

SPIRITUAL SUPPORT: A PASTORAL CARE MODEL  
FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS  
IN TRAUMA

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Using the principles of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture, this study used qualitative data (collected from verbatims of ten children and teens) to describe in detail, a pastoral care model, developed by, and originally used at First Steps Spirituality Center. The model allows children, with the companionship of a spiritual support provider, to name their pain, spend time with God, and move from despair to hope, finding peace through discovering spiritual integration. This document includes biblical, theological, and historical foundations that defend the appropriateness of, and the need for, pastoral care to be provided for children in trauma.

## INTRODUCTION

Based on Christ's theology of children stated explicitly in the words, "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven," (Mt 19:14)<sup>1</sup> the church today strives to be a place where children are welcomed, included and cared for by the community of faith.

Huge amounts of church budgets are appropriated for buying curriculum used to teach our children about their faith and their denominations. Volunteers spend countless hours caring for, teaching and welcoming children into the body of Christ.

However, in times of crisis and pain, when children find themselves in places of despair and hopelessness, shattered by an event often out of their control such as a divorce, death, deployment of a parent, diagnosis of a psychological disorder or learning disability, the church often finds itself unsure of how to help or what to say.

During these times of crisis the church's response is often to make a referral to a secular agency or counselor and in most cases no offer of pastoral care is made to the child. It is as if the church has nothing to say to a child about God's role in the midst of their pain. It is as if hope, the comforting presence of God and the truth that light shines, even in the darkness, are messages only for adults during times of crisis and not for children.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the Revised Standard Version.

One reason for this lack of pastoral care for children in times of crisis might stem from views of the child as not yet being of an age where they are able to grasp concepts of God or experience the presence of God. Another reason might be that pastoral care originated as a system to care for adults, and the care for children has simply not yet been considered.

Whatever the reasons, the fact remains that the call of the church is to care for all God's children in times of hurt and pain and this must include care for children and teens. This care is especially needed in times like these when incidents of traumatic events for children and risky behaviors among children are growing exponentially. Surely the church has a word of good news for these hurting children and teens.

### The Problem

After extensive research this author could not find an articulated, formal pastoral care model for children. While chaplains, pastors and Sunday school teachers certainly give this kind of care in their individual settings, there has not been a model articulated or designed for use with children or teens in times of crisis. Without a model of care, it is no wonder churches often remain silent during times of crisis for children.

## A Starting Place

For the past six years, First Steps Spirituality Center, located in Colorado Springs, has offered spiritual support, which is a pastoral care model, to several hundred hurting children and teens. However, the model was intuitively grown through interactions between the spiritual support provider and the children and teens coming for help. The model had never been studied in an academic way, but was simply a model that evolved and grew over time.

This Doctor of Ministry project provided the vehicle for the study of the spiritual support pastoral care model used at First Steps Spirituality Center. This paper will begin with a biblical, theological and historical foundation of the need for and the validity of a pastoral care model for children, as well as describe the model and the results of its use in detail following a qualitative study of it.

This model is hopefully a starting place for others to begin providing care for the hurting children and teens in their churches and ministry settings, as well as a model that could be shared with other disciplines such as the psychiatric, educational and medical communities. It is also, hopefully, a model that can be experimented with and further studied.

## The Study

This paper consists of six chapters. Chapter one describes the context of the ministry setting of First Steps Spirituality Center including its history, population served and model of ministry used. It also describes the author's role in creating it and her call to work with hurting children and teens in a spiritual setting.

Chapter two provides a literary overview of books, articles and lectures given about the spirituality of children and the need for pastoral care in times of crisis. Most of the books are theological and biblical in nature, but because of the lack of materials written about pastoral care for children, materials from other disciplines have also been included.

Chapter three provides a biblical, theological and historical basis for the need for and the validity of a pastoral care model for children and teens in times of crisis. These foundations are based on three assumptions of the author: that children are a blessing and deserve to be treated as such with respect and great care; that children have innate spirituality or the ability to connect spiritually with God; and that children need and deserve pastoral care in times of crisis and pain.

Chapter four describes the methodology used to study and describes the structure of and the results observed of ten children and teens who received spiritual care at First Steps Spirituality Center.

Chapter five is a detailed description of the findings including three phases of spiritual support that include the discovery of, and the importance of, the core statement. Further, the observed results of the spiritual progression of the children who received spiritual support over a series of sessions are tracked and described.

Chapter six is a summary of the study and contains biblical and theological reflections of the author about the study.

### Summary

The author does not assert that this is a definitive model of pastoral care for children and teens, or that the bias of the author did not affect this study, but rather she

offers it as a starting place for others who are called and committed to the pastoral care of hurting children. It is her hope that by articulating this pastoral care model of spiritual support, that those within the church and in other settings such as the medical, psychological and educational communities, will begin to acknowledge the role that spirituality can play in the lives of children and teens in crisis and pain.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

Growing up in Appalachian Kentucky, the daughter of a United Methodist Minister, the hurts of children were obviously apparent to the author. Poverty, lack of proper sanitation, and poor nutrition surrounded her. Watching the struggles and pain of her childhood friends, the author became acutely aware that childhood was more than the stereotype of a carefree and joyful existence. It was seeing this hurt and pain up close, such as watching as the United Methodist Women arrived at school each week to check her classmate's heads for lice and wash their hair, that created a lifelong compassion for hurting children deep within her soul.

At age four, the author experienced a time of serious illness where she experienced convulsions due to high fever, and doctors feared that she might have contracted tuberculosis. She later developed a rare kidney disorder requiring multiple stays in the hospital for weeks at a time. Again, the awareness of hurting children was apparent. Children with cancer, children who had lost limbs, and children who never had a visit from their parent surrounded her. She had little time to feel sorry for herself, as the pain of other children seemed so much worse than her own. Her heart broke for them.

During high school she received a call to ministry to work with sick and dying children and teens. While attending United Theological Seminary she was encouraged to follow that call, but was aware that at that time, the notion of spiritual care for children by an Elder in the United Methodist church was non-existent. She was not sure she would be able to find employment following seminary.

During those years the author served as a student chaplain at Children's Medical Center, Dayton, Ohio where she worked with children who were fighting cancer, dying of cystic fibrosis and children who struggled daily to overcome illness. She regularly responded to crisis calls from the Emergency Room and Intensive Care Units. During that time, the author first observed the deep spiritual lives of children and the ways in which they used their spirituality to cope with and heal from illness and crisis.

Following seminary she was assigned several pastorates where she continued exploring the spirituality of children and teens in curriculum-based settings such as Sunday School, Confirmation Classes, prayer groups and summer camping experiences. During this period it became increasingly apparent that while these arenas worked well for developing spirituality and teaching children the Bible and about their faith tradition, children in crisis often found their needs unmet. The author also found herself feeling ill-equipped to meet their needs. Often they were referred to psychologists who were better prepared to help them.

During three units of Clinical Pastoral Education, the author was able to begin exploring what pastoral care for children might look like. It was from this experience that she decided to create First Steps Spirituality Center and begin providing pastoral care to

hurting children and teens at no cost. Unsure of exactly what to do or how to do it, she began looking for others doing similar work. There were none that could be found.

During the first years, the author worked closely with children drawing upon her experience as a chaplain and children's minister. She eventually designed an intuitive model of pastoral care for children, which she continues to use today.

First Steps Spirituality Center is a 501(c)(3), nonprofit organization qualified under the 509(a)(1) statute. A young organization, First Steps was started in November of 2000. The mission of First Steps is as follows:

The First Steps Spirituality Center is dedicated to providing spiritual care and healing to hurting children and teens who are experiencing pain from death, loss, divorce, low self-esteem or hurt of any kind. We believe that children and teens have been blessed by God with an innate spirituality and light which they can identify and use to heal their pain. Our task is to facilitate their spiritual healing by helping them identify and strengthen the light within using prayer, reflection, art and movement. It is also our mission to provide spiritual support-based training to adults who work with hurting children and teens.

First Steps Spirituality Center is located in downtown Colorado Springs, a city of over 500,000 people. The office consists of an administrative office, a storage room and volunteer space, and one small room where Spiritual Support is offered to the children. The office is located over Tony's Bar and Grill and across the street from Poor Richard's Used Bookstore, Toy Store and Restaurant. This line of shops is a *fixture* in Colorado Springs and people from all walks of life shop and dine there. Located down the street is Acacia Park, which has a fountain for children to play in and at the same time is a refuge for homeless teens and adults. Not far from First Steps Spirituality Center is Palmer High School, probably the most eclectic high school in the city. It houses the International

Baccalaureate program for gifted, college-bound students and has a large population of gothic teens, as well. The downtown area is a mix of very wealthy people, homeless people, and an outdoorsy, earthy population. Like many cities, Colorado Springs is divided into separate economically based neighborhoods. The rich live in very distinct zip code areas and the very poor in others. The downtown is the hub or center of these groups coming together. First Steps Spirituality Center is intentionally located in the downtown area so that people from all walks of life and various economic levels will feel comfortable coming to it. It is also located downtown so that people from all parts of town will have equal driving distances.

At the present time the author is the only paid staff member. She is an Elder in the United Methodist Church and serves under a special appointment within the Rocky Mountain Conference.

An active Board of Directors governs First Steps Spirituality Center. In addition to the board, it has a Program Board that coordinates events such as the Community Children's Sabbath and various workshops. The center has seventy-five volunteers who do a variety of services including folding and mailing the quarterly newsletter, baking cookies, volunteering at funeral homes and helping out where needed. The ages of the volunteers varies from children to elderly adults.

Children and teens who come to First Steps receive *Spiritual Support*. It is not counseling, but rather a ritualized time for children to share their feelings and connect with God. The children are seen on an appointment basis. As they enter the children's room (a room designed to be especially comforting to children) there are homemade cookies and a set of Holy Listening Stones (a tool designed by the author to help children

begin articulating their feelings) on the table. The children are then invited to participate in the four-step process. The four-step process was created organically, after meeting with and listening to children share their pain, and is now used during each spiritual support session.

Step one is *Holy Listening*, where a child or teen can share their pain, crisis, and hurt safely and without correction or judgment. Then, if they are comfortable with prayer, they are invited to *Create a Sacred Space*, which allows the child to focus on God and God's healing and enter a *Time of Prayer*, the third step. The child may pray by drawing, playing with clay, sitting in silence, lighting a candle, playing in the spiritual sandbox, ringing a chime, or in any way that helps them connect with God. The fourth step in spiritual support is the *Blessing* where the child is blessed and God is invited to work within the child's life to bring wholeness, peace, comfort and healing.

The ministry of First Steps seeks to provide spiritual care to children and teens that are hurting because of a variety of reasons. The Board of Directors decided that First Steps would offer its care free of charge so that all teens and children would have equal access to the care available. Families facing divorce, illness and death are often facing financial crisis, as well. The Board did not want money to be a factor in providing help for hurting kids and teens. However, the free service does not mean that the majority of children are from low-income households. Services are provided to families of all economic ranges.

Spiritual support is provided to approximately two hundred children and teens each year. They range in ages from two years old to eighteen years old (see chart 1). The majority of children and teens receive one-on-one spiritual support, however support

groups are developed and led as needed. Most of the children are white, as is reflected in the racial make-up of Colorado Springs. The city is approximately 75% white, 12% Hispanic with the balance of residents split evenly between black and Asian people.<sup>1</sup> There have been attempts to reach out to the black churches in our community and as a result the center works with more children and teens of color.

Over half of the children and teens that come to the center are facing illness, death or divorce. The others come for a variety of reasons including being picked on at school, drug or alcohol use, peer relationship issues, family stress, eating disorders, and questions of faith (see chart 2).

The children and teens come from diverse religious backgrounds. Nearly eighty percent are Christian. Denominations included are United Methodist, Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, Non-denominational, Episcopalian, Christian, Mormon, and United Church of Christ. The other twenty percent are Jewish, Buddhist, Unitarian Universalist, Wicca, and some have no faith tradition, but still seek spiritual care.

Most families hear of First Steps through word-of-mouth referrals. Referrals are made from churches, schools, counselors, psychologists and other parents. First Steps also partners with several organizations including: Heartbeat and Teen Heartbeat, which provides support for those who have lost a loved one to suicide; Urban Peak, a teen homeless shelter; and Dignity Memorial Providers Funeral Homes. Additionally, First Steps Spirituality Center provides grief groups in local elementary schools and works with referrals from hospice organizations. House calls are made when needed. In addition to partnering, presentations and workshops have been given to foster parenting groups,

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<sup>1</sup> From the "Local Church Profile," First Congregational Church, Colorado Springs, CO, July 12, 2005.

school counselors, hospices, and several church-related groups. The author also serves as the children's specialist on the Federal Medical Reserve Corp of Colorado Springs, a group that provides help in times of community crisis, and is a member of the Bereavement Coalition of Colorado Springs. Additionally, First Steps Spirituality Center participates in and organizes children's activities for the Christian-Jewish Dialogue of Colorado Springs.

Because of the success with the children and teens receiving spiritual support, requests for trainings for adult leaders began coming into the center. The Board of Directors blessed this new direction knowing that while a limited number of children and teens could be seen at First Steps, training other adults meant that children and teens in a variety of settings and in different parts of the country could be helped using the methods and skills developed at First Steps Spirituality Center. The author travels nationally leading workshops, lecturing and preaching about the spirituality of children. The First Steps Certification Course, a six-session course designed to teach the basics of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture, is offered regularly to people wanting to learn more about the spiritual lives of children. Professionals from churches, schools, hospitals, mental health organizations and other settings have been trained and now use the methods.

Resources to be used by parents and other professionals who work with children and teens such as the *Praying With Your Baby Booklet* and a booklet about using First Steps Spirituality Center techniques with children and teens called, *Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture for Children and Teens* have been developed. A DVD entitled, *Stepping Up to Wholeness: Five Real Steps to Use with Kids in Crisis*, is the latest resource developed and provides concrete suggestions for helping children in crisis.

Allowing affiliates to operate has expanded the mission outreach of First Steps Spirituality Center. The leaders must complete the certification training and meet standards set by First Steps, such as not charging children or teens for the care they provide and by doing background checks on all volunteers. The affiliates create their own center's name and are independently operated. There is no fee for affiliation. At the present time there are five affiliates operating: *The Blessing Center* in Xenia, Ohio; *Sacred Steps* in Colorado Springs, CO; *Heartpaths for Kids*, Saint Luke's United Methodist Church in Oklahoma City; *The Hub*, in Norman, Oklahoma, and *The Grace Place*, in Leawood, Kansas.

The success and growth of First steps Spirituality Center has been a blessing and yet there are some issues with it, as well. The core issue is, while the spiritual support provided to children appears to work, there has not been a formal study about how it works, why it works, and how children are strengthened and heal through the process. It has also largely been the work of one person, the author, who intuitively works with children. The number of children reached through the efforts of one person are limited.

In the meantime, the numbers of children and teens in crisis in America are staggering. According to a resource created by the Children's Defense Fund, the following facts occur each day in America:

- 1 mother dies in childbirth.
- 4 children are killed by abuse or neglect.
- 5 children or teens commit suicide.
- 8 children or teens are killed by firearms.
- 77 babies die before their first birthday.
- 177 children are arrested for violent crimes.
- 375 children are arrested for drug abuse.
- 390 babies are born to mothers who received late or no prenatal care.
- 860 babies are born at low birth weight.

1,186 babies are born to teen mothers.  
 2,076 babies are born without health insurance.  
 1,900 public school children are punished corporally.  
 2,385 babies are born into poverty.  
 2,341 babies are born to mothers who are not high school  
 graduates.  
 2,482 children are confirmed as abused or neglected.  
 2,756 high school students drop out.  
 3,742 babies are born to unwed mothers.  
 4,262 children are arrested.  
 16,964 public school students are suspended.<sup>2</sup>

A publication from the Suicide Prevention Partnership, tells of the effects of suicide on young people.

More teenagers and young adults die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia and influenza, and chronic lung disease **combined**. Between 1952 and 1995, the incidence of suicide among adolescents and young adults nearly tripled. Based on approximately 29,000 suicides annually, the number of survivors is estimated at 174,000 each year. If there is a suicide every 18 minutes, then there are 6 new survivors every 18 minutes, as well.<sup>3</sup>

These statistics tell only part of the story. Many hurts that children experience never make the list. In addition to the facts above, an unending list of other hurts exist, including the pain resulting from being overweight, being picked on at school, learning disabilities, spiritual questions and concerns, speech impediments, physical disabilities, death of a pet, hearing about a death and being afraid. The effects of national disasters such as September 11 and Hurricane Katrina are now part of children's and teens' daily realities.

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<sup>2</sup> Shannon Daley-Harris, *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths Manual 2005*, 14 vols., vol. 14 (Washington, D.C.: Children's Defense Fund, 2005), 43.

<sup>3</sup> Ann Swink, *A Training Manual for Professionals Who Respond to Suicides* (Colorado Springs: Office of Suicide Prevention, 2004), 10.

Despite statistics like these, there have been few spiritual approaches developed to help children and teens in times of crisis. One of the reasons for this is grounded in history. The Greco-Roman notion of children as being more plantlike than human led people to believe that children were incapable of having their own thoughts, let alone spiritual experiences with God. The concept of original sin viewed children as sinners who needed to be tolerated until they could become *saved adults* who would be capable of a relationship with God. The greater population believed that children were not capable of having religious experiences and so spirituality was not considered as a tool that might help them in times of crisis. These beliefs, so deeply entrenched, are rarely questioned and as a result little study or theological reflection has been given to the role spirituality might play in the life of a child in crisis. As a result, there has not been a pastoral care model developed specifically to meet the spiritual needs of children in crisis.

Therefore, churches, schools and neighborhoods, filled with well-meaning adults, often do nothing to help children and teens, not because they do not care about these children, but because they do not know what to do. Children need spiritual care during times of stress, pain and hurt and yet no formalized pastoral care model has been designed.

While the idea that children are less than human and not capable of having relationships with God was the predominate voice within the Christian Church, historically, biblically and theologically, there are examples, theologies and biblical passages which refute this notion.

In ancient Judaism, the idea of the child being a blessing and capable of having a relationship with God was present, and is still a central understanding within their faith community. Jesus, being Jewish himself, demonstrates this notion in his treatment and sayings about children. The early church fathers, Clement, Origen and The Shepherd of Hermas all spoke of the goodness of the child. John Chrysostom and Fredrich Schleiermacher also shared their view of the child. More recent theologians such as Matthew Fox, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Horace Bushnell, Karl Barth and Karl Rahner all provide solid theologies that support the notion that children can be spiritual people and can relate to God.

The Bible is filled with stories of children who demonstrate their ability to connect with God spiritually. Jesus speaks of children in the present tense as already belonging to and living out the kingdom of God.

History is filled with accounts of children whose deep spirituality was acknowledged by the adults around them. Even John Wesley recorded his observations about the depth of the spirituality of children in his journal.<sup>4</sup>

Once the belief that children are spiritual beings capable of a relationship with God is established, the door is opened for them to receive pastoral care. The method of spiritual support developed and used by First Steps Spirituality Center is perhaps a tool that could be used to help these hurting children and teens. However, because First Steps is the first spirituality center designed to meet the spiritual needs of children in crisis, and due to rapid growth, the methods used have never been examined or articulated as fully as they might be after such a study. The Pastoral Care model used with children and teens

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<sup>4</sup> David Walters, *Children Aflame: Accounts of Historic Wesleyan and Modern Revivals with Children* (Taylorsville, South Carolina: Faith Printing Company, 1995).

has not been grounded in an academic, biblical and theological system. Studying the work and methods of First Steps Spirituality Center will strengthen its effectiveness, point out places where the model does and does not work, and help articulate to others a pastoral care model that could help children and teens in crisis.

The author was compassionately aware of the hurts and pain of children from her earliest years and she entered ordained ministry to work with children and teens in crisis, and created First Steps Spirituality to fully live out her call to ministry. The pastoral care model developed by her and used at First Steps Spirituality Center needs to be studied, grounded theologically, biblically and historically, understood and articulated, so that others can carry this work forth. Understanding the work and articulating it effectively to others is the next step in the author's spiritual, as well as professional, journey. This Doctor of Ministry project provides the structure and discipline for a thorough study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY PROJECT**

This review contains a comprehensive amount of literature from which a theological, historical and biblical foundation can be established, and is a cornerstone for understanding the need for, and development of, a pastoral care model for children could be established. However, literature specifically written about the pastoral care of children is limited. There are few theologians, if any, who have created a theology specifically addressing the arena of children. Christian educators have spent much of their time developing curriculum to be used for the instruction of children. While pastoral care models for use with adults have been written about, no literature describing a formalized pastoral care model for children could be found.

As a result of the lack of literature directly written about pastoral care for children, this review includes the material from a variety of disciplines. Most are from Christian historians, theologians, biblical scholars, and Christian educators. Some sources that were primarily written for adults have been read and applied to children to create a solid foundation for the development and an understanding of the necessary components of an effective pastoral care model for children.

Additional literature was derived from professionals working in other disciplines that have studied and developed theories about how children heal from pain and crisis. These include the fields of psychiatry, education and psychological research. Without additional resources from other disciplines, there was simply not enough foundational material to explore and understand how children might heal and benefit from a pastoral care model.

The author began by exploring the history, theology and biblical literature that directly spoke about children, and then examined sources written primarily about adults that might be applied to children. Finally, the work and opinions of a variety of other disciplines were consulted. In using this multi-faceted approach, a well-established foundation for the understanding and development of a pastoral care model for children could be justified, developed, and studied.

There are several books that were enlightening in the areas of history, theology and the Bible. *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity*<sup>1</sup> written by O.M. Bakke is an excellent source for understanding the perceptions adults had about children beginning with the Greco-Roman period and extending through the early church fathers. The book helps the reader understand from an historical, theological and biblical basis the contrast between the Greco-Roman view of children, the Jewish perspective of Jesus, and the views of early church fathers. It then demonstrates the shift to a more Greco-Roman view of children with the theology of original sin developed by Augustine.

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<sup>1</sup> O.M. Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005).

*The Child in Christian Thought*<sup>2</sup> is a book edited by Marcia Bunge which traces the perceptions of children by theologians throughout history. The book begins with the Second Testament and journeys throughout the 1800's. The theologies and biblical foundations for such great thinkers as Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, and The Social Gospel's Movement, Karl Barth and Friedrich Schleiermacher are included.

Direct sources exploring the theologies of early church fathers and Augustine were also consulted. *The Confessions Book I*<sup>3</sup> brought clarity not only about Augustine's theology of original sin but also his beliefs about the innate sinfulness of the child. While the author strongly disagrees with this view, it was important to understand it fully because of the deep and lasting ramifications it had throughout history, especially in regard to the understanding and treatment of children spiritually.

The writings of the early church fathers such as Clement of Alexandria<sup>4</sup> and later diary excerpts about children by John Wesley<sup>5</sup> helped clarify that throughout history there have been continuous comments and opinions about the innate spirituality of children. They are not overt, but certainly can be found.

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<sup>2</sup> Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions Book I* (20 March 2006); available from <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/augustine/Pusey/book01>.

<sup>4</sup> "Clement of Alexandria: Theologian for the Intelligentsia," (ChristianityToday.com, 2004, accessed); available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/special/131christians/clement.html>.

<sup>5</sup> David Walters, *Children Aflame: Accounts of the Historic Wesleyan and Modern Revivals with Children* (Taylorsville, South Carolina: Faith Printing Company, 1995).

The role of the child historically in the Jewish community and family contained much insight. The *Encyclopaedia Judaica*<sup>6</sup> provided a basic Biblical understanding for the importance of children and the role they played within the family as a cherished being. George Robinson's, *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs and Rituals*,<sup>7</sup> further demonstrated the role of children in Jewish culture. *Jesus the Jewish Theologian*,<sup>8</sup> a book written by Brad Young, provided much insight into Jesus and his view of children based on his Jewish roots.

In addition to the historical, theological and biblical foundations for the child's role throughout history, developing a pastoral care model for children needed to include a knowledge of the history of pastoral care. G.R. Evans edited a book entitled, *A History of Pastoral Care*,<sup>9</sup> that traces the development of pastoral care from the second century where it was primarily defined as the *saving of souls*. Evans traces pastoral care to the twentieth century marking the shift in definition away from *salvation of the soul* toward a *ministry of presence*. Also included is the development and overlap between the new definition of pastoral care and the emergence of psychotherapy.

*A History of Pastoral Care in America From Salvation to Self-Realization*,<sup>10</sup> explores pastoral care and the changes occurring from 1700 to 1900. The shift from *salvation of the soul* to *care of the soul* finds its root in this period.

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<sup>6</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 5 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971).

<sup>7</sup> George Robinson, *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs and Rituals* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Brad H. Young, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> G. R. Evans, ed., *A History of Pastoral Care* (London and New York: Cassel, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983).

Howard Clinebell in his book, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*,<sup>11</sup> contrasts pastoral care and pastoral counseling and provides excellent definitions for both. Clinebell also describes pastoral care and its use in communal pastoral settings, as well as private offices.

Both Robert Leas in his article, *A Brief History*,<sup>12</sup> and Rachel Rosner in her article, “James Jackson Putnam and the Legacy of Liberal Protestantism in Early American Psychotherapy or Psychotherapy and the case of the Missing Ministers,”<sup>13</sup> detail the history of Clinical Pastoral Education and the subsequent division between psychology and the church.

Developing a theological basis for this project was formed in two ways. First, any theological references by theologians were studied. Additionally, theologies written about adults were reframed into a solid foundation where the need for and appropriateness of a pastoral care model for children could be established.

Karl Rahner’s concept of the *prior knowing of God* and his beliefs about children being fully human were extremely important. His *Theological Investigations*,<sup>14</sup> along with several additional articles about him were invaluable. His work, along with *Original Blessing*<sup>15</sup> written by Matthew Fox and the writings of Meister Eckhart<sup>16</sup> form a strong

<sup>11</sup> Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966).

<sup>12</sup> Rev. Robert Leas, *A Brief History* (The Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc., 2006, 16 April 2006); available from <http://www.acpe.edu/cpehistory.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Rachael Rosner, “James Jackson Putnam and the Legacy of Liberal Protestantism in Early American Psychotherapy or Psychotherapy and the Case of the Missing Ministers,” (2000, 16 April 2006); available from <http://htpprints.yorku.ca/archive/00000018/01/putnam.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. III (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1967).

<sup>15</sup> Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing* (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, Inc., 1983).

theological basis for the innate spirituality of children. The theology of the Quakers and the concept of *inner light* as defined and applied to children was discovered in “Quakers: The Religious Society of Friends”<sup>17</sup> and “Thoughts on Children and the New World.”<sup>18</sup>

Jewish theologians such as Abraham Heschel in his lectures, “Chose Life”<sup>19</sup> and “No Religion is an Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue,”<sup>20</sup> and Harold Kushner in his book, *To Life! A Celebration of Jewish Thinking and Being*,<sup>21</sup> do not subscribe to the concept of original sin. Their theologies describe the *blessedness* as opposed to the *sinfulness* of all people. This formed a strong portion of the theological foundation of the innate spirituality of children.

The notion of innate goodness in children can easily be pushed too far and become a *stereotype* of childhood instead of a realistic representation of the child. Work of post-modern theologians such as Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki<sup>22</sup> and George A.

<sup>16</sup> David O'Neal, ed., *Meister Eckhart: From Whom God Hid Nothing Sermons, Writing & Sayings* (Boston & London: New Seeds, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> *Quakers: The Religious Society of Friends*, (1999, 18 February 2006); available from <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu.nrms/quak.html>.

<sup>18</sup> *Thoughts on Children and the New Worship Group*, (Friends General Conference, 2006, 12 January 2006); available from [http://www.fgcquaker.org/ao/toolbox/thoughts\\_on\\_children.htm](http://www.fgcquaker.org/ao/toolbox/thoughts_on_children.htm).

<sup>19</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Choose Life!,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, no. January (1966).

<sup>20</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *No Religion Is an Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue* (3/18/06 1991, 22 April); available from <http://www.cs.auckland.ac.nz/%7Ealan/chaplain/Heschel.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Harold S. Kushner, *To Life! : A Celebration of Jewish Being and Thinking* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of America, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> Marjorie Hewitt Suchoki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003).

Lindbeck<sup>23</sup> served as reminders that while Augustine's concept of innate original sin may be outdated, the need to recognize sin in humans still remains. While the author did not use these theologies in creating her theology foundations, they did serve as an important reminder not to make the child a caricature and to include all attributes of the child.

Andrew Park Sung's theology of Han found in, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded*,<sup>24</sup> was the only theology the author could find directly speaking to a theological foundation for healing the wounded. This work is paramount for developing a case for the need for pastoral care for children.

Along with acknowledging the child as wounded and needing care, Liberation Theology lays the foundation for the child needing and deserving to be liberated from pain. *A Concise History of Liberation Theology*,<sup>25</sup> *Jesus and Liberation Theology*,<sup>26</sup> and *Liberation Theology in the New International Context*,<sup>27</sup> not only described the history and background of Liberation Theology, but also expanded it to include children as those who need liberating.

Beyond formal theology, several books have been written directly about children and their role and acceptance in the church. They contain sound theological and biblical understandings about children. John Witvliet, the editor of *A Child Shall Lead Them*:

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<sup>23</sup> George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984).

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, *A Concise History of Liberation Theology* (Orbis Books, 16 April 2006); available from <http://www.landreform.org/boff2.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> Robert T. Osborn, *Jesus and Liberation Theology* (Christian Century Foundation, 1976, 16 April 2006); available from <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1842>.

<sup>27</sup> Pablo Richard, *Liberation Theology in the New International Context* (EPICA, 2004 2003, 16 April 2006); available from <http://www.epica.org/Library/millennium/richard2.htm>.

*Children In Worship*,<sup>28</sup> creates a theology of the child as spiritual leader in the church based on biblical foundations. *The Ministry of the Child*,<sup>29</sup> by Benson and Stewart, describes children as being innately spiritual and deserving care by the community of faith. Cheri Fuller's book, *When Children Pray: How God Uses the Prayers of a Child*,<sup>30</sup> describes the capacity of children to have very real experiences with God and defends this theologically and biblically. Don Rogers' book, *In Praise of Learning*,<sup>31</sup> describes the child as innately good and deserving of care through solid Christian education. *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*<sup>32</sup> clearly works from a foundation of the worth of the child and requires the church community to provide care for them, especially the children in crisis, pain and poverty.

The views of the child as innately spiritual and deserving spiritual care in terms of crisis have been the topic of discussion beyond the scope of formal church doctrine and theology. Many works written by secular educators contain insights into the child and provided structure for a pastoral care model.

Marie Montessori was an educator and her worldwide educational principles of children found their roots in her theology. This is articulated in the articles, "Marie

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<sup>28</sup> John D. Witvliet, ed., *A Child Shall Lead: Children in Worship* (Garland: Chorister Guild, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Dennis C. Benson and J. Stewart, *The Ministry of the Child* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978).

<sup>30</sup> Cheri Fuller, *When Children Pray: How God Uses the Prayers of a Child* (Sisters: Multnomah Publishers, 1998).

<sup>31</sup> Donald B. Rogers, *In Praise of Learning*, ed. Ezra Earl Jones, *Into Our Third Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980).

<sup>32</sup> Harriett Jane Olson, ed., *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1996).

Montessori: A Love Story”<sup>33</sup> and “Maria Montessori: Through the Eyes of the Child.”<sup>34</sup> Rachel Kessler, in her book *The Soul of Education*,<sup>35</sup> invites the education community to see the child as a spiritual being and raises the call to respond to their pain by acknowledging their spirit and responding with spiritual sensitivity. The book, *What Will We Do? Preparing a School Community to Cope with Crisis*,<sup>36</sup> is a compilation of suggestions by a variety of educators with suggested ways to help children and teens in times of crisis including school shootings, stress, suicide and anger. While not specifically focusing on spirituality, the book provides a framework for the pain children and teens face daily. Additionally, the suggestions given overlap tools used in pastoral care such as treating the children with respect, making time for them, listening to, and not judging them.

Educator Max vanManen explored the role of a teacher as an important factor in the outcome of children’s progress educationally and emotionally. His description of the teacher in “Pedagogy, Virtue, and Narrative Identity in Teaching,”<sup>37</sup> had obvious correlations between the roles of teacher and spiritual support provider in a pastoral care model for children.

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<sup>33</sup> Theresa Carson, “Marie Montessori: A Love Story,” *Catholic Digest* (2000).

<sup>34</sup> Karen Grace, *Maria Montessori: Through the Eyes of the Child* (Cafh Foundation, 2002, 15 March 2006); available from [http://www.seedsofunfolding.org/issues/06\\_05/profile\\_1.htm](http://www.seedsofunfolding.org/issues/06_05/profile_1.htm).

<sup>35</sup> Rachael Kessler, *The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School* (Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Robert G. Stevenson, ed., *What Will We Do? Preparing a School Community to Cope with Crises*, ed. John D. Morgan, 2nd ed., Death, Value and Meaning Series (Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc., 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Max vanManen, *Pedagogy, Virtue, and Narrative Identity in Teaching* (26 August 1994, 18 September 2006); available from <http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/max/articles/virtue.html>.

In addition to the educational community, the psychological community was a source of literature about the spirituality of children. For purposes of this project, an understanding of their theories and studies was imperative. The work of psychologists and psychiatrists provided a basis for understanding the theories of how children heal which could then be applied to the understanding of how and why a pastoral care model could be effective in working with children in crisis.

In addition to the histories of Clinical Pastoral Education cited above, the history of psychotherapy was found in the article “Freud in Our Midst,”<sup>38</sup> which gave a timeline of the development of the different methods of psychotherapy beginning with Freud and the early psychotherapy pioneers, including Carl Rogers. Also included were the emerging psychologies of today. The psychological method of Carl Rogers, person-centered therapy or absolute positive regard, was found to best support the process used in the pastoral care model developed by the author. A lecture given by Carl Rogers in 1946 entitled, “Significant Aspects of Client-Centered Therapy,”<sup>39</sup> and the article, “Person-Centered Therapy,”<sup>40</sup> described in detail the main components of Rogers’ method.

Play Therapy, the first therapy developed for use specifically with children, is based on Rogers’ method. Named after its innovator, the Axline Principles describe the goal, methods and role of psychologist in working with children in crisis. The article,

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<sup>38</sup> Jerry Adler, “Freud in Our Midst,” *Newsweek*, March 27, 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Carl Rogers, *Significant Aspects of Client-Centered Therapy* (1946, 24 February 2006); available from <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Rogers/therapy.htm>.

<sup>40</sup> “Person Centered Therapy,” in *Connecting with Kids* (2003).

“Play Therapy UK”<sup>41</sup> described in great detail the history and the components of Play Therapy. Sandbox Therapy evolved from Play Therapy and its use of symbolic language to help children open up was of great value to understanding the workings of the pastoral care model for children. Ann Buck’s article, “Using Sand Tray with Bereaved Children,”<sup>42</sup> was of particular interest.

The editors of the book, *Spirituality and Psychological Health*,<sup>43</sup> make the case that psychology and spirituality can have a complimentary relationship and dialogue between the two disciplines would be beneficial to each. A chapter of particular note was “Spirituality and Children,”<sup>44</sup> where the authors, Barry Nierenberg and Alissa Shildon, explain that few actual studies about the spirituality of children have been done and instead the most common thought about their spirituality was derived by adaptations of educational models. They affirm the need for studies to be done. This sentiment is echoed by Thomas Moore in “Care of the Soul: The Soul of Medicine.”<sup>45</sup>

Much of what has been written about the spirituality of children, from the church, educational and psychological worlds, is based on theory and isolated studies. Rarely do the writers work directly with children. Books written by those who do actual one-on-one

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<sup>41</sup> *Play Therapy UK -- Axline Principles of Play Therapy*, (PTUK Ltd., 2004, 15 March 2006); available from <http://www.playtherapy.org.uk/AboutPlayTherapy/AxlinePrinciples.htm>.

<sup>42</sup> Ann Buck, “Using Sand Tray with Bereaved Children,” *Sand Tray News* Spring (2000).

<sup>43</sup> Betty Ervin-Cox Richard Cox, and Louis Hoffman, ed., *Spirituality and Psychological Health* (Colorado Springs: Colorado School of Professional Psychology Press, 2005).

<sup>44</sup> Barry Nierenberg, ABPP & Alissa Shildon, “Spirituality and Children,” in *Spirituality and Psychological Health*, ed. Betty Ervin-Cox Richard Cox, and Louis Hoffman (Colorado Springs: Colorado School of Professional Psychology Press, 2005).

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Moore, “Care of the Soul: The Soul of Medicine,” *Spirituality & Health*, June 2006.

work provided many insights. *There is a Rainbow Behind Every Dark Cloud*,<sup>46</sup> was written by a staff of clergy, psychologists and children with cancer explaining the role of spirituality in healing and coping with the disease. Marilee Strong, a therapist specializing in helping teens heal from *cutting*, describes her hands-on work, including the use of spirituality, with quotes from the patients she has worked with in her book, *A Bright Red Scream*.<sup>47</sup>

The books, *On Death and Dying*<sup>48</sup> and *On Children and Death*,<sup>49</sup> reflect the insights of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and her work with children who had experienced the death of a loved one. She gives much insight into the symbolic language of children and the need for children to freely express themselves in times of crisis. Robert Buckingham, in *A Special Kind of Love: Care of the Dying Child*,<sup>50</sup> gives a detailed description of his work and methods used to help these children through crisis.

An additional area of study of great importance toward understanding ritual in the healing of children was found in books describing the use of spiritual practices employed during spiritual direction and pastoral care for adults. While the exercises were created for adults, there was much overlap with the use of ritual with children in similar settings. Several books focused on the need for listening. Kay Lindahl describes the role of listening during pastoral care in her book, *Practicing the Sacred Art of Listening: A*

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<sup>46</sup> “There Is a Rainbow Behind Every Dark Cloud,” ed. The Center for Attitudinal Healing (Milbrae: Celestial Arts, 1978).

<sup>47</sup> Marilee Strong, *A Bright Red Scream* (New York: Penquin Putnam Inc., 1998).

<sup>48</sup> Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc, 1969).

<sup>49</sup> Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Children and Death: How Children and Their Parents Can and Do To Cope with Death* (New York: Touchstone, 1983).

<sup>50</sup> Robert W. Buckingham, *A Special Kind of Love: Care of the Dying Child* (New York: Continuum, 1983).

*Guide to Enrich Your Relationship and Kindle Your Spiritual Life*.<sup>51</sup> Cari Jackson, in *The Gift to Listen, The Courage to Hear*,<sup>52</sup> affirms the need for listening in pastoral care and *Zen Keys: A Guide to Zen Practice*<sup>53</sup> gives concrete exercises to help those who desire to truly listen, learn to do so. Marc Gafni describes the need for listening especially to children in *Soul Prints: Your Path to Fulfillment*.<sup>54</sup> The book provides exercises for helping people listen more effectively.

*Cup of Sorrow – Cup of Joy: Perspectives on Suffering*<sup>55</sup> is written by two pastoral counselors and describes the benefits of naming one's pain. The work of the Shepherd's House is described in *Living From the Heart Jesus Gave You*<sup>56</sup> and it also describes the use of *naming* in helping people to heal from pain.

Guided imagery and prayer are other tools used during the pastoral care of those who seek healing. Joyce Rupp's book, *Praying Our Goodbyes*,<sup>57</sup> uses guided imagery as a spiritual practice for healing from grief. Carolyn Bohler's book, *Prayer on Wings: A Search for Authentic Prayer*,<sup>58</sup> is filled with both guided imagery as well as rituals and a variety of prayer styles. The same could be said for *Spiritual Healing: A Handbook of*

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<sup>51</sup> Kay Lindahl, *Practicing the Sacred Art of Listening: A Guide to Enrich Your Relationships and Kindle Your Spiritual Life* (Woodstock: SKYLIGHT PATHS Publishing, 2003).

<sup>52</sup> Cari Jackson, *The Gift to Listen, the Courage to Heal* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2003).

<sup>53</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Zen Keys: A Guide to Zen Practices* (New York: Doubleday, 1974).

<sup>54</sup> Marc Gafni, *Soul Prints: Your Path to Fulfillment* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001).

<sup>55</sup> Frank D. Janzow and James M. Bickel, *Cup of Sorrow - Cup of Joy: Perspectives on Suffering* (Waukesha, Wisconsin: Ascension Lutheran Church, 1415 Dopp Street, Waukesha, Wisconsin 53188, 1992).

<sup>56</sup> James G. Friesen and others, *Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You* (Pasadena: Shepherd's House, Inc., 2000).

<sup>57</sup> Joyce Rupp, *Praying Our Goodbyes* (New York: Ivy Books, 1988).

<sup>58</sup> Carolyn Stahl Bohler, *Prayer on Wings: A Search for Authentic Prayer* (San Diego: LaMedia, 1990).

*Activities, Guided Imagery, Meditations, and Prayers for Exploring and Deepening Our Own Spirituality and the Spirituality of Others.*<sup>59</sup>

One book stood alone in the literature. Erving Goffman's work on liminal space and the structure of theater entitled, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*,<sup>60</sup> provided great insight into the liturgical structure of the author's pastoral care model. This book gave great clarity to the need for structure in the midst of pain.

Attempting to analyze and measure the spiritual experiences of children is a daunting task. Beyond the basic books and articles about Qualitative Research including *On Qualitative Research: Living by Words*,<sup>61</sup> *Writing Up Qualitative Research*,<sup>62</sup> and "Triangulation: Establishing the Validity of Qualitative Studies,"<sup>63</sup> the need to explore the work of those attempting such study was needed.

Donald Ratcliff's book, *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*,<sup>64</sup> was the best collection of studies and methods found that focused on the study of spirituality and children. A chapter of particular note was, "Exploring

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<sup>59</sup> MA Douglas C. Smith, MS, MDiv and PhD Theodore J. Chapin, *Spiritual Healing: A Handbook of Activities, Guided Imagery, Meditations and Prayers for Exploring and Enhancing Our Own Spirituality and the Spirituality of Others* (Madison: Psycho-Spiritual Publications, 2000).

<sup>60</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

<sup>61</sup> Ruth Vinz Margot Ely, Maryann Downing, Margaret Anzul, *On Writing Qualitative Research: Living by Words* (Philadelphia: RoutledgeFalmer, Taylor and Francis Inc., 2001).

<sup>62</sup> Harry F. Wolcott, *Writing up Qualitative Research*, Qualitative Research Methods Series vol. 20 (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1990).

<sup>63</sup> Lisa A. Guion, *Triangulation: Establishing the Validity of Qualitative Studies* (2002, 2006); available from <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

<sup>64</sup> Donald Ratcliff, ed., *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2004).

Scientific and Theological Perspectives in Children's Spirituality."<sup>65</sup> The other book of great value was *The Spirit of the Child*<sup>66</sup> where the structure, methods used, and results of a study of the spirituality of thirty-eight children were documented. David Heller's book, *The Children's God*,<sup>67</sup> described the use of drawings as the research tool used to help children articulate their spirituality.

Other articles consulted to discover the methods of data collection and articulation of findings were, "Spirituality, Health and Medical Care of Children and Adolescents,"<sup>68</sup> "Selected Literature in Spirituality and the Practice of Psychology,"<sup>69</sup> and "Practical Applications of Spirituality and the Practice of Psychology."<sup>70</sup> These psychologically based studies provided many ideas of how the information could be gathered and interpreted with clarity.

As stated earlier, there are very few pieces of literature written specifically in the area of the pastoral care of children. Possible reasons for this will be discussed in later chapters of this paper. However, by carefully reading theology and history, and finding children in the midst of them, by exploring writings intended for adults and finding points

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<sup>65</sup> Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, "Exploring Scientific and Theological Perspectives in Children's Spirituality," in *Children's Spirituality*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2004).

<sup>66</sup> David Hay, *The Spirit of the Child* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006).

<sup>67</sup> David Heller, *The Children's God* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986).

<sup>68</sup> Lisa Miller, "Spirituality, Health and Medical Care of Children and Adolescents," *Southern Medical Journal* 99, no. 10 (2006).

<sup>69</sup> Betty Ervin-Cox and Louis Hoffman and Christopher Grimes, "Selected Literature on Spirituality and Health/Mental Health," in *Spirituality and Psychological Health*, ed. Betty Ervin-Cox Richard Cox, and Louis Hoffman (Colorado Springs: Colorado School of Professional Psychology Press, 2005).

<sup>70</sup> Clarence Leung, "Practical Applications of Spirituality to the Practice of Psychology," in *Spirituality and Psychological Health*, ed. Betty Ervin-Cox Richard Cox, and Louis Hoffman (Colorado Springs: Colorado School of Professional Psychology Press, 2005).

of intersection with children, and by using the wisdom of other disciplines including educators and psychologists, there is enough literature to create a solid foundation and support for a pastoral care model for children that will be studied in this project.

At first the lack of literature was disappointing. But on further reflection, the author is more convinced than ever of the need for, the creation of, and an understanding of a pastoral care model for children in crisis. The books and articles cited during this literature review provide the core foundation for the study and articulation of this work.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

This Doctor of Ministry project uses the Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture principles to create a pastoral care model to be used with children and teens in crisis. Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture is an approach to understanding the spiritual life of children and teens. The inherent underlying assumptions are that children are blessings, deserving to be treated with great care and respect and, that children have been blessed with an innate spirituality that can be tapped into and strengthened in times of crisis. Based on these two assumptions is the third assumption that children deserve and would benefit from a pastoral care model to be used in times of crisis.

The Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture Model is one of the first models ever created specifically to meet the spiritual needs of children and teens. It is a model that has been developed from years of working in a variety of settings with children and teens, watching them closely and asking them directly what did and did not work. Because this model is organically grown, it has not been thoroughly studied in an academic way, although the foundation of the work is based on solid historically, theologically, and biblically sound principles.

The exploration of the spirituality of children historically, theologically, and biblically, begins with the assumption that children are innately spiritual beings who are

blessings and deserve to be treated as people of great worth and value. While this statement may seem to be an obvious one, throughout history the understanding of childhood spirituality and the worth of the child, has covered a broad spectrum from extreme cruelty and total disregard to an unreal caricature of the child as a perfect, flawless being. The author's assumption is that children are people, neither to be devalued nor to be caricatured, but rather to be treasured as spiritual blessings from God. They, like all spiritual people, require, deserve and would benefit from spiritual care, especially in times of crisis and grief. While children have not always been treated as a blessing or received the pastoral care they needed, there have been people and groups who support these assumptions throughout the life of the church.

This paper will explore these assumptions from historical, theological and biblical perspectives. It also examines the development of psychology as a science and the contributions and impact it has had on pastoral care in general and in understanding the role of spirituality while healing and coping with hurts of all kinds.

The acknowledgement must be made that children have not often been the focus of theologians, or biblical scholars. Some of these assumptions are grounded in adult models, which have been reinterpreted to apply to children. The lack of concrete studies and debate have not discouraged the author, but rather encouraged her to continue this work, knowing that it is an area of study needing much attention.

As Marcia Bunge comments:

. . . until very recently, issues related to children have tended to be marginal in almost every area of contemporary theology, although the church has highly developed teachings on other issues, such as abortion, economic justice, and moral conduct in war, theologians

have not offered sustained reflection on the nature of children or on the obligations that parents, the state, and the church have to nurture children.<sup>1</sup>

### **Children as a Blessing: Spiritual People of Great Worth and Value**

The first assumption by the author is that children are a blessing. By this it is meant that they are spiritual people of great worth and value. According to *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, children have been seen in three primary ways. “The first regards the child as unspoiled, trusting and innocent, the model of loving dependence on God. Clement of Alexandria gives a sustained account of the child as the apex of Christian perfection in his *Paidagogos*.”<sup>2</sup> The second description of the child is, “pre-rational, a *tabula rasa* to be schooled into the responsibilities of adulthood. The common view in the ancient and medieval worlds was that 7 was the age at which a child could be deemed rational.”<sup>3</sup> The third model used to describe the child is, “as the prey of original sin and the fruit of the base sexual instincts, a reminder of mortality, and a distraction from the spiritual life.”<sup>4</sup> In addition to these three understandings of children in the Christian faith a fourth model is proposed, the child as being a blessing. There are historical, biblical and theological foundations to support this assumption.

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<sup>1</sup> Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 26.

<sup>2</sup> Alistar Mason Adrian Hastings, and Hugh Pyper, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 45.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

## Historically

Historically, it is important to understand the culture in which the early Christian church began. In the time of Jesus, the people of God found themselves living in two distinctly different worlds. The first was the Greco-Roman world and the other was the Jewish community of their faith. Both world-views carried a very different view of children.

In the Greco-Roman world, free male citizens were thought to possess *logos*, or rational thought. This was considered to be a most desirable quality. Women and older men were thought to possess *logos*, but to a much lesser degree. Slaves, children and barbarians were believed to have none of it and as such were considered worthless.<sup>5</sup> Plato, who was considered a person of much *logos*, shared this view of children. “He claims that children have little knowledge; they are ‘gullible’ and easily persuaded, they are able to understand only the simplest things, they talk nonsense and make unreliable judgments.”<sup>6</sup> Plato referred to children as “marginal actors,” along with other groups such as women, slaves and animals.<sup>7</sup> It was also Plato who described children as a “wax tablet” which could be easily molded and shaped because of their lack of *logos* or intelligence.<sup>8</sup>

Roman law dictated that the father or *paterfamilias*, was the absolute head of the household. Children were considered his property and if he was angry with them they

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<sup>5</sup> O.M. Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 16.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

could be disowned, sold into slavery or killed.<sup>9</sup> A father held the right, by law, to decide whether a child born into the family should live or die. “Fathers also had the right to decide whether to keep or expose their newborn babies. The midwife placed babies on the ground, and only when the paterfamilias picked it up was the baby formally accepted into the family. Exposure — the deliberate abandonment of an infant to the elements — was practiced on obviously deformed infants, or when the father felt the family could not support another child.”<sup>10</sup> The father had eight to nine days to decide on the fate of the child. “The critical phase was the first eight to nine days, during which this question was decided. The acceptance of the child as a family member was celebrated ritually in the home on the so-called *dies lustricus* (“day of purification”). This ceremony was held for boys on the eighth day after birth, for girls on the ninth day, and it marked the child's social birth, as opposed to its biological birth.”<sup>11</sup>

The time between the birth and the *day of purification* was a time where a baby, according to Plutarch, was not yet human but rather considered “more like a plant.”<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, children in the Greco-Roman world were placed in a low position, keeping good company with plants and animals. They were seen as possessions of the father that could be discarded at will, and were often treated as sexual objects and

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<sup>9</sup> *The Roman Empire in the First Century*, (PBS, 2001, 19 March 2006); available from <http://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/life/index.html>, 67.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Bakke, *The Birth of Childhood*, 67.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 30.

slaves.<sup>13</sup> “There is no doubt that children were treated in a very rough way, and relatively many of them were exposed to what we today would call violence and sexual abuse.”<sup>14</sup>

It was this world that co-existed with the Jewish community at the time of Jesus.

In Judaism, the worth and value of the child was drastically different. Children were “considered a great blessing (Gen 22:17; 32:13), and childlessness a source of frustration and despair (Gen 30:1; I Sam 1:10). A childless man was regarded as dead.”<sup>15</sup> Further, if a woman failed to give birth in the first ten years of marriage, it was grounds for divorce.<sup>16</sup> This view of children as a blessing originated in the First Testament, Genesis I, when God instructed humans to be fruitful and multiply. Children, especially sons, were the great sign of blessing.<sup>17</sup> Rabbi Howard Hirsch, professor at Regis University and President of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue, said, “From the beginning of time, children were a blessing, a great blessing and joy. We [the Jewish Community] still see them as such. It is the same now as then.”<sup>18</sup> “Judaism has always considered children to be a gift, a blessing from the Creator. In Genesis 17:16, Adonai tells Abraham, ‘I will bless [Sarah]. Indeed, I will give her a son by you.’ Conversely, barrenness was seen as a curse.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bakke, *The Birth of Childhood*, 42-43.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 5 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971), 426.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Adrian Hastings, *Oxford Companion*, ed., 110.

<sup>18</sup> Howard Hirsch, interview by author, Colorado Springs, CO, 14 October 2006.

<sup>19</sup> George Robinson, *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs and Rituals* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000), 139.

Along with the joy of having a child came the insecurity and fear of losing that child. “In the past, the birth of a child was accompanied by an array of superstitions. Amulets were hung near the sleeping baby to ward off evil spirits, and family and friends would gather together regularly to pray for the protection of the new arrival.”<sup>20</sup> The birth of a baby girl was celebrated as the Father was called forward to read the Torah in the synagogue as soon after her birth as possible.<sup>21</sup> It was at this time she would receive her name.<sup>22</sup> His circumcision, or the *brit milah*, commonly referred to as the *bris*, which took place on the eighth day following his birth, marked the birth of the son.<sup>23</sup> “The operation is still performed on the eighth day after birth, and can take place on the Sabbath, on festivals and even on the Day of Atonement.”<sup>24</sup> After the procedure was completed, the son would be given a Hebrew name<sup>25</sup> and the child would become a member of the covenant of faith.<sup>26</sup> As the child grew, the community believed that they could and in fact, it was required, that they be educated starting at an early age. “Judah b. Tema advised that healthy male children were to be taught Scripture at the age of five, Mishna at ten, to fulfill the law at 13 and study the Talmud at 15. According to another opinion, a child's education should begin as soon as he starts to speak distinctly.”<sup>27</sup> Children were

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<sup>20</sup> Lavinia and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *A Short Introduction to Judaism* (Rockport: Oneworld Publications, 1997), 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>22</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd., 1971), 65.

<sup>23</sup> Robinson, *Essential Judaism*, 426.

<sup>24</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, *Introduction to Judaism*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Robinson, *Essential Judaism*, 424.

<sup>26</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, *Essential Judaism*, 7.

<sup>27</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 427.

not only tolerated in worship experiences but were made an integral part. For example, at the Passover Sedar the child has a central role as the one who asks the four questions, *Mah Nistannah*.<sup>28</sup> A child was not considered the property of the father, as was a child of a Greco-Roman *paterfamilias*. “Many of the laws and customs that govern adoption grow logically out of the initial premise, that one does not take title to children as one would chattel.”<sup>29</sup>

The contrast between the Greco-Roman understanding of children and that of the Jews, living at the same period, is striking. To the Greco-Roman world the child was of little value, incapable of any *logos* and a possession whose very life could be ended on the eighth day after his or her birth or at any time the father was displeased. Being born a child in the Greco-Roman world was perilous. The baby might be exposed, sold into slavery, or treated as a sexual object for the pleasure of adults. In contrast, Judaism believed the gift of a child was a blessing given by God and as such the child was treated with great care. The birth of the child was cause for great celebration. Instead of the fate of the child’s life being determined on the eighth or ninth day, the child was named and welcomed in the community. Instead of being seen as empty and incapable of *logos*, the child was introduced to learning, worship and the word of God as soon as possible. The child was not considered property of the Father, but as a child of God. The child was not considered equal to animals, which even made the logistics of adoption difficult because

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.28.

<sup>29</sup> Robinson, *Essential Judaism*, 144.

the child was not a possession to be transferred from owner to owner.<sup>30</sup> A Jewish child was seen as a blessing, a Greco-Roman child was seen as a problem.

### Theologically

It was from these two drastically different perspectives that the early church began to formulate its theology of the child. It is clear that some theologians were affected by a Greco-Roman point of view and some by the teachings of Christ about children, which is most certainly, since he was Jewish, derived from the blessing point of view. The problem with articulating the Jewish theology of Jesus is that the early Rabbis did not believe that the mystery and wonders of God should or even could be put into a formal systematic theology. Brad Young, speaking of this says:

The old Rabbis seem to have thought that the true health of a religion is to have a theology without being aware of it; and thus they hardly ever made—nor could they make—any attempt towards working their theology into a formal system.<sup>31</sup>

He further explains that:

The theological underpinnings of Jewish thought guide the practice of Judaism. But one should not be aware of the theology. God is beyond finite comprehension. Judaism focuses more on active obedience to God's will as revealed in Torah than on theological reflection. On the other hand, the old rabbis did have a theology.<sup>32</sup>

The Jewish scholars, a group which Jesus was certainly part of, believed that all attempts to systemize God would fall short anyway, so the best theology was a non-verbalized one. They resisted the temptation to write theology, preferring stories that

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>31</sup> Brad H. Young, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 270.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 271.

illustrated it to theological discourses. It was a much better use of time, they believed, to *do* your theology than to talk about it.<sup>33</sup> Jesus had a theology of the blessedness of children out of which flowed his kind treatment and deep regard for them. He lifts them as examples of those who will inherit the kingdom of heaven, and he welcomes them into his arms and blesses them, as well as warning anyone against hurting these little ones. While he did not write a systematic theology about children, Jesus would have certainly seen children as a blessing, as did the Jewish people of his time.

After Jesus' death, and as the early church began to create theologies, the early church fathers kept some of Christ's theology about children intact. However, as time went on, the Christian church distanced itself from Judaism. And then, with the development of the theology of original sin, the theology of the blessedness of children was nearly lost.

According to Bakke, the early church fathers, during the first two hundred years of Christianity, such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen and the Shepherd of Hermas used the child as a metaphor for adults to follow. The behavior of a child relating to a parent or teacher was the same behavior adults should have toward Christ.<sup>34</sup> While the metaphor of child was used, the depiction was rather Greco-Roman in that the adult, using the child as a role model, was depicted as helpless and worthless without their shepherd, Christ. "Although Clement paints a picture of the child that emphasizes qualities fitting his program of transforming people into what he considered the proper understanding of Christian life, the very fact that he uses children as positive paradigms is striking. It is

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 273.

<sup>34</sup> Bakke, *The Birth of Childhood*, 63.

even more remarkable when we take into account the marginal position of children and the qualities associated with childhood in his cultural environment.”<sup>35</sup> There is an apparent beauty, simplicity and gentleness in Clement’s description of children, as is found in a hymn written by him: “Gather your children who live in simplicity. Let them sing in holiness. Let them celebrate with sincerity, with a mouth that knows no evil, the Christ who guides his children!”<sup>36</sup>

In addition to Clement, other church fathers continued using the child as a metaphor for adult behavior. Origen, the Shepherd of Hermas and Aristides of Athens all include the child as a romanticized role model in their theologies.<sup>37</sup> Their view of children, while not exactly vibrating with the Jewish concept of blessing, was kinder and more respectful than that of their Greco-Roman counterparts. Aristides spoke of the differences between the ways Christians treat their children and others when he said, “Christians thank God for their children. In contrast to pagans who do not care for, and even kill, children, Christians value children and consider them a gift from the Creator.”<sup>38</sup> John Chrysostom, believing that children were Christian role models, writing in the *Baptismal Catecheses* even goes so far as to declare them as sinless: “You see how many are the benefits of baptism, and some think its heavenly grace consists only in the remission of sins, but we have enumerated ten honors [it bestows]! For this reason we baptize even infants, though they are not defiled by [personal] sins, so that

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> *Clement of Alexandria: Theologian for the Intelligentsia* (ChristianityToday.com, 2004, accessed); available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/special/131christians/clement.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Bakke, *The Birth of Childhood*, 63-68.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

there may be given to them holiness, righteousness, adoption, inheritance, brotherhood with Christ, and that they may be his [Christ's] members.”<sup>39</sup>

However, at the same time as children were being looked upon as blessings or as role models, based on Christ's attitude toward them in the Bible, the words of Paul, about the importance of celibacy made people question whether or not actually having children was desired.<sup>40</sup> It is here we begin to see a shift away from the concept of a child being a blessing toward the child as a burden. “The raising and rearing of children for the Lord's service became a duty and vocation for those not gifted with the grace of celibacy.”<sup>41</sup>

Bakke emphasizes this point as well:

At the same time, however, some groups saw an incompatibility between caring for one's children and leading a life of religious perfection. We find as early as the New Testament a tension between family life and its obligations on the one hand and the radical following of Jesus on the other, and this tension was intensified and given clearer emphasis by the adherents of the ascetic movement. Some argued that one should not have children at all; others abandoned their children for lengthy periods of time; and even mothers could “abandon” their children in yet a more radical way by voluntarily accepting martyrdom. Others again encouraged their own children to become martyrs.<sup>42</sup>

Along with the ambivalence associated with childbearing and child-raising, there emerged in the beginning of the third century a new understanding of the child: one who was stained by inherited original sin. These beliefs came as result of acceptance of the

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<sup>39</sup> *John Chrysostom*, (Catholic Answers, 2005, 20 March 2006); available from [http://www.catholic.com/library/Early\\_Teachings\\_of\\_Infant\\_Baptism.asp](http://www.catholic.com/library/Early_Teachings_of_Infant_Baptism.asp).

<sup>40</sup> Adrian Hastings, ed., *Oxford Companion*, 110.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Bakke, *The Birth of Childhood*, 260.

writings of Augustine.<sup>43</sup> “Obviously, he sees his sins in adult life as anticipated in infancy. He emphasizes that there is no fundamental difference in the gravity of the sin whether it is committed by an adult or an infant.”<sup>44</sup> In his *Confessions*, Augustine describes the sinful nature of himself as an infant and while he acknowledges that he was weak and did not know better, the sin was from the same root.

Hear, O God. Alas, for man's sin! So saith man, and Thou pitiest him; for Thou madest him, but sin in him Thou madest not. Who remindeth me of the sins of my infancy? for in Thy sight none is pure from sin, not even the infant whose life is but a day upon the earth. Who remindeth me? doth not each little infant, in whom I see what of myself I remember not? What then was my sin? was it that I hung upon the breast and cried? for should I now so do for food suitable to my age, justly should I be laughed at and reprov'd. What I then did was worthy reproof; . . .

. . . The weakness then of infant limbs, not its will, is its innocence. Myself have seen and known even a baby envious; it could not speak, yet it turned pale and looked bitterly on its foster-brother. Who knows not this? Mothers and nurses tell you that they allay these things by I know not what remedies (1.7.11).<sup>45</sup>

While not everyone agreed with Augustine and his view of children possessing original sin, it became the predominant theology of the nature of humans and this included the child, as well. This is obvious as we acknowledge the distinct shift away from the child as a blessing and role model for Christians to being sinful creatures needing to be saved. Augustine lived in the early fifth century and his concept of original sin can be found in theologies of churches even today. With original sin, came the view of the child no longer as a blessing, but as an inferior, weak and helpless sinner. Again, it

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>44</sup> Bakke, *The Birth of Childhood*, 90.

<sup>45</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions Book I* (20 March 2006); available from <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jod/augustine/Pusey/book01>.

is at this point we see theologically what we saw historically, two opposite views of the state of children.

Well known theologians such as Thomas Aquinas (1224?-1274), Martin Luther (1483-1546), and John Calvin (1509-1564), as well as others, built their theologies around the notion of original sin.<sup>46</sup> Thomas Aquinas describes infants as being punished for having original sin by being deprived of the ability to be productive as soon as they were born. In *Summa Theologicae*, he lists the “proofs” of original sin in infants.

Objection 1: It would seem that in the state of innocence children would have had perfect strength of the body, as to the use of its members, immediately after birth. For Augustine says (De Pecc. Merit. et Remiss. i, 38): “This weakness of the body befits their weakness of mind.” But in the state of innocence there would have been no weakness of mind. Therefore neither would there have been weakness of body in infants.

Objection 2: Further, some animals at birth have sufficient strength to use their members. But man is nobler than other animals. Therefore much more is it natural to man to have strength to use his members at birth; and thus it appears to be a punishment of sin that he has not that strength.

Objection 3: Further, inability to secure a proffered pleasure causes affliction. But if children had not full strength in the use of their limbs, they would often have been unable to procure something pleasurable offered to them; and so they would have been afflicted, which was not possible before sin. Therefore, in the womb not have been deprived of the use of their limbs.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Christina L. H. Traina, “A Person in the Making: Thomas Aquinas on Children and Childhood,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 112.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologicae*, 1947 (Benzinger Brothers, 20 March 2006); available from <http://www.ccel.org/a/aquinas/summa/FP/FP099.html#FPQ99OUTP1>.

Martin Luther argued that, “an infant's need for the grace of the sacrament is just as urgent as any other person's, for a child comes into the world already damnably infected with original sin—that is the inherent inability to trust, fear or love God.”<sup>48</sup>

Barbara Pitkin, writing about John Calvin, notes that, “In a passage written in 1536 and carried throughout all subsequent editions of the *Institutes* unchanged, he says, ‘Even infants bear their condemnation from their mother's womb; for, though they have not yet brought forth the fruits of their own iniquity, they have the seeds enclosed within themselves. Indeed, their whole nature is the seed of sin; thus it cannot be but hateful and abominable to God.’”<sup>49</sup>

While the concept of original sin clearly found much support, the concept of children being blessings theologically was not entirely lost. While the author believes it is necessary and important to acknowledge the popularity and prevalence of the original sin doctrine, it is equally important to keep alive the blessing based theologies that originated in Jewish thought, that were carried forth by the early church fathers and are being revived in recent theologies.

Frederich Schleiermacher, writing in the eighteenth century, rejected the notion of original sin and acknowledged the “natural goodness” of children. He warned that instead of focusing on breaking the will of the originally sinful child, society must be careful not to ruin the natural goodness of children.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Jane E. Strohl, “The Child in Luther's Theology: For What Purpose Do We Older Folks Exist, Other Than to Care For . . . The Young?” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 141.

<sup>49</sup> Barbara Pitkin, “The Heritage of the Lord: Children in the Theology of John Calvin,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 161.

Horace Bushnell, a United Church of Christ pastor, and considered, still today, one of the leading theologians on children, rejected the notion of original sin and instead insisted that a child had “seeds of faith inside them,” which if left to grow freely, would allow the child to, “grow up a Christian and never know himself as being otherwise.”<sup>51</sup>

Karl Rahner wrote that from the very start, children are fully human and that the child, “is intended right from the start to be a partner with God.”<sup>52</sup> He believed deeply that children, even while still children, were fully human, and as such he believed that children, “...are to be respected from the beginning of life. They are a ‘sacred trust’ to be nurtured and protected at every stage of their existence.”<sup>53</sup>

Matthew Fox, in his book, *Original Blessing*, reminds readers that the theology of “original blessing” is much older than the newer concept of original sin. “The fall/redemption theory is not nearly as ancient as is the creation-centered one. The former goes back to Augustine (354-430AD); . . . The creation-centered tradition traces its roots to the ninth century B.C., with the very first author of the Bible, the Yahwist or J source, to the psalms, to wisdom books of the Bible, to much of the prophets, to Jesus.”<sup>54</sup> He describes the center of the universe not as one of “sinful humanity,” but says, “the

<sup>50</sup> Dawn DeVRIES, “Be Converted and Become as Little Children: Friedrich Schleiermacher on the Religious Significance of Childhood,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 334.

<sup>51</sup> Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1861), 10.

<sup>52</sup> Mary Ann Hinsdale, “Infinite Openness to the Infinite: Karl Rahner’s Contribution to Modern Catholic Thought on the Child,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 423.

<sup>53</sup> Marcia J. Bunge, “Historical Perspectives on Children in the Church: Resources for Spiritual Formation and a Theology of Childhood Today,” in *Children’s Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2004), 49.

<sup>54</sup> Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing* (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, Inc., 1983), 11.

Universe itself, blessed and graced,” is the true starting point.<sup>55</sup> He further asserts the “God of the Covenant is the God of the Blessing,” and that God promises health, abundance and good things to God’s people.<sup>56</sup> Finally, as he describes children and birth he exclaims, “We enter a broken and torn and sinful world—that is for sure. But we do not enter as blotches on existence, as sinful creatures, we burst into the world as “original blessings.’ ”<sup>57</sup>

Closely aligned with Fox, is Marian Wright Edelman, who though not a formal theologian, has spent years working with children and advocating for them through the Children’s Defense Fund. Speaking of the blessedness of children she says:

Edmond McDonald wrote that when God wants an important thing done in this world or a wrong righted, he goes about it in a singular way. He doesn’t release thunderbolts or stir up earthquakes. God simply has a tiny baby born, perhaps of a very humble home, perhaps of a very humble mother. And she puts it in the baby’s mind, and then—God waits. The great events of our world are not battles and elections and earthquakes and thunderbolts. The great events are babies, for each child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged with humanity but is still expecting goodwill to become incarnate in each human life. And so God produced a Gandhi and a Mandela and a Harriet Tubman, and Eleanor Roosevelt and a Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>58</sup>

Maria Montessori, living in the nineteenth century, developed the Montessori teaching method used all over the world. Her theology, based on the belief of the child as

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Marian Wright Edelman, “Standing up for Children,” in *The Impossible Will Take a Little While: A Citizen’s Guide to Hope in a Time of Fear*, ed. P. R. Loeb (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 38.

a blessing, is rooted in her devout Catholicism.<sup>59</sup> She speaks of the joy and blessings of children:

The child, instead of being a burden, shows himself to us as the greatest and most consoling of nature's wonders! We find ourselves confronted by a being no longer thought of as helpless . . .but one whose dignity increases in the measure to which we see in him the builder of our own minds; [he is] the greatest marvel of the Universe, the human being.<sup>60</sup>

Abraham Joshua Heschel, a rabbi and a deeply respected Jewish theologian,

speaks of the holiness that separates people from all other creatures. “A person is not just a specimen of the species called *homo sapiens*. He is all of humanity in one...the human is the disclosure of the divine,...Many things on this earth are precious, some are holy, humanity is the holiest of holy.”<sup>61</sup> He is often quoted as saying, “Just to be is a blessing.”<sup>62</sup> In the simplicity of his theology, he reminds us that life is a blessing and we who have been given life are blessed.

Throughout the development of Christian theologies, struggling to define the core of humans, children have been portrayed as role models for adults of human perfection by the early church fathers and many mystics, and conversely, sinners of little worth. They have also been accepted and celebrated as beings who were created by a God who loved them. While this has not been the predominate theology of Christians, throughout time it has refused to go away.

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<sup>59</sup> Linda Woolf, *Maria Montessori*(Webster University, 15 March 2006); available from <http://www.webster.edu/~woolfm/montessori2.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Karen Grace, *Maria Montessori: Through the Eyes of the Child*(Cafh Foundation, 2002, 15 March 2006); available from [http://www.seedsofunfolding.org/issues/06\\_05/profile\\_1.htm](http://www.seedsofunfolding.org/issues/06_05/profile_1.htm).

<sup>61</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *No Religion Is an Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue*(3/18/06 1991, 22 April); available from <http://www.cs.auckland.ac.nz/%7Ealan/chaplain/Heschel.html>.

<sup>62</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, (22 March 2006); available from <http://www.cybernation.com/quotationcenter/quoteshow.php?type=author&id=4151>.

## Biblically

History demonstrated two contrasting views of the child: the Greco-Roman view that children were lacking *logos* and clearly inferior and disposable; and the Jewish viewpoint of children as a blessing and gift from God. Theologically, the same dichotomy arose: the child as a sinful carrier of original sin and the child as being a human created in the blessing and goodness of God. Biblically, with the exception of only a few passages of scripture, children are seen as a great blessing.

In the First Testament children are seen as a gift from God and as a great blessing. In Genesis we hear God speaking after creating the first man and woman, “And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘be fruitful and multiply,’ ”(Gen 1:28a). The first commandment to people is to have children. Before all else, children are to be born and fill the world. This is the first blessing given to humans, children! “The covenant community, represented by its founders will have an abundance of children (descendants) as a sign of God's favor” (Gen 16:10; 17:2; 4-5; 20; Ex 1:7).<sup>63</sup>

The First Testament proves the importance of children because it is filled with “numerous allusions to them.”<sup>64</sup> Children are shown to be a great joy and blessing.

Lo, sons are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons of one's youth. Happy is the man who has a quiver full of them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with the enemies in the gate (Ps 127:3-5)

Blessed is every one who fears the Lord, . . .  
Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house;  
Your children will be like olive shoots around your table.

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<sup>63</sup> George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. I (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 558.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

Lo, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord  
(Ps 128:1, 3-4).

Grandchildren are the crown of the aged,  
And the glory of the sons is their fathers (Prov 17:6).

Not only are children spoken of in the wisdom literature of the First Testament, they also play a prominent role in blessing, not only to their parents, but in the furthering of the history of the people of God. In Genesis, we find Abram and Sarai childless. God appears to Abraham and tells him that God will make of him a great nation. “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing,” (Gen 12:2). God also promises to bless Sarai, “I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her; I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations;” (Gen 17:16). It is by giving them a son that God will bless, not only them, but also the world, “and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves,” (Gen 12:3). God gives a son, Isaac, to them and his birth is a great blessing.

Time after time, in the stories of the First Testament, a child is born who is not only a blessing to the family, but to the entire people of God. Moses is a great blessing and joy to his parents, and at the same time is born to save the Jewish people from the oppression of slavery in Egypt. “The Talmud tells about Miriam (Moses’ sister) who prophesied, saying, ‘In the future my mother will give birth to a son who will save Israel.’”<sup>65</sup>

Samuel is another child whose birth brought great joy and blessing to his parents and especially to his mother, Hannah, “For this child I prayed; and the Lord has granted my petition which I have made to him,” (I Sam 1:26). She is so overjoyed with the baby’s

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<sup>65</sup> Young, *Jewish Theologian*, 4.

birth, she gives him into the service of God for life. He becomes the one who is called by God to find and anoint King David. Again, the child blesses the family and also the community of the faithful.

Children are at the same time a blessing to individual families and to the community. They are always seen as a blessing.

Children were a pride within the Old Testament family, which mentions them as a sign of God's blessing. In the biblical tradition and, indeed, in many parts of the world today, even the names given to children by various members of the family expressed the family's gratitude to God and their hopes for the child's life.<sup>66</sup>

In the Second Testament, the idea of children being a blessing continues. The first story in Luke begins with a couple who find themselves childless and praying for this blessing. Zachariah is a priest and his wife a faithful woman. God blesses their faithfulness with a son, John, who later proclaims the coming of Christ. The pattern from the First Testament continues. A child is a blessing to the family and to the faith community. As Mary, the mother of Jesus discovers she is with child; she goes to visit her cousin, Elizabeth, who is at the same time pregnant with John. As Mary approaches, John leaps within his mother's womb and Elizabeth shouts with great joy, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb" (Lk 1:42b). Jesus was a child born to be a blessing not only to his family, but also to the world.

Brad Young makes the point well about the importance of children to the individual family and to the community found in both the First and Second Testaments:

Important biblical figures chosen by God to carry out special tasks in salvation history often have unusual circumstances surrounding their births . . . Frequently a miracle baby is

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<sup>66</sup> John D. Witvliet, ed., *A Child Shall Lead: Children in Worship* (Garland: Choristers Guild, 1999), 23.

considered to be destined for greatness in God's higher purposes. Salvation and redemption are possible because God sets apart an individual even from the womb to be anointed for the divine task. For instance, the Old Testament contains a number of miraculous births. Abraham and Sarah miraculously give birth to Isaac . . . Isaac had a unique task to fulfill in the divine plan. In addition to Isaac's birth, the births of Samson, who saved the people from the Philistines, and Samuel, who served as an anointed prophet, were also described as miraculous events (Judg 13:3, 24; I Sam 1:2, 20). Many rabbis felt that even Moses was a miracle baby. Isaac, Samson, Samuel, and certainly Moses all played roles in the divine plan . . . the episodes in the Gospel of Luke indicate the manner in which God used the longings of an ordinary family like Elizabeth and Zechariah, the mother and father of John the Baptist, to fulfill the divine strategy. They wanted a baby. When they prayed, God supernaturally intervened, and John the Baptist was born. His mission was to prepare the way for Jesus. Amazingly, the personal anguish of a barren family gave way to the higher purpose in God's divine plan to prepare for the coming of Jesus.<sup>67</sup>

Jesus is the one who most clearly asserts the blessing of the child in the present time. It is obvious that he loved children and saw them as ones who were blessed by God *now*. He spoke of them in the present tense and did not refer to the role they might play in the future. When the children were brought by their parents to be blessed, Jesus not only welcomes them, but blesses each of them. "Such action does not imply a simple passing encounter with the children, but a personal interest in each child."<sup>68</sup>

Then children were brought to him that he might lay hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people; but Jesus said, "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." And he laid his hands on them and went away (Mt 19:13-15).

Jesus also saw children as being such a precious gift that God appointed a special angel to watch over each of them and cautions against disliking them:

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<sup>67</sup> Young, *Jewish Theologian*, 4-5.

<sup>68</sup> Witvliet, ed., *A Child Shall Lead*, 23.

See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my father who is in heaven (Mt 18:10).

Jesus continues to show his love of children as he heals them; the child who has epilepsy (Mt 17:14-18); the son of an official who is ill (Jn 4:46-53); the daughter of Jarius (Mk 5:21-34, Lk 8:49-56); and the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Mt 15). Children, who many would consider disposable at the time of Jesus, were considered by him to be of such great value, he chose to bless them and heal them. He reached out to children when others, including his own disciples, would have turned them away. Jesus loved children, valued them and considered them a blessing.

Biblically, in the both the First and Second Testaments, children are regarded as a blessing and joy. However, it must be noted that in a few places of scripture, this is not the case. In the First Testament, we find the disturbing passage: “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.” (Prov 22:15).

In the Second Testament, Paul does not seem to share the view of children as a blessing. Adrian Hastings describes the contrast between the view of child by Jesus and Paul when he notes, “Jesus enjoined his listeners to ‘become as little children’ (Mt 18:3), for ‘of such is the Kingdom of Heaven’ (Mt 19:4); Paul, however, ‘put away childish things’ (I Cor 13:2) in his growth to maturity as a Christian and berates the Corinthians for remaining ‘babes in Christ’ (I Cor 3:1).”<sup>69</sup>

Although there are a few passages of scripture where children are not seen as blessings, the overwhelming opinion of children in the Bible is that they are a great blessing to their own families and also to the community of believers.

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<sup>69</sup> Adrian Hastings, ed., *Oxford Companion*, 110.

## Conclusion

Historically, theologically and biblically, Judaism has regarded children as blessings who are to be welcomed, taken care of and treasured. Christianity found itself torn between two worlds, that of the Jews and of the Greco-Roman culture. The influence is seen as some early Christians embraced children as a blessing while others believed they were cursed with original sin or were a burden to be tolerated. However, there have always been threads of Christianity, growing from the roots of Judaism that have maintained the blessedness, value and worth of children.

### **The Innate Spirituality of Children**

Much of the work done in areas of Christian Education with children has focused on *teaching them* how to be spiritual people beginning with the assumption that they are not capable, until a certain age or maturity level to possibly be connected to God. Many theologians and historians have begun with the Greco-Roman notion that children are empty slates onto whom we must *write their character and beliefs*. Others believed children arrive tainted with original sin and must be helped to rid themselves of it before becoming faithful people.<sup>70</sup> The notion of children being spiritual from birth, or being capable of having deep relationships with God while still children, has not been the predominant voice in the Christian church, there is historical, theological and biblical support for this idea.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

## Definition of Innate Spirituality

To begin this section of the paper, it is important to find a working definition of “Innate Spirituality.” Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso defines spirituality as, “a mode of living in the awareness of the divine presence, the sacred. It is the recognition of the transcendent.”<sup>71</sup> Religion, on the other hand, is “the container for the life of the spirit.”<sup>72</sup> Innate spirituality is that part of people, including children, which is a given. It is there before “spiritual awareness.”<sup>73</sup> There is a difference between “having” and “being able to name spirituality.” Innate spirituality begins with the notion that children are spiritual and have their own, unique relationship with God. The role of Christian education is to help them find language for the experiences of holy they are having. As Rabbi Sasso explains:

Like adults, children are spiritual seekers; they come to us with an innate spirituality. What they don’t have is the language to express it. Religious education for children, including spiritual writing, should give them the language, the tools they need to reflect and explore their spiritual experiences. Spiritual experience is a given; spiritual awareness must be learned or it will remain dormant for a lifetime.<sup>74</sup>

David Steindl-Rast in writing about the spirituality of the mystics throughout history distinguishes between having *an experience* with God and being taught language,

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<sup>71</sup> Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, *Children's Spirituality: An Interview with Sandy Sasso* (April 8, 2006 1996, accessed); available from [http://www.spiritualityhealth.com/newsh/items/review-feature/item\\_8479.html](http://www.spiritualityhealth.com/newsh/items/review-feature/item_8479.html).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

ritual and being able to articulate doctrine about God.<sup>75</sup> He defines a spiritual experience as “simply our awareness of communion with the ultimate.”<sup>76</sup>

Richard Cox, who holds Doctorates of Psychology, Medicine and Ministry, speaks of the innate spirit of people when he says, “We must be willing to admit the existence of a real entity called ‘spirituality.’ We must be willing to recognize that some part of the human being is distinct from (although related and relating to) both psyche and soma. Spirituality must be seen as the all embracing, all encompassing, totally inclusive part of the human, out of which all else physical, mental, and emotional flows.”<sup>77</sup>

And further, he believes this spirituality begins in the womb:

As far as we know only human beings experience what we call spirituality. We have no evidence that the lower animal kingdom experiences this dimension of existence. Of course, we do not know at what stage of life spirituality starts to manifest itself in human beings. It is my contention, as stated previously, that it starts in the womb, thereby laying down a foundation for all spiritual experiences that will follow.<sup>78</sup>

For Cox, spirituality is the foundation for all the spiritual experiences that may follow. It is the base, the core and beginning place for all body and psychological experiences.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> David O’Neal, ed., *Meister Eckhart: From Whom God Hid Nothing Sermons, Writing & Sayings* (Boston & London: New Seeds, 2005), introduction.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Richard H. Cox, “The Developmental Stages of Spirituality: A Proposed Paradigm,” in *Spirituality and Psychological Health*, ed. Betty Ervin-Cox Richard Cox, and Louis Hoffman (Colorado Springs: Colorado School of Professional Psychology Press, 2005), 38.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

Wendy Haight, studying the spiritual lives of children, began her study with the following definition of spirituality in children: “Spirituality encompasses feelings, ideas, and practices pertaining to a non-material higher force (Boykin, 1994), as well as meaning and purpose in life (Coles, 1995).”<sup>80</sup>

Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, another scholar studying the spirituality of children suggests a definition of their spirituality as being, “the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence in which the individual participates in the sacred—something greater than the self.”<sup>81</sup>

While the definitions of spirituality vary, there is a shared belief between these scholars that spirituality can be found in children and that they can have very real experiences with God. “Beginning in childhood, spirituality can be a source of joy, comfort, meaning and interpretation of life’s trials.”<sup>82</sup> For purposes of this paper, innate spirituality will be defined as *a child’s ability to connect with the divine presence of God.*

### Historically

Because of their lack of verbal skills, and the reality that even articulate adults cannot sometimes express the mystery of God with words, young children do not yet have the skills to verbally describe the spiritual experiences they have had. As a result, many adults have assumed that children were not capable of such experiences. With the development of the concept of original sin, children were assumed to be evil and not

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<sup>80</sup> Wendy Haight, “A Sociocultural Perspective on Children’s Spiritual Development,” in *Children’s Spirituality: Christian Perspective’s, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2004), 110.

<sup>81</sup> Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, “Exploring Scientific and Theological Perspectives in Children’s Spirituality,” in *Children’s Spirituality*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2004), 122.

<sup>82</sup> Haight, *Sociocultural Perspective*, 108.

*expected* to be holy. As Thomas Aquinas spoke of infants he described their beginnings as far from innately spiritual. He described babies as beginning as:

. . . masses of inordinate desires, they are essentially sinful, selfish, and repulsed by all things good and holy. Christian maturation is their gradual “convalescence” from original sin and its effects through the sacraments, prayer, and tutelage, which - through the aid of grace - curb, heal and redirect these desires, producing virtue and devotion.<sup>83</sup>

Luther also believed in the inherent sinfulness of infants and children:

Luther argues that an infant's need for the grace of the sacrament is just as urgent as any other person's, for a child comes into the world already damnably infected with original sin - that is the inherent inability to trust, fear or love God.<sup>84</sup>

For theologians, pastors and parents who believed in the notion of original sin, it would not have been impossible for a child to be spiritual and very little attention, if any, would have been paid to the presence of it. In fact the early church was so convinced of the original sinfulness of children, the rite of baptism was a service of exorcism.

Before baptism itself took place, the priest carried out at the door solemn exorcisms, repeatedly adjured the devil to depart from the child, and signed its forehead, breast and right hand with the sign of the cross. He put hallowed salt in its mouth, and anointed its ears and nostrils with spittle in remembrance of the miracle by which Jesus had healed the deaf and dumb.

The baptism service itself began in the church with the officiants' interrogation of the godparents, who answered in the child's behalf about its renunciation of the devil and all his works. Assured by the godparents of the child's faith and desire for baptism, he baptized it in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Traina, *Person in the Making*, 105.

<sup>84</sup> Strohl, *The Child in Luther's Theology*, 141.

<sup>85</sup> David Cornick, “The Reformation Crisis in Pastoral Care,” in *A History of Pastoral Care*, ed. G. R. Evans (London and New York: Cassel, 2000), 226.

Still other people were educated and indoctrinated with the Greco-Roman notion that children were simple-minded and unable to comprehend matters of any importance. This would include spirituality and God. This position is best summarized by the beliefs of Plato, “He claims that children have little knowledge; they are ‘gullible’ and easily persuaded, they are able to understand only the simplest things, they talk nonsense and make unreliable judgments.”<sup>86</sup>

Even as late as the 1960’s, research works, such as those done by Ronald Goldman, based on his Piagetian-styled psychological studies of the religious life of children, concluded that “spiritual experience was ‘rare in adolescence and practically unknown in childhood.’”<sup>87</sup> Rebecca Nye, who has researched the development of the spirituality of children, explains that the work of Goldman has far reaching effects:

The legacy was twofold. First it came to be assumed that children could handle only a watered down kind of religious life and by implication spiritual depth and valid insight was an exclusively adult experience; . . . The second part of the legacy was that children's expressions on apparently spiritual matters should be treated as cute, accidental, unintentionally meaningful, frequently illogical and a source for adult amusement.<sup>88</sup>

With the assumption that children were filled with original sin or were much too weak minded and immature to comprehend spiritual matters, it is no wonder that their innate spirituality, their ability to live in the awareness of the divine presence of God, has gone vastly unnoticed. However, there are examples from history, theologians and

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<sup>86</sup> Bakke, *The Birth of Childhood*, 16.

<sup>87</sup> Rebecca Nye, “Christian Perspectives on Children's Spirituality: Social Science Contributions?,” in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2004), 92-93.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

scripture that reinforce the reality and existence of an innate spirituality found in children of all ages.

Throughout history, religious leaders noticed that children did have the ability to connect with God at early ages. In Judaism, as was mentioned earlier, children are assumed to be capable of learning about God from an early age. As stated above, “Judah b. Tema advised that healthy male children were to be taught Scripture at the age of five, Mishnah at ten, to fulfill the law at 13, and to study Talmud at 15 (Avot 5:21). According to another opinion (Sif. Deut. 46; Suk. 42a), a child’s education should begin as soon as he starts to speak.”<sup>89</sup> Children are also included in worship such as being a central part of the Passover Sedar where the child recites the *Mah Nishtannah* (the four questions).<sup>90</sup> Another example is: “In Jewish homes in which religion plays a part, children are exposed to prayer at an early age, regardless of the level of observance in the family. From a *halakhic* standpoint, a child's education is supposed to begin at three, and one should teach a child at the least to say the simpler *b'rakhot* then. The Mishnah says that boys are to begin the study of torah at age five, Mishnah at ten, and Talmud at fifteen.”<sup>91</sup>

In Judaism children are seen as capable of learning, connecting with God and doing what is right in the eyes of God. From their birth onward they are expected to be children of God. The belief that children are connected to the wonder and mystery of God is articulated in the Jewish Prayer Book. The words are read at the naming ceremony when the child is only days old:

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<sup>89</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 247.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>91</sup> Robinson, *Essential Judaism*, 154.

Rabbi reads: God and Creator, happy parents have come into Your presence to voice the longings of their hearts in prayer. Give them the wisdom to teach their child to be faithful to the heritage of the household of Israel, that he (she) may grow up with the knowledge that you are always near to him (her), guiding and sustaining him (her). Keep open the eyes of his (her) spirit, that he (she) may ever be conscious of the beauty and wonder of Your world. And let him (her) learn to love the goodness that is in man and woman, that he (she) may ever nourish the goodness that is implanted within him (her). Though none can escape sorrow and pain, we humbly ask for his (her) strength to subdue it. Grant him (her) health of mind and strength of body, that he (she) may enjoy fullness of years and live to do Your will in faithfulness, Amen.<sup>92</sup>

Notice that the child mentioned in this prayer is being blessed to know the wonder of God *now* and in the future. Because the child will experience God throughout their lives, does not negate the fact that the child is *already* having the spiritual experience. The ending of the ceremony again makes this clear, “May God's blessing rest upon this child now and always.”<sup>93</sup>

The same faith in the spirituality of child, at the present moment, as opposed to the future, is found in the Sabbath blessing given to boys and girls by their fathers each week:

May God bless you and guide you. Be strong for the truth, charitable in your words, just and loving in your deeds. A noble heritage has been entrusted to you; guard it well.

(for a boy)

May God inspire you to live in the tradition of Ephrim and Menasheh, who carried forward the life of our people.

(for a girl)

May God inspire you to live in the tradition of Sarah and Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, who carried forward the life of our people.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Chaim Stern, ed., *Gates of the House: The New Union Prayerbook* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1977), 118.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

The implication in this blessing is that the child has a very real spirituality, the capacity to connect with God and to do the will of God. Historically, and still today Judaism has assumed that children are spiritual and pray that they will remain so throughout their lifetime. They are seen as capable, even at their naming ceremony as babies, to be able to connect to the vastness and wonder of God through their innate spirituality.

The beginning of Christianity, the break with Judaism, and particularly the concept of original sin, marked a change in the expectations of the spiritual capabilities of children. However, stories about children with deep faith in God and who are connected with God, particularly in the Catholic tradition fill the pages of history. While the predominant theology of the day, original sin, embraced by the majority of adults expected little spirituality from children, countless stories of their deep faith and innate spirituality surfaced.

Innate spirituality during childhood is documented in several stories of the lives of the saints. Many of them, while telling their stories to adults while still children, were accused of being incapable of having such an experience because they were children. Despite the disbelief of many adults, who were most likely influenced by the theology of original sin, these stories were preserved with great care and have lasted throughout history.

Saint Patrick was just a boy, and admits, a naughty one, when he was captured and taken into slavery in Ireland. He describes the deep faith he had while only a boy:

But after I had come to Ireland,  
it was then that I was made to shepherd the flocks day after day,  
and, as I did so, I would pray all the time, right  
through the day.

More and more the love of God and fear of him grew  
 strong within me,  
 and as my faith grew, so the Spirit became more and  
 more active,  
 so that a single day I would say as many as a  
 hundred prayers,  
 and at night only slightly less.  
 Although I might be staying in a forest or out on a  
 mountainside,  
 it would be the same;  
 even before dawn broke, I would be aroused to pray.

In snow, in frost, in rain,  
 I would hardly notice any discomfort,  
 and I was never slack but always full of energy.  
 It is clear to me now, that this was due to the fervor of  
 the Spirit within me.<sup>95</sup>

As a boy Saint Nicholas survived the death of his parents. They were very wealthy and after inheriting their money, moved by the spirit of God, he went about the community in secret during the night giving it away to those in need.<sup>96</sup> At the age of only thirteen, he became the Bishop of Myra.<sup>97</sup>

Saint Birgitta was another saint who began having visions as a child. The visions provided the foundation for her entire life.

Birgitta began to have visions at the age of seven; in these visions an angel, the Blessed Virgin Mary, or Christ, usually appeared and talked to her. When she was 10 years of age she heard a sermon on the passion of Christ. That night Christ appeared to her as if he had just been crucified, and said, "Thus am I tortured." Birgitta, thinking that the wounds were fresh, asked, "O Lord, who has done this to Thee?" Christ replied, "Whoever despises me and spurns my love does this to Me." From that day on, the passion of Christ affected her so much that she seldom

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<sup>95</sup> Saint Patrick, ed., *The Confession of Saint Patrick* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 38-39.

<sup>96</sup> Anne E. Neuberger, *St. Nicholas the Wonder Worker* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2000), 23.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

could think of it without tears. It is a constantly recurring theme in her revelations.<sup>98</sup>

Saint Joan of Arc was another example of a child who began her spiritual life with visions and voices:

It was at the age of thirteen and a half, in the summer of 1425, that Joan first became conscious of that manifestation, whose supernatural character it would now be rash to question, which she afterwards came to call her “voices” or her “counsel.” It was at first simply a voice, as if someone had spoken quite close to her, but it seems also clear that a blaze of light accompanied it, and that later on she clearly discerned in some way the appearance of those who spoke to her, recognizing them individually as St. Michael (who was accompanied by other angels), St. Margaret, St. Catherine, and others. Joan was always reluctant to speak of her voices. She said nothing about them to her confessor, and constantly refused, at her trial, to be inveigled into descriptions of the appearance of the saints and to explain how she recognized them. Nonetheