

**Creating a Space Toward Healing Through Grace Within the
African American Church and Community**

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Sebrina Trent Elmore

Drew University

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Abstract

This dissertation is a study of the African American Church that provides the resources for spiritual healing for and within the African American Church and community, from the perspective of a pastoral diagnosis of complicated grief. Utilizing the methodology of ethnography and contextual theology, this dissertation focuses on the grace which is essential for the spiritual healing of both the African American Church as well as the African American community. Special attention is focused on interviews with three Baptist Pastors, and a cohort, of millennials, including Baptist congregants and friends, located in churches, in the New York and New Jersey areas. In addition, attention is focused on the research of several African American scholars who have addressed issues of healing in and beyond the African American Church and communities. Among them are Edward Wimberly, Gregory Ellison, Derald Wing Sue, Willis Johnson, Paolo Freire, and Ta-Nehisi Coates. This investigation encompasses the interconnectedness of the African American Church and the African American community within the scope of current pastoral care and counseling practices, as they pertain to providing care for present-day African American Church and communities.

It is my belief that the study of complicated grief within the African American Church and community, which stems from decades of varied types of loss, is essential for spiritual healing. It is imperative that the African American Church and community begin self-examination so that spiritual healing may begin. It is also my contention that the Church/community's spiritual healing will culminate in the acknowledgement of the many losses as well as their ability to respond through healthy methods. Complicated grief is incapacitating, and prevents the resuming of life because of feelings associated with loss. Such losses may include but are not exclusive to loss of identity, family, employment, severe illness or death of a

loved one, loss of physical ability or financial security. I believe spiritual healing as it pertains to the African American Church and community are prevalent in the Church community but must be unearthed.

Chapter I

Introduction

My mother has always been the barometer or compass for my coping skills as a black Christian woman, experiencing poverty, in America. Her emphasis on religion and education in the household would prove to be a guidepost, resource, or prophetic intervention, on my behalf. I reflect on religion and education as essential pieces of a non-verbal, counter-narrative that my mother created over and against that of the dominant population. However, in this study, I will focus primarily on the spiritual foundation my mother laid for me in my formative years, as well as my personal experiences, witnesses, and scholarship pertaining to the African American Church/community. My mother deposited me through the doors of our family church, Bethesda Baptist Church of New Rochelle, weekly, for Sunday Morning Bible Study, Sunday morning worship and choir rehearsal. The African American Church provided me with biblical literacy and, therefore, empowered me to navigate the numerous and disturbing losses in my life because I was born poor, black and female. I ascribe my ability to apply biblical truths, in a practical way, to my everyday living of life's circumstances, at an early age through the African American Church institution.

The Church afforded me biblical literacy and strength which are essential to navigate the realities I was confronted with, such as: the absence of my father, the volatile behavior of my brother, infiltration of drugs in my neighborhood, as well as being raised as a "latch-key" kid by a single mother. Biblical literacy was and remains necessary for me to navigate through my personal reality as it provides me with a counter narrative. Biblical literacy offered me solace, provided me with a sense of identity and purpose in which my surroundings were designed to do just the opposite. The Bible is the resource to which I turn for meaning, regarding my social,

psychological, and/or spiritual experiences. Within the context of what I experienced and witnessed in the neighborhood of my upbringing, the options were in tandem with a negative outcome concerning my life. Therefore, my reality hinged on my Biblical theology; wherein, my theological thinking informed my decisions as they relate to the tension between my faith and the world's view of me.

My mother told me on several occasions, as I matured, “A Black woman does not have time to be depressed.” Although my mother rarely articulated the anguish that caused what I now believe was depression, her statement gave me insight into her feelings of loss. I intuitively knew my mother's suffering, through the sad, yet soulful lyrics, of Nina Simone songs that reverberated throughout our home periodically, such as “Feeling Good” or “Here Comes the Sun” or “Everything Must Change” or “Black is the Color of My True Loves Hair” or “My Baby Just Cares for Me.” In hindsight, as a Chaplain and a witness to suffering on many levels, I identified the seasons during which my mother played those songs with the losses she suffered in her life: loss of her identity as a wife, loss of her marriage, loss of her individual dignity, loss of steady employment, loss of children through several miscarriages, loss of her parents and siblings, as well as loss of her health. Ultimately, her declaration regarding black women and depression, reminds me of how interwoven the sufferings of many black women are with others within the Black community.

My mother, an African American woman, raised in the African American Church, and experiencing the church as a safe haven, entrusted me, her black, female child, into “her” care. I am inferring to the Black Church, in particular, when I use the adjective “her”, because of the mothering care I received as a young girl there. My mother's decision to introduce me to the African American Church ushered me into being more than a member of the church, it as the

body of Christ, continues to mold me into a disciple of Christ. My initiation through baptism by immersion was an intrinsic element of my spiritual healing; I came to know intimately the love of Jesus and it transformed my understanding of my place in a sin-sick world. My Biblical teachings made the experience of baptism clear to me as having died with Christ, as I went down into the watery grave, identifying with Jesus' resurrection as the Pastor lifted me from the baptismal pool. As a fourteen-year-old who had experienced life on its most oppressive terms, I believed in Jesus as my Savior from a personal perspective, rather than from my mother's perspective. I believed the Biblical truths to be relevant for me personally and although my mother introduced me to the African American Church, it was the love of Jesus in which I became intimately involved.

Spiritual healing through the Holy Spirit has always been a resource in the African American Church for the congregation. This spiritual practice is discussed later in the dissertation. Although I applied biblical truths to the social ills associated with my social-economic reality such as my father being estranged from our family, and being raised by a single Mom who experienced abandonment and loneliness, many of those with whom I attended school did not engage biblical truths as I did. While my mother found solace in her music, she also became engulfed in her work as a nurse, and although she faced many challenges as a black woman, she kept her faith in God. Like my mother, as an adult, I would contend with the parallel narratives of those biblical truths and the social ills I experienced daily.

The biblical truths which the African American Church afforded me as a young girl and throughout my adulthood as a wife and mother would be my foundation, as I navigated some of the same social ills with which my mother struggled. Many of our struggles stem from being black in America: living in poverty and surviving as an underserved people. My faith in God

directly correlates to my decision-making during the most tumultuous times in my life. This would especially be true because of the tension between the knowledge of Jesus' saving grace for me and my African American Church/community and the suffering experienced by the African American Church/community. The brokenness I personally experienced on a micro level was transpiring on a macro level: my home life paralleled that of my African American Church/community. The African American family/community has been under attack for centuries in the United States of America. Kevin Drum comments on Ta-Nehisi Coates' "Atlantic" article entitled "The Case for Reparations," in which he makes the case that black labor and wealth had been plundered by whites for centuries.¹ I believe the African American Church heard the cries of its community and responded to those living on the fringes of society. I believe the Church and the community were so interconnected that pockets of grace were created within the Church as well as the community for the healing of multiple losses. Ultimately, my mother's influence on my development and its relationship to my pastoral care and counseling ministry work is likened to the slave narratives I have read. That is, because of their exposure to trauma many slaves were unable to conceptualize their salvation from the horrors of slavery in their lifetime but prepared them through modeling and hoped for the survival for their children. What we now deem a "good death" in hospital settings such as death from sickness and aging, African American slaves experienced as heinous and cruel deaths on a daily basis. Although grief is a natural process, cumulative grief is defined by the palliative care dictionary, in terms of the caregiver as an "emotional response when there is no time or opportunity to completely or adequately grieve for each person who has died."² Ultimately, her example of self-care and her

¹ Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Considering Reparations," *The Atlantic*, January 27, 2016, , accessed August 17, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/01/tanehisi-coates-reparations/427041/>.

² What Is Cumulative Grief - Meaning and Definition - Pallipedia, , accessed December 2, 2017, <http://pallipedia.org/cumulative-grief/>.

endowment of the African American Church and community as a refuge for my personal healing catapulted me into my role as a servant-leader.

In this study, I will examine the African American Church which remains relevant in response to the suffering of the African American community. I will also use the terms, the African American Church and the Black Church, interchangeably, throughout the contents of the dissertation and refer to the definition of Kelly Brown Douglas and Ronald E. Hopson in their essay, "Understanding the Black Church: The Dynamics of Change." In that text, they describe the "Black Church as those Christian institutions that African Americans have established and developed during and after slavery, including but not limited to such denominations as the independent black Methodist, Baptist, and Pentecostal churches".³ It has long been the opinion of many great thinkers that there is a breakdown of the African American Church/community in America. Dr. Edward P. Wimberley cites two scholars Dr. Homer Ashby and Dr. Cornel West as having respectively written concerning "fragmentation and relational disconnections" and also "nihilism" in terms of "the loss of the African American community."⁴ However, the Rev. Alicia D. Byrd, the Director of Theological Education and Leadership-Development Programs for the Congress of National Black Churches in Washington, observes that "the church goes back to African religion and society, where the fate of the individual was directly related to the fate of the community, and the pastor continues the tradition of an African elder or chief; wherein, there is a tremendous power vested there."⁵ Both positions create valid arguments for the relevance of the African American Church based on the apparent changes in the African American community.

³ Kelly Brown Douglas and Ronald E. Hopson, "Understanding the Black Church: The Dynamics of Change," *Journal of Religious Thought* 56/57, no. 2/1 (March 2001):.

⁴ Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), loc 61-68.

⁵ Megan Drennan, "Spiritual Healing," *Education Week* 15, no. 37 (June 5, 1996), 35.

I am a third-year chaplain resident and practitioner presently working in a hospital setting, particularly providing pastoral care and counseling for children and their families. When a child is sick, it most assuredly pulls on the heartstrings and affects the entire community, bringing a sense of grief that infiltrates the core of that community. Similarly, I have always been passionate about the genesis of my own African American community's grief. I have in the past been innately aware of my own struggle concerning the many losses I have experienced as an African American woman. At present, I am intentionally studying myself, the African American Church, and African American community, in relation to grief. Understanding these three will lead us to understand the depth of spiritual healing which the African American Church and African American community so desperately have need of. Through the study of self, I have become intimately aware of sufferings which are associated with the unconscious bias and stereotypical ideologies imposed upon the African American community.

These biases and stereotypical ideologies are extremely damaging to the African American Church/community. Dr. Derald Wing Sue in his book, *"Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation"* contends that microaggressions are constant and continuing experiences of marginalized groups in our society; they assail the self - esteem of recipients, produce anger and frustration, deplete psychic energy, lower feelings of subjective well - being and worthiness, produce physical health problems, shorten life expectancy, and deny minority populations equal access and opportunity in education, employment, and health care and are manifestations of racism. Considering that overt expressions of racism (hate crimes, physical assaults, use of racial epithets, and blatant discriminatory acts) may have declined, some argue that those expressions have morphed into a more contemporary and insidious form that hides in our cultural assumptions/beliefs/values, in our institutional policies and practices, and in

the deeper psychological recesses of our individual psyches.”⁶ Therefore, it would behoove the African American Church/community to reflect on their personal developed traditions on a constant and consistent basis, as opposed to those biases and stereotypical ideologies being imposed upon the community from the outside. In so doing, the African American Church/Community will acknowledge the leverage or power they wield when the church and community acknowledges and addresses these issues.

Reflection has also led me to a level of self-awareness in which ethically leads to self-examination for the purpose of providing care in a pluralistic setting. Self-awareness is defined as being aware of one’s traits, feelings, and behaviors.⁷ Rolf Nolasco, Jr. sets forth this concept of self-awareness as it impacts my work as a clinician: “Our attitudes towards our clients, the lens that we use to filter and make sense of information or stories gathered, the therapeutic technologies we adopt and the lingering thoughts, feelings, and reflections we have before and beyond the therapeutic hour are heavily dependent on our self-perception and professional identity.⁸ Self-examination over and above self-awareness is necessary within the scope of my ministry work because the latter keeps me grounded in a position of God-consciousness. This means I provide care to a broken community toward healing recognizing I am broken also and this knowledge is dependent on the Holy Spirit to guide me, considering my aforementioned personal bias.

Having reflected on my past experiences of suffering and loss, I now embrace my personal story through the processes of self-awareness and self-supervision. I suffered great neglect, abuse, abandonment and rejection as a child. Formerly, I was unable to name these

⁶ Derald Wing Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2010) 8.

⁷ Houghton Mifflin Co., ed., *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed., s.v. "Self-awareness."

⁸ Rolf Nolasco Jr., *The Contemplative Counselor: A Way of Being*, Minneapolis, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 18.

experiences for what they were: inhibiting factors which prevented healing. My mother was unconsciously, herself, as were generations before her, striving to find the cure for an acute as well as complicated grief because of the pain, guilt and shame that emerged from multiple losses and furthermore an embedded theology. F. Willis Johnson explains, embedded theology as follows: “the beliefs and assumptions that were absorbed or passed on to us from our families, church experiences, and world and furthermore, impressed upon our unconscious mind; yet, underdeveloped and without disciplined reflection, crafted through a lifetime of experiences our faith can end up choking it into rigid and shallow understandings.”⁹ My embedded theology helped form some of my biases and shaped my worldview. However, I am now aware of these biases as a result of my times of reflection.

Although many of my feelings in light of my sufferings stem from an embedded theology, many also emerge from the dominant culture’s view of me, associated with socially constructed social, economic, and gender locations ascribed to me as a black, poor, female in America. For example, I would have sabotaged my own success in the past by not acknowledging I could learn from anyone, including my white professors. The process of reflection has brought me to a point where I am able to care for my wounds which had not previously attended to. These are the wounds I attribute to both my embedded theology and the dominant culture’s depiction of me. Fortunately, my mother surrounded me with those who would allow me the liberty to craft my deliberative theology.

Willis explains deliberative theology as a “theology that we intentionally craft as we grow and mature spiritually.”¹⁰ As a seminarian, being exposed to various theological concepts and biblical interpretation, reasoning with my colleagues, and being open to my professors have

⁹ F. Willis Johnson, *Holding up Your Corner: Talking about Race in Your Community* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017) 6.

¹⁰ Ibid.

informed my deliberative theology. Also, my work as a multi-faith/ multi-cultural chaplain has informed my deliberative theology as I come to terms and articulate my personal theology.

I have since acknowledged my embedded theology as a closed system, ridden with bias. However, I have begun the journey of attending to my own personal wounds through a process of daily reflection and action, as well as seeking the companionship, comfort and care of the Holy Spirit. This process of attending my needs, particularly because I work in a Pastoral role is known as self-care, the practice of attending to one's self: physically, emotionally and spiritually. Keeping a healthy balance, considering the trauma, demands, and expectations bestowed upon those who are called to provide pastoral care and counseling is imperative. Considering that my diagnosis of the African American Church and community is that it is suffering from complicated grief and, at the same time is providing care, it is imperative that the Church as caregiver focus on self-care.

As part of my plan for self-care, I have committed myself to the daily meditative practice of reading the Word of God and reflecting on its truths. As a leader in the African American community I have delved into my own personal places of suffering, and I am more readily prepared to lead those who are experiencing grief into the un-navigated, yet to be acknowledged or named places of suffering of loss and pain. God's people experience un-navigated places because some have closed their ears to one another's narrative, or maybe not having explored or acknowledged their own losses, we, as the African American Church, are unequipped to walk with one another in our suffering. It is impossible to lead where one has not traveled and irresponsible as a leader, to require others to eat what one has not eaten. As an illustration, let's take Henri Nouwen's Messiah in *The Wounded Healer*; where, the Rabbi offers him as an example of "the wounded healer, the one who must look after His own wounds but at the same

time be prepared to heal the wounds of others.”¹¹ Self-care is pertinent to the work of pastoral care and is often neglected by caregivers especially those I have observed within the context of the African American Church/community.

As an ethnographer, I am in the process of studying the culture of the African American Church, using methods such as close observation and interviews. The following definition guides my practices as an ethnographer,

Ethnography, the study of people in a natural setting provides an opportunity for researchers to conduct a detailed study of a group of people while being immersed in the culture of that group. Ethnography (ethno, “people” or “folk,” and graphy, “to describe something”), sometimes referred to as participant observation or field research, involves the study of people or an organization through face-to-face interactions in a real-life social setting. Over time, this interaction yields a rich and detailed account of the culture, history, and characteristics of a social phenomenon.¹²

I consider myself an ethnographer because I observe the culture of the African American Church/community; yet, I have only begun the written description of my findings more recently for the purposes of my doctoral work. Furthermore, I have gone beyond the written description of events and details to interpret the culture of the African American Church in relation to her African American community. It is at this point I will draw on my pastoral care and counseling training and skills to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the African American Church and community. In light of the above definition of an ethnographer, the process has been challenging

¹¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (Garden City: Double Day, 1979) 82.

¹² H. James Birx, *Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2006).

because, as my seminary professor, Dr. Lynn Westfield taught, “a phenomenon is difficult to study if or when we have been engulfed in that phenomenon for a significant period of time.”¹³ Indeed, it is difficult to remain objective when the phenomenon has to do with self. To remain objective, it is important to enter into conversation with others who are willing to do the same: partake in the study of self. Furthermore, Dr. Westfield went on to teach that “the content of the phenomenon must be studied from every angle for a substantial period of time.”¹⁴ Hence, these participants, Pastors whom I have interviewed and individuals of the same age-cohort have gathered to self-reflect, and to study themselves as African American leaders amidst the dominant culture, in America.

I also consider myself a theologian which is defined as, “one who studies religious faith, practice and experience as well as the study of God and God’s relation to the world.”¹⁵ I consider myself a theologian as it enables me to study the ways in which the members of the African American Church apply their faith to their everyday circumstances. Within the context of this doctoral work, I also study the African American Church/community’s faith practices and experience as it relates to years of oppression endured. Thus, the African American Church which has been the bulwark and sustaining foundation for the community needs to reexamine its traditions to be relevant and inclusive for the healing of those millennials living in a society that has ultimately moved them to alternatives to the Black Church and an

¹³ Lynn Westfield (Lecture, Seminary Course, “Art of Theological Reflection,” Spring 2014, Drew Theological School, Madison).

¹⁴ Lynn Westfield (Lecture, Seminary Course, “Art of Theological Reflection,” Spring 2014, Drew Theological School, Madison).

¹⁵ “Theology,” Merriam-Webster, , accessed December 5, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theology>.

unconscious searching for meaningfulness and identity through current pastoral and counseling practices.

To accomplish the goals of this study, the following tasks will be undertaken as described in the following chapters. Chapter two focuses on the reasons why I intentionally continue to study the African American Church /community. Utilizing my skills as a chaplain, I examine the complex grief of the African American Church/ community. It is essential that the African American Church “be” a witness in the midst of the African American community regarding our love for one another and acknowledge through self-reflection that we, as God’s children, are limited. We need to be guided by the Holy Spirit, who guides us into all truths according to Jesus’ promise. I suggest the responses of those whom I interviewed in the African American Church regarded their own complicated grief and are based on concepts found in pastoral care and counseling.

Chapter two also expounds on my title for this study, “Creating a Space Toward Healing Through Grace Within the African American Church and Community”. My aim is to demonstrate that spiritual healing exists in an intentionally created space, in the African American church, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit within its context as well as its community. When one loves another, therein lies grace towards those in any kind of difficulty or crisis, promulgating healing within the Church. It is essential for the African American Church, while having attended to her own wounds, to then lead the African American community toward spiritual healing: living out its purpose, particularly, in the African American community. It is essential that it “be” a witness in the midst of the church community regarding our care of one another in the Church; therefore, recognizing the limitations of tradition and standing on the

Word of God. I focus primarily on healing of the deep spiritual, emotional and psychological losses the African American Church/ community has experienced, especially identity, family and hope. Therefore, I believe it is at the intersections of the African American Church/ community itself that self-reflection ought to begin on a communal level. From my perspective, the intersection in terms of the African American Church/ community encompasses relationships, particularly interpersonal relationships.

I suggest my pastoral “diagnosis” of the African American Church/community as complex grief through an in-depth definition of this term. I examine what the African American Church’s reaction, response, or lack thereof is regarding the losses that her community has endured. I pose the question as to whether the integrity of the African American Church has been compromised within the faith community as well as in the surrounding African American communities. I ponder how the African American Church creates unconscious habits that injure God’s created beings. Yet, Dr. Edward P. Wimberly states, “storytelling can also trigger within individuals, marriages, families, extended families, and villages unconscious memories that provide imaginative resources for reconstructing our villages.”¹⁶ Through the tradition of storytelling the entire Church may be involved in the reconstruction of forms of pastoral care and counseling.

I also address how we, as the African American Church, view ourselves, as active listeners in providing a ministry of presence. Can our projects, events and fundraisers and ultimately our managing of those who are grieving be likened to that of the Pharisees long prayers in the public square (Matthew 6:5)? People, many like my mother are overlooking their physical or mental symptoms for the sake of survival, rather than seeking the path toward wholeness and/or healing and liberation. Finally, when the effects of loss permeates the

¹⁶ Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), loc 107.

individual to the point in which one cannot locate/find themselves; mental illness can occur. The question arises upon analysis, how is it that we can come to a theological assessment of the African American Church/ community's strengths and weaknesses for the purpose of healing?

It is my contention that God has prepared the African American Church to provide care for her grief-stricken African American Church/community. Therefore, for this study I will glean from clinicians who are active in the field of pastoral care and counseling such as Dr. Gregory Ellison II, Ph.D., Dr. Edward P. Wimberley, Ph.D., Dr. Anne E. Streaty Wimberley, Ph.D. and the American theologian and scholar, Howard Thurman. I also turn to the age cohort group of millennials for their thoughts and feelings regarding the condition of the African American Church/ community today. Furthermore, I utilize the work of specialists within the behavioral sciences regarding developing more in-depth pastoral care and counseling practices towards healing in the context of the African American Church/ community, particularly the work of Rolf Nolasco, Megan Drennan and, Derald Wing Sue.

In chapter three, I examine the continuum of pastoral care as well as the fostering of communal care particularly for the Christian community following Jesus' death, through the study of the New Testament Epistle of James chapter 5. The African American Church is a rich resource to which the African American community has been lead into places of recovery, through revival from losses which have long plagued our community. This can be observed through practices which the half-brother of Jesus points to and the elders within the community, as a model of their response to the suffering the Jamesonian community is experiencing.

In chapter four I examine several pastors' current pastoral care and counseling practices, as well as the experiences of millennials living out their spirituality in the African American Church /community. My doctoral work is informed, in part by data gathered through the

interviews of three pastors who serve the African American Church/community: one of whom serves young adults, in particular. I am curious as to their current pastoral care and counseling practices related to the African American Church/ community. These pastors all serve in similar Baptist contexts, in the New York and New Jersey areas. Included are Allen Paul Weaver III, Co-pastor of my home church, Bethesda Baptist Church of New Rochelle, who offered his description of the church to which my first interviewee, Rev. Dr. Allen Paul Weaver Jr. is Senior Pastor, as a Bible believing, biblically literate and charismatic, church community charismatic, meaning, seeking to be Holy Spirit filled, empowered and guided.¹⁷ From my perspective, I have found the churches in which the interviewees Pastor are similar in context. I am also curious and concerned regarding their views of the present spiritual condition of the African American Church/community. My work is also informed by a group of millennials which I convened for the purpose of obtaining their experience within the African American Church/community. The age-cohort of millennials was specifically convened as a focus group and initially agreed to two 90-minute sessions. Also interviewed was Reverend Fred Sullivan, an African American minister whose role at Mount Olive Baptist Church in New Jersey is Minister to Young Adults, whom I am privileged to call my colleague, considering we attended seminary together. Finally, an African American female Pastor who prefers to remain anonymous participated in my interviews. She was quite candid regarding her pastoral care and counseling practices as it relates to her role in the African American Church/community.

¹⁷ Allen Paul Weaver III, M. Div., "Co-Pastor, Bethesda Baptist Church of New Rochelle," interview by author, 2017.

Chapter II **The Why of This Study**

This chapter explains the process of why I have embarked on a journey towards healing for the African American Church/community through the methodology of pastoral care and counseling. Firstly, I believe the African American Church/community suffers from complicated grief and therefore making a space for mourning is essential. Secondly, I believe healing ought to be sought from within the African American Church through the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, for healing to occur from within the African American Church, she must begin the work of self-reflection. Fourthly, I propose the use of a pastoral care and counseling methodology that includes “active listening” and “ministry of presence” to be established within the African American Church/community.¹⁸ When I use the phrase African American Church/ community I refer to the African American Church as well as her surrounding African American community. When I ponder the history of the Black Church, she is neither devoid nor unattached from the Black community and, therefore, both are held in the same regard in terms of my study.

Why This Journey?

My social location has much to do with my receiving Jesus as my Lord and Savior and eventually accepting my call to the African American Church/community. As a black female child raised, in the poorest borough of New York City, The Bronx, I was exposed to racism, sexism, and classism on a consistent basis. However, my experience in the African American Church overshadows and, in essence, eradicates my aforementioned losses and/or the potential loss of my purpose and calling, “to care for orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27) as I grow and mature in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Howard Thurman claims, that

¹⁸ Rev. Johnny Bush (lecture, Clinical Pastoral Education, WMC Curriculum, Westchester Medical Center, Vahalla, NY, 2017).

“Christianity is the technique for the survival of the oppressed.”¹⁹ I believe that my mother, knowing the losses she and her African American Church/community have endured, merely because of the color of their skin, primarily looked to their Christian faith for their survival. Despite being raised by a single mother and being born into circumstances beyond my control, the African American Church offered me the option for life through the incarnated Jesus!

My Pastoral Diagnosis for the African American Church

There are many ways one may experience grief, including: acute grief, immediate grief, unresolved grief, complicated grief and anticipatory grief. My pastoral diagnosis of the African American Church/community is that of complicated grief. My assessment is based on the pattern of accumulation of grief suggested by Dr. H. Norman Wright who speaks in his book, *The Complete Guide to Crisis and Trauma Counseling: What to do and Say When it Matters Most*, of “unspeakable losses.”²⁰ The Mayo Clinic defines complicated grief (also referred to as persistent complex bereavement) as “feelings of loss which are debilitating to the point wherein painful emotions are so long lasting and severe that one has trouble recovering from the loss and resuming their own life”.²¹ Therefore, I view the African American Church/community’s experience in America through the lens of Dr. Wright’s concept of accumulative losses associated with chattel slavery, Jim Crow, and present-day habitual mass incarceration of African Americans in which Michelle Alexander refers to in the title of her book, “*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.” I also agree with Rev. Dr. Allen Paul Weaver’s assertion that the present self-destructive, aggressive, and violent behavior prevalent in the African American community is a result of the cumulative losses suffered throughout the

¹⁹ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996) 347.

²⁰ H. Norman. Wright, *The complete Guide to Crisis and Trauma Counseling: What to do and Say When it Matters Most!* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2014) 67.

²¹ "Complicated Grief - Symptoms and Causes - Mayo Clinic," , accessed December 1, 2017, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/complicated-grief/symptoms-causes/syc-20360374>.

community's approximate one hundred and fifty year period of enslavement in America.²²

Therefore, my perspective of the losses suffered because of the oppressive nature inherent in the system of slavery deems my pastoral diagnosis of complicated grief as appropriate.

Although chattel slavery does not exist in our post-modern society, I believe the African American community bears the sufferings in the psyche as well as generationally through learned behaviors and patterns detrimental to survival. Post-traumatic symptoms from that period in American history are experienced presently as a result of acts committed against the personhood of African Americans, physically, mentally, and spiritually. These symptoms are indicators of present-day issues, which cause the African American Church/ community to be in crisis or in a state of emergency. Consistent and continuous exposure to trauma, caused by modern-day types of slavery such as mass incarceration, police bias against African Americans, an unjust penal system, and underrepresentation in areas of education, labor, and housing have caused the African American Church/community to live in crisis.

I agree with the argument that the indignities that the African American/Church community suffered, as we once knew it, has ceased to exist. However, the African American Church's response to the changing landscape of the community has led to a lack of support that was once present and is still necessary to transcend and/or buffer the suffering, which has resulted from racism, classism and sexism.²³ For instance, Dr. Edward P Wimberley quotes Homer Ashby and Cornel West, who argue as to the relational traditions between the Church and community and therefore, the lack of connection apparent within the African American

²² Rev. Dr. Allen Paul Weaver Jr., M. Div., "Senior Pastor, Bethesda Baptist Church of New Rochelle," interview by author, 2017.

²³ Ibid.

community.²⁴ I suggest that the African American Church is now called to respond to a vastly changing village.

Healing From Within the African American Church

I believe healing ought to be sought from within the African American Church through the Holy Spirit. As it was throughout the Old Testament, God's Spirit gives divine empowerment; wherein, divine power, not human power will enable the community to overcome current oppositions for its strengthening and rebuilding. Therefore, the angel says to Zerubbabel "...Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." (Zechariah 4:6) Let us consider C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya's description of the Church, in their book, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* in which, "reliable investigators have consistently underscored the fact that Black Churches were one of the few stable and coherent institutions to emerge from slavery as well as the most independent, and dominant institutions in black communities."²⁵ This statement underscores my proposal for the African American Church to be reestablished as a resource for the African American community toward healing. My experience within the African American Church is that it has assisted as well as provided the opportunity for the community to speak "their" truth. It has provided hope during periods of persecution and despair and ultimately has been the voice of the African American community.

The Prophet Jeremiah poses the rhetorical question, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughters of my people not been restored (Jeremiah 8:22)? Like the Prophet Jeremiah, I ask of the African American Church/community and lament as he did; yet, expecting a positive answer considering there is spiritual healing available within for the Church/community. In the past, the African American Church's ability to

²⁴ Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care Revised Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008) loc 71.

²⁵ Charles Eric. Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 7.

provide active listening enabled it to walk with the African American community in crisis. Despite the arguments that the African American Church is dead, I believe it is equipped to respond to the village which is in the midst of ever-evolving but pervasive forms of racially-based oppression. However, there is a contention amongst African American scholars that the African American Church is neither functioning nor is relevant to our post-modern African American community. Eddie Glaude, Jr., Ph.D., argues in his article “The Black Church is Dead,” three points, the second of which I would like to highlight, which is that African American communities are “more differentiated and furthermore, black religious institutions and beliefs stand alongside a number of vibrant non-religious institutions and beliefs; however, Dr. Glaude is not suggesting the African American communities are wholly secular.”²⁶ Dr. Glaude asserts that the African American Church no longer holds sole leadership role in the African American community and therefore, the community has found other ways towards liberation; whereas, during one point in American history, civil rights work outside the Church was condemned. Dr. Cornel West believes more strongly and argues, “nihilism in the community has diminished the African American community’s once venerated position for the church as a resource for healing.”²⁷ Although West believes the relational aspect of the Church/community has changed, storytelling within the context of the African American faith tradition remains a powerful tool for its liberation. I agree with West’s contention that storytelling in modern-day forms such as rap, spoken word poetry and comedy have proved to be powerful resources for the African American community for healing. These aforementioned forms of storytelling are what I believe Dr. Glaude, Jr. means by the African American communities being more differentiated.

²⁶ Eddie Glaude Jr. Ph.D., "The Black Church Is Dead," The Huffington Post, August 23, 2012, , accessed April 23, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/eddie-glaude-jr-phd/the-black-church-is-dead_b_473815.html.

²⁷ Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care Revised Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008) 68.

As I consider the African American Church as a source of healing, I am reminded of Paulo Freire's study, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in terms of the community as healer/teacher. I assert that it is imperative that the African American Church/community recognize the power toward healing is found within their stories. The story may be told through varied and different forms of expression; yet, the Church must be patient. The results may not be evident in this generation or the next; yet, the Church must persist in its work towards spiritual healing. The Church must now, as it has in earlier generations, press its ears to the suffering Church/community and provide an active and deeper-listening.

This active listening involves the listener (Church) to provide instances in which it offers no response. This requires that the Church reject the temptation to "fix" or "change" or "do something." This practice speaks to the capacity for the Church to sit with the community in its suffering. The practice of active listening also involves that the listener ask open-ended questions. The use of open-ended questions within the context of pastoral care would encourage the community to reflect on their experiences through more in-depth responses rather than simply yes or no replies. The Church ought to assume grief is the underlying issue and therefore, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, respond to that grief appropriately and with care. Unfortunately, the Church within the changing village and amidst the crisis to which she is also experiencing has been distracted by what I sense is an iceberg effect. By this I mean the anger and violent behavior to which the grief-stricken African American community reverts to and presents is but a symptom of the inward emotions due to the complicated grief she is experiencing. Emotions such as anger and frustration are those emotions in which we witness and are but remnants of deeper, unconscious feelings associated with loss.

The African American Church/community is also providing the support necessary to move toward the spiritual healing required for the African American Church/community in crisis. This is likened to Freire's concept that "the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches but one who, himself is taught in dialogue with the students who while being taught, also teach."²⁸ The Church in communication with the storyteller (Church/community), the experience and the Holy Spirit (the latter giving insight into, or discernment as to the suffering within their stories) is able to assess the needs and strengths of the Church/community.

It is important to remember the Church is incapable of creating the space for grace or spiritual healing on its own but is a resource through which the power of the Holy Spirit works. Thomas Long wrote in his book, *The Witness of Preaching*, that "those who come before the congregation and/or the community act in Christ's name"; therefore, "it is Christ who is doing the confronting."²⁹ The practitioner who empathizes and acts, diving into the deep end of the pool, along with those who are suffering, hears the Spirit and boldly enters the place of suffering. There is the idea that the uncovered or rediscovered wound may cause trauma and likened to the medical example of a scab being removed; whereby, the wound is traumatized initially. However, the wound having initially been tended to, would never have grown a scab but the body's natural tendency forms the layer to protect the wound. With that said, we must act upon or "attend to" the symptoms caused by the suffering. Again, grief is cumulative and, the feelings associated with grief such as fear that a disease such as cancer will return, that one's unarmed son will be murdered by police, that remain in our unconscious, and surface as the Church/community is presented with new instances of loss.

²⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973) 80.

²⁹ Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016) 16.

In doing the work of God, the Church must learn and practice active listening and “no longer be docile listeners” as Freire framed it.³⁰ God exemplifies what He intends for the Church’s response to the dying world. For example, He heard the cries of the Israelites, when they were slaves in Egypt and acted on their behalf. God guided Moses to then lead the people out of bondage and during their wilderness experience, through learning and practice, they developed a relationship with God. I make this point because the Church ought to be in constant and consistent dialogue with God to fulfill its calling. God is calling the Church to task: to hear God’s people in their suffering and rather than stand by idly, to take action. The Church is called to take on an empathic posture just as God did for the Israelites. Empathy, unlike sympathy, takes on the form of active listening. Empathy, comes from a place of action and therefore, delves deeper, on the other’s behalf; whereas, sympathy remains at the periphery of the situation and often is complacent. The African American Church’s calling has been established, and like God heard the cries of the Israelites, the Church must actively listen and take on an empathic stance amidst distractions such as racism, classism and sexism. However, it is vital that the church listen to the Holy Spirit, considering God’s omniscience.

Active listening involves patience and enables the Church to respond to expressions of suffering inherent in the stories, riddled with loss and told by the Church/community. It is necessary that feelings and emotions be expressed during times of grief as well as be heard. Grief may be expressed through verbal, non-verbal, passive and active channels and may be represented through four categories of feelings: mad, glad, sad or scared.³¹ I have observed that the African American Church/community’s expression of grief through emotions such as anger

³⁰ *ibid*

³¹ Rev. Johnny Bush (lecture, Clinical Pastoral Education, WMC Curriculum, Westchester Medical Center, Vahalla, NY, 2017).

are often labeled as pathological. From my perspective the dominant culture's view of the African American Church/community's response to loss, is that of managing or programming rather than caring for the community. Often the community grieves through non-verbal expressions of lament, wailing or tears and these are the emotions most often ignored or glossed over; wherein, active listening is imperative. For instance, tears, lament and mourning, are examples of non-verbal expressions of grief and therefore, active listening involves all our senses. The Church should respond to her community's stories bereft of non-judgmental, impartial and unbiased responses.

Therefore, the goal of the African American Church as competent responders should be that of support, confrontation and clarification. Yet, the Church's competence in this area depends on timely, reflective feedback. The approach I am suggesting requires that the Church recognize its intent as the responder. The Church's intent ought to be one in the same as its purpose, to care for others, wherein, the impact is neither overly critical nor damaging. When the African American Church goes forth in the power of the Holy Spirit, its response must be towards the healing of unconscious wounds. "The unconscious, a psychological term also known as subconscious refers to that which exists in the mind but not immediately available to consciousness: affecting thought, feeling, and behavior without entering awareness."³² Therefore, it is not by the Church's might but by the power of the Holy Spirit which reveals the source(s) of the suffering. It is also through the power of the Holy Spirit that these causes of the suffering be exposed.

Through resources such as storytelling, a theology of hope and prayer, the Church has invariably provided opportunities for the suffering community to speak their truth. Through the

³² "Subconscious," Merriam-Webster, accessed December 5, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/subconscious>.

power of the Holy Spirit the African American Church has the ability to be the conduit through which the voice of the black community is heard. In other words, traditionally the African American Church actively listened and responded to the grief resonating in the people's stories. It provided a sacred and safe space for an identical narrative to be heard. I believe healing also ought to be sought from within the African American church as a source of life for the community in the church's "woundedness." The African American Church enabled the African American community to thrive in the face of racism considering it has also provided the ministry of presence.³³

Self-Reflection and the African American Church

The African American Church, in order to be revived in the midst of its wilderness periods, for the task at hand must turn to the practice of self-reflection. My pastoral diagnosis of complicated grief for the African American Church/community is an assessment of it as being in a state of life or death. I make this assessment in terms of the unconscious wounds that remain uncared for. Self-reflection is the practice which the Church should undertake to then uncover how oppression has also affected it. It is also imperative because traditions that are held in high regard in the Church are also the cause of unconscious wounds. For instance, the church's obligation to certain interpretations of the Bible cause it to gloss over pathological illnesses caused by complex grief such as loss of identity, loss of self (mental illness), loss of family as well as loss of relationships. The Church's own unacknowledged and unnamed sufferings cause it to be less likely to sit with those for whom it is called to care for.

When the Church does not attend to her own wounds associated with oppression it is incapable of sitting with those of the community. Not having acknowledged or named and thereby bringing suffering to the surface for examination the African American Church continues

³³ Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care Revised Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008) loc 71.

to unconsciously endure and subsequently remains stagnant on the journey towards healing. As the African American Church continues to compartmentalize her sufferings to places of non-discovery, their ability to carry the burden of its community to God in prayer is thwarted. The Church must become well-versed in the practice of studying herself to then respond to its wounds as it moves toward healing the community. Through concepts such as “active listening” and “ministry of presence” within the sphere of pastoral care and counseling, the Church is afforded the skills for retrospection toward healing of her own internal wounds. It is the essential that the African American Church responds to its own wounds, to be equipped to serve the community.

Through my experience as a chaplain in a hospital setting, I am able to recognize to what extent self-reflection is essential for practitioners who care for the sick. Reflecting on its wounds, should cause the Church to respond to an unconscious bias and stereotypes that thwart her mandate concerning humankind. I began to reflect one day on my individual practice towards healing and also my personal practice of self-care. As I make my way into the side entrance of the hospital this particular day and continue down the corridor, I reflect on how I have been caring for myself, considering I am exposed, on a regular basis to trauma on many levels. Yet, witness it I do and bear it in my body, mind and emotions: absorbing it into my whole being. Similarly, reflection should be an integral practice for the African American Church/community. God has, in fact, called the Church in particular to the sick, the widows, and the disenfranchised. There is a need for the church to take on a posture of self-reflection that it may be able to endure in this season.

There is an individual self-reflective process that every disciple ought to practice daily in terms of self-care so that spiritual paralysis will not occur. However, there is also a cultural or

corporate self-reflection which I propose occur within the Church. Personal and corporate healing comes through meditating on the Word of God as a mirror into the soul of the disciple as well as the Church. As such, disciples also become accountability partners for one another toward healing to give one another grace upon which to self-reflect. However, when our self-reflection does not line up with the Word of God and self-awareness occurs, the will and mind must be given over to the Holy Spirit for change. Through theological reflection, the individual and the body of Christ-the (African American) church binds up her own wounds, in preparation, toward the healing of particularly the African American community.

The African American Church must acknowledge its suffering for it to embark on her journey toward spiritual healing. As I reflect on the spiritual health of the African American Church, it burdens me; it is foremost in my mind, and prevalent in my thoughts. I have a love for the Church as a whole, because it is “the body of Christ,” of which I am a relevant and essential member. I am a witness that the African American Church provides aspects of active listening and ministry of presence, and thereby I have survived suffering caused by oppression systems of racism, classism and sexism. Furthermore, I have been liberated by the power of Jesus’ resurrection. As a leader in the African American Church, I stand on the shoulders of those who have their ears to the suffering that is predominant in the community. I believe that the church has always led our community to places of spiritual healing. It will benefit the African American Church through self-reflection to acknowledge its wounds through the methodology of pastoral care and counseling.

Pastoral Care and Counseling For and With the African American Church

In his book, *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Emmanuel Y. Lartey highlights Dr. Edward Wimberly’s definition of pastoral care

and counseling as “the bringing to bear upon persons and families in crisis the total caring resources of the church as well as particular emphasis in the black church tradition emerging as overwhelmingly about preparing, strengthening and attempting to change those conditions which prevent persons from choosing healthy crisis coping patterns within a framework which is communal and supportive.”³⁴ Pastoral care and counseling is a sparingly examined subject in the context of the African American Church/community, in particular. The African American community is often suspicious and lacking trust in the African American Church and therapy. However, because of its emphasis on active listening and ministry of presence, the African American Church/community could benefit from these pastoral care and counseling techniques. From my perspective, the African American Church has an ethical responsibility to assume an empathic posture towards the spiritual and emotional care of the African American Church/community, as it pertains to the history of oppression in America. This empathic perspective ought to be the Church’s passion as it pays attention specifically to the spiritual and emotional health of the community. As a result, the African American Church/community could benefit from the implementation of pastoral care and counseling that considers the diagnosis of anticipatory grief as well as the aforementioned pastoral diagnosis of complex grief associated with oppression.

My pastoral diagnosis of anticipatory grief includes the rise in Baby Boomers and those who come before them who are suffering from debilitating diseases such as Alzheimer’s, dementia and the like. Considering the age cohort described as Baby Boomer’s covers a wide range, there is a great number of younger Boomers who are presently caring for their grandparents, parents or loved ones. Although death is a naturally occurring season in the life

³⁴ Emmanuel Yartekwei Lartey, *In Living Color an Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003).

cycle, anticipatory grief is unique in that it presents the challenge of witnessing a loved one's death. Families are presented with disruption, witnessing the deterioration of a loved one's body, and experience the vigil that takes place at the bedside, and the myriad of difficult decisions concerning a loved one's physical, mental and spiritual well-being, and overall loss.

We are losing the wisdom of our elders, as they forget who we are, and we are also losing an entire generation as we recoil from their desperation. Thus, we come to just a few of the factors that are contributing to the African American Church/community's accumulative loss. The present generation is experiencing racism contrastingly different in its subtlety, perpetuating itself through varied systems of oppression. Many young adults appear indifferent in terms of relinquishing their rights and autonomy, their power, and their energy. Instead, they are focused more on the solution rather than the problem. They are persistent in terms of their overcoming the obstacles that immobilized former generations. My observation is that a portion of the African American Church/community has succumbed to mind and mood altering substances as a method of circumventing the pervasiveness of oppression.

Another portion of the African American community responds by expressing their suffering through the hip hop culture. The African American Church is called upon to care for those who were addicted to substances and another portion in which they were unable to communicate with or control. Yet, self-medicating and the creation of an entirely different culture was and remains this generations' lament and resolution. However, I was taught that the storyteller becomes more abstract as the trust in the listener lessens.³⁵ The hip hop generation has created its own culture, becoming less trusting of the African American Church, once the pinnacle of the African American community. However I believe this culture is created from

³⁵ Rev. Johnny Bush, CPE Educator (Didactic, Clinical Pastoral Education, WMC Curriculum, Westchester Medical Center, Vahalla, NY, 2017).

rage to which the underlying causes are hidden away in a shroud of secrecy by the former generations.

The purpose of the church as the body of Christ is that of God's hands and feet in this world. As God's co-laborers on the earth, the church's purpose is that of ministering to those in need: body, mind and soul. However, I propose that it is essential that we first go about the work of self-care; whereby, being prepared to do the work of ministry in caring for others. The care of others entails entering the places of suffering with others. God has called the Church to go into the world with compassion; yet, it is imperative that the care be lived out first within the context of the Church.

Multiple losses which remain prevalent in the unconscious of the African American Church/community causes suffering to which the Church/community is experiencing, yet, unaware as to how deep-seated the pain and suffering extends into our daily lives. For instance, Dr. Stephen G. Ray Jr., in his review of James Cone's book, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, identifies lynching as "the common practice of murdering (killing seems too sanitized a term) African Americans as a means of social and political control after the demise of Reconstruction, and was tortuous as well as a public spectacle."³⁶ For the African American Church/community, Cone contends both the tree and the cross symbolize death; however, the latter symbolizes hope and salvation and the former symbolizes negation of that hope, through the actions and outrages of white supremacy. Dr. Ray speaks of the lynching experience as does Cone from the standpoint of a black theology: that of experience. Dr. Ray claims that "it is the primacy of the Church/community's experiences with not only the divine but also the vicissitudes of human

³⁶ Stephen G. Ray Jr., review of *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, *Christian Century*, January 2012, , <http://www.christiancentury.org/reviews/2012-01/cross-and-lynching-tree-james-h-cone>.

pain and suffering caused by the working of evil that brings it to a theological understanding.”³⁷ Dr. Wimberly also speaks of the “core beliefs of the African American Church/community” which, “gives shape to the world and is how the people have come to grips with the world in a meaningful way.”³⁸ It is my observation that the African American community, having experienced generations of unattended complex grief; wherein, the African American Church/community’s faith has led the people thus far.

Reflecting on the elements of suffering, how it affects one spiritually, and the response of the practices of pastoral care and counseling are keys for the journey of the African American Church toward its own healing. My desire is that the African American Church be present for the community as it regains its consciousness amidst the postmodern suffering and that the feelings which quite often make us react, be reflected upon as a community. Reflection creates images for liberation and healing and the discovery of unconscious feelings which have been silenced for the survival of the Church/community; however, the unearthed lead to opportunities toward spiritual and emotional healing.

Creating Space

It is my contention that the African American community has created a culture of secrecy evolving from the trauma associated with slavery. I remember the elders admonishing us as children saying, “What goes on in this house stays in this house” or “don’t tell anybody that your uncle messed with you.” This behavior is evidence of deeper, more evasive cumulative grief in which unconscious and valid feelings associated with loss become prominent because of the African American Church/community’s experience with suffering. Although civil disobedience and resistance have been historical responses to the depth of the grief endured by African

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008) 3.

American Church/community, the full scope of the impairment has yet to be discovered. Therefore, the causes of grief appear to be insurmountable and the depth of the response is futile in comparison to the cumulative loss. My mother claimed that the black women had no time to be depressed; yet, during her recent debilitating struggle with breast cancer, as I witnessed her response to suffering and interpreted her practices of prayer, lament and praise, I believe she was creating a sacred healing space for herself with God and ultimately, she found a resting place for healing, for her spirit.

I am not proposing that we as servant-leaders create because God is only able to create something out of nothing. I am proposing that the servant-leaders in this season are being called as co-laborers with God. God is presenting opportunities for all to be heard wherein; I propose the African American Church “be” a co-creator with God. I am lifting up for consideration the open doors of grace to which others who feel they are not heard nor seen can enter. It is the responsibility of the Church who has been called to now recognize opportunity’s wherein God is making the spaces available and through the Holy Spirit, to enter into that space of care for another.

Dr. Gregory Ellison II, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at Candler School of Theology, talked about how his grandmother transformed a dark porch in Arkansas from a fearful space into a fearless one: a place of possibility. It was in this space, after three nights of night terrors that the six-year-old “Greg”, as his grandmother called him, would enter an altered atmosphere of fearlessness and calm. Two decades later he was able to talk to his grandmother about his HIV test coming back negative. The space created by Ellison’s grandmother’s wisdom work and God’s words were given to her and have remained as welcoming as when he was a small child. Today as a man, no subject is taboo or off limits.

Presently, through writing and lectures, Dr. Ellison talks about creating these spaces as work and additionally speaks of the creation of these spaces as both an art as well as a science.³⁹

Furthermore Dr. Ellison has stated that creating for or within God's purpose is for the bringing together of people; wherein, the screaming stranger is heard and hears with intention. Dr. Ellison declares, "The work of creating is for those formerly unseen individuals, hidden in plain view."⁴⁰ It is imperative that the circumstances, in which those we serve, wherever they find themselves, whether it be physical, mental or spiritual, we meet them there. The space is therefore one of co-creating: a freedom wherein no subject is off-limits and God can be seen through the eyes of many rather than the controlling few. It is in these life and death situations that the Church is called to work out our own soul's salvation as well.

I agree with Dr. Ellis that creating space is work and from my experience as a participant in various groups I know it to be challenging. I have experienced that, forming relationships within the context of varied chaplaincy groups, residents or interns, in the Clinical Pastoral Education model is often times challenging. The spaces to which the groups are relegated for weekly didactics are expected to function within the context of its diversity to therefore learn and practice cultural competency. The chaplains, as well those they are called to provide care, are of diverse populations regarding ethnicity, social-economic status, gender, age and religion. Chaplains are expected to convene with people whom they have recently met, studied and practiced new methods of care as well as reached agreement on goals and have begun to tackle them. This is basically what the African American Church/community is being called to do in our postmodern world.

³⁹ Dr. Gregory Ellison, lecture 2017 (ACPE 50th Anniversary Conference, Michigan).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

As a servant-leader, in the African American Church/community, I am a witness and in partnership with my fellow sisters and brothers in providing the space in which the community may find spiritual and emotional healing; a space where, people may grieve and mourn the many losses they have experienced, due to trauma. This is a place where the African American Church/community are companioned and encouraged to, in their own time, embrace a counter-narrative, specific to their personal and communal story of suffering. I imagine this space, as one wherein, the Gospel of Jesus is the message; however, the methodology by which the message is disseminated is God-inspired. This is in consideration of God's natural attributes, as omniscient, which is defined as an infinite rational spirit, infinite in intelligence and having perfect knowledge of everything that occurs on in His world.⁴¹ Therefore, it is imperative that the space function and be nurtured through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Grace

Considering my experiences in diverse contexts, dissimilarity may create a gap and rather than focus on places of disconnection, I have encouraged the calling upon of grace on many occasions. I have also needed grace when I found myself in discouraging spaces of bias and prejudice because of my imbedded theology or ignorance. During these times, I also have engaged into self-reflection as I entered an internal place of grace and therein was able to suggest the place of grace I discovered upon encountering it. I believe everyone needs grace at times and therefore within groups, it is vital to healthy formation. Furthermore, having been self-aware and

⁴¹ Rev. Dr. Johnnie G. McCann, Ordination Educator/Catechist United Missionary Baptist Association (New York: Curriculum of the Attributes of God, New York, 2017).

having recognized my own limitations and lack of cultural competency, I have made a disclaimer when I required grace. Scripture strongly encourages grace and God desires that grace be found in human relationships especially among strangers. Grace is defined as an undeserved favor or kindness, mercy, compassion and generosity, from which every human can benefit.

The following are three examples of grace shown toward another which occurred under duress or extreme circumstances found both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Having been faithful to her mother-in-law Naomi after famine drives them into a foreign land. Ruth entrusts herself to Naomi's God and her people. Boaz favors Ruth; yet, she asked him, (Ruth 2:10) "why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" David asked, "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake (2 Samuel 9:1)?" Acts 28:2, is an example in the New Testament of kindness shown by strangers. Though strangers, the people showed Paul and the others kindness, kindling a fire and providing shelter from the rain and cold. These examples show people giving of themselves, their time, and their resources to another, apart from the difference that may exist. Ruth, Jonathan's family, and Paul, all needed grace and who are we to judge when, where or who should be offered grace. The Church's ability to care one for another ought not to be dependent on the color of one's skin, how one behaves, one's culture, ideals, or beliefs. Ruth acknowledges that Boaz found grace but, he went further than that when, he had knowledge of her. She needed to be seen, for all that she was, not merely her plight at the moment. Ruth's present reality is that she is gleaning in the fields but what is her story, or background, her plight? Boaz knew her faithfulness to her mother-in-law but also he knew of the many losses she had experienced. She had left her mother and father, her homeland, the death of her husband. God knew Ruth needed grace and Boaz being a type of Christ.

David also extends grace to the family of Saul for Jonathan's sake, according to the scriptures. The reader who has not known grace in his/her lifetime may not know why David would extend grace to Saul's family. After all, Saul hated David and, on more than one occasion, tried to kill him; yet, David loves Jonathan and seeks out his son, saying "so that I may show the kindness of God unto him." (2 Samuel 9:3)

The Christian life is totally dependent on the grace of God: God's grace compensates for human weaknesses.⁴² Through Jesus Christ, God has provided deliverance. Grace is God's undeserved favor and we would be remiss if we do not commend grace to one another. However, for my purpose of creating a space whereby we may experience grace through human relationships, it is my belief that we, as Christians, offer grace to one another as a gift within the context of our human relationships. However, from my perspective, when the African American Church provides active listening and space, open communication will be made possible. Furthermore, the Church/community will be open to one another's suffering as we recognize that there is more likeness than difference in people's suffering and challenges.

Healing

It is my desire to examine the spiritual and emotional wounds that the African American Church/community has suffered. I realize there are different types of healing; however, an examination of them all can never be contained in this project. Therefore, I will focus on the healing required for the deep spiritual, emotional and psychological losses to which the African American Church/community has succumbed without the freedom to grieve or mourn. The

⁴² H. H. Rowley, *Dictionary of Bible Themes* (Place of Publication Not Identified: Harpercollins, 1970).

African American community's existence throughout decades of slavery that reflected perpetual loss and therefore grief, being often layered and continually disallowed opportunities or permission by the slave-owner for either.

The African American Church/ community often glosses over grief perhaps because we have become desensitized. We live in a world in which violence, sickness, and death are so prevalent. We find that among those referred to as baby-boomers are either caring for or burying their parents. These are experiences into which we must delve because of the nature of certain situations of violence that have historical ramifications for the African American community. However, there are those who are raising their voices in the public square in anger, crying out "Hear me," "See me,"; yet, where are the laborers who have heard God's commandment: "Go" (Matthew 28:18)?

Spiritual healing within the Church will perpetuate the Church's mandate which is only possible through the power of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Wimberly states, "The church leader emerges or is chosen from within the congregation/community" and, therefore, it is my observation that spiritual healing is needed for the African American Church as well as the community because the valley of the shadow of death is experienced by the entire community. Isaiah 9:2 says, "The people of God, once walked in darkness and lived in the land of deep darkness and a light has dawned." When we relegate certain people within God's creation to contrasting spaces, this action removes opportunities for God's grace. The table must be set for all; the banquet hall doors must be open for all, when we consider all who will occupy the space as created by God. The table has been set for all humankind as all humans are made in the image of God: Imago Dei; the Church has got to move over. The question, therefore, becomes, if we all have been created by God, why has the spiritual aspect of a portion of the world's health been

ignored? I surmise that the changing village has much to do with our responses; yet, what about the love of which Jesus speaks, much like the question that one of the experts in the law asked Him, “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.”⁴³

How do we respond to an evolving village in the midst of crisis? From my experience and observation I would suggest that it is imperative to answer the cries of those who are not engaged or present in the church: the millennials. I decided to engage the age cohort or group whose faith I believe is important. Additionally, I believe just as significant is their need to be heard and seen. It is my desire that the African American Church reach the level of grace whereas the changing African American village can experience the healing power of the Holy Spirit. During times of crisis, God’s children may experience spiritual drought and become spiritually depleted. Yet, spiritual healing is found in the Word of God and in the Holy Spirit. Therefore, spiritual healing is found in Jesus because as we read in John 1:14, “The word became flesh and made His dwelling among us.” It is vital that the Body of Christ remain spiritually strong and healthy so that it may resist the “enemy”: Satan. Our spiritual health is pertinent to the work that God has for the Church. God’s plan is to fill us with His Holy Spirit so that we may endeavor to reach others who are spiritually depleted.

Jesus has given gifts to the body of Christ, “giving some apostles, some prophets, some evangelist and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry for the edifying of the body of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-12) It is also imperative that the Body of Christ work through her individual gifts to maintain the spiritual health of her

⁴³ Mark 12:30 (KJV)," Blue Letter Bible, , accessed December 17, 2018, https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/mar/12/30/s_969030.

members. Jesus has given that which is needed to equip the body for the work of ministry which is service. Now, through self-examination and acknowledging who we are in Christ and who we are as children of God, the body of Christ ought to be rest in Christ's finished work: defeat of our greatest fear, which is death and our greatest enemy who is Satan.

Intersection

The *Encarta Dictionary* defines an intersection as a crossroad: "a place where two roads or paths cross each other" and furthermore as "an overlapping between two things such as different personal interests or political positions."⁴⁴ If we are to consider the two definitions in regard to the African American Church and her community's relationship, they could be considered as two ships passing in the night or as a haphazard or incidental meeting. From my perspective, it appears the two only form an alliance at the point of crisis. This observation asserts no prior relationship, and therefore, no point of connection. In other words, one knows nothing of the other until something occurs which affects both tragically.

Assumptions and biases may cause boundaries to become blurred and the breakdown of communication at the onset of relationship. I believe accusation, observation, and confrontation may be utilized as healthy methods of understanding one another's perspectives and opinions. However, when we come together without viewing relationships as a place of learning, the aforementioned methods may become provocative at best. Therein, the Church/community must develop, through practice the method to which Jesus has modeled. It is through Jesus' modeling that I propose the Church create as well as make the journey into the intersections that exist within the African American Church/ community; yet, it is an atmosphere that must be accessed in unity. It is the responsibility of the community to grapple with the soul repairing needed for

⁴⁴ Kathy Rooney, *Encarta World English Dictionary* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1999).

spiritual healing of the people within the Church/community. This requires the coming together, navigating the contention that divides and causes discord, confusion and ultimately thwarts healing.

Dr. Willis Johnson raises the idea for consideration that “when one stands at the centermost place of your convictions and dares to speak and act in public, one can expect to get creamed: the intersection is a dangerous territory.”⁴⁵ Have we considered the state of interpersonal relationships within the African American Church/ community at present? Are there generational gaps, racial gaps, gender gaps, or ‘isms’ regarding eco-socio status and such? Have outside social constructions infringed upon the community’s ability to come together against oppressive forces which appear to have become a common place where the norms, having been renamed microaggressions, as if these ideologies have not been written into law? However, if we can remember our historical and communal values, and if we can move above the fray, we will commit our love to one another likened to Cornel West’s contention that, “justice is what radical love looks like in public.”⁴⁶ Surely radical love is the path for the African American Church/community on the journey from a divisive intersection of tradition and self-centeredness through a model set by a radical Savior-Jesus.

I find it curious that an institution such as the African American Church which was the voice of the black community sits silently and complacent in many instances of contemporary suffering. Gregory Ellison uses the language of history to get people’s attention in his book *Cut Dead but Still Alive: Caring for African American Young Men*. Historically the phrase “cut

⁴⁵ F. Willis Johnson, *Holding up Your Corner: Talking about Race in Your Community* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017) 9.

⁴⁶ Cornel West Quotes (Author of Race Matters)," Goodreads, , accessed December 17, 2018, https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/6176.Cornel_West.

dead” means ignored deliberately.⁴⁷ When did the African American Church and her community become “the other”? When have the lines of demarcation become such that they are unrecognizable or unsurmountable? My perspective of the circumstances is that the African American Church gazes outward at their dying community and the community’s opinion of the African American church is that of a disfigured view of Christ. The traumatized African American Church/community expectantly awaits the revival of the Church in which it once found hope, resilience, leadership and a place to which one harkened as a guidepost for faith. The point of intersection is no longer enough; healing is at the point of needing “much more” for the battered and bruised psyches finding themselves up against a wall but not recognizing that they are in a place of grief.

From my perspective, the intersection is where one’s entire self is encountered. It is my belief that wherever we find ourselves in life, we bring ourselves to our social location with all its victories and losses. Because we would rather ignore or disguise the losses, these places are often occupied by false pretenses, masks, or makeup but rarely is our mutual desire for reconciliation noted. We do not willingly come to these places of grief but with much contention, fear and anger. It is also a place of embarrassment, shame, and often legalism. Grief often presents itself as anger and those that once walked through the fire and the flood with the Church/community are weary.

The intersection is often devoid of grace but it is a place of expediency and therefore possibility. The space is ripe considering much loss has occurred, and it is the leveling place, affecting the African American Church as well as the community. The African American Church is presently in a state of denial concerning generations of trauma, loss and grief, the African

⁴⁷ Gregory C. Ellison, *Cut Dead but Still Alive: Caring for African American Young Men* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013) 1.

American Church/community finds itself on separate journeys. Because of complacency, weariness, and difference, an entire people suffer. Referring back to Henri Nouwens's character, the African American Church must attend to her own wounds before it can move towards providing care for the African American community. My goal as a servant-leader in the African American Church is to provide a space to "be" in one's suffering for those who otherwise are neither heard nor seen. My aim is to help them understand that Christ granted them the freedom to tell their stories. Through the practice of acknowledging as well as the naming of one's suffering, stages of grief may be discovered and uncovered; whereby mourning may occur. The African American Church/community, having experienced and endured years of cumulative grief, will be able to encounter a place of trust. Guided by the Holy Spirit, moment by moment through the church's process of self-discovery, the Church and community will be guided toward spiritual healing.

Chapter III Contextual Theology

How does the African American Church respond to an evolving community that is also in the midst of crisis? I propose it is through the Holy Spirit that the Church is guided to care for the Church/community that suffers from complicated grief. Furthermore, I believe skills utilized in the work of pastoral care and counseling, one being active listening, ought to be taught and implemented within the African American Church/community. Additionally, as the African American Church presently lives into the visible presence of God, particularly in the African American community, it must first acknowledge and care for the underlying symptoms of complicated grief, within its own context. The Church is called to be unique and different: high above what the world has to offer and it is essential that it respond to the community's spiritual deficits. The portrait of a Church in terms of teaching God's ways ought not to be synonymous with that of the world but specific to God's original plan to establish His teaching within the Church and in the world.

From my perspective, the African American Church/community has become disconnected from its life support. The medical term for life support is "the use of specialized medical procedures or specialized equipment to keep the body healthy when crucial functioning of its system fail, which can keep one alive until the body is ready to take over again".⁴⁸ The Church attempts to provide care through secular methods; however, the Holy Spirit has always been the Church's life support for its sustenance. That is why some elders call the Holy Spirit a "specializer." In order to shift toward healing for itself, the Church and the community must acknowledge its wounds, reflect on its losses, and take action within its own context: standing in the power of the Holy Spirit. However, I do not believe the African American Church is at the

⁴⁸ "What Is Life Support?" WebMD, , accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.webmd.com/palliative-care/what-is-life-support#1>.

point of withdrawal of care or waiting for a natural death, considering its leadership and the way in which it continues to teach. I liken the Church to Ezekiel who, having been placed by God in the valley of dry bones, stands in the midst of them and asks God, “Can these bones live”? This is the question we ask while in the midst of the Church/community’s “dry bones” experiences. The leadership, obedient to God, continues to speak and to prophesy at the places of suffering within the Church/community. It continues to shift its dependence from itself through programs, projects, and events and attempts to be relevant in the world, to wholly depending on the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus has left as a guide, teacher, and comforter. The Church only has to attune its ears to the Holy Spirit, as well as the suffering community and it will no longer deem it necessary to utilize the world’s methodology or treasure the world’s ideologies for relevance, to fulfill its role of “being” a vessel of honor. There is a remnant of those who hear God and because their hearts are fine-tuned to God’s voice, they are the prophetic voices that are resounding, octaves above the causes of grief. The African American Church is the vessel in which God is pouring out His Spirit to mend the brokenness in the African American Church/community.

God knows the intricacies of our traumas, our losses, and the reasons why humankind grieves. Scripture offers hope to the believer, in Romans 8:28, that says, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” It is into the dark place of complex grief that the Holy Spirit will be invited and welcomed by the African American Church/community to enter a place of acknowledgment, acceptance and ultimately an embracing of our stories, precipitating spiritual healing. The Holy Spirit moves with the power to heal and to provide liberty, because “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17). This freedom allows for the African American

Church/community to remember their stories without fear of criticism or judgement. Again, the coming together of the Body of Christ, as I envision it, is likened to the prophet Ezekiel's obedience to the Lord's command to speak in the valley to the innumerable and extremely parched bones. The space is conducive to the miracle that takes place as the Spirit of God comes from the four corners of the earth and breathes life into the dead community as God did when he breathed life into humankind in the beginning. Therefore, the condition of the village, like the valley of the dry bones is palpable for naming the suffering that has caused present conditions of instability (mental illness), stifled development (social and economic stagnation) as well as dysfunctional relationships (closed family systems) in the African American Church/community. The Church as God's prophetic voice on the earth must prepare for a revival and resurrection within its context as well as in the communities it serves as it speaks to the "dry bones" based on the commandment of God.

How must the community that is experiencing cumulative losses respond to suffering? God is our strong tower to which the Church/community hastens and finds refuge for despair and anguish in this season. The African American Church/community's initial loss is that of our homeland, across the Atlantic Ocean, on the continent of Africa, from which we were stolen. On the shores of America, the African community experienced the loss of family as infants were ripped out of the arms of their mothers, fathers separated from children, and husbands from their wives. Some slave narratives record the sounds of moaning and lament so heart-wrenching and disturbing to the soul that white onlookers were brought to tears. The loss of identity spans both socially-constructed identities: that of the Negro and that of "whiteness." African American communities grieving due to the dominant community's losses as well considering the ways in which the two communities are eerily connected. For instance, many slave-masters fathered

children by their female slaves. Yet, many of the African male slaves became violently allegiant to their slave-master to the detriment of those in their own African slave communities.

The African's experience in America is also that of a loss of identity through the dominant culture's calculated, purposeful and self-serving system of chattel slavery. The systematic stripping away of individual identities and humanity included the loss of their names, their religions and their languages. The African was neither an American nor a whole person. Rather, the African was deemed and treated as property, even less than human. Furthermore, the African community is forbidden to grieve or mourn its profound and numerous losses. Fortunately, along with such deep loss, there is resilience because there are internal resources: the physique may be weary, yet the spirit cries out for relief and the Lord answers, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you." (Jeremiah 29:11-12) The Atlantic Ocean was a watery grave and because the suicide and homicide rate during the middle passage was so great and "the blood so much the migration patterns of sharks were altered."⁴⁹

It was during this middle passage that those who spoke different languages were unable to formally communicate. Likened to property, or livestock, African slaves were stored in the hold of ships for days: encrusted with vomit, human waste, and sweat, the people created the place of resilience. In the place of diversity and indifference, I can imagine the people moaned to summon the Spirit of God for relief, as a form of prayer and in desperation. The resources for the survival and revival of those African bodies would be born out of lament, a lament that would be carried to the "hush harbor church" and along the Underground Railroad, into the pulpits of the African American Churches and revivals.

⁴⁹ Dr. Ricky Randall (Lecture, Doctor of Ministry Course via Zoom, Drew Theological School, 2017).

The African American Church/ community's resources are revealed through her rich culture of storytelling, preaching, music, dance, poetry, art, and literature. It is the African American Church that I propose be the vessel in which God has always resided in the praises of the African American people, and in which the Lord told Peter, the "gates of hell would not prevail against." It is where God will show forth His grace, making space for the voiceless to be heard and those who are passed over to be seen. It is a space to which many who are living in fear, shame, and/or neglect can run to and find liberty and hope. The power of God creates and heals and, therefore, the African American Church which has been called a "hospital" must first be in the process of healing to be co-laborers with God, in the process of implementing a treatment plan for a pastoral diagnosis of complex grief. Although the suffering of the African American community is often times seen from a physical lens, the places that are necessary for healing are deep, unseen, unforeseen, and often masked behind generations of defensive, combative and psychological layers. It is to God we must turn to support humankind as it seeks "visitation rights" into the African American Church/ community's suffering for the deep listening that is needed to occur.

Following a brief background as to the Book of James, I will examine James 5:13-20 as an example of pastoral care and counseling initiating from within a grieving community. I will attempt to draw from the community as a template for pastoral care and counseling for the African American Church/community as it prepares to live out its purpose in the world. I will take into consideration the fact that scholar and theologian, Dr. Bob Utley, states in his book, *Jesus' Half-Brothers Speak: James and Jude* that The Book of James is written early after Jesus' death.⁵⁰ When we consider this to be true, the reader may conclude that we are being afforded a depiction of a grieving community. As we read through the book of James, it becomes obvious

⁵⁰ Bob Utley, *Jesus Half-brothers Speak: James and Jude* (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2000) 1.

that the community is experiencing distress. The community's encounter with oppressive forces are described in James 2:6-7, as well as its physical need in 5:4-11; 13-14. The traditional belief in terms of authorship is that James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote the book. The community following Jesus' death continued under the leadership of Jesus' half-brother James and scholars concur that the Church in Jerusalem remained under the leadership of Jesus relatives for some time. The emphasis of the book of James is that of practical living – faith in action (cf 1:3-4) as it is addressed to the Jews who lived outside of Palestine as well as to the Jews of the diaspora.”⁵¹ I will examine how James directs the community in response to what I propose to be a pastoral diagnosis of complex grief such as that from which the African American Church/community suffers.

From my perspective, James' epistle is likened to a template of a sermon, in which the preacher tells the people what he is going to say, he says it and at the conclusion he once again reinforces his message. James commences the epistle with encouragement as to how this Jewish Christian community ought to respond to their varied trials. It is curious, at best, yet similar to the theology of hope prevalent in the African American Church, when he counsels the community to “consider it pure joy when they encounter trials of any kind” (James 1:2). He explains to them that the trials in which they are experiencing have a purpose. Furthermore he describes the trials as having validity because they will produce maturity for them if they endure until the end. However, James not only highlights the crisis but offers a response to ensure that at the core of their belief system, is their faith in Christ. Therefore, he speaks to the community regarding their practical theology.

⁵¹ Harold W. Attridge, Wayne A. Meeks, and Jouette M. Bassler, *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books with Concordance (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2006).

I also propose the epistle of James as an example of a pastoral care and counseling model of grief in which the pastoral figure enters another's space with the supposition that they, too, are experiencing grief and their goal is spiritual care. Therefore, James immediately enters into the pit with the community and highlights their temptations. He describes their experience with these temptations, as a fall. The Greek word for fall, *peripipto*, means to be encompassed by. He says, "When ye fall into divers temptations" (1:2 KJV). Though the trials are all around and are numerous and possibly producing feelings of anxiety, fear and doom James exhorts the community of Jewish Christians "to count it all as joy." The Greek word for joy is *chara*, "that which is in opposition to sorrow that Paul had experienced when returning to the church at Corinth" (2 Corinthians 2:1-3). It also is defined as "the joy that is in the Holy Spirit." The Greek word *hegeomai*, means to lead. Therefore, James is encouraging the church to take up a posture of joy in the Holy Spirit to lead the way, as the believer who is in distress navigates their new life in Christ. Rather than be tempted by their former legalistic practices James gives the community a clear picture of the outcome, if they follow the lead of the Holy Spirit with patience.

James delves into the anxiety that loss of identity and the stress that temptation causes. The scripture gives rise to how the flesh having not been redeemed grieves for the former things, the old nature: the things that are opposed to God. The faith that has caused the believer to turn their entire selves over to a God. This is the faith to which James suggests the people, now exiled from their homeland, are persecuted and dispersed. James is reminding the community of their convictions, even suggesting their anxiety as their strength, in addition to their faith, as their overarching reality. Anxiety having its purpose and place can help to engage patience. James responds to their faith in a "God who exists and is the creator and ruler of all things, the provider

and bestower of eternal salvation through Christ.”⁵² He also responds in a supportive manner, hearing faith as the Church/community’s reality, over and above what seems to be loss. Therefore, he continuously directs the community to their faith in God, which informs the plentiful and pervasive losses associated with complex grief.

James continues to assert his pastoral authority and fearless leadership style, surveys the losses this community has experienced as pathological as well as cumulative. Because cumulative grief presents itself as insidious and indifferent within the context of their new identity in Christ, James refers the community to God for the wisdom that they will need as they make the trek through the “fire and the flood” on their Christian journey. He directs them to God for wisdom and assures them that God will give it to them and that they are not alone as they forge forward in faith. The word ‘asks’ in Greek, *aiteo* suggests that one should ask for yourself. He is affording them the opportunity and responsibility for acknowledging, naming, and responding to their suffering. James is not only directing them to God but encourages them to enter into a personal relationship with God. James admonishes the community, as does the African American preacher, as well as the hymn to, “have a little talk with Jesus, tell Him all about your problems and He will hear your faintest cry and answer by and by.”⁵³ There appears to be a sense of vulnerability that the community who adheres to God’s direction will experience. Although vulnerability by definition leaves us exposed to attack, criticism, and temptation, Scripture gives us insight into who God is. Scripture informs the people as to the integrity of God concerning the believer, when it says, “God is not a man that He shall lie, nor the son of man,

⁵² “Genesis 1:1 (KJV), “Blue Letter Bible, , accessed December 18, 2018, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G4102&t=KJV>

⁵³ “Hymnlyrics.org, “Every Day with Jesus, Hymnlyrics.org, , accessed December 18, 2018. https://www.hymnlyrics.org/newlyrics_j/just_a_little_talk_with_jesus.php

that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it?”⁵⁴ James is virtually inviting these Christian Jews to a valley experience in which God is their companion, comforter, and counselor and their spiritual healing will come and be complete in Jesus.

James provided the community with the opportunity for self-reflection through the word of God in the first chapter of the epistle. He again highlights the trials which have caused the distress he speaks of in 5:13. Viewing the community from a standpoint of grief, he returns to the theme in which he opens the epistle: the believer’s response to trials. Yet, he does not only invite them to delve into their trials, but also points to the purpose of the trials which is the development of patience. The Greek word for patience, *makrothymia*, according to *Strong’s Concordance* is “the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings.”⁵⁵ The adversity, affliction and trouble that James recounts repeatedly throughout the epistle, are designed to tempt the people. The word for temptation in Greek, *peirasmos*, means the “trial of man’s fidelity, integrity or virtue.” It also means rebellion against God and thus the trials are also devised to make the believer doubt God. Yet, James directs the people to the place of healing which is prayer.

James asks the entire community to self-identify as afflicted. He asks, “Is any among you who are afflicted? Varied Bible versions use interpretations such as, “in trouble” or “suffering.” James assessment of the community speaks of distress and hope inherent in the community’s relationship with Jesus, resembling what Dr. Wimberly speaks of within the African American Christian context concerning “deep metaphors related to the life, death, and

⁵⁴ Numbers 23:19 (KJV), “Blue Letter Bible, , accessed December 18, 2018, https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/num23/19/s_140019.

⁵⁵ “James 5:10 (KJV), “ Blue Letter Bible, , accessed December 18, 2018. https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/jas/5/10/s_1151010.

resurrection of Jesus Christ, who liberates the oppressed and cares for the downtrodden.”⁵⁶

James’ reference to affliction and merriment in the same passage point to the range of emotions that the community is able to experience because of their faith which, in the midst of oppression, is evident through their ability to apply their faith to their oppressive circumstances.

Again, James calls the community to the task of self-reflection as well as self-awareness. He asks, “is any sick among you? (5:14). The community is asked to again acknowledge their condition of weakness, being without strength, due to their suffering. He is admonishing the community to call the elders for prayer and anointing, in the name of the Lord. Furthermore, James is calling for an awakening within the church community concerning their spiritual condition as well as their need to welcome others “into the pit” with them. The elders are to be companions to those who acknowledge they are in the depths of sickness. James acquiesces his authority to the “elders,” the term used in Exodus 19:7 when Moses laid before their faces the words which the Lord commanded Him. James says, the elders will invoke the power of prayer and the Holy Spirit, of which the oil is a symbol. The elders pray in the name of Jesus, for revival of the heart and mind which is God’s will.

James implores the community to be caregivers in the midst of a community in distress. The promulgation of a relational element towards healing for the community in jeopardy of change is evident in verse 16 when he says, to “confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.” The Church community’s relational effort is the hinge on which hangs their ability to live out God’s mandate to them concerning the community. This admonishment opens the space that is needed for the love that Jesus says is the second greatest commandment. It points to the space in which open and genuine relationships, devoid of

⁵⁶ Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care* (Nashville:Abingdon Press, 2008) 3.

judgement and criticism, are promoted. It gives license to a space of grace that those who are facing numerous challenges may abide and find healing for their weary souls.

The Church has been appointed, separated, called and sent into the world. What are the theological implications as to the loss of possibility within a grief-stricken community? The Church is commanded by God, to “teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). God’s Word is eternal and fluid and therefore our responses to one another, within the context of the African American Church, ought to line up with the Word of God. I surmise that we ought to take time for introspection, as the “body of Christ.” How do we enter into, establish, and maintain relationships with one another in love, to accomplish the work we have been mandated to do, by God? The Church must listen for the sound of mourning so that it may by the power of the Holy Spirit, be a companion to the grief-stricken community. The African American Church/community must become professional listeners, hearing the cries of a people as religion, culture, people and a way of life cause them to stray from it. Again, I purport that the African American Church/ community has been in a state of unprocessed grief, and, as a result, many do not feel heard.

Matthew 28:18-20

18 And Jesus came and spoke unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:

20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen KJV

I initially considered the above mentioned pericope as a guidepost for creating space toward healing, specifically for the grieving African American Church/ community as it relates

to a pastoral care and counseling model. It conveys a dual responsibility by Jesus to his disciples which is missionally and pastorally driven. It is a calling out and a calling on those who have been called from darkness and guided by a great light. Who better to exemplify or model out care for those who are grieving than those who have come through many hard trials themselves? Jesus, a man intimately “acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3), has now been given power over the causes of humankind’s grief; sin and death.

Jesus modeled the ultimate example of pastoral care and counseling for all of humankind by His death on the cross and continues to model His care for His children as He intercedes for us in His rightful place, at the right hand of the Father in glory. Different versions of the Holy Bible describe the grief with which Jesus became personally familiar. For instance, the New International Version describes Jesus’ grief as suffering; the Christian Standard Bible as sickness, the New English Translation Bible illness, The World English Bible speaks of Jesus’ disease and the NRSV uses the word, infirmities. I highlight these words to describe the type of suffering which Jesus embraced and that from which most humans flee. Yet, Jesus becomes personally acquainted with suffering for those he knew, hated and despised Him, because of His love for all of humankind. The African American Church/community approaches loss according to how the Bible informs us in Thessalonians 4:13 to “not to respond to loss without hope, like others and not to be ignorant, concerning those who are asleep.”

God, in Jesus, modeling out His response to suffering in the world due to sin, put on flesh, takes the world’s sin on Himself, and overcomes sin and death. However, when I observe the stereotypical way the Son of Man is viewed and yet “he loved them to the end” (John 13:1) was treated, I am offended and appalled. Isaiah 53:3 says Jesus was viewed as such according to several versions of the Holy Bible. He was viewed as despised and rejected according to the New

Living Translation Bible, despised and forsaken by men according to the New American Standard Bible, as well as hated and rejected according to the Contemporary English Version of the Bible. Furthermore, Jesus was treated as such: “held in low esteem (NIV), we did not care (NLT), we esteemed Him not (ESV), — a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care.” How is it that we view those who are grieving, sick, suffering and subjugated amongst us? Jesus instructs his disciples about the suffering when He becomes intimately acquainted with them, and has set an example for them as well as future generations. We generally flee from grief and the suffering associated with it, rather than embrace it. Jesus meets us where we are in the pit of grief and despair and through His resurrection power, He is a companion for us in the depth of that suffering

Chapter IV

Interviews With Clergy and Lay Leaders

The interviews that I conducted are an intricate component of this dissertation. I interviewed clergy members, lay leaders of both genders, and various ages to gain insight into the questions I raised pertaining to the spiritual healing needed within the African American Church and community. One of the participants is the Senior Pastor of a Church located in a suburban section of Westchester County, New York. I interviewed him because I believed he would be objective considering that he has served in the role of being a pastor for more than fifty years and has served in both white and multi-cultural settings. I felt both his wisdom and longevity in the ministry could provide me with clarity as to the subject matter of this doctoral project. I also interviewed an African American female Pastor who serves a congregation in an urban church-setting in the South Bronx. Her congregation is multilingual (English/Spanish) and she is quite radical in her approach to ministry. I believe she would be candid and would provide me with “non-traditional” pastoral care practices which she utilizes to meet the needs of the people in her congregation. I also interviewed a Youth Pastor, serving in an urban Church in New Jersey. I requested his insight because of his youth and furthermore, because I wanted to know how he experiences the youth who are now navigating the Church and community. The final persons to whom I turned for insight into the path toward spiritual healing for the Church and community were an age-cohort of millennials. I approached both men and women with whom I have had prior relationships. Among them are many who have leadership roles in the Church and/or attend the Church. I wanted to grasp their perception of the African American Church and its response to the suffering of those in the Church and in the surrounding communities.

Interview I

Anonymous Interviewee, Pastor, New York

The first interview conducted was with an African American woman, BP, the Senior Pastor of a Baptist Church who serves a multicultural congregation and community. The members of BP's church are African American, Caribbean, African and Spanish; yet, BP describes her church as an African American Church. I will refer to her as BP, which are not her initials, as she chose to remain anonymous. I chose BP as a participant in this study because I sought to provide objective perspectives of the pastoral care and counseling practices, as they relate to the spiritual health of the African American Church/ community. I originally chose all male participants. However, following a time of prayer and consultation with my colleagues, I decided to invite BP to participate.

We met in her office which is located on the first level of her church's newly acquired building. As we began to exchange expressions of affirmation, BP extended gracious amounts of hospitality, being most hospitable. BP models the love of God towards all and therein she displays the best practices for a methodology of pastoral care and counseling.

Before I asked any formal questions, she began to talk about my doctoral work, and her enthusiasm was clear. She began to touch on assumptions I had reflected on in the initial stages of my doctoral project. BP concurs that the Spirit of God ought to lead the church as the church cares for humankind. She is confident that the guidance of the Holy Spirit is vital for the care of souls. It is her contention that "our origins as an African American people come from a spiritual/supernatural location."⁵⁷ She talked about the traditional images in which our African ancestors expressed their spirituality, which some people may call idols. BP dismissed the idea

⁵⁷ Anonymous Interviewee. "New York," interview by author, 2017.

that the African people served idols and reaffirmed the transcendent nature of their beliefs. She spoke of the interconnectedness of the African people when arriving in America with Jesus as “an authentic and organic connection.”⁵⁸ She assured me that our African ancestors knew a relational God before being introduced to Jesus in the Americas.

From her perspective, our ancestors believed that God protected and provided for them and, indeed, she reminded me that in Ethiopia there exists one of the largest and oldest Christian groups or movements in Africa. BP contended that the provision of God is what caused the Africans to triumph in the midst of slavery in America. BP spoke of the African captive resistance, and their resilience despite the losses they suffered. Therefore, BP concluded that the African people were able to overcome suffering and are able to function because of their belief.

BP restated that the guidance of the Holy Spirit is essential to the caring of people and talked about her expectations for the community, and how spiritual healing is necessary. BP referenced the many doctrinal beliefs that are representative of the various denominations of Christianity. BP used the Baptist tradition as an example of one of many doctrinally-led denominations. She declared her desire for the Baptist faith to institute a disciplined companion in the Bible as with other faith traditions. She referred to the articles of faith which are central to the beliefs of the Baptist faith and describes God as a Spirit. BP pointed out the need for more teachings in the Baptist tradition, concerning how to integrate our faith into everyday living. In her view, we understand again that the Holy Spirit is a supernatural being that is not of this earth. She notes there is an issue because people do not see the supernatural that governs the universe. BP also noted that people do not know God as the supernatural, spirit who governs the universe.

BP explained that through Jesus we receive a demonstration of what is invisible and that it is possible to know God through different disciplines such as science. BP shared that her

⁵⁸ Anonymous Interviewee. "New York," interview by author, 2017.

understanding of God was limited to the Baptist perspective; therefore, she sought out answers elsewhere. With a transparent gesture, she pointed out that the Baptist church did not sufficiently inform her of who God was. BP was curious and sought out alternative teachings and learned that God is an energy that creates by a force. Furthermore, BP pointed out that a scientific understanding of God according to what is called the “big bang” theory, offered her a perspective of God in which she claimed to find an affinity. BP disclosed that her ability to relate to God in different ways to different people, such as the agnostic or humanist, makes her a better teacher. She highlighted her response to people who may choose to call God by other titles or those who prefer not to connect in a spiritual aspect but through empirical knowledge, and expressed her inclusiveness of all ideologies, beliefs, personhood and values.

BP continued to expound on how the Spirit of God lives through the Church for God’s desires in the community. BP explained her teachings concerning the Holy Spirit as a guide and teacher for those on the journey that God desires for the members of both the Church and the community. BP also explained that the natural nature of people must be guided because humankind, outside of the Spirit of God, is devoid of self-control. She shared her meditative practice of constantly submitting to God and asking for direction in everything she does. She analyzed this practice as consulting God on what may appear to be to most minute issues or circumstances.

BP shared her present pastoral care and counseling practices. How she goes about her practice is by coming in early on certain days and keeping in contact with her congregants. She noted that being available means much to the people who may need just a moment on some days. She stated, “it may seem difficult to the clergyperson who makes themselves available, but care only requires giving people attention.” BP shared how she provides active listening during

seemingly unorthodox instances; yet, because of her deep listening skills, she hears and is able to share in the person's suffering. BP shared that even during those unusual instances, she will suggest a time to meet with the individual. BP inferred that her practice of active listening extends to the church's community as well. BP is determined, in terms of those in the surrounding community, to be available to them. Even if the dissemination of information regarding her church services is the only thing that is needed, she makes herself available. BP shared with me resources which her Church has provided to the community, such as food and clothing. The Church has also extended themselves to the women at the shelter next door to the Church. The Church provides a ministry of hospitality, prayer, encouragement and hope to these women, as well as to their families.

BP shared her vision of how the Church ought to care for the community with love, compassion, and demonstrations of these two attributes (LCD). She stated this concept is taught in the new members class because there can be no love without compassion and no compassion without a demonstration of it. BP was visibly excited as the interview progressed, especially as she shared the church's plans for a spring bilingual (Spanish/English) worship service. I sensed her level of cultural sensitivity considering the bilingual (Spanish/English) service she has planned because of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nature of the church's surrounding community.

BP conveyed to me the community's response to the Church's ministry of hospitality and commitment to return to the Church, although they may not reside in the neighboring community any longer. She validated my observation that the surrounding community is multicultural; however, she described the church as African American. She is attentive to the cultural needs of the African American community to provide support and a sense of value and worth. Therefore,

she shared her upcoming sermon, in which she will celebrate the African American community during Black History Month. BP shared with me a portion of her proclamation regarding, “how a piece of ore becomes gold through fire, and having been under fire, the lampstand is created from it which is the church of God.”⁵⁹ In her perspective, God is the foundation of the African American Church and has formed it to be able to withstand whatever they need to face. Furthermore, BP stated if we are to be that light in the world, we must know from where we came, because the Lord has brought us a mighty long way. BP talked about the piece of ore, representative of the Church, whose strength as a piece of metal has been uncovered from the earth, and withstanding the test of time.”⁶⁰ The Lord showed her that if the African American Church, in particular, is to be the lampstand, the foundation of the church in the world, the church’s light must continue to shine brightly in the world. She referred to the African American plight, likened to the piece of ore, as having been dug out of something raw and emerging as brilliant and precious, in this country where the people have persevered. The legacy of the African American Church is often dismissed but the fact that God made sure that all would have access to Jesus will never be denied.

BP described the African American Church and community as survivors. She maintained that although we reside in multicultural communities the African American Church has been the voice of the people for centuries. BP offered her account of the history which confirmed her observations of the African American Church’s actions of providing support to communities. She stated that from the first African American Baptist Church in Silver Bluff, South Carolina which was already established in the American revolutionary war, the Church heard the cries of

⁵⁹ Anonymous Interviewee. "New York," interview by author, 2017.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

those who suffered and attended to their needs. She stated the African American Church had been created to produce and be a source of strength wherever we are.

BP reflected on her memories of the African American communities who met at churches in the communities because African Americans could not assemble in the town hall. BP continued her narrative of how the Pastors and Elders would bring the NAACP to the church to speak to the people. BP reminded me that freedom for the slave did not seem within their grasp, but their hope was for the generations to come. BP revealed whatever she sets forth within the body of her work as a doctor of philosophy, that it would be an example for the people to build on. We discussed how life could be brought back to the African American Church.

BP also considered her former mentor and decided her congregation required her pastoral guidance rather than that of her former mentor. She has been guided and comforted by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, she feels called to teach that it is very real for her. BP continued the interview with great passion in her voice for the community, and stated that prayer is also a practice she believes has the power to heal. Furthermore, BP contended, her verbal and non-verbal language as well are important towards healing for her community. She explained that the “why” questions often cause people to become defensive. She stated, responses such as “what is wrong with you” or “that’s wrong” or making critical or judgmental statements about the community cause harm. She stated, in terms of the trust factor concerning the African American Church and community that people request ritualistic practices such as weddings, funerals, and the blessing of babies but really have no day-to-day need for the Church. She explained the community is skeptical of the Church and, therefore, there is a lack of trust in response to the misconduct within the Church by leaders. She posed a rhetorical question: How do people receive healing from a place that they associate with hurt? BP stated there is a problem when the

church is focused on programs and events more than the spiritual healing necessary for the people.

BP explained her present pastoral care and counseling practices are specific to the African American community, due to the generational exposure to oppression and the suffering experienced within the church, as well exposure to various negative types of coping mechanisms utilized because of the aforementioned pressures of life. BP commented that, some of her congregants use reefer (marijuana), but they simply sum it up to, “it is what it is.” The mentality about reefer (marijuana) is that it is not heroin but the truth. BP adds that there are presently addictive agents in the synthetic drugs. BP noted her observations of the African American community infested with hatred and drugs, having become desensitized to violence, sickness and death; yet, “weed” (marijuana) is nothing compared to traumas the African American community is experiencing. The African American community is masking the past sufferings with drugs and violence, substituting it for the Church and her healing power. However, BP says, her congregants continue to encourage one another to call her for Pastoral counseling.

BP shared the perspective of the use of marijuana from those she serves. She conveyed remarks witnessed by her congregants such as, “marijuana comes from the ground,” “it is natural,” “I can have just one,” or “God made it.” Their mindset is that marijuana use is neither a threat nor harmful to their existence. BP said, she reminds her congregants that poppy is natural, too, but in the hands of the drug pusher, it is harmful. BP also stated that her style of counseling offers space for individuals to reflect. For instance, she would cause the person to reflect on the suffering that has transpired in their life, causing present grief. BP self-identifies as approachable, unafraid and a risk-taker. BP emphatically stated the African American Church

must go into the trenches because we need to care for the people in the midst of their suffering. She stated her principle concern is for people's souls.

Interview II

Dr. Allen Paul Weaver Jr., D.Min.

Reverend Dr. Allen Paul Weaver, Jr. pastors the historic Bethesda Baptist Church of New Rochelle, founded in July 1888, the oldest African-American Baptist Church in lower Westchester. The Church celebrated its 130th Anniversary on Friday, July 6, 2018. Since coming to the New Rochelle community in July 1980, Dr. Weaver has consistently demonstrated his love of Christ, his love of Christ's people and his love of the surrounding communities. During his formative years as Bethesda's new pastor, he instituted many social programs to address the needs of the area where the church is located. He sought to lead the church in addressing the needs of the hungry within the community through the Lad's Lunch Ministry, where they fed weekly over one hundred persons for the first twenty-five years of his ministry. Today, it remains open to the people of the community who currently reside there. In partnership with Feeding Westchester, located in Elmsford, New York, Bethesda established a Food Pantry in 2016 and distributes food, on an average of two hundred households per month, with an accumulative monthly distribution on an average of one thousand persons in households which include seniors, children and adults. The food pantry, acknowledging the need in the neighborhood, is devoted to distributing food throughout the twelve months of the year.

Dr. Weaver also led the church in addressing the issue of the lack of clothing of the people within the area through the Helping Hand Ministry, where the church provided clothing for the neighborhood. Within the first five years of his pastorship, he led the church in purchasing the building on the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Brook Street. Presently these

buildings are the home of a supplemental education program, that ensures that children, ages five through eighteen, be prepared academically to finish college. He also led the church in building a 3.2 million dollar Family Life Center. It was dedicated in July, 2008, in conjunction with the Church's 120th Anniversary. Pastor Weaver believes in teaching, training, and preparing believers to live a more productive Christian life. He is an advocate for intense Bible study, for workshops on Prayer and for encouraging the people to become all that God intends for them to be. At seventeen years old, Dr. Weaver accepted the call to the ministry. His preaching career spans more than fifty years.⁶¹

Rev. Dr. Allen Paul Weaver described his present pastoral care and counseling practices as sitting, listening and offering counsel. He was transparent, in terms of his limitations in terms of counseling and said, “when he believes the situation is beyond him he will suggest someone who is trained in counseling.” Dr. Weaver shared his experience in counseling to include the following: marriage, intervention, substance abuse, as well as for a plethora of other reasons that people come to him for guidance.

Dr. Weaver highlighted he does more listening than talking. He agreed that counseling is about listening and asking the right questions. He stated, if we as counselors listen and ask the right questions people will come up with their own solutions. Furthermore, Dr. Weaver stated that a good counselor refrains from offering solutions, considering our help, people will come to a truth which they innately know. He concluded, when people are suffering, they are incapable of arriving at a conclusion on their own.

Dr. Weaver noted that there is much hurt in the African American Church. He substantiated the hurt as self-inflicted, due to low self-esteem that many black people possess.

⁶¹ Rev. Dr. Allen Paul Weaver, Jr., "Our Pastor," Bethesda Baptist Church of New Rochelle, , accessed December 18, 2018, <http://www.bethesdabaptistny.org/our-pastor.html>

Dr. Weaver referred to a book he read, *Black Rage*, and how a black executive nearing the top of his career with great success, sabotaged his own efforts. William H. Grier, a former Professor of Psychiatry, Wayne State University, and former Chairman, Department of Psychiatry, Meharry Medical College and Price M. Cobbs, Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry, University of California, San Francisco, initiated the study of this individual who understood the executive's prevailing thought as, "I'm scared, I'm not supposed to be here, I can't handle it, and I'm black."

Google described the book, *Black Rage* as follows:

The first book to examine the full range of black life from the vantage point of psychiatry, this widely-acclaimed work has established itself as the classic statement of the desperation, conflicts, and anger of black life in America. *Black Rage* tells of the insidious effects of the heritage of slavery; describes love, marriage, and the family; addresses the sexual myths and fears of both blacks and whites; chronicles how schools fail the black child; examines mental illness among black people, and the psychic stresses engendered by discrimination; and, finally, focuses on the miasma of racial hatred that envelops this country, why it exists, and what will surely happen if it is not soon dispelled.⁶²

Dr. Weaver claimed that we, as African American people, do not like ourselves, so we create conflict in groups to make ourselves feel better. I asked for clarity, in terms of the groups to which he was referring. Dr. Weaver referenced groups in the churches and in the communities, of which we are a part. Similarly, Dr. Weaver also noted that rather than having a productive schedule, we tend to want to

⁶² "Black Rage by William H. Grier, Price M. Cobbs - Books on Google Play," Google, , accessed December 19, 2018, https://play.google.com/store/books/details/William_H_Grier_Black_Rage?id=2INKAwAAQBAJ.

disrupt. Dr. Weaver has observed one of the key facets of most African American Churches is that we have more people who tend to disrupt rather than to build up the church. He spoke of the African American Church as afraid to confront the disruptive behavior and hide behind the excuse that we are Christians. Yet, he offered for example both the Apostle Paul and even Jesus, who were unafraid of confronting the issues of disruptive behavior and hypocritical behavior of the Christian or persons who sought to say they are one way but behave another way.

Dr. Weaver provided biblical evidence to support his point around confronting disruptive and hypocritical people within the church. He provided the following as examples: Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1), Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24), and Paul's account of those who abandoned him because they loved this present world (2 Timothy 4:10). Dr. Weaver recalled his counseling professor in seminary, as having described the person who comes to the pastor with a problem. He described their actions, as presenting their issue in terms of it being an emergency, though they have been grappling with that problem for months or years. Furthermore, he noted that they will give the pastor/counselor the impression they are dealing with an emergency. In such cases, the counselor becomes tempted he/she must do something, when, in reality, needs to sit and listen and help lead them in the way that can help to remedy the problem.

Dr. Weaver explained the issue for African Americans is not just about being black but that rather the type of oppression we have encountered has branded us. He contended that it would seem that one hundred and fifty years later we would have overcome the stigma, but we are still being oppressed in our minds by white people. He suggested I need to talk about what is spiritual healing and about the benefits of spiritual healing. He offered for consideration that there is a downside to spiritual healing. Dr. Weaver explained there are those who go off the

deep end, having no spiritual balance and as they become caught up in their concept of the spirit, that they become offensive to others.

Dr. Weaver recalled a prophet that God told to walk from one end of the street naked to the other. He persisted with the point that it may seem illogical to us when God tells us to do such a thing but Dr. Weaver concluded with this statement, “God tells us things that are illogical and we need to recognize that God has a reason.”

Focus Group

Initially I envisioned the focus group with eight individuals in mind, of the age-cohort described as “millennials,” Pew Research Center describes millennials as being born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 22 to 37 in 2018).⁶³ My original intent for the group was to have eight participants: four women and four men, but the final group was composed of five women and three men. Two of the original participants decided not to participate for personal reasons. One of the two was unavailable for comments and the other after a brief conversation preferred not to change his Sunday schedule to participate in the focus group. However, the latter appeared and had sounded excited to participate during previous phone conversations. As the group arrived we socialized and there was much energy, as we supported the young adult ministry’s bake sale. This offered an opportunity to transition from the worship service to the meeting of the focus group.

The bake sale also offered an opportunity to invite others to participate in the group considering two had chosen not to participate. It also provided an opportunity to be with one another in an informal atmosphere. When and where we were to convene was also left open to the group. I sensed the participants were excited as they offered suggestions prior to our meeting

⁶³ Abigail Geiger, “Millennials.” Pew Research Center. December 11, 2018. Accessed December 14, 2018. <http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/millennials/>.

and appeared accommodating to one another. For example, one participant offered to bring others from the young adult ministry, or present the invitation to the group at one of their meetings. Another participant altered his/her work schedule to attend the group and also offered suggestions as to what type of food and beverages should be made available. Interestingly enough, this participant naturally became a co-facilitator during the actual meeting. I interpreted these suggestions as a sign of the enthusiasm concerning the content of the focus group.

In hindsight, the organic collaboration with the millennials participating in the focus group as well as their willingness to assist me with my doctoral project is descriptive of them. As we gathered, I shared with several of the participants the fact that the group's original formation had changed. The information traveled quickly, and the idea of participating having been interesting, two more who were equally enthusiastic, were encouraged to collaborate with us. We gathered more sweets from the bake sale and pitchers of ice water and gathered in the room the Deacon had suggested for us. The facilitator held the space as well as validated the participants' feelings, opinions and perspectives. It was made clear by the facilitator that all self-disclosure would be kept confidential by all participants.

The participants introduced themselves having shared personal facts about themselves. One participant, having previously participated in a focus group proposed an interactive and amusing method of exchange, following each participant's self-disclosure. The specific language I felt was interesting and intriguing as they were, at times, gently encouraged to share more. The entire group was extremely transparent, demonstrating great emotional intelligence. Their experiences as well as feelings evoked by their lived experiences were shared.

One of the older participants, age thirty-two, shared that one of several personal life goals is to become a millionaire; yet, having listened to several millionaires he learned from them, best

practices such as serving society and learning about distribution make the goal attainable. Furthermore, he added that he would use the knowledge gained to teach young people and it would ultimately lead to the achievement of his original goal. He was observed as being selfless by another participant who stated the following: you are never successful unless everyone else around you is successful. The participant affirmed her statement and said that he heard many wealthy and accomplished people state the same thing. She shared with a supportive response, that she likes the fact that he would use his skills to help others, especially among youth. One participant described the focus group as a supportive network regarding its positive value and shared his gratitude for being a part of the focus group.

The aforementioned thirty-two year old participant also talked about his social location in terms of economics and also reflected that he has never had to go a day without food and considers himself blessed. He self-identified as lower middle class and although he has never experienced being homeless or going without a meal, he expressed his feelings of sadness thinking about children who live in poverty and are on the “school to prison pipeline.” Although he was visibly close to tears he said it is not his habit to become emotional in public. He does not think it is fair that that he has relatives such as his aunt and uncles, considering his mother is deceased, and therefore he suggested he has options. He contended there is a war within our African American community and he has attempted to fight it peaceably, although tempted otherwise.

One participant remarked that the enemy that we deal with, calls it a cold war, but people are still being gunned down in the streets. Many in the group agree that the African American experience is not taught in the African American school curriculum. Another participant agreed with visible frustration in her voice that what they do teach is hate and segregation. She

remarked that she teaches a counter-narrative every chance she gets. For instance, she shares with her Spanish schoolmates, the history of how African American and Spanish ancestors were launched into slavery but on separate boats.

Another participant self-identified as a truth teller who is unbiased in this group, although she is related to the primary researcher, her grandmother. She stated that she is presently employed in a hospital setting and initially thought she would merely feed the patients. She stated she now has a different outlook as far as her work is concerned. In her view, it is a ministry because the patients appreciate her being there for them. Although another participant entered the group late she continued that she will eventually enroll in college to achieve certification as a midwife, considering “home births” as her primary function.

Another participant self-identified as a student, presently enrolled in a Masters of Social Work Program and initially revealed the meeting place as her home-church. She is presently serving in an internship role at a local nursing home facility for the aged. She described her role in the church as co-chair for the young adult ministry. She said she anticipates intertwining her bachelor’s degree in criminal justice with working with juveniles. AL shared her experience working in Queens with youth but experienced gun violence which forced her to leave the opportunity. Still another participant self-identified as, age twenty-two and graduating with his Bachelor of Arts in June. He shared his desire to be a homicide detective and is currently applying to the military and the police academy. He shared his dissatisfaction with his current employment status. He shared he has four jobs and this prompted his preparation for a career change. He also shared his desire to help people and furthermore feels the current situation is benefiting no one. He disagreed with how some, outside the group, view the military regarding it is being equated with dying yet, he holds contrary views, as he sees it as helping people.

Another participant self-identified as a young man trying to figure out his expectations of the future. He quickly shifted to his current work situation and expressed his feelings as to being suspended from work. As quickly as he illustrated his otherwise challenging circumstances, he shifted to how grateful he is to have found solace. He shared his story of gratitude, in that, while supporting his grieving friend, the day before, they attended a spoken word gathering. The speakers talked about racial battles they had experienced. He shifted back to the narrative about work and described a two-year battle with his boss which came to an ugly head recently, resulting in his suspension. He has observed over a period of time on a daily basis that African Americans are not respected where he works. He expressed his anger and quoted statistics in terms of how few African Americans work in the particular town where his job is located. More recently, he witnessed an older African American man being disrespected and although this was not the first time, he himself was treated unfairly, he expressed his weariness, and thus why it was necessary for him to take action and therefore, he called his union representative.

The young man shared feelings of embarrassment when his boss talked to him like a child and his feelings of temptation considering expressing himself in a more aggressive and disrespectful manner. He said he has had enough but used his intelligence, posing open ended questions to his boss, regarding the unfair treatment the boss displayed in the past. He recognized that he may have experienced racism before, but until he “woke up” and paid to it, it did not register to him to fight back. In a passionate tone, he exclaimed, that this beating did not come with a whip this time but with power and money. He recently watched his fellow African American counterparts “fall” and “cradle” under the weight of racism and his response to this is

“what is going on.”⁶⁴ He retorted, at this point he is determined to “speak his truth” regarding his feelings.

The participant was so enraged and discouraged at this point, not in the present but in terms of the entire situation that has gone on for years, because he said, he is “awoke” and reflected that “if his co-workers had fought the fight that he is fighting he would not have had to fight now.”⁶⁵ The expression, “awoke” which the participants continue to utilize means that they have been awakened to certain realities. The participant shared his energy towards his belief in provocative tones and, in addition, mentioned that his energy in terms of this subject extends to his niece and nephews. He encouraged them to watch the film “Birth of a Nation,” about Nat Turner and the slave rebellion he chose to lead. Furthermore, he explained how he teaches the younger generation through the film’s content, explaining it to them afterwards and entering into dialogue. He shared their curiosity and finally he observed that all these experiences in his life have led up to today. As a whole the group listened attentively and were present with the participant in his suffering, humiliation and pain as he suffers the loss of income but has gained self-identity as being “awoke” again, meaning he has been awakened to his understanding of the reality that racism is not only present in the world but in his daily context.

Another participant connected with him as he reflected on how a friend enlisted in the Army following high school and his desire to enter the Army also. He reflected aloud with the group that it was good that he waited because the years of experience have made him a more well-rounded young man and considering his former desire is more prevalent at present he feels prepared.

⁶⁴ focus group March 2018, undisclosed location

⁶⁵ focus group March 2018, undisclosed location

A male participant also shared his childhood desire to enter the military, since he was eight or nine years old. However, his perspective as an adult is that the U.S. military is used as global security to rape other nations. Someone once asked him about his perspective regarding joining the military, considering he is a Christian. The male participants are divided as some are more inclined to an obligation to their patriotism, saying they love being an American. Another male participant agreed the best move following college is the military. The female participants had been excluded from the conversation until this point; however, one female shared that the military experience is not as positive as people may think because there are mandates to which you must subscribe. She gave an example of one of her friends who is sick because he was mandated to take certain anti-bodies at twenty-six years old, while serving in the military.

The group transitioned into a dialogue about the ways in which the government attempts to take control over one's body and considered certain vaccinations that are required. She said her mother had influenced her brother not to receive the flu shot. Unfortunately, following receiving the shot, she said her brother was hospitalized and was close to death. Another participant reflected on how black bodies were involuntarily infected with syphilis years ago. Another female participant shared her perspective in terms of taking vaccinations and the ambiguity involved considering the doctors are not sure what strand of the disease will be prevalent in any given season. The strands of racism inferred within the content of the group's conversation are subtle yet prevalent.

One participant talked about segregating black youth out of the economy, while another added that her son is required to do his homework on devices that some homes may not have access. Parents in the group talked about the level of homework assignments to which the parents are unable to assist, considering subjects have evolved since they were in school. The

conversation moved toward systemic racism as one participant shared his brother's plight in terms of being jailed. He spoke passionately about the case of being one of entrapment intertwined with racist undertones. Talks continued about how the boomers do not have a clue as to what their generation is experiencing. Another participant before she stated her name puts forth a disclaimer that she wanted to be "woke" until she was, and now it hurts so much of the time. She shared she is a nanny for two small white children. She shared her feelings of joy inherent in her work with the children and intertwines many stories involving her experiences during the focus group.

She also shared that she will graduate this spring and desires to enter law school to become a leader in education, here in the United States. She reflected on how her family did not struggle when they lived in what people viewed as an urban area. However, when her family moved further north, to a more upscale community she witnessed a family who were "living as if they were in a third world country." Her family provided support to the children in this family and she said their story further inspired her to become a school principal. She wants children to know they are bigger than their circumstances and that they can overcome their dire circumstances. She expressed her past beliefs that nothing can stop you realistically but yourself and she wants to encourage parents as well.

I observed the focus group comprised of African American millennials' lament as a response to an inequitable system that directly affects their community and to which they have inherited or been born into. Also, I noted their response as genuine and organic, in which they find solace, and having explored solutions rather than continuing to study the problem. The participants had a profound sense of self and therefore the current day racism that they witnessed as well as experienced, such as the incarceration of a disproportionate amount of Black men and

women as opposed to their White counterparts had not thwarted their self-esteem nor has there been a failure to thrive. I found the group quite transparent regarding their strengths and weaknesses and verbose in terms of how they view the African American Church/community in terms of having exemplified coping methods for them. The participants also appeared open to examining their own suffering and that of the African American Church/community.

The millennials whom I interviewed believed they are not being heard within the context of the African American Church/community as well as the larger community. Yet, I believe the community's responsibility, to actively listen also involves the elder's ability to assist them to speak. Thereby, as an elder in the community my listening skills were honed. During the final group meeting, following a group consensus, it was proposed that we continue to meet. Also, one of the younger female participants asked me to mentor her as she completes her Masters of Social Work Degree.

Interview Pastor Serving Black Young Adults

The following interviewees' Church is located in Hackensack, New Jersey within a growing urban area. Minister Fred Sullivan says of the Church where he has been appointed Youth Pastor that it meets the needs of the growing urban population. Minister Sullivan has been challenged as well as uplifted during his time at Mt. Olive Baptist Church and has gleaned from the extensive experience of Reverend Gregory Jackson who is the Senior Pastor. Although Minister Sullivan has experienced challenges, he has developed a more closer relationship with God and himself, I gathered from the interview.

The feedback I received from this Youth Pastor was phenomenal in that he was quite engaged during the interview. He appeared genuinely concerned about the young adults and how they are being cared for these days, navigating their places in society, while navigating as an

African American in America. I desired that the interview be face-to-face; yet, because of both of our full schedules and the proximity of our locations, we decided to conduct the interview over the phone.

Minister Sullivan stated he believes the African American community is experiencing a crisis. He stated he senses the African American community is in multiple crises. He said he has been inspired by and follows the ideology to which Robert Franklin ascribes in his book, *Crisis in the Village*, in terms of the village in multiple crises. He explained some crises are general and others are specific to demographics regarding gender and the marginalized spaces; wherein gender is not along the binary. Furthermore, he added as to the African American community's crises, our articulation or enumeration while identifying these could go on for quite some time.

Minister Sullivan also highlighted that the young adults are affected by over policing, racial profiling, and student loan issues such as loan balances. Although he asserted the latter is not particular to African Americans, yet, it makes a greater impact because of the lack of and disparities of wealth. Educated African Americans who are under-employed are forced to maintain multiple jobs or to work in places or positions they may not have envisioned for themselves. These circumstances cause them distress and leave them living below the standards they thought they would achieve. He asserted, having graduated from college, moving from their late twenties and into their early thirties, some find themselves still living with their parents.

Rev. Sullivan also reflected on counseling as one of those things that individuals often seek. In addition, he contended that we as clergy ought not go into intimate places or dispense counseling where we have not been invited with individuals. He said this practice of his from his perspective is an attempt to try to remain a pastoral figure. He also stated his belief as to why the young adults whom he serves come to the church. He stated his belief that they are not interested

in assistance with navigating issues in their lives. He also said he intuitively believes they may be seeking assistance from one another or their parents. He does not know why they do not come to the church. However, Minister Sullivan further reflected that the group he serves does not mention their problems, and furthermore he interprets their sharing as venting rather than asking for assistance. They share regarding relationships with God, family and those with whom they come into contact within the context of work and their social settings as well as when they are seeking employment. They also vent about not being welcomed into the activities of the larger Church as he talked more about in the interview.

When asked for clarification as to his view of the invitation into those he serves issues, he spoke of earlier in the interview, he firmly stated: he positions himself to let those he serves know he is available, provides encouragement, offers to pray for and with them, and leaves it at that. He also explained, he would wait for the individual to then request assistance from him. I asked him if he would rather not take the risk or take license to delve into their issues, or touch those “tender spots” with the individual, as a pastoral figure. He added that in the two years he has worked with the young adults he feels they do not yet see him as someone they will talk to about their issues. He reflected he does not feel they see him in the role of a counselor and does not believe they are in conversations with the senior pastor on this level either.

Minister Sullivan also shared his suspicions regarding why they do not share their personal concerns with him, he feels that many may not relate to him considering that he is an older married man. His thoughts are that some in his young adult group are single younger women. When I asked him if he thinks millennials have trust issues, he replied reflectively that there could be or it might come down to a comfort issue. He suggested it may be both: comfortability and trust. He assured me that “he does not want to be for them simply to say he

was.”⁶⁶ I believe this statement comes from his understanding of ethics and integrity concerning his role as Pastor. From his perspective, care for the group has been in terms of the make-up of the group. The group being primarily women who may not want to cross gender lines.

Minister Sullivan reflected on his own feelings, sharing his story along gender lines with the one brother in the group. He shared another aspect of the young adults and his relationship as the young women may desire to have their young adult meetings in places he does not desire to go or feel comfortable. Additionally, his assumption is that they may be soothing each other but he is convinced if they can trust each other and help each other out, that is a good thing.

Minister Sullivan described his young adult group in which he serves as being all church attendees. However, some who are involved in the choir may or may not attend church. In many instances, unless the individual is participating in a certain ministry, such as the choir, they will not attend regular worship services. He noted that he needs to reflect on this behavior more; however, some people have built these things over time as a function to combat how they have been treated, some things that have been said to them, or their perception of how they have been treated. He inferred that this is the way they determine whether they choose to attend church and whether it is true or not that it is valid or meaningful for them. He added more in terms of the group’s patterns regarding their gathering, in which they include others from school or college. However, he stated, what they talk about in those spaces is beyond his knowledge.

Minister Sullivan commented that the group gets together for Bible Study and he offers Sunday school as a bible conversation because some do not respond to Sunday school. Yet, he feels he needs to change but scheduling, often interferes since five or six events are taking place concurrently. He said he is trying to put together an evangelistic push for a more outward focus and everything they do will not be focused on those inside the walls of the church. When they

⁶⁶ Minister Fred Sullivan, M. Div., "Youth Pastor, Mt. Olive Baptist Church," interview by author, 2017.

gather with him, it is it more so for spiritual leadership, instruction from a Biblical perspective. His hope is that he is not the only one speaking, so that his role is more that of a facilitator.

I validated his observations about the young adult's recognition of his spiritual care or service for them being at the heart of his concern for their biblical literacy. I sense the groups spiritual health is at the heart of his service, ministry, and care for them. Minister Sullivan said the group especially has a desire to serve much like that of the youth and the adults. They desire space for themselves and are quite concerned about how they are perceived in church; therefore, he encourages them to be visible. Therefore, he said he offered them a space wherein they are afforded a leadership role in the church.

Minister Sullivan interprets the youth group's hardship as grief and their lamenting of their own personal progress in terms of economics. He also said that he observed their external shock, and fear stemming from the police shootings of unarmed individuals; wherein, he noted they were very upset. Considering people were without knowledge as to how to respond to these instances of injustice, he shared the group's attempts at church-wide discussions to raise their political awareness. However, he also reflected on the fact that the youth group were not interested in discussion but rather, desired to take action. YP contended that grief and loss as a response to tragedy in the community occurs in ebbs and flows, and as reactionary. However, attention to social justice issues does not appear to be prevalent at this time. Minister Sullivan explained that the group has had conversations about community service and what they would like to do in the community along the lines of service. However, there is some consternation within the group about not being accepted to serve through their Church. The response to the young adults from the Church community was that they needed to wait. Judging from Minister

Sullivan's comments during the interview the Church community wanted the young adult's to be mentored more so they could grow into certain roles within the Church.

In terms of serving, Minister Sullivan has talked to them about commitment as well as consistency. He went further to give the group examples of the commitment that would be expected to engage, if this was a stand-alone effort. He suggested that they become allies with other groups initially. Minister Sullivan assesses the youth group's condition not necessarily as grief or loss but frustration due to their not being allowed to participate. Their frustration he believes is that they are being told to wait; yet, they are trying to move forward in their twenties and thirties. Minister Sullivan shared his thoughts as to how grief is presenting itself but couches it as their inability to participate as their perceived loss and struggle. He concurs that they may be living into some of their parents' struggles.

I asked Minister Sullivan what he suggests millennials do with their feelings and he reflected that their feelings are a constant source of struggle. Their comments reflect their constant source of struggle in their reflections, when they come together in group settings. He sensed they have sought to be prayerful about their issues. However, he does not know if they have talked to anyone about their issues. For instance, he gave an example of a local Congressman who offered his assistance and requested they send their resumes, call his office and reach out to him. He is not aware of anyone who took him up on his offer simply because of a matter of like or dislike concerning the candidate. Their negative feelings about the candidate caused limited reactions as far as reaching out to someone who has offered aid.

Minister Sullivan also observed that they often do not know what to do with their general feelings or how to go beyond the issues they were dealing with. He expressed his concerns about how he views the youth group's response to some of the issues they have shared with him and

one another. He notes their self-identified unhappiness as valid but their moving toward better decisions is not apparent. He expressed feelings of disappointment as to their self-medicating because that is a temporary remedy.

I asked Minister Sullivan if he think there are underlying issues rather than what is present at the surface. He suggested that the Church bring in a professional who is more skilled, to talk with the young adults. This intervention would be beneficial for issues of mental health, substance abuse, and grief, daily stressors and problems, before they become major issues. Substances are a huge deal because the question arises as to when enough, is enough considering many people believe they can have what they call “a little something.” The question is at some point we should put down the “turn up”. The colloquialism, spelled “turnt up” according to the urban dictionary describes “the state of being wild and crazy like someone would be at a party, potentially engaging in sexual activity and large amounts of alcohol, marijuana or other drugs.”⁶⁷

Minister Sullivan feels there is an element of self-medication even within the context of the “turnt up” in terms of one’s ability to respond to stresses and what we do to “blow off steam.” Maybe the answer is in the talking to someone and that may or may not be he. His general practice is to talk to the individual three to four times and then refer him/her to a more specialized practitioner. The aforementioned practice is one in which I have heard many pastors refer to as the ideal method of counseling. Minister Sullivan said of this practice that clergy and people, regardless of age, need to be aware of what the leadership is capable of. He suggested that maybe people do not know what to expect from pastoral leadership.

When I asked Minister Sullivan if he thinks the African American Church is silent or complacent regarding the issues specific to millennials, he agreed saying churches are both silent

⁶⁷ "Urban Dictionary, December 18: Lets Gain This Grain," Urban Dictionary, , accessed December 19, 2018, <https://www.urbandictionary.com/>

and complacent when it comes to the young adults. Furthermore, he stated the young adults will not attend church if they experience criticism. In his opinion, the church cannot ask where the young people are, and in the same breathe, criticize them. He shared his experience as a forty-six year old pastor, and the youngest individual in the Wednesday night Bible Study. He reflected that we may be treating the millennials as if they are children and therefore the church may be silent as to our ability to treat them as adults. Some millennials are running multi-million-dollar companies. What makes them unlike any other adult when the fact of the matter is the difference in age? “Why not change the name from “young adult ministry” and the elders as well as the millennials themselves will see themselves in a different light?”⁶⁸ He projected his thoughts to another group behind the millennials and questioned our knowledge in terms of differences between the two groups. He also suggested that they are coming of age now and some are in college and some who did not go away are joining the armed forces. For instance, YP shared that the deacons call him son or young man, and he will be soon fifty years of age. He queried, that if they call him young, what are they saying to the adults who are younger than he is? He thinks if the young adults present themselves as adults and they are treated as such, bringing them alongside them, the complacency and silence will end. However, he asserted that millennials are too quick to indict the system and not all things he believes need to be reinvented. Minister Sullivan envisions a future wherein they are integrated; full fledged members of the church. I believe he is one of our prophetic voices in our African American Church.

Conclusion

⁶⁸ Minister Fred Sullivan, M. Div., "Youth Pastor, Mt. Olive Baptist Church," interview by author, 2017.

During my lifetime I have observed the African American Church as the preeminent example of living out a theology of hope, in the face of oppression. Yet, my perspective of the present-day African American Church and the African American community is that of a village in crisis. The village is suffering from complicated grief because of its inability to acknowledge generations of loss and, furthermore, the hope of being healed. Without the acknowledgment of the pain and suffering associated with multiple losses of the African American Church and her community, her wounds remain open and uncared for. Thus, like the prophet Isaiah, I ask the question, Is there no balm in the African American Church and community? Is there no physician there? Why then does there seem to be no opportunity healing the wounds of my people? I, America, and the entire world have witnessed the spiritual healing which emanates from within the context of the African American Church. I, like Isaiah, ask this question with the expectation of a positive outcome for the Church and community suffering from a spiritual deficit.

It is my observation and assertion that the African American Church must acknowledge and care for herself and therefore, as I embarked on my doctoral work, my goal was to seek and illuminate those pastoral care and counseling practices which historically shed light on a dark path toward liberation for the Church and community. The evidence of the African American Church's ability to move toward spiritual healing for herself and the community is that she has raised a generation of those whose faith in the radical leadership of Jesus, negated the voices that said, "wait" for freedom, "wait" for equality, "wait" to be counted among the living.

My original goal was to delve into the pastoral care and counseling practices of the African American Church to examine the practices for her own spiritual healing. Once I began my professional studies, I became cognizant of a deeper and underlying awareness of its

suffering. Considering that I have lamented, fasted, and prayed for the spiritual well-being of the African American Church and contend there is a healing for those who are grief-stricken in its midst, I began to inquire as to the meditative practices that had sustained her and allowed her to become that pillar to which the African American community relied for its sustenance.

I have also witnessed in this present-day climate, less dependence on the African American Church by the African American community. From my perspective, I pondered this estranged relationship, curious as to why the community no longer valued the spiritual resources prevalent and available in the African American Church. I embarked upon my doctoral work equipped as a mother, wife, daughter, grandmother, minister, licensed in the African American Church, and a leader in my community, Chaplain and theologian. I also embark upon my doctoral work prayerfully, and with a purpose and a burden for the spiritual healing of my African American Church and community, confident that my work is God's will.

In chapter one I named my mother as having introduced me to the African American Church, our family Church, when I was approximately five years old, as it had been in existence for at least eighty years. At that time, she nudged me into the doors of Bethesda Baptist Church of New Rochelle. I relegated the African American Church to a place in my life as a pinnacle of empowerment for me as a black woman who was raised in poverty by a single mother. Furthermore, I consider biblical literacy as having offered me solace considering the suffering I both experienced and suffered because of my social location. It was to the Church and her prophetic voice that I turned to pave the way for me throughout my tumultuous life, wherein the Church's theology of hope remained prevalent as I navigated a world without hope in me. In chapter one I frame the overall role of the African American Church in my life and her influence on my development and her relationship to my doctoral work.

In chapter two, I explain the intentionality of this study of the African American Church and the surrounding community. My passion for this doctoral work, stems from my love for my African American Church as well as her surrounding African American community. Therefore, I expound on my social location as a catalyst to my doctoral project and lifetime work as well. I also state my objective observation, and concerns regarding the welfare of the African American Church and the African American community. My thematic statement is that of a village in a state of crisis. I also propose that healing should come from within the African American Church/community rather than gleaning from the dominant culture or the dominant culture projecting their values as if the former was the latter's patient, project or program to be fixed. I also propose the Church/community, through self-examination seek healing from within the Church/community through the leading of the Spirit of God.

In chapter two, I also relay my intentional study of the African American Church/community through the examination of the key aspects of the title of this dissertation. For instance I expound upon the need for the African American Church/community to foster spaces that exist in the Church as places of grace for the "other", those who are deemed different. In addition to creating and seeking opportunities for collaboration for the Church/community, I suggest how these spaces ought to "be." I assert that these opportunities must be approached and sustained through grace because diversity tends to create closed relationships rather than open relationships. I offer several example of persons from a Biblical context to whom grace was extended, such as Ruth, Jonathan's family, and Paul. The intersections ought to be a place of grace wherein we recognize that grief is a leveling place because loss is a natural part of life. Grief is an intimate and humbling experience wherein it can be a special place of connection at

the point of diversity. I submit that spiritual healing is available through the gifts that Jesus gave to the Church.

In chapter three, I introduce a contextual theology having to do with the Jamesonian community and its response to crisis. I exegete the final chapter in which James admonishes the community concerning trials and tribulations in which they have experienced. I ask the question as to how the African American Church responds to a changing community as both experiencing the same set of circumstances, culminating in both communities in crisis. I raise for consideration that their responses to loss have become vastly unique as the community seeks out support from resources other than the Church. I utilize the Jamesonian community as an example of how the Church should respond to the loss and ultimately the complex grief associated with those losses. I urge the African American Church to “companion” her community and to unite in the “re-membering” of their stories as a unified force and therein bringing about healing for both Church and community.

I also offer an overview of the African American experience in America from the perspective of chattel slavery, commencing with the “middle passage.” I contend that this experience within itself was a place wherein the African responded with a sense of resilience having no method of communication with one another, I believe their cries were intended for God. I rehearse the methods of resilience throughout the African American gatherings in the “hush harbor churches” to worship, took refuge in Churches along the Underground Railroad and witnessing the healing power of the Holy Spirit at revivals I continue to reveal the support provided through the African American Church through song, dance, storytelling, lament and prayer for the spiritual healing of the Church and her community.

Considering, one scholar states that the Book of James was written following the death of Jesus, this fact lends credence to the loss that is prevalent in their community at the time of James' writing. James admonishment to the Jamesonian community in terms of their response to the anxiety and stress that loss causes is straight forward yet, supportive. James presents to the fledgling community the space to respond to their grief through acknowledgement and naming. Although James' direction exposes the community to a sense of vulnerability I counter that vulnerability is essential for the natural process of grief. Ultimately, James is saying that the grieving process has a purpose. It is an integral element of our developing patience.

The community is called to several pertinent tasks in the final chapter of James, such as self-identification, self-reflections, self-examination, and finally implores the community to be caregivers for those in crisis. He expounds on what we are to do with contrary information to which our brothers and sisters within the faith community confide with us. The loss of possibility is inherent in James' instructions to confess our faults one to another, so that we can pray for one another for healing to take place. James asks us to trust God with one another's faults because we are not capable of carrying them alone. We are incapable of carrying them and incapable of forgiving sin, which only God can do. We are also incapable of being objective when it comes to one another's indiscretions.

Finally, I hold up as my initial consideration for a contextual theology within the scope of this dissertation Matthew 28: 18-20. Although, this scripture puts forth both a missional and pastoral responsibility, it is the former portion of this pericope which informs my doctoral work. How is it that we treated one who was intimately acquainted with grief and bore humankind's burdens? Is not this the method to which we treat those who are sick and suffering in our Church and community? Yet, Jesus commands that which He has done Himself, because the Spirit of the

Lord was upon Him. Jesus said that those who believe in Him, the works that I do, shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do... (John 14:12).

In chapter four, I interviewed those whom I believed would provide insight into the existing pastoral care and counseling practices utilized within the African American Church and her surrounding African American communities. The interviews proved to be challenging considering pastors have busy schedules; however, all the participants were gracious and accommodating in their efforts to assist me with my research. I noted several practices evident in the care in which African American pastors provide which is likened to that of pastoral care and counseling practices. One practice I observed was active listening, in which the pastors responded to those they counseled with open ended questions. Therefore, the pastors are neither wielding their authority or power through leading or suggestive responses. I also noted the narrative approach with which the pastors utilize story-telling to promulgate emotional and spiritual healing. This is in consideration that illness can cause spiritual disconnection. However, illness may cause individuals to grow closer to God.

Among the principle questions that I probed are as follows:

What in your perspective, happens to the African American community, experiencing complicated grief over an extended period without care? Are feelings of abandonment, anguish, neglect and anger manifested within that community when self-care is not applied? For example, do these feelings of abandonment, anguish, neglect and anger manifest within the African American community's external violent behavior? Are feelings associated with loss, internalized in the minds of the young, particularly at the vulnerable ages of ten and twelve, to believe that the violence their communities are experiencing is their fault? How do we tend to respond to the brokenness which is prevalent in our African American Church/ community? Has the African

American Church become complacent and more so, even silent amidst the crisis which is evident in her African American community? Why does the African American community continue to seek out resources outside the sphere of the African American Church? Is the seeking of care and counseling elsewhere, beyond the Church, an indictment on the African American Church?

Grief manifests itself in losses other than death; however, very often people do not view certain circumstances as loss. The African American Church/community often dismisses loss through a theology of hope or denial. The former has to do with how the African American community's interpretation of scripture informs the community concerning loss, trauma and crisis. The latter from my perspective is often a defense mechanism for the preservation of the mind as it relates to survival. Yet, the African American Church remains a ray of hope, as it is guided by the Holy Spirit. There are spaces which provide grace for the African American community, finding themselves yet in the midst of crisis. My hope is that the Pastors as well as the African American Church can and will be guided by skills practiced within the scope of pastoral care and counseling such as active listening and a ministry of presence. Active listening is essential considering one of the reasons why age cohorts, such as the millennials, tend to disengage from the church when they feel they are not being heard. Another reason is that they are seeing a disconnection between what is taught in the Church and the behavior of those who are in leadership roles. Still, another reason millennials are disenchanted with the Church is due to their desire for biblical teaching in regards to practical living that they are not currently finding. They wish that it could be made available to them, and even be made real for them. As I continue to use the phrase African American Church/ community, I pray that it will become a prophetic vision for the spiritual healing of both, as the two again become one.

It is my vision and ongoing life's work to continue to study the African American Church and her surrounding African American community. My plans for future research are to continue to delve into the suffering and trauma that has plagued the African American Church and community through various initiatives. One of these initiatives is the establishment of a Pastoral Care and Counseling Center. The Center will be established in collaboration with my home Church, Bethesda Baptist Church of New Rochelle. The Center will provide spiritual and emotional care for those who reside in the lower Westchester Area and the five boroughs of New York City. My goal is to provide care for those who are a part of the faith community as well as those who are not affiliated with a Church. Ongoing research concerning the abovementioned project will entail traveling to Pastoral Care Centers throughout the country to interview pertinent personnel as to their best practices.

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