau. *2008 American Community Survey Data*

Willimon, William H., *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*

Personal Narrative Interviews

The Book of Ruth

New Testament Scriptures

**Timeline:**

**January 31, 2018**

1. Christology
2. Ministry & Disability
3. Healing vs. Cure
4. Specialized Ministry
5. Scripture and Disability
6. Methodologies and Christology

**February 1, 2018**

Evaluation, Learning curve, Experience

Why is this important to me?

Healing vs. Cure

Transformational Healing

Theological Method

**April 15, 2018**

Final Project Draft Submitted

## **Introduction**

### **A Ministry of Healing & Faith in Theology**

People with disabilities have always been a part of society, but whether or not they are included depends on the openness of their community and the opportunities provided them. The same applies to the church, which chooses to either shun the disabled and make them invisible or actively engage in their inclusion and encourage participation. A minister takes the responsibility of providing spiritual guidance to the members of their community. Thus, he or she has to embrace as wide range of the population as is possible. This implies diversity not only along the lines of gender, age, race, and social status but also across differences in physical and mental capacity to perceive preaching and the Holy Scriptures. As our society strives to become more and more inclusive, we adapt to all perspectives of life and educate people in order to combat discrimination. This is the right direction for the church to progress in as well. In order to reach this ambitious target, there has to be education for the ministers and other religious leaders, as well as the members of congregation, teaching them how to avoid discriminating against the disabled.

Disabled people face numerous obstacles and challenges in their daily life that include difficulties in employment, relationships, and academic pursuits. If a church becomes a place of discrimination rather than joy, relaxation, and diversion, it means that one of its crucial targets is not fulfilled, as it is said, “Those who listen to instruction will prosper; those who trust the Lord will be joyful.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, learning not to discriminate in order to bring joy to the lives of faithful people who have disabilities is essential for ministers and members of a congregation.

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 16:20.

One way to create a united community is to encourage participation of the disabled in various church activities and to be dedicated to providing special attention to their needs. Primarily, physical access to the church should be offered to people with special needs, so they may feel comfortable enough in attending services. Nevertheless, psychological and attitudinal inclusivity may play an even greater role than the physical access. A minister can offer special services of counseling or prayer, depending on the needs of persons with disabilities. Sharing the news about Jesus Christ, the Gospel, and other crucial Biblical messages may be of particular necessity for the disabled and their families. In the case when disabilities involve some mental or intellectual impairment, a minister's personal involvement can be especially helpful, and joyful. A minister can make sure that people with disabilities and their families benefit from God's love by providing more thorough spiritual support, explanation, and counseling.

Addressing the topic of disability and ministry, Elaine Leong Eng describes the encouragement model using the acronym "LIFE."<sup>2</sup> The elements of the model cover the essentials of encouragement that can be provided to the disabled in the church community. "L" stands for listening, which should be done by a minister effectively enough as to meet the emotional needs of the disabled and needy. "I" indicates the inspiration needed for the disabled and their family members to be motivated towards development and personal fulfillment in life. "F" is "to foresee," which presumes that a minister should give a disabled person hope for a better future, the vision of improving circumstances, and an expectation that God's plans for the person's life are amazing. "E" means "to engage," presuming that a minister has to find some specific approach to connect with the disabled person and to deliver the message; this is most commonly reached via dialogue or counseling.

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<sup>2</sup> Elaine Leong Eng, *A Christian Approach to Overcoming Disability: A Doctor's Story*. Routledge, 2004, xi.

In order to ensure that discrimination is eradicated within the church community as a whole, one of the minister's tasks is teaching the congregation members to be non-discriminating, inclusive, and supportive. This target may be reached by organizing awareness services, which would be dedicated to the needs of the disabled and illustrate how others may help them. Moreover, awareness meetings should be organized regularly, so that the issue is constantly upheld as relevant. A minister may effectively discuss the challenges of the disabled and the need to serve them and, after gaining a family's permission, discuss their issues for the purpose of teaching and learning how to approach and support them as they struggle with the burden of a disability. Needless to say, a minister has to have done their own personal work to understand how insidious discriminatory thoughts and traits are in relations to disability. This is a critical first step as leaders to foster trust and understanding in the congregation.

Yet, such an approach may not suit all people with disabilities, as their expectations of support and inclusivity will naturally be diverse. It is suggested that some people would prefer not to be singled out for their disability but simply treated as the rest of the congregation. Such equality may be in reality even harder to attain than special attention and support. Compassion is a significant feature taught by Christ's church, while the possible downside of compassion may be seen as a harmful pity that produces discomfort. A part of compassion is to recognize and respect anyone with a disability. Compassion is not allowing one's own need to care for or show pity to overtake boundaries or lead to a disrespectful engagement.

## **Ministers with Disabilities**

Another situation to be considered is when a minister or a minister-to-be has some form of disability. The nature of Christ's church implies a great capacity for inclusivity, which should mean diversity not only in composition of congregation but in ministry as well. It is the all-encompassing approach of the church that should make it possible for a minister with disabilities to embark on the path of service. A minister should have the full capacities of intellect, empathy, and emotional connection with people in order to serve, so that his or her perceptions are not distorted. Though, in the circumstances of some intellectual or mental disability, the potential of ministry may be rather restricted and thus not desirable.

The perspective of a minister who himself or herself is disabled can make a particularly significant contribution to supporting congregation members with disabilities and their families. Such a minister could illustrate the urge for non-discrimination in church and also provide a perfect example of strength and faith in Christ. Finally, the choice of such minister illustrates that this community is already compassionate, inclusive, and understanding enough to perceive people with disabilities as equal.

## **Invisible Disease Syndrome**

A person with a disability clearly visible to the others may expect support and compassion in relation to his or her environment. However, there are many whose serious health problems cannot be easily distinguished, and therefore they have to correspond to the similarly strict demands as their counterparts. The Invisible Disease Syndrome (IDS), or invisible illness, refers to conditions that are not visible to the others but that produce pain, discomfort, and limitations in one's life. IDS may encompass a range of chronic illnesses, different forms of pain, or other severe conditions, which have lasting effect. A person who has survived a major medical

issue like stroke or cancer may have IDS, which is associated with poor health outcomes and related limitations.

Ministry is still possible for those with IDS; they may fulfill their responsibilities in full scope despite the personal challenges. A minister with IDS would presumably be even more compassionate towards people because of their individual hardship and bitter experience. Although such people are not guaranteed support and understanding similarly to the disabled, they also learn to cope and become brilliant ministers. This ordeal and the necessity of coping with a hardship that is not equaled to a handicap can make a minister with IDS rather vulnerable on the one hand and stronger and more supportive of the congregation, especially its disabled members, on the other hand.

### **Church Benefits from Disability**

The disabilities of congregation members make a church a more inclusive place that is able to introduce a greater change in community. If a church embraces the diversity of its followers, it teaches the entire community to be compassionate and prevents discrimination not only towards disability but also in other crucial aspects as well. In his article dedicated to the role of disability in church, the Pastor Anthony Kidd argues, “Families with disabled children have too much to teach the church about the gospel to remain at the periphery.”<sup>3</sup> Kidd’s point is simple: the life and struggles of families, especially those with the disabled family members should be not concealed from the wider community. Instead, he illustrates both the challenge and the ways it is overcome. Particularly, if this example is successful, it can be of great use for the church and community.

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony Kidd, “Disability Makes a Church Strong,” *Desiring God*, Accessed on April 17, 2017. <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/disability-makes-a-church-strong>



A church may also greatly benefit from a ministry in which functions are performed by a person with disabilities. A disabled minister would represent the inclusivity of a church, similar to the Kingdom of Heaven. Greater understanding within the community would guarantee comfortable access for disabled people to the church services. If a church has a minister with IDS, the practical benefit is also in his or her capacity to serve the community with no discrimination. Finally, inclusivity has a notably reciprocal nature, which implies that people learn from each other to the benefit of all members of a congregation and community.

### **The Book of Ruth**

The Holy Bible may be a source of many inspirational stories of healing, faith, and salvation, which can be used by ministers addressing different cases of disability. The Book of Ruth illustrates a story of faith, trust, and allegiance, which helped a devastated woman to overcome the challenges she faced in life. The example derived from the biblical story may be successfully applied in circumstances of disability, IDS, grief, depression, and other related psychological distresses or problems. Although Ruth suffers from bereavement, she does not abandon her faith in God and loyalty to Naomi, following the designated path. The story illustrates that adherence to God's plans bring happiness and joy in the consequence. As the Book of Ruth teaches trust in the divine plans, disability also requires a person to maintain a faith as strong as a rock in order to be happy. Loss and bereavement suffered by Ruth can be as bitter as the challenges of the disabled and particularly the parents of disabled children. Yet, this suffering and challenges should not deprive a person of faith, and it is this message that a minister can successfully deliver to people with disability with the help of the Ruth's inspirational story.

## **Ministry**

The essence of servant ministry is service entirely dedicated to God as performed through the support, guidance, and assistance a person is able to give to other people. Jesus Christ elucidates the notion of ministry for me, “even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, ministry done in the context of a church community should be perceived as participation of the ministry that was initiated by Christ. This divine ministry follows the ultimate goal of bringing all people to the Kingdom of Heaven, and the work of each individual minister should be done in this direction, regardless of how small one`s contribution is. The meaning of ministry should not be confused with mere theology or preaching, since the scope of this term can be perceived much wider. Ministry encompasses the potential of these notions but it is complemented by love, compassion, the knowledge of psychology, and simple kindness to people.

## **Faith**

Faith is the scope of assurance and trust that a person has in God, while living faith is manifested via dedicated service to God. True Christian faith is predominantly about the confidence one has in their personal relationship with God. It can be interpreted as the trust that two people have between themselves, a trust that is foundational for love. The strength of faith is not in mere theory but in its practical embodiment, as it is stated in the Book of Psalms, “Unless the Lord builds the city, its builders labor in vain.”<sup>5</sup> The inspiring interpretation of these words by Elaine Leong Eng<sup>6</sup> is that living faith should be present in any undertaking of a believer`s life,

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 20:28.

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 127:1.

<sup>6</sup> Elaine Leong Eng, *A Christian Approach to Overcoming Disability: A Doctor's Story*, 49.

be it ministry or common manual activity. Thus, faith can be viewed as the constant practice of trust, obedience, service, and confidence in God.

### **Healing**

In the context of ministry, healing can be viewed as bringing wholeness and reconciliation to a person's life. Healing can be confused with curing, but the latter encompasses only the treatment of disorders that can be addressed by medical professionals. However, the scope of healing is much wider, as it implements the wholeness of human well-being as it is reached with the help of faith in and love from God. Healing can be attained by the good news of the Gospels and the active support of ministers who understand what a specific person needs in his or her life circumstances. The complexity of healing is in the need to make a person feel mentally and spiritually whole, even if physical perfection cannot be restored. True healing encompasses the concept of the total good of a person, which is achieved through spiritual well-being and faith. Elaine Leong Eng<sup>7</sup> suggests that healing should include counseling, ministry, prayers, and education in order to bring healing to a person, particularly those who suffer from trauma or stress.

### **Disability**

There are a variety of ways to view disability, but it mostly encompasses physical or mental limitation. A disabled person may have limited movements or activities he or she has access to; additionally, there are various mental disabilities, which limit one's scope of understanding and thinking. Even in civil society disability carries associated stigma, while in the Christian tradition, it may be even seen as a sign of sin that is present in the disabled person

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 95.

or their relatives.<sup>8</sup> It is also possible that a person has an invisible form of disability or IDS, for instance stroke survivors or people with PTSD. It is essential for ministers to realize the need for inclusivity in church as well as an emphasis on not stigmatizing people with disabilities.

Disability should not mean that a person does not deserve to benefit from the grace of God.

Moreover, while not every disability can be cured from the medical standpoint, there is the scope of spiritual healing of a person, which is more vital for one's spiritual well-being.

Finally, the discussed terms are closely interconnected, as ministry addressing the needs of people with disability has to apply the potential of healing and faith to each case. Yet, a minister should also deliver a message that emphasizes spiritual healing and not physical perfection. It is possible that people with disabilities may not be healed in church. Much more significant than physical healing is spiritual healing, which delivers wholeness, joy, and happiness in the light of Christ's love. The role of disabled people and their participation can mean a great deal to a church, which becomes more inclusive and engaging. Ministers with disability or IDS can also play a pivotal role in contributing to the nondiscriminatory treatment of disabled people as well as other diverse groups. Thus, awareness about disability in church is an urgent issue, which should be addressed to change the lives of thousands.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.,104.

## Chapter 1.

### The Journey

Many people suppose that the human journey starts with a first breath at the moment when a child is born. However, this is not the truth for all, as many people do not realize their true potential till the end of their days and do not live a full life. There are lucky few who can hear the voice from within in childhood and follow it; they begin their journeys early and become rather fruitful along their paths. For many, their lives divide into “before” and “after,” and Father Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest, suggests that there can be two halves of life along the spiritual path. What is more, according to this theologian it is the second part of life that becomes filled to the maximum after the person realizes that he or she has to embark on a journey.<sup>9</sup>

Rohr discusses this journey in the terms of the “monomyth of the hero,”<sup>10</sup> which is present in different mythologies and religions under different titles. During such a journey a person undergoes challenges, changes their way of thinking, meets new people, and completes different tasks. It is indicated by Rohr that the early life of a hero is spent in an ordinary world, which seems to be sufficient until some change or problem appears. So, the journey is undertaken due to an inner call that urges a person to move. The final result of such a journey is the transformation of a hero or a heroine, and a state when he or she “knows the place for the first time.”<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, this journey is fruitful as it “is always an experience of an excess of

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*, (New York: Jossey Bass, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

life, a surplus of energy, with plenty left over for others.”<sup>12</sup> So, it is natural for such a hero to pass along what was learned during the challenges.

My personal life experience has not entailed an event that gave me my faith and divides my life into a clear before and after. I would suggest that during my life journey I always understood that my life is connected with the Church and God, as it was a part of my existence from early childhood. There was no one exact moment that told me that God exists, as this knowledge has been part of me seemingly forever. However, the call to become a minister and to preach to people did not arise at once. It came in development over time as I grew into my personality and was choosing what I should do in my life, and then God spoke. At that time I did not have a disorienting dilemma, which would separate me from my loved ones, as they have always been nearby and ready to support me, and that has been a blessing.

Still, there was a trigger that stimulated me to be more effective and persistent on my path. Several years ago, in 2006, I had a stroke that shattered my life and changed my understanding of things. This is one reason why I feel compelled to present this project. Rohr claims that “Much of the work of midlife is to tell the difference between those who are dealing with their issues through you and those who are really dealing with you.”<sup>13</sup> So, I learned through my own experience what it means that people do not need you much when you are in trouble yourself. It was in this experience of clearance, that the unnecessary people just disappeared and the dependable ones revealed themselves in full. Yet, the most striking realization was that whatever happens and whoever leaves you, it is God who remains the closest. I had always believed that my faith was very strong, but nothing compared to the solid unwavering faith given me by God as I survived the stroke and became strong again.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Rohr, *Falling Upward*, 2011.

What is important about this new part of my life is the urgent need to spend every moment with efficiency and to help others. I have much experience to pass on, and I started to serve at the ministry much more vigorously. Moreover, I dedicated myself to writing several books that would be helpful to the others who suffered from disease, as I wanted to show that the love of our Father can make true miracles. This marked the moment when a new kind of journey began. It was as if it were a transformation from a life selfishly filled with the love of God as if it were only for and about me into a life full of understanding that there are plenty of others who need the light of His love too.

While in recovery and dealing with depression from PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), Aphasia, Neuropathy and IDS (Invisible Disease Syndrome), I began to see life differently. God was shifting me, and my faith became even stronger. Because of my faith, and how it's allowed me—or should I say helped me—break through barriers, I want to share my life and my testimony with the world. It's my hope that as I explore the pathways of my life, and openly share my living faith, that someone's life would be transformed. In *Disability Theology*, Debra Creamer provides a clear sense of what disability means. She notes that, “Disability theology explores the ways in which religious traditions have engaged (or failed to engage) notions of disability and impairment, and offers constructive possibilities for inclusive theological work in the future.”<sup>14</sup> I present four primary models of disability (moral model, medical model, social model, and limits model) and explore how these relate to religious understandings and practices. The image of the Disabled God is highlighted, as are the ways this field has come to engage varieties of disability experiences (including cognitive disabilities and autism) and diversity more broadly. Philosophical notions (such as those around normalcy or human flourishing) are explored alongside advocacy and access issues (particularly with regard

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<sup>14</sup> Deborah Beth Creamer, *Journal of Religion in Disability and Rehabilitation*, 1995.

to religious practices such as preaching, religious education, and biblical interpretation). Future possibilities and directions for disability theology are also proposed. This was profound, churches and communities are in the dark regarding those with disabilities, and need to be informed. If ministers, leaders, and those in our communities are to understand the meaning of disability, I believe that the churches, and communities need to be more united, and foster a deeper concern for people who have disabilities.

Deborah Creamer defines a clear overview of disability theology. In her view, disability theology begins with the observation that experiences of impairment (physical, intellectual, psychological, and social) are a significant and relatively unsurprising element of human life, and as such are worthy of theological reflection.<sup>15</sup> From her perspective, there is no single approach to disability theology because understandings of disability as well as styles of theology vary widely across contexts. Yet, most share a few common elements, including attention to embodiment as a source for theological reflection, a belief that there is nothing inherently wrong with a person who experiences disability, a commitment to justice for people with disabilities, and a fundamental conviction that theology and disability have something significant to say to each other.<sup>16</sup>

The first task of any theology of disability is to define the word “disability” itself. Our commonsense understanding of this word might make definitions seem unnecessary, at least at first. Most of us would say that we know what disability is, and we recognize it when we see (or otherwise encounter) it. Yet when we do not pause to ask ourselves what we mean by disability, we let our unexamined assumptions block our ability to engage disability more fully. For one

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<sup>15</sup> Deborah Beth Creamer, *Journal of Religion in Disability and Rehabilitation*, 1995.

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



thing, this leads us to think about disability in particularly narrow ways (e.g., stereotypical portrayals of wheelchair users, blind and deaf people, and those with developmental disabilities), leading us to ignore the vast diversity of people with disabilities, let alone the diversity of disability experiences themselves. We too easily forget that people with disabilities hold a wide variety of other identity characteristics as well (such as gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, political views, etc.) and that each experience of disability is somewhat unique (for example, not all wheelchair users or people with Down Syndrome are the same). This lack of attention to definition also leads us to simply skip over harder inquiries such as whether experiences like depression, PTSD, or obesity might count as disability, or answering such questions without pausing to ask what we mean by disability. Second, this leads us to caricaturize disability rather than to engage it complexly, and so we imagine it to be primarily an experience of loss, we imagine people with disabilities as worthy of either pity or admiration, and we rest more on cartoonish imaginations than on thoughtful engagement with the complexity of life with disability. Finally, our unexamined assumptions about disability lead many of us to think about disability as an “other” experience – something that is unusual, a rupture to normal life, and something we only need to think about when it happens to us or someone we care about a perspective that is surprisingly at odds with data that shows that that as many as one in five residents of the United States report some level of disability,<sup>17</sup> that many of us have experiences that fall on a continuum with disability or that benefit from accommodation (eyeglasses to help us read, hearing aids to assist with hearing, curb cuts that assist with strollers), or that most of us are likely to experience significant impairment at some point in our lives, particularly as we age. Most of us live with illusions about disability and non-disability, without ever pausing to ask

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<sup>17</sup> Census Bureau, 2008.

what values such understandings evoke.

Many disability studies scholars and theologians have identified at least four different models of how to think about disability: moral, medical, social, and limits. Within the moral model, attention is paid to how disability is interpreted as either good or bad, and how people with disabilities are imbued with moral weight. This can be observed in literary depictions from Shakespeare and Dickens to comic books and reality TV shows, where a villain is often marked with some sort of hideous scar or deformity or where a person with a disability is immediately identified as a hero and simultaneously as deserving of pity simply in the basis of their impairment, long before we know anything else about their character or life story. Religious studies scholars pay particular attention to the ways in which disability is attributed moral value in sacred texts, from Leviticus 21:16–24 which forbids anyone with a blemish from approaching the altar, to stories of Jesus in the Christian gospels that seem to equate belief and faithfulness with physical healing. A modern companion to the moral model is the medical model, which understands bodies to be like machines that work to greater and lesser extent, and where disability is identified as a defect in the body. While perhaps less obviously so, this model is still thick with value claims, particularly insofar as bodies with significant “defects” are considered to be less desirable (and thus, less good) than those without, and in which the preference is always towards modification: to fix the defect if one can, to normalize it as much as possible if it cannot be fixed, and to hide it if neither fixing nor normalizing are effective. These two models are so embedded in the dominant United States culture that most of us do not even recognize them as interpretations, but instead either treat them as accurate and sufficient depictions (e.g. assuming that every experience of disability is best understood as a problem or defect to be fixed) or simply do not even notice them at all (e.g., failing to recognize that the villain so often

has a scar or limp).

Many disability studies scholars and advocates challenge the assumption that these interpretations are the best ways to make sense of disability. The social model, based on the principles of disability rights advocacy, parallels in some ways the commitments of liberation theology or of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. It begins by noting the ways in which disability is a minority group experience insofar as people with disabilities experience prejudice, exclusion, and discrimination in employment, housing, recreational opportunities, and countless other aspects of life. It goes beyond this observation, though, to challenge our idea of disability itself. Rather than equating disability with physical (including cognitive or emotional) impairment, the social model suggests that the “problem” of disability lies in society itself in architecture, attitudes, and assumptions. This model suggests, for example, that if physical spaces were sufficiently accessible, the inability to walk or see would not be disabling. Or, similarly, it proposes that if we were to engage people with disabilities as people first, rather than as diagnoses or (im)moral caricatures, we could go a long way toward addressing the problem of disability. In other words, this model changes the emphasis from a person who cannot navigate an environment to that of an environment (physical, social, and so on) that excludes certain people based simply on a perceived difference. One can easily see similarities here to other liberation movements, which claim, for example, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. so prophetically stated that “people should not be judged on the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”<sup>18</sup>(King 1963). This social model of disability has become the foundation for most advocacy and scholarly work on disability today.

The limits model takes this a step further by questioning our assumptions about what it is

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<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. *“I Have a Dream” Speech*, <https://www.nobelprize.org>, Accessed March 28, 2018.

to be “normal” or “disabled” in the first place. It highlights impairment as an unsurprising aspect of the human condition, something that we all experience at some point in our lives. Not only do our lives often progress toward impairment (e.g., as we age or take risks in life), but also we are surrounded by limits (which we do not consistently describe as impairment) all the time—we cannot fly, we experience scarcity in natural resources, we all tire and die. Human life is, in so many ways, an experience of limitations. This model observes that our notion of “normal” is an illusion, and a dangerous one at that. Instead of cementing disability as a distinct and separate category of otherness, this lens encourages us to consider the ways in which limits are normal, unsurprising, fluid, and even good. While rejecting sappy notions such as “we are all disabled,” this model allows us to engage and assess the particularities and specificities embodied in each experience of disability. For example, under this model we can observe that it is a bit absurd to lump together a person who is blind from birth, a person who uses a wheelchair as the result of a skiing accident, a stroke victim such as myself, or a person with Down Syndrome, as if they all have something in common simply by virtue of being labeled with disability. Similarly, we can ask why it is we interpret a wheelchair as a sign of disability (rather than as a piece of technology that assists the human journey, as does a car, calculator, or eyeglasses), or what life would look like if we highlighted more positive characteristics of disability—like creativity, interdependence, or perseverance—rather than defining disability as an experience we would like to avoid as much as possible.

As disability theology developed from Nancy Eiesland’s initial proposal, *The Disabled God*<sup>19</sup> attempts in numerous ways to reveal and deconstruct the impairments of the moral and medical models, and to build upon the constructive possibilities embodied in the social and limits

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<sup>19</sup> Nancy Eiesland, *The Disabled God, Toward a Liberator Theology of Disability*, (Nashville: Abington Press, 1994).

models. Additional images of God that embrace disability have been offered, such as the Interdependent God (Black 1996), which proposes that God is not a giant puppeteer who causes impairment but rather that God is present in the midst of life and the midst of suffering, the Authentic God (Creamer 1994), where God authentically claims I AM rather than assigning or accepting value based narrowly on ability or capacity, or the Accessible God (Block 2002), which highlights the stories of Jesus welcoming all to sit and eat with him, and with particular attention to those who were typically considered unwelcome. Others built on these liberatory images and carried them forward into particular contexts and practices of ministry, such as preaching, religious education, biblical interpretation, and other elements of religious practice. Still others explored religion as it emerged within communities that intentionally include people with disabilities, such as those within the expansion of the Theology of Disability field.

As scholars built on this early work in disability theology, the field gained depth and complexity. One significant development relates to the creative potential in the image of God (the *imago Dei*). Eiesland's proposal of the Disabled God as a sip-puff wheelchair user, or of an impaired Christ with visible scars on his hands and feet, was clearly revolutionary in ways that resembled James Cone's proposal of the Black Jesus (Cone 1975) or of feminist theologians' suggestions that we consider God as a woman. But a wheelchair using God was not as impossible to imagine as some of the proposals that came next. What if we propose a Deaf God? Or, perhaps more provocatively, what if we imagine God with a cognitive disability or mental illness? Reflection on intellectual disability in particular not only raised a challenge against anthropocentric models of God (i.e., that imagining God as a person may have creative potential but also carries significant dangers and limitations) but also highlighted some of the problematic assumptions of the social model, particularly the implied claim that people with disabilities are

“just as good” as the non-disabled, where “good” actually meant competent, smart, capable, and so on. Theological engagement with experiences of autism, stroke, IDS, Down Syndrome, or profound intellectual disability has also led to interesting epistemological questions around what it means to be human and how we attribute value to individuals and relationships. Attention to such issues continues to be one of the most provocative areas in disability theology today.

A second significant development focuses on more complex concepts beyond the image of God, interrogating the core assumptions of disability models and representations more deeply. Some of this work emphasizes the inadequacies of the social model and the need for additional ways of thinking about disability, but it also highlights the instability of disability identity itself. Drawing on insights from postcolonial and queer theories, this stream of work rejects not only the hierarchical structure but also the binary division of able and disabled, and proposes that “normal” is nothing but an illusion—one that is dangerous, deceitful, and needs significant deconstruction. Thus, a dis-abled reading, or a disability theology, is not only a more liberatory perspective than the alternatives, but is, in many ways, the only legitimate option. This awareness offers openings for a critical analysis of structures, conventions, and worldviews that go far beyond what we typically think of as residing narrowly within the category of disability. A third significant development will be introduced as this project transitions more fully to scholarly analysis and away from personal narrative, a development that I call “Specialized Ministry.”

While disability theology has come a long way in a very short time, much work remains to be done. As with disability studies more broadly, disability theology has been largely inattentive to issues of race, ethnicity, and class, and has only had minimal engagement with queer studies. Without greater attention to intersectionality, disability theology will likely remain a segmented field, and will fail to benefit from the theoretical work already done in these other

fields, let alone represent fully the lives of real people—such as myself—who live with disabilities and who also hold other identity characteristics.

As disability theology continues to move toward greater complexity, it will continue to stretch and challenge our notions of disability. This will likely include greater recognition of the diversity of experiences of disability, both that people with similar impairments may still have very different perspectives on disability and theology (e.g., that there can be no single “Deaf Theology” or “Theology of Autism”) and that disability includes experiences that have not yet received much theological attention (e.g., chronic pain, IDS, neuropathy). One might look to earlier contextual theologies, such as feminist theology and Black theology, to imagine ways in which disability theology might grow, including a possible division into those that claim a redemptive core to the tradition and thus engage in historical reconstruction as opposed to those who might find Christianity to be based on problematic notions of healing and histories of oppression and, as a result, to be largely irredeemable or in need of new models and practices. At the same time, it is important to recognize that disability differs in gender, race, and other identity markers in significant ways, particularly in its fluidity and porousness. Disability will need to take its distinctiveness seriously, claiming its unique perspective and niche while simultaneously continuing to push religious studies more broadly to engage disability and for disability studies to attend more carefully to religious themes and practices.

Finally, in the midst of all these theoretical explorations, it is essential to recognize that disability still remains a significant issue of civil rights. People with disabilities experience some of the highest levels of poverty and unemployment within any group in the United States and are disproportionately the victims of crime and abuse. Current political challenges to health care funding, government programs, and rights-based legislation makes this population even more

vulnerable. Such issues require the attention of churches, communities, other religious entities, both to address ways in which worship and faith can be models of inclusion and access that will speak to the issues of the disabled more broadly, which can lead them on a path of faith and healing.

### **Religious Tradition in Transition**

The spiritual path of many people develops in searching, analysis, and change. It is common for parents to pass their beliefs and understanding of God or other divine beings on to their children. This garners varied responses, and whereas many people follow the path of their parents and past generations, still others resist and spend a great deal of time and effort in their spiritual exploration. I am one of those happy people who were brought to Church by my parents and that found consistency and harmony in their traditions and beliefs. As a result, I did not need to spend additional effort in searching for and choosing my spiritual path, as I saw it very clearly laid out in front of me. This does not mean that I failed to explore the Church itself and the Word of God, rather I tried to study it in depth, and it made my faith and understanding much stronger.

My heroine's journey, as Rohr would refer to it, is a lifelong one. To my benefit, my religious tradition has been very supportive and I constantly experience a solid support structure in my background. My choice to become a minister was made long ago, and at that time I was young, strong, and full of energy that I wanted to pass to the others. My faith did not have a beginning, an abrupt end, and beginning of the new life in God as it often happens with people who are forced to believe by some powerful external circumstances. My spiritual path developed in constant transition as I met new people, witnessed the transformations of others, and realized that the Hand of God is in many deeds and situations we encounter in our lives.



A great support in my transformational spiritual path was made by the Life Changing Word Church International that I truthfully belong to. This has been my shelter for my entire life, and the ministry of this great Church has shaped much of my understanding of God. I have virtually grown up in this Church, so I experience a deep connection with this establishment, especially when I became an active participant in it. The LCWCI is a non-denominational church, and this fact strengthens my connection with all people as it helps to eliminate denominational barriers. LCWCI understands community, and doesn't stigmatize you. I remember when I was able to attend church for the first time, and my husband at the time took me. I was just getting out of the wheelchair, and using a walker. With that being said, I felt love, and not pity. I felt God's presence in that church.

What is even more important, it is this Church that did not leave me when I was in my health disaster after the stroke. As I learned that there are people who stayed in my life and people who left, I realized that a majority of those who supported me in hard times belonged to my Church. This fact made me much stronger in the second part of my life that unfolded after the stroke, as I came to understand that I have a task worth struggling for. Moreover, Church teaches us to be thankful, and I felt a call to return to people the love and support that I experienced through the powers of ministry. So, in the second part of my life I am an even more dedicated follower, a devoted minister, and a sister to all of my Church followers.

Rohr claims, "Sin happens whenever we refuse to keep growing."<sup>20</sup> I have comprehended the need to be more adaptable, to change, and to be more open to the signs that God sends me through life experiences and encounters with other people. Again, my multi-cultural Church has always been encouraging in relation to change as it is an essential part of more effective

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<sup>20</sup> (Rohr n.d.)

ministry. “The ego is that part of you that loves the status quo, even when it's not working.”<sup>21</sup>

These words of Rohr can reflect my transformation in the second half of my life because I have been in a constant struggle with my resisting ego. Even now I follow constant dialogue within, which is directed at becoming more open to the world again and more easily perceiving the new concepts that God has allowed in my path. My faith and healing is an indication that God is still present.

My religious tradition has been continuously with me, but I had to undergo an inner transformation in order to comprehend its depth and accept it fully. Even now when I think that my faith is at its highest point, I am open to the possibility that further in my life it will be challenged by God again and further fortified. I know that my Church will still support me and I will find consolation and support at every pivotal turn of my spiritual path.

### **The Work of Mirroring**

The concept of mirroring suggested by Richard Rohr promotes sincere and clear visioning and reflection of God.<sup>22</sup> The selection of the mirror symbol is a perfect explanation of the mutual love that can be developed in the true prayer of a spiritual follower. A mirror is an object that reflects anything that is in front of it without distortion. The clearer the mirror, the more distinct and precise the reflection. Rohr introduces the concept of ultimate mirroring, which implies that a person can receive the gaze of God: “Like any true mirror, the gaze of God receives us exactly as we are” (Rohr).<sup>23</sup> With the notion of ultimate mirroring, Rohr speaks to the utmost sincerity of relations of a follower with God and even with the inner self.

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<sup>21</sup> (Rohr n.d.)

<sup>22</sup> (Rohr n.d.)

<sup>23</sup> (Rohr n.d.)

Mirroring mostly works in deep and sincere prayer, but people may have different experiences depending on the level of their engagement in praying. In my personal experience, mirroring is the process that helps me to be open to the fullness of myself before God. There are frequently thoughts and feelings that we tend to suppress and not confess, even to ourselves. This attitude creates a barrier between a person and God, so the mirroring becomes unclear and the reflection becomes blurred. Mirroring is the elimination of any barriers which may exist between oneself and God.

In my attempts to reach ultimate mirroring I continuously check if anything is left disguised or hidden in my soul. The ability to uncover the most controversial and unpleasant thoughts and attitudes leads me to better mirroring. I have a quote that I use often, “Every girl deserves a good mirror.”<sup>24</sup> We have to be mindful of who we are engaging, and who’s life we are mirroring. We are always being watched, and need to think before we act or respond. Moreover, this process entails recognition that God is ultimately merciful and benevolent, so I don’t have to be fearful of anything. As long as I am completely honest, I will be always forgiven. Rohr claims, “every time God forgives us, God is saying that God's own rules do not matter as much as the relationship that God wants to create with us.”<sup>25</sup>

Another important concept Rohr proclaims is that “we seem to be ‘mirrored’ into life by the purpose, love, and needed challenge.”<sup>26</sup> Mirroring is a significant quality for parents, because it is about love and complete trust. I suppose that what I mirrored from my parents was love, respect, and deep faith. Resentment was very rare on faces of my parents, so there was plenty of good mirroring when I was a child. As far as I can remember from my earliest childhood, I have been always surrounded by love and admiration. Every glance from my mother was full of

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<sup>24</sup> (Chillis 2017)

<sup>25</sup> (Rohr n.d.)

<sup>26</sup> (Rohr n.d.)

sincere love; however, there were still moments when I was afraid I would be punished for some misconduct. It would not be harsh or serious, but still it would be present, and a slight shade of distance penetrated into the mirroring.

Only when I grew up was I able to comprehend the difference between my relationship with God and my parents. Whenever you try, you cannot reach the same level of mirroring with parents as is possible in the ultimate gaze of God. The contrast is in this full acceptability and assurance that everything can be forgiven and will not be remembered. Mirroring helped me to realize the uniqueness of a relationship with God, “which is always compassionate and embracing, or it would be not divine”<sup>27</sup> (Rohr). I understand that supreme openness and lack of selfishness are required in appealing to God, so His gaze can be returned and not distorted in my imperfect mirror. When I became an adult I also realized that we frequently let bad mirroring be present in our lives: it is done in the moments when we lack faith or enter foolish debates. My lifelong wish is to get rid of any hints of negative mirroring, so it does not hinder my spirituality.

Finally, mirroring is a process of being sincere and open in front of God. If one wishes to be truly heard, no barriers of distrust or dishonesty should be stated between the self and God. Reaching ultimate mirroring is a hard process and I am sure that there are new levels of openness for me, as I am still in development despite my lengthy spiritual path. While reflecting on mirroring, we must ask ourselves what is the purpose of church, and why do people even attend, if they are not going to reflect on the divine word of God, which would ultimately change the way we, and others, consider faith and healing.

Many people go to a church without understanding the real reason they attend. Visiting churches is necessary, for the person, and those they encounter. Therefore, from the very beginning, it is important to mention that there is no sense in going to church, if it's only going

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<sup>27</sup> (Rohr n.d.)

to be a formality. If people come to church just simply to stand or sit, listening to nothing, without penetrating into the doctrine and in God's law, their belief is really formal. It is not important whether those people visit church or not. Such formal belief is close to superstition.

Many people visit churches and say that it helps them to cope with their issues, and difficulties. The church could become helpful for them, providing they were spiritually and emotionally involved. In some cases people are not willing to change, or just don't want to change. They realize their sinfulness and choose to continue in their bad affairs. A person's soul is not actually connected by a formalistic approach. The person wishes to receive an award for simply executing any ceremonious actions. Therefore, speaking about church visits, it is necessary to understand that it is a question of high-grade participation. It is vital to remember that the church is some kind of meeting not just for believers, but non-believers as well.

Most people who consciously go to church understand the real mission. They think that their belief in God is of great importance. A vast majority of those believers have a leader in the church. In most cases it is a priest. The leader should be a very spiritual person who is always able to understand and to give good advice. People need such leaders, as some of them might not have had the opportunity to talk about all difficulties and sins with those who know them well. It is one of the most important reasons why people go to the church.

It is not necessary for leaders to speak beautifully. Sometimes it can be the heart in church what miracles God made into the lives of believers, and non-believers. Moreover, people should understand that God makes wonders for everyone and people share them in church. Those who feel God's love can tell non-believers about the miracles that happen or about the miracles they heard about in church. Non-believers or struggling believers can become interested in

miracles and start to look for the Lord too. So, it is not necessary for the execution of a message about our loving God to be communicated in a beautiful sermon.

To conclude, it is really important to go to church, both for an individual and on behalf of other people. This will allow you to engage and fellowship with those that have the same beliefs as you. This will provide spiritual growth and allow doctrine to manifest when time permits. It's a time of learning, encouraging, and embracing change. I find that prayer is crucial, and when the saint's get together prayers are answered. Some people just want to find a quiet place to pray and to think about their lives. Every person has his/her own reasons for belonging to the church. However, it should be mentioned that it is necessary to visit church services regularly to get to know more about God and to learn how to make one's life better. Richard Rohr talks about getting to know the self, the true self. The definition of, and the contrast between the true, and false self is addressed in his book, *Immortal Diamond*.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self* by Richard Rohr**

Once, John Anderson sang "I'm just an old chunk of coal, but I'm gonna be a diamond someday." Richard Rohr, in his book *Immortal Diamond: The Search for Our True Self*, illustrates the process of an individual's transformation into a diamond. At the same time, the author reveals the truth about our True Self and answers the burning question why and to what extent we let out False Selves obscure our True Selves.

Rohr argues that the True Self is a presence of the divine power that exists in us and is able to transform us, if released, into the individuals we are created to be. As a matter of fact, the author introduces us to a transforming foundation, a key to which is Christ: "I believe the Christ is the archetypal True Self offered to history, where matter and spirit finally operate as one,

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<sup>28</sup> (Rohr, *Immortal Diamond* n.d.)

where divine and human are held in one container, ‘where there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female (Galatians 3:28)’<sup>29</sup> (Rohr, 2013, p. xiii).

It is necessary to mention that the book consists of 9 chapters, starting with a detailed insight into the issue of the True Self and moving to a concise definition of the False Self. The following chapters further designate and clarify the contrast between the above-mentioned two concepts. The author explains that the False Self is a thing that gets every person started in his or her lives. It is who we think we are. It is a cultural and social building block of our lives that forms our initial identity.

According to Rohr, the False Self is not necessarily bad, as it has its own aim. The False Self may be compared to a costume that we wear in order to hide our true identity and not reveal our inner emotions: it may be necessary at the beginning of our lives, but is of no need in the end. In fact, the False Self is a minor self, which consists of education, job, physical appearance or body image, clothing, cars, money and other material things. Rohr states “These are the trappings of ego that we all use to get us through an ordinary day. They are a nice enough platform to stand on, but they are largely a projection of our self-image and our attachment to it”<sup>30</sup> (p. 28). The False Self is a self-realization that lacks consideration of the divine presence, while the True Self is the divine expression that is present in every person on the Earth.

The True Self is who we are in God and who God is with us. It is the awareness of our self and the conscious choice to live in Christ’s mind. Rohr mentions that the False Self is mortal and relative, and it will eventually die. But, the True Self will live: “What dies? Your False Self – and it is just a matter of WHEN, not IF. Who lives? The God Self that has always lived, but

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<sup>29</sup> (Gal 3:28 n.d.)

<sup>30</sup> (Rohr, Immortal Diamond n.d.)

now includes YOU. And note that it is a WHAT that dies, and a WHO that lives”<sup>31</sup> (Rohr, 2013, p. 66). It is an interesting fact that Rohr perceived the True Self as an inanimate object calling it “what,” while the True Self, “who”, is described as a living being. In such a way, the author suggests where we should look for redemption and how we can attain transformation. As a matter of fact, the pressures and stresses that we are confronted with, while recognizing our False Self and giving priority to the True Self, is what triggers our transformation to the “immortal diamond.”

It is an interesting fact that many people live with the False Self nowadays. They praise many things that are of minor significance. They go through their routine and dead-end job in order to buy completely unnecessary products. At the same time, they seek a profound change that can make their lives better. However, they fail to realize that the change should come from inside, but not from the outer world. I must admit that I have also lived with the False Self until recently. But, the *Immortal Diamond* helped me understand that there are more important things than fancy clothes or a stylish hairdo. Now, I can feel happiness not because I bought something costly, but because I am with God and he is with me. I am deeply grateful for many things that I have recently taken for granted: the ability to live, see, hear, feel, walk and love. Life is full of wonders, we just need to open our souls and embrace the True Self with eagerness. This will also help, and define, and assist others when it comes to Spiritual Direction.

## **Spiritual Direction**

Spiritual direction can be connected with the religious life of the person that has internal faith and wants to lead their life according to spiritual principles. However, in the twentieth century the notion of spiritual direction has undergone serious changes. Firstly, it has become

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<sup>31</sup> (Rohr, *Immortal Diamond* n.d.)



closer to the management and guidance of people, it's a companionship of the soul. It's a one on one relationship, deep soul work and spiritual work. Secondly, spiritual direction nowadays does not necessarily mean that a person, practicing it, has to be fanatically focused on only one confession or religious branch. Spiritual direction has come through the changes that made it more practical, more useful, highly efficient, and applicable in everyday life of every person, willing to live with faith and hope. Will Hernandez, puts it like this, he says, it's "companionship of the Soul."<sup>32</sup>

Within Christianity, spiritual direction is defined by Barrette as "the help or guidance that a person (directee) seeks and another (director) gives over a period of time in the process of growing in a loving relationship with God."<sup>33</sup> It is also claimed in the article under consideration that efficient spiritual direction gives the person the possibility for:

- Developing and maintaining strong and unique relationship with God, who is present in every person internally.
- Living life in this relationship as a true disciple of Jesus Christ.
- Knowledge and utilization of the practical methods of supporting such relationship by the means of "prayer, asceticism, and meditation" (Barrette, 2002, p. 290).
- Easy and quickly recognizing and eliminating any signs of sin, coming from the external factors or the internal thoughts.
- Recreation of the life in a special relationship with God as the representation of the Kingdom of God, promoted by Christ, in daily life.

The historical roots of the spiritual direction in Christianity can be traced from the early years of its formation and development. Despite the fact that Christianity as a separate branch

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<sup>32</sup> (Hernandez n.d.)

<sup>33</sup> (Barrette n.d.)

developed the millennium after the advent of Jesus Christ, the roots of its spiritual direction may be traced to the first centuries when the Holy Scriptures had been written. The first spiritual leaders of the church might be the ones that sermonized in deserts of Egypt and Syria, and among them at that times were women as well. This opportunity for women was eliminated when Christianity became to form as an official religion, so the spiritual leading by women became limited.

On the other hand, spiritual direction today may differ according to the preferences of the local priest, pastors, bishops or community. Miller suggests that the most important in the spiritual direction is organizing the sessions that may teach people to listen and relax. This approach is unique, but it is also a type of the spiritual direction. The healing listener listens with the eyes, the whole body, and with the soul. One out of the many quotes in Millers book really plunged my heart. It's says; "Prepare yourself for the world, as the athletes used to do for their exercise; oil your mind and your manners, to give them the necessary suppleness and flexibility; strength alone will not do."<sup>34</sup>

The ability to practice spiritual direction and choose a unique way is promoted by Blythe (2006) in the book *50 Ways to Pray: Practices from Many Traditions and Times*. This collection provides a wide range of methods of how the person may appeal to God and to lead a special way of spiritual direction, which would be the most appropriate and efficient. The ideas of how to pray vary from the ancient ones to the approaches stimulated by the modern times. This fact proves that there is no one-way to pray, as people are able to maintain spiritual direction as they wish. When we focus on our relationship with the divine we encounter its presence. Having that prayer life is important, the time of meditation, and relaxation. Being able to hear from that third

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<sup>34</sup> (Miller n.d.)

ear, and like Zen would say, have the ability to “see with the eye of the heart.”<sup>35</sup> The book also gives us insight, and helps us see where our strengths, and weaknesses are and how we can cultivate them within our own ministries, personal lives, faith healing and communities.

In the terms of spiritual direction, the young people, especially the college students, would have special needs. This category of people can be characterized by special skepticism towards the issues related to spiritual life and faith; moreover, they are very dependent on the various technological advances. As a result, in their minds the science and religion are two opposite spheres that can hardly be connected. Our gifts as leaders, ministers, and spiritual directors would be to guide them in the moment. We have to be able to let God do the work and be in the moment.

In order to address the needs of students, youth, congregants, people, pastors in the spiritual direction it is necessary to provide them with information that they would like to have. The spiritual practices, such as prayer, meditation, and music, should be presented as aligned with the scientific domain. These people should be not appealed in the terms of pure faith, while it may be more beneficial to provide them with reasonable explanation for the issues, which may be explained. The religion, faith, and spiritual direction should be promoted as the elements of human life that can be easily practiced in the conditions created by the modern world. It’s a time of focus, evaluation, revelation, and a time in which we can hear God.

Ultimately, spiritual direction is the phenomenon of guiding a person in the spiritual and religious life by another person who has more experience. It can be practiced both in the monastery and in the social environment, and it may have equal efficiency. Young people are suggested to need aligning spiritual direction with the demands of modern world. It is our responsibility as Spiritual Directors to guide them and to help them to understand the perspective

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<sup>35</sup> (Zen n.d.)

of living life. That in order to hear God you have to be silent, in the moment, and have a willing heart.

Spiritual Direction is a sacred space in the middle of life, healing, presence, being, it's one's personal encounter. It's for anyone who wants to go deeper in God. It's a prayerful process of one person directing another into the process. Some of the challenges that we may encounter are allowing our own personal feelings to get involved. We have to be very careful to keep the focus on the other person. We have to make sure self doesn't take over, and we must keep the sacred and remain in the present. Once we have done this, we can seek to have a stronger faith life, and receive a deeper inner healing.

### **Theological Reflection**

Every man and woman lives in the sight of God and thus is gifted in one-way or another. It is one of the targets of our life to understand what gifts God gave each of us and to live and act accordingly. I consider myself to be one of those happy people who recognize the role of God and His gifts in my own personal life. The major gifts that God gave me for my journey in religion are spiritual discernment, evangelism, planning, preaching, leadership skills, and counseling. That may seem like quite a bit, and I must agree. However, these are the gifts that help shape me as a minister and leader today. Also, they bring higher meaning to everything I do in my life, and my ministry of service.

Recognition of the gifts given to me motivated me to perform the ministry in which I serve. One of the major motives that stimulate me towards ministering having the ability to engage with the people. As it is said in the Holy Scripture "For where two or three have gathered

together in my name, I am there in their midst.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, I believe that the force driving me towards ministry is of the divine nature and I hope to be the vessel of God. Another significant motive is to provide spiritual nourishment to those I serve, and those who surround me.

The described motives define the roles I perform within my ministry. Firstly, I provide people with the support they need with the help of prayers and psychological counseling. Sometimes, a simple talk with a person can change things. Secondly, guiding people in the proper direction of their worship, helping with prayers, giving them advice on this way, and empowering them to be stronger and more confident in their faith and service. It is the spiritual guidance that I suppose to be the most important role of mine in the ministry.

The mission of church has different aspects and can be hardly described in a few words or phrases. Still there are the major aspects that can be stressed on. Firstly, church is an important unit of the mission as a place where people can assemble, pray together, and discuss crucial moments. The missionary work of churches, probably, has the greatest influence on people than an individual can have. Churches often try to outreach to the biggest number of people in the served area, and as a result they reach everyone, including not only people who go to church but the lost ones. As Jesus Christ asked disciples to go to different regions around the world, and preach, so it is done by many churches of today.

The nature of the church has to be service with love: if every minister uses a simple rule commanded by Jesus “Love your neighbor as yourself,” it will be easy to set priorities and to minister rightfully. Justice is among the basic principles that have to be a core element of every church, because if people do not see justice at church they will be disappointed in all of the other institutions. Kindness is also in the background of every church and every minister, as without kindness it is impossible to help people. A minister at the church has to walk humbly, showing

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<sup>36</sup> (Matt 18:20 Bible n.d.)

no arrogance and being an example of humility. Still, love is the basic priority and without love, any real justice, kindness, or humility can be naturally displayed and practiced at any church.

A church has to operate as if it is part of the Kingdom of God, because the work of every church brings the Kingdom closer. For the Father, all people are equal and desired, so the church should not alienate anyone or embracing the brokenness. It is stated in the Scripture “For there are many called, but few chosen,” so the church has to call everyone for everybody to have a chance.

The primary activity of church is to preach and to deliver the word of God to every person. However, today there are many different highly crucial questions that cannot be ignored by church, focused on the ancient principles. Church has to be able to adapt to the ongoing changes and to face new challenges. For example, the problem of climate change can be addressed by the church, faith and healing, spiritual direction, community activism, and the difference between suffering vs. cure. On the other hand, the integrity of the teaching of the church should not be lost, so no one can claim it to be the turncoat, but will understand that it is able to face new problems.

Good relationship can be built only when communication is two-way.<sup>37</sup> This principle can easily be applied to ministering, because it should not be one-way preaching, teaching, or building but seeing how people accept the word of God. Simple words are necessary for the servants of God in order to reach the minds and hearts of ordinary people. It is also crucial to build trust, and it can be built in the best way when people see real example of the ministers, who abide by the rule of God in their everyday lives. Every dedicated follower of God needs to have

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<sup>37</sup> David Augsburg, *Caring Enough to Confront: How to Understand and Express Your Deepest Feelings Toward Others*, ReadHowYouWant.com, 2010, p. 26

strong values, based on the Christ's teaching. Faith is crucial, and the ability to heal can be seen through the eyes of those following Christ's commands.

If Jesus did nothing but to leave the two commandments of love carved in the heart of everyone, it would still be the greatest of his doings. For me the words Jesus and love are almost synonymous, so powerful and influential is the example of the self-sacrificing love of Jesus for me. Being also a real servant of love inspired by Jesus Christ is a goal that I will pursue in all my ministry activities. I also respect my call and perceive it with gratitude, supposing it to be a true gift of Jesus. To be like Christ is the greatest possible epithet and a thing that perhaps every priest and minister seeks for and tries to reach. It is hard to understand, but it is contained simply in one or two words: love, and faith in simple action—to see God in every person, and in every situation.

In describing Jesus, Henri Nouwen claims that He is “the God that sets us free.”<sup>38</sup> People have freedom of choice and while one becomes a saint, another one becomes a criminal. Understanding Christ and the Holy Spirit, their power and the notion of choice amaze me. In my community I observe different people and different behaviors, but still I try to remember that we all are children of God, practicing patience and love. Christ serviced not the rich, but the poor, the hungry, and the abandoned;<sup>39</sup> moreover, he travelled a lot to reach as many people as possible in His time. His example of dedication inspires me personally in my every-day life of service.

My future ministry will certainly be not-for-profit, because it is only in such a way that real service to God can be conducted. I will attempt to understand and then to address the needs of people, providing them with necessary counseling, spiritual direction, faith, love, motivation,

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<sup>38</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Letters to Marc About Jesus*, Harper Collins, 2009 p.11

<sup>39</sup> Andreas Schuele, Günter Thomas, *Who is Jesus Christ for Us Today?:*

inspiration, and other areas of help. One of my priorities of ministry is making real change in community, ordinary families, or at least in lives of God's people. I will consider myself a helpful minister if I become truly loving, humble, and kind, revealing these features to all people.

Eric H. F. Law, when describing his own experience in ministry, explains his major message as follows: "You might have mistakes; you might be broken down; you might even unknowingly hurt another, but in the end, God will send an angel to minister to you."<sup>40</sup> For me, ministry and evangelism is a method of helping other people. When I state this priority in the core of what I do in ministry, I see all the other activities performed naturally and easily. When I see that my ministry has been able to help at least one person that had no faith and hope before, I will consider myself complete and all my spiritual work done not in vain. If we can all follow the Rule of Life, it's my belief that life will be better, and we will be better disciples.

### **Rule of Life**

1. Relationship with God.
2. Relationship with others.
3. Relationship with all of creation.
4. Relationship with self.

We can assume that having a relationship with God means that our life is complete, and nothing could be better than a life that's wholesome. Having a relationship with God, we must first understand and realize who God is and what He stands for in our lives. The first thing I had to recognize in this journey of life, is that God loves us in spite of ourselves, and that there's nothing we can do that would change His love for us. In John 3:16 it states: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."<sup>41</sup> Now I know we are not speaking of eternal life, but we are speaking of the Love that God possessed, and demonstrated, by giving up his only son so that we may live.

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<sup>40</sup> Eric H. F. Law, *Word at the Crossing*

<sup>41</sup> (John 3:16 n.d.)



For by grace we are saved and because of that we can live a life that is pleasing to God and his Son Jesus. Having a relationship with God doesn't mean you will not sin or fall short. We all sin, but God wants us to know that he loves us unconditionally. Romans 6:23 states, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."<sup>42</sup> God wants us to address the sin in our life. When we acknowledge sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us. That alone is another indication of His love for us. I'm glad to have a relationship with God, because I have shortcomings, and He is an understanding God that forgives me.

Being a child of God plays an important role in my life. I don't dispute the need to have God as the pilot of my life. I feel the need to have a relationship with God and consider it a gift from Him. When we turn to God in our despair he receives us with open arms. My relationship with God allows me to get through many of life's challenges. I'm able to trust Him to guide me when I need it most. To know God and have a relationship is meaningful, and the outcome of your expectancy is what signifies your true relationship. The idea of having the Trinity as an intricate part of your life helps one identify who they are as a person. Knowing that God is the head and that the relationship starts with you, can comfort, and heal most situations one face.

One rule of life that I will reflect on when it comes to my relationship with God is to keep him as the head and the forefront of your decisions regarding life. Having this rule, along with a strong devotional life, will enhance the relationship with God and others. When sharing my values and beliefs with others I have learned to be mindful that people have different perspectives and values pertaining to religion, and relationship. Those that I encounter or share my space with already have insight on how I feel about God, and the Trinity. I don't try and conceal my relationship or personal feelings around people, be it family, friends or strangers. God is God, and I will always worship him as such no matter where I am.

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<sup>42</sup> (Romans 6:23 n.d.)

One thing is certain, and I'm truly blessed that the people that I share my life with are aware of my relationship and they support and encourage me every step of the way. Those that don't support or encourage me, I pray for them, and try to live my life as an example by letting my light shine. My life is the vessel, and light that people see is God using me to get through to others. I've learned not to force my beliefs, and religion on people, and adapted to living my life in a way that is pleasing to God, sharing his word the best I can. While not being judgmental and remaining unbiased towards unbelievers, I stress the Rule of life that enables me to have a relationship with all creations and not just a selected few. God created us all in his image, and I'm reminded of that daily by the word.

Having a relationship with all people opens up the opportunity for them to see Jesus and not self. When I took a trip to Korea, I didn't experience only the culture but I saw God there. I was able to see Jesus, how the Holy Spirit moved and God, all in an entirely different world. The verity of the Koreans, the way they served, and the nobility they possessed allowed me the opportunity to be apprised of the God that dwells within all creations, not just a selected few creatures.

If we were to keep in mind the good rule of life and be practical by operating on the need to nourish our spirituality we can then develop and grow spiritually. When we are spiritually mature, our thoughts, deeds, and actions will align with the things of God, causing the reality of dealing with all creation.

Because of the disparity among so many people, it's not always going to be an easy task. However, considering the failures and disappointments in my life, I can and should be empathetic to others, encouraging, motivating, and demonstrating a heart of love and

compassion. This rule of life that represents our spiritual call on creation would warrant the need to put on the full Armor of God. Which brings me to my final rule of self-identification.

If I had to consider the knowledge of self and my awareness of the rule of life, I would be challenged. I'm nowhere close to where I should be in God, or my relationship with Him. Each day that I'm granted grace and mercy gives me the opportunity to do better, become well, love better, become wiser, and be accountable for my actions and behaviors. I deem it necessary to live a life pleasing to God and having that intimate relationship with Him. One thing I've done to start on that path was journaling. Journaling enables me to have a sense of consciousness of my feelings, thoughts, and emotions. I've incorporated a weekly Sabbath, which starts on Sunday and goes into Monday evening. This Sabbath helps me get in tune with self and the creator. This also helps me identify my weak areas and allows me to develop myself where needed. It's also a tool for self-care, which is a very important tool when conducting ministry.

There is a quote by William H. Willimon, that states; "The Sabbath rest is given so that people might be able to stop and remember God, to recall that source of our life which, in the everyday, workaday, word we so easily forget"<sup>43</sup> (with Glad and Generous Hearts). We need time apart to align our hearts with God, to listen to our deepest yearnings and the answers of the spirit. We need times of silence and solitude, time away from family, friends and social media. The Sabbath is a place where you can hear the stillness, feel the feelings, and allow the thoughts, which are so easily drowned by people, places and things in our daily lives to surface.

In my humble opinion in order to be productive and provide effective ministry tools, we need to have a relationship with God. In order to meet the needs of the people, we have to be conscience of the personal needs and be award of our own needs at the same time. I believe that I

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<sup>43</sup> (Willimon, William H. n.d.)

need to be meticulous in my call to ministry, so that I can fulfill that call without the vigorous hold that may come along with this walk and responsibility.

Micah 6:8 states, “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”<sup>44</sup> Our job on this earth is to be servants that meet the need of the people, in order for us to do what stated in Micah 6:8, we must have a relationship with God. We must be willing to do what we were called to do, and we must follow some simple rules to assist in aligning our lives up, that we can be productive and pleasing to Gods will. Thinking about what was important to you, and how your faith changed when you realized that your personal journey and relationship with God caused you to have deeper meaning in life.

In my conclusion, it’s my hope that within the vocation or ministry that I’m connected to, that the presence of God, and all that I’ve experienced emotionally, physically, and spiritually allow me the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others. Richard Rohr writes, “Spiritual maturity is largely a growth in seeing and full seeing seems to take most of our lifetime.”<sup>45</sup> What I see more fully now than before in my first half of life, compared to my second half of life invites me to embrace the true self. This has exposed me to identify my shadow self, giving authenticity to others, in hopes of a positive reward. With compassion, respect, and a gracious heart, I seek to do God’s will with a spiritual eye using the Rule of Life having a relationship with God, others and the true self.

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<sup>44</sup> (Micah 6:8 n.d.)

<sup>45</sup> (Rohr, Falling Upward n.d.)

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Contextual Theology**

The matter of equality is one of the crucial matters promoted in a religious community. A minister is a person who should be able to effectively connect to a person of any status, gender, age, or ethnicity, and to provide the necessary spiritual guidance. A disabled minister may have a unique vision of the matter due to personal challenges and even possible segregation within a community. Such person is supposed to understand not only disability but also the other issues relating to diversity and its complexity within a congregation. Presumably, such leader of a religious community may be more effective than an “able” person in the same position. Therefore, a minister’s physical disability is not a restraint of some kind, but instead, it can be a factor that will enable a minister with a greater comprehension of the people in need.

Nevertheless, when some form of intellectual disability is concerned, the capacity of a person to be a minister is much restricted. Ministry presumes active work involving all of the senses, use of intellect, empathy, and emotional connection with people. Some forms of intellectual disability distort the person’s perceptions to such an extent that makes it impossible for a person to become a minister. Furthermore, the nature of a community in Christ should by default mean all-encompassing approach, which resembles the diversity of people as God’s children. Being created different, people have rights to pursue their dreams and to help the other people. Thus, serving God also should be fulfilled by any person experiencing the inner call and who is willing to dedicate himself or herself to spiritual service. From the sociological perspective, a disabled minister represents the inclusivity of a church, which may even extend

the inclusivity offered by a society as a whole. The reciprocal nature of inclusivity means that people with and without disabilities learn from each other and become more open-minded.<sup>46</sup>

### **Christology of Healing vs. Cure in Disability**

The terms ‘healing’ and ‘cure’ may be confused, as both of the terms mean the process of becoming healthy after some disease. While they are closely related, they do not mean the same thing. The term ‘cure’ relates to the domain of therapy and medicines that alleviate pain, treat an illness, and make a person become physically or mentally healthy. In the concept of curing, there exists relations between a physician and a patient, and the latter passively receives medicine or therapy. Healing presumes that a patient ceases to be merely a recipient, because a person can be healed only with active participation. Thus, healing may happen only from the inside of a person, who becomes not only physically but also spiritually and emotionally full again.

Therefore, where a theological perspective is concerned, it is healing that is of greater relevancy to ministry, because curing remains within the domain of physiology. The experience of being healed is even associated with Jesus Christ who was “healed through experience of resurrection.”<sup>47</sup> Seeking a cure and not finding it in relation to one’s disability is one of the factors potentially leading to the loss of faith. However, healing can be attained as a result of faithful pursuit of God, and Christianity can provide numerous accounts of healing that happened over its history. A minister can be helpful in guiding disabled people to reconciliation with themselves and restoration of faith. Even if physical healing does not occur, the spiritual healing may be a powerful result of such work.

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<sup>46</sup> Albert A. Herzog. *The Social Contexts of Disability Ministry: A Primer for Pastors, Seminarians, and Lay Leaders*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017. p. 75.

<sup>47</sup> Christopher Newell. *Voices in Disability and Spirituality from the Land Down Under: Outback to Outfront*. New York: Routledge, 2014. p. 8.

## Specialized Ministry

The term ‘specialized ministry’ refers to the services performed by a minister in some more specific settings than a conventional church. Ministers may feel a call urging them to serve at a state institution or a hospital, to provide pastoral counseling, or to work at some business or non-for-profit organization. Specialized ministry should be the choice of those ministers who think their goal is to serve some specific group of people. Greater understanding or sympathy may cause one to focus on a particular population. Specialized ministry can be highly effective when a minister willingly chooses to work in the settings considered here. He or she may have a deeper understanding of the needs of these people and thus may provide the necessary help and support.

Chaplaincy is a well-known example of a specialized ministry which is applied in institutional settings rather than in churches. Different institutions, for instance hospitals, prisons, governmental organizations, or military bases may have their chaplains. A chaplain may choose such service if he or she considers that the best work can be done in such conditions for the people requiring urgent spiritual need. The notion of “language of presence”<sup>48</sup> may be used to describe the role of pastors in such settings, as the mere presence of spiritual support may be crucial for people.

The choice for any kind of specialized ministry is made individually considering the abilities and inner call of a minister. My ministry is mainly done in the church settings, but there may be present some elements of specialized ministry when, for example, spiritual help is needed at a hospital. Ministry can be equally effective outside the church as it is inside, because it is primarily the connection between a minister and a person that plays a role, and not the surroundings. When we address “specialized

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<sup>48</sup> Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *A Ministry of Presence: Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care, and the Law*, University of Chicago Press, 2014. p. 174.

ministry,” we are not excluding “mental health.” In my interview with LSW Najamah Davis, she suggests that within mental health, spirituality plays a role. She notes, “the term spirituality has different connotations to various people and cultures.”

Despite the fact that the term spirituality was used in the context of religion, the recent definition has factored in variations and diffusion of meanings which are condensed to mean the quest for holiness, hope, belief in a higher being and “self connectedness” to a supernatural power or god and an extent, nature. Thus, spirituality is the aspect of human existence that gives the man his or her humanness (Corner, 2006). Spirituality differs with religion in the sense that whereas spirituality is almost all-encompassing and inclusive religion narrows to a specific tradition, faith, and institution, and is usually connected to belief in a god.

Studies have indicated that there is a powerful link between spirituality and mental health. For instance, an individual who was connected to a spiritual society or community experienced enhanced support, friendship and unity. Spirituality makes one feels that he or she has a connection to a bigger thing than oneself. Spirituality and religion help one believe that the mental illness one suffers from may be as a result of the sinful nature of an individual, the parent or even a relative. There is an inter-intra connection between religion, spirituality, and mental illness. For example, the various researches done by researchers from different disciplines have indicated that those who are staunchly connected to spirituality and religion are likely to suffer mental and cardio-vascular related diseases. Nonetheless, some aspects of religion and spirituality are harmful and accelerate mental illness in the society. Such includes the religions that impart rejection of people with mental illness since their beliefs and teachings are subjective and are geared towards denouncing mentally ill persons. To an extent, these are not better and positive ways of dealing with mentally challenged and disabled individuals since it only acts fuel the rate of rejection of such individuals.



Spirituality and religion, therefore, have a beneficial effect on mental illness, although the relationship changes depending on how the spirituality and religion are administered. Spirituality also helps in fighting depression, which is a serious mental illness, as it outlines hope and consolation for the better future as it moderates anxiety and post-traumatic stress. Spirituality offers coping styles to persons who suffer mental health issues, and gives great network of social support thus reducing the risk of mental illness.

In the book *A Ministry of Presence: Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care, and the Law*, Winnifred Fallers Sullivan discusses the phenomenon of chaplaincy in the modern United States. The author suggests that the secular nature of the country provides new grounds for chaplains but also imposes challenges. The work of these religious servants is described in all the complexity of any matter where religion and law intersect. The author provides a deep insight into the role of spirituality and religion in a secular society. She illustrates how the question of religious freedom intricately interplays with the governmental sponsorship of pastors, who are serving in variety of settings, like prisons, airports, hospitals, military bases, universities, and other institutions.

The book uncovers a complex relationship between religion and institution. An example illustrating the challenge of chaplaincy can be viewed in the issues of a pastor's denomination. On the one hand, a chaplain has to belong to a certain denomination in order to be approved for such service, but on the other hand, it is completely forbidden to proselytize. So, chaplaincy aims to deliver spiritual services, which can reach a person of any religion; yet, this aim is complicated due to abundance of religions and denominations. The author depicts how the US government tends to regulate the matters of religion in chaplaincy.

This book can provide a variety of theological insights. Whereas it is written about a specific category of spiritual servants, it may be thought provoking for ministers of any Christian denomination. The author seems to regret that religion is being transformed into a sort of secular therapy imposed by the government. However, it proves that spirituality is needed at all levels regardless of growing secularization and anti-religious claims. The challenges faced by chaplains can teach a practicing minister, preacher, leader how to cope with a different audience in their service. With so many issues surrounding mental health, it's imperative that our congregants, church leaders, and local affiliates in the communities be enlightened on ways to decrease the suffering as much as possible. The importance of having a spiritual relationship helps those dealing with the disabled condition and those that are caretakers embrace the matter in a more effective way.

### **Scripture and Disability**

The New Testament contains many stories of the miracles Jesus performed on disabled people, healing “the blind and the lame.”<sup>49</sup> However, Scripture also illustrates that the association of disability and sin has been pervasive for millennia. The question disciples asked Jesus, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”<sup>50</sup> illustrates the strength of this bias. Yet, Jesus argues, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.”<sup>51</sup> In such a way, He rejects the presumably common prejudice connecting disability and sin, while He healed all the disabled people having faith.

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<sup>49</sup> Matthew 21:14.

<sup>50</sup> John 9:2.

<sup>51</sup> John 9:3.

On the other hand, disabilities like blindness also have metaphorical meaning in Scripture. The sight granted to a man, healed by Jesus, is contrasted to the spiritual blindness displayed by the leaders in a Jerusalem's synagogue. Furthermore, Jesus was supposed not only to perform the deeds of healing miracles but also to combat greater blindness at a spiritual level. Therefore, He claims, "He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind."<sup>52</sup> Though, in this passage, mentioning a physical disability has nothing in common with physical well-being or disease but with the spiritual vision and experience.

In the contextual theology of ministry, the stories of disability from the Scriptures can play a powerful role in helping people restore their faith. It is possible to teach the congregation to be tolerant to disabled people as Jesus was in His deeds. Our society is not inclusive enough because some stigma towards disabled people still exists, and ministry is a tool for helping to solve this problem. The purpose of my proposal is to project a platform that will enable those in leadership or ministry to see the "disabled" from a different perspective. It's my hope to provide the necessary tools, texts, and workbook within my project. My ultimate goal is to transform and not just comply the minds of those in leadership, and those impacted by disability.

### **Methodology and Christology of Jesus**

As the study of Christ, Christology has a wide range of aspects to be considered, for instance resurrection, Christ's divinity and humanity, or ascension. The vision of the Christ's image that I follow in my ministry corresponds to the following definition; "Jesus is a representative beginning of a new order of righteousness and love."<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the notion of love displayed by the Lord in His words and deeds is one of the most crucial ones. Moreover,

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<sup>52</sup> (Luke 4:18 n.d.)

<sup>53</sup> Newell. *Voices in Disability and Spirituality from the Land Down Under: Outback to Outfront*. 2014. p. 148.

among all attributes of Christ, like sinlessness or eternity, love is the most universal concept to be used in ministry, along with spiritual guidance.

It is Jesus who gives the two commandments of love, which put love to God at the first place and the love to a neighbor at the second, and He claims, “There is no commandment greater than these.”<sup>54</sup> In such a way, He opens a new epoch in Christianity, which substitutes “an eye for one eye” principle with the idea that even enemies should be loved. Studying the life and deeds of Jesus from the viewpoint of love reveals that it is one of the most crucial messages He delivered to people. Many sayings and passages of the New Testament promote divine love and love that should exist among people, “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.”<sup>55</sup>

Christology is significant for a greater understanding of what the true is church for the unity of people. A church can be viewed as “an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to Him,” thus it is the instrument through which love should be spread. In ministry, love embodied by Jesus can be helpful in finding ways to approach people with very different needs and disabilities.

## **Project**

A THEOLOGY OF DISABILITY: MINISTRY TOWARD FAITH AND HEALING

BY: *JANEIDE A. CHILLIS*

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<sup>54</sup> Mark 12:31.

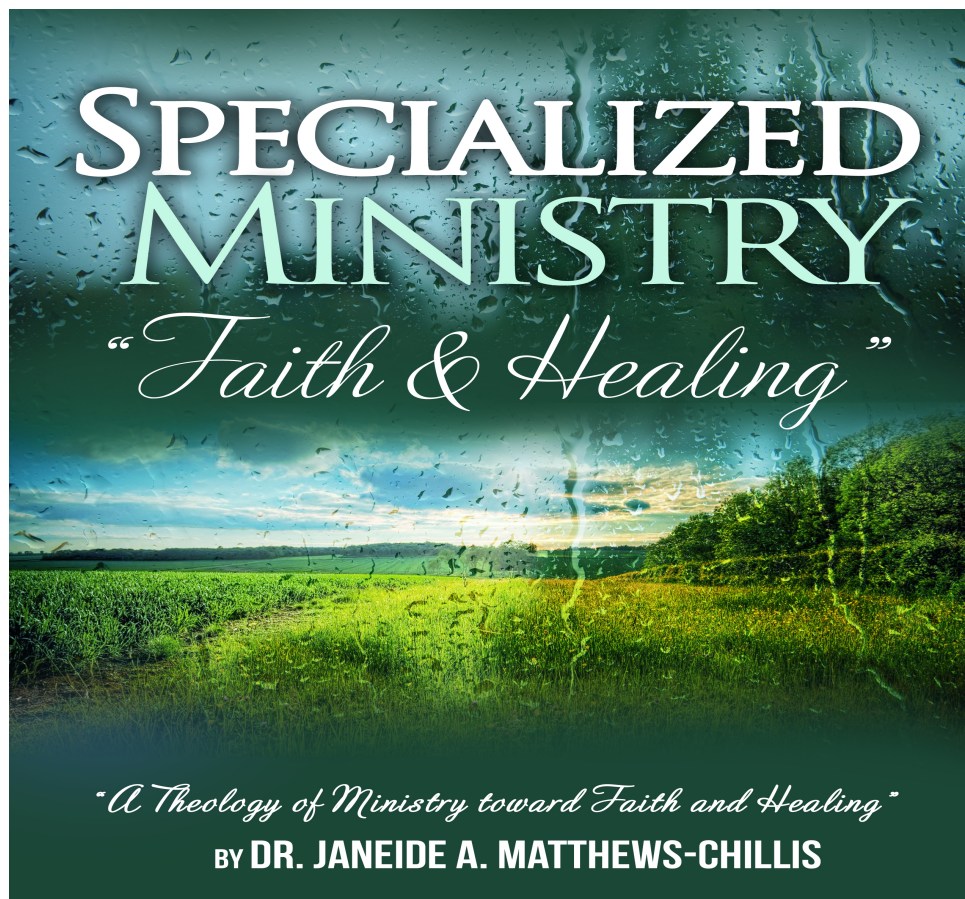
<sup>55</sup> 1 John 4:7.

## Scripture

“I have much more to say to you, more that you can now bear. But when he the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truths.” John 16:12

“Come near to God and he will come near to you.” James 4:8

## “Specialized Ministry”



### **Introduction: A Theology of Disability Toward Faith and Healing**

People with disabilities have always been part of society but their inclusivity depended on the openness of their community and the opportunities provided. Likewise, within ministry it

involves being present to the pain, suffering and the vulnerabilities of the congregants. I believe how one treats people with disabilities and how they are welcomed tells much about how we live out the Gospel message. While this project can be seen as an area of “specialized ministry,” my intentions is to highlight central questions and issues within your ministry, community for leaders in general. It’s my hope to interface the issues of ministry with the more general issues of disability, allowing growth, understanding, and transformation.

I will focus on the roles of faith, healing, prayer, and spirituality as it relates to the issues of disability. I will make note of the theological and psycho-spiritual issues of living with disability, and how theology, ministry, and scripture can have a profound impact on these issues. Some areas to be examined will include: grief, depression, healing in the spiritual journey; mental illness, and finding God’s strength in weakness; healing wholeness and transformation vs. cure.

The goal of this project is awareness and understanding. Having a lens through the gospel in accordance with faith and people with disabilities from a spiritual perspective through Christ. To incorporate ideas and strategies for ministry that will enable one to develop inclusive and welcoming faith communities where they serve. Lastly, to find meaning and purpose in life, as they deal with grief loss and suffering.

**The Contents of this Publication Includes:**

1. Introduction
2. A Minister Disabled
3. I. D. S. (Invisible Disease Syndrome)
4. Church Benefits (Disabled)

- 5. The Book of Ruth (Summary) grief & loss
- 6. Ministry Issues
- 7. Faith
- 8. Healing
- 9. Disability
- 10. “Specialized Ministry”

**Chapter 1.**

**A Disabled Minister**

I indicated earlier in my paper, that the perspective of a minister who himself or herself is disabled can make a significant contribution to supporting congregation members with disabilities, and their families.

1. Can you list ways in which you as a leader can support someone who is disabled?

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2. If you were to engage with someone who had mental illness, what character traits would you need to possess? How would you approach, or not approach the disabled, or their family members? Explain!

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3. As a leader, do you feel it's your responsibility to address the needs of those dealing with disability or mental health issues?

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## Chapter 2.

### I.D.S

I.D.S. – Invisible Disease Syndrome, or hidden disability, that captures a whole spectrum of hidden disabilities, or challenges that are primarily neurological in nature. I.D.S. is a sitting disability of invisible impairments; sitting problems are usually caused by chronic back pain... chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, chronic dizziness, and mental illness all are invisible conditions that are characterized within I.D.S.

Many people living with a hidden physical disability or mental challenge are still able to be active in their hobbies, work, or ministry. However, on the other hand some struggle to get through the day. Some can work, and some can't work at all. Wade Sutherland stated, "We may not look sick, but turn our bodies inside out and they would tell a different stories."<sup>56</sup>

1. What are some hidden disabilities that you may be aware of?

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<sup>56</sup> (Sutherland, Wade n.d.)

2. Do you know anyone who suffers from I. D. S.? Y/N explain the disability.

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3. How can you help someone in your ministry, family, or community who suffers from I.D.S.?

Explain!

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4. In your ministry do you have the necessary accommodations for those who suffer from I.D.S.?

Explain!

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5. What ministry do you have in place that meets the needs of those dealing with disability?

Explain!

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### **Chapter 3.**

## **Understanding How Disability Benefits the Church, Through Biblical Literacy**

1. We Grow Spiritually as Individuals: In Col 3:16 it states, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom, with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

2. Our Churches are Healthier: Healthy churches are made up of healthy members. Church members who dwell in the Word overflow with fruits of the spirit. They are patient, loving joyful, and others-focused (disabled).

3. We Reach More for Christ: Biblical literacy is the foundation for evangelism and missions. We should not expect to be motivated to tell others about God’s love for them if we are not engaged in His word. Conversely, when we are dwelling in the Word and it is dwelling in us, we can’t help but tell others the good news of Christ.

- What movement can you establish toward Biblical Literacy that would allow the disabled to have the ability to interact? Can you give an idea or suggest some benefits that would enable change in your ministry?
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### **The S.W.O.T. Analysis**

#### Strengths:

- Things your ministry does well
- Qualities that separate you from other ministries
- Internal resources, such as skilled leaders, and knowledgeable staff
- Tangible assets such as intellectual property, capital, proprietary technology to aide in your ministry

#### Weaknesses:

- Things your ministry lacks
- Things your competitors (ministries) do better than you
- Resource limitations within your ministry
- Unclear unique presentation propositions within your ministry

#### Opportunities:

- Underserved ministry for saving souls
- Limited resources for your area of ministry



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## Chapter 4.

### The Book of Ruth

#### Biblical Narrative: Ruth 1-4 New International Version (NIV) Naomi Loses Her Husband and Sons

**1** In the days when the judges ruled, [a] there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. **2** The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

#### When death happens

**3** Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. **4** They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, **5** both Mahlon and Chilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

#### Naomi and Ruth Return to Bethlehem

**6** When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. **7** With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

**8** Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me? **9** May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband." Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud **10** and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

#### Making a decision in the midst of grief

**11** But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? **12** Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— **13** would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!”

**14** At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

**15** “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

**16** But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.

**17** Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” **18** When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

**19** So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?”

### **When the loss of a loved one causes distress**

**20** “Don’t call me Naomi, [b]” she told them. “Call me Mara, [c] because the Almighty [d] has made my life very bitter. **21** I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted [e] me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”

### **Living in a foreign land**

**22** So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

#### *Portrayal of my project regarding Grief and Loss:*

When faith prevails in the darkest hour allowing those to overcome through the contemptuous cycle of sin, deliverance, repentance, and unfaithfulness. This book teaches of the providence of God, and that God’s love is for all mankind. It’s my hope to enlighten those within my ministry of the importance of faith, God’s love, and hope in the midst of grief and loss. I will present a method that demonstrates a strategic chart, enabling those impacted to use during the progression of healing.

#### *Purpose:*

While the book of Ruth could be an illustration of those who are facing grief and loss, along with faithfulness in God, despite the harsh and idolatrous times, it is likely this book reveals divine origin and lineage of the family of David and gives its Messianic associations. Ruth 4:17-22 shows that faith in the midst of grief and loss helps the healing process.

1. Ruth came to know Him (1:1- 4)

2. Ruth sustained herself and Naomi, and came in contact with Boaz (1:22-2:3)
  3. Boaz redeeming Ruth (3:5)
  4. The origin of the lineage of David (4:17)
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## **Summary of Ruth**

### **(Grief & Loss)**

Ministerial settings often have the need to provide counseling and support for grief and loss. It is always inspiring and comforting to hear the stories of people who have successfully coped with the loss, and ministers can rely on the Bible for the source of such plots. The biblical Book of Ruth can serve as a comprehensive guide for those who have faced the passing of close people. Naomi and Ruth illustrate coping with loss of feminine characters, whereas Boaz is featured as a man who helped in overcoming this experience. The Book of Ruth is able to offer invaluable insights for those who have suffered the loss and are trying to cope with grief, so it is useful to use in ministerial settings.

The story begins with description of the loss that Naomi suffered: in ten years after the death of her husband Elimelek, she loses both of her sons Mahlon and Kilion. Since they were married, she has two daughters-in-law Orpah and Ruth, but only Ruth decides to stay with her mother-in-law and travel with her to Bethlehem. A crucial moment of the story is that Ruth decides to leave her past life behind and follow Naomi accepting her new homeland and her religion. When they arrive in Bethlehem, Ruth is still viewed as a foreigner, being called a Moabite. Then, she meets Boaz who sees her working in the field and appraises her qualities.



Later, they marry and Ruth gives birth to a son, Obed, who is claimed to be the grandfather of King David.

The character of Ruth is important beyond the fact that she appears to be the great-grandmother of David. The faithfulness of Ruth is one of her most appraised and cited qualities. She expressively reveals her allegiance to Naomi, when the latter tries to send her home, saying, “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.”<sup>57</sup> Ruth acquires a new religion and faithfully follows Naomi. This decision of Ruth to disconnect with her past life can be interpreted as a means of coping with the loss. Despite that Naomi is the mother of her deceased husband; Ruth decides to support her mother-in-law in their common overcoming of grief.

Naomi also presents an example of coping with grief, as her loss is much greater than Ruth's: she lost both her sons and her husband. Fewell<sup>58</sup> suggests that when Naomi tries to send Ruth to her homeland, she is coping with her personal fears of going to a strange land. Naomi decides to cope with her grief on her own, despite the fact that it would have added to her suffering. Yet she is fortunate to have Ruth with her to share the loss and overcome the burden of the past events. Naomi is compassionate to her daughter-in-law and encourages her to move on in marriage with Boaz, and as a result, they both find a new life.

The role of Boaz, though unrelated to the former events, is also significant in coping with loss of Naomi and Ruth. He marries Ruth, who is a foreigner in their land, and becomes a new husband to her and allegedly a son to Naomi. His example proves how significant the support of the other people is, since appearance of Boaz changes the lives of both Naomi and Ruth.

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<sup>57</sup> *The Bible: Book of Ruth*, 16.

<sup>58</sup> Dana Nolan Fewell, “Space for Moral Agency in the Book of Ruth” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Vol 40.1 (2015): 79-96

Moreover, despite the former tragedies, creation of this family contributes to genealogy of David and thus of Christ.

In the end, the lives of Ruth and Naomi are filled with the new meaning, as they acquire a husband and a son. The Book of Ruth illustrates how loyalty and faithfulness can help to overcome the feelings of grief and bereavement. This book has precious insights for the ministerial settings, since it teaches true faith. Presentation of the stories of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz can be advantageous in showing how loss and grief can be coped with from variety of perspectives. The significance of The Book of Ruth for the ministry is in communicating the message that faith is the best supporter in the loss, and that's one reason I chose to include, "A Grief Observed, by C.S. Lewis."

In *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis provides the account of his own life after the loss of his wife, who died three years after their marriage. The author provides a very candid and open description of his own grief that he suffered after the death of his beloved spouse. The openness of the narrative even stimulated the author to initially publish the work under a pseudonym, as he wanted to avoid identification, and only after his death the personality of the author was revealed. Diaries that he kept in the period following the death of the spouse compose the work of C.S. Lewis. Whereas the writing is very sincere and intimate, it is also obvious that the writer has a target to reveal the notion of the grief after the loss itself and to present his personal experience in the light of general processes that undergo in a soul and a mind of a sufferer.

*A Grief Observed* is unique in its highlighting the role of faith in the process of acceptance of the bereavement. Development of the relationship of C.S. Lewis with God is the most inspiring aspect of the book. Firstly, he illustrates bewilderment at death and intrinsic anger that he experienced towards God, unlike Naomi. In reading the book of Ruth, I didn't imagine

her to be angry. However, in *A Grief Observed*, the descriptions of the author's existence without his wife reveal the pain and impossibility to maintain a happy life.

The significance of the book is not only in the analysis and diary itself but also in the inner movement and change that is depicted by C.S. Lewis. With the time passed and with more understanding filling the consciousness of the author, he indicates the importance of death as a phenomenon that is able to open the eyes of a person on the nature of existence. C.S. Lewis claims "Death only reveals the vacuity that was always there" (p. 104). Thus, he recognizes that death can bring not only grief but foster the notion of importance of life, faith, and movement. It is further stated by the author that he experienced his personal restoration of faith, which, though, was reached after the suffering that he went through. In general, the personal account of grief by C.S. Lewis is highly spiritual and brings up the notion of reconciliation with God.

Another similar case following the path towards faith and reconciliation in the midst of grief and loss is, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, by Leo Tolstoy. A secular, but highly spiritual person wrote this book, and it uncovers the suffering and pain of an ordinary person with meticulous detail and precision. The idea that is promoted by Tolstoy is simple: not only do close people have to accept loss, but also it is significant to the person dying. The main character of the story, Ivan Ilych, learns that he is going to die from a lethal illness. The grief which this person experiences is unique as he grieves about his own imminent death, not perceiving that it is going to happen soon. Consequently, Ivan Ilych starts hating his family because they tend to avoid the subject. In the end, Tolstoy leads to the reconsidering of the man of the sense of his former artificial life and the need to have more sympathy. The idea of the finale of the book is strong as it brings reconciliation to the family and peace to the man's soul. The discussed accounts of grief

and suffering have led realistically or fictitiously to understanding life better. However, in real life it is frequently much more complicated to bring people back to peace and normalcy.

These books would help anyone in ministry or leadership aid those that are dealing with such matters as grief and loss. My personal experience of work with such people reveals the presence of much misunderstanding that the life goes on and it is important to continue as well. People can be so engulfed by grief that they are unwilling to pay attention to anything that surrounds them, as if in reality some part of their self has died. This is one situation that I'm dealing with, within my own community and family.

It is also often hard to operate with the loss of faith. Spiritual tradition can provide a great comfort to the grieving person who is deeply faithful. The problem is that sometimes a loss of a close person and subsequent grief can create different effects, and both the strengthening and the loss of faith is possible. When I work with people I frequently observe that initially those who have faced the loss do not perceive much from what they are told. Consequently, it is better to give them some time in order to live through the hardest period, which is brightly exemplified by C.S. Lewis and Tolstoy and the book of Ruth. It is not hard to notice the transitional period in the grief of a person when the work of a pastor or leader can be the most fruitful; it is then when the faith can be strengthened or restored that matters.



In Ruth 1:16-17, Ruth tells Naomi, her Israelite mother-in-law, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me."

The image depicts a ground level of grief, pain, and emptiness. As ministers, and leaders it's our place to open up the forum/church/community for faith, hope, love, and redemption to all people. With a magnitude of people in my context dealing with matters, like grief and loss, I hope to one day be able to share this book, and how it spoke to me. The idea of abandonment, isolation, and grief can be a tool for healing, through faith, communication/counseling, group study, and time.

**1. Where do you see FAITH, and HEALING in this STORY? Explain...**

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**2. Can you identify with the STORY in any way? Y/N Explain.**

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**Chapter 5.**

**Issues in Ministry**

Have you ever been hurt by a church? If so, you're not alone. Not all churches hurt people. Some people are hurt through their own mistakes, others because of the sin committed against them, and still others because of failed leadership. This reality can leave them reluctant to re-engage, afraid of being hurt again, wanting to protect themselves, and questioning the place of church in their lives. I can personally attest to this because I was hurt on more than one occasion. The first encounter of church hurt was when I was much younger. I was touched in a very inappropriate way by a church member, and nothing was done about it. The second pain I encountered was by someone in a church, who called himself a Deacon. The abuse nonetheless



caused so much devastation in my life. The good news for the hurt is that God has the ability to speak to the pain. In the New Testament it gives us a guideline to solve problems within the church that would eliminate the hurt that so many encounter.

- Scripture References for the Broken Church: Galatians to solve legalism (Galatians 1:6-7, 3:1-3, 4:9, 5:1).
- Colossians to solve heresy (Colossians 2:4, 8).
- 2 Timothy to solve tension in succession (2 Timothy 4:9-16).
- Philippians to solve conflict and selfish ambition (Philippians 2:3-22).
- 1 and 2 Corinthians will solve a host of problems centered around the issues of human pride in speaking that led to loveless and arrogant religious activities, or the lack of.

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2. **Seek after the holiness and love you hope for in others** - Passionately, sacrificially, and deliberately perseveres in seeking Christ-like discipleship. When you're faced with betrayal or disappointment, it will require perseverance. (Learn – Grow – Forgive - Repent). Stay on the path daily, recite, and don't give up. Trust that the good work God is doing in you and in others will ultimately be for the good of all who believe in him.

3. **Trust love to ultimately prevail:** Love anyway. It seems impossible in the moment, but it's the all of every Christian in every situation to love. In the end, only love will abide (1 Corinthians 1:13). Without love our lives would be meaningless and unfruitful. Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). Therefore, the wisest and safest way forward is always love. Love as if your life depends on it. Regardless, of how they treat you, love anyway. Love does not mean avoiding tough conversations or life-on-life accountability, but doing those things from a loving, humble, gracious, and patient position, which is from a mind and heart like Christ's.

**What ways can you LOVE when someone wronged you, mislead you, or hurt you?**

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As we know, there are a variety of ways to view disability. The mere fact is that it encompasses not only physical limitations, but mental limitations as well. Because disability is such a broad topic, I didn't want to focus on one specific condition. The way in which we comprehend disabled person's can have a major impact on our church, community and the complexity of issues within our congregation. We can't focus on the limitations, but rather focus on the humanness of the persona, and find ways to be effective, and open minded.

1. What are some areas in your ministry that lacks awareness when it comes to the disabled?

How can you as a minister, leader, or parishioner change that? Explain!

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2. As a minister, or leader can you consider the needs of the disabled, without discriminating?

Y/N Explain!





Chapter 9.

“Specialized Ministry”

# SPECIALIZED MINISTRY

*(Grief & Loss)*



BY DR. JANEIDE A. MATTHEWS-CHILLIS

The Importance of Ministry & Leadership enables us to embrace the DISabled...

### **The Power of Stories**

In her book *The Power of Stories: A Guide for Leading Multiracial and Multicultural Congregations*, Jacquie J. Lewis unveils the way multiracial ministries work. Whereas it is common to view a congregation as a unity of people who are close ethnically and racially, there is also an approach of diversity. Jacquie J. Lewis provides a variety of examples, which illustrate the strength of such ministerial work. The author reviews the aspects that helped the leaders to become inclusive with the time. She analyzes family background, challenges, (i.e. disabled) the experience of segregation and racism, and the role of mother in childhood, religious life, and other elements of their relationships and environment. The minister's intrinsic needs of reconciliation through diversity are formed by different forces, like childhood conflicts, teaching of parents, personal struggles, and segregation viewed from the inside. The book delivers a message that a diverse and embracing congregation is possible to be built with the help of the power of compassion and love.

I consider that this work greatly contributes to ministerial leadership. It is particularly important to those ministers who do their service in diverse communities and have individuals with disabilities. However, the lessons outlined by Lewis have something to teach a minister or leader of any church, since diversity may take various forms. As we know, age, gender, and social status may also bring the challenge of inclusivity. The book is powerful in its overall claim that the church should overcome boundaries, while it also analyzes the features of the inclusive church and teaches through examples and stories giving congregants the opportunity to embrace those that are disabled. Though, there is presented neither one explanation of how to accept



multiracialism nor a generalized recipe that every leader can easily apply in his or her daily ministerial service. However, the book fosters diversity and inclusivity by showing a direction and providing much inspiration to those who are willing to follow this path. For me personally, this book provided much guidance, and I particularly loved the author's explanation for the need of diversity: all people are entitled to all good things; this doesn't exclude those that are disabled or challenged. Reconciliation, faith, and unity among all people can help make that happen.

My personal understanding of leadership has been shaped throughout my personal, professional, and ministerial experiences. When I became ordained, I assumed I had a clear vision of myself as a ministerial leader. It was the actual practice that influenced and enhanced my views in many ways. On the one hand, I strongly believe that one needs to possess some innate characteristics, faith, hope, passion, and purpose, make one person a follower and the other a charismatic leader that promotes others to be. Much also depends on the background of a person, especially when the spiritual leadership is concerned. On the other hand, I partially agree with Lewis, who claims, "Leaders can be taught to lead"<sup>62</sup>. Whereas I do not suppose that a person with no inborn skills can be trained to become a successful leader, I accept the idea of teaching a leader to become more skillful, understanding, and knowledgeable, even in the areas of the disabled.

When the matter of diversity is concerned, much indeed depends on leadership. In Lewis's book, there is appraised inclusivity practiced by some congregational leaders. I consider that a leader is capable of building a unified and supportive congregation at the place where racial or ethnic conflict would instead prevail. I believe that abundance of ethnicities is a true challenge devised by God in order for humans to embrace diversity. The ministers who foster inclusivity are the ones who help to promote this beautiful design, which illustrates that people

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<sup>62</sup> Jacquie J. Lewis, *The Power of Stories*, 2008

may be of different color, and face challenges but they can be united. So, for me spiritual leadership fulfilled via ministry is the ability to inspire, unite, and lead people to understanding the message of God. This would include those that are disabled. The church is not the only physical place of gathering, but the unity where spiritual guidance, understanding, compassion and shelter can be provided to those who are seeking to hear and perceive the word of God. I also, believe that ministry, and concern for the disabled can be productive outside the walls of the church, allowing all people to have an opportunity to grow, heal, and be regardless of the gender, race, ethnicity, social status or disability. It's my sincere hope that this workbook enhances all those in ministry or leadership, with an open mind, sincere heart, and an attitude and desire to see growth in the church, and community.

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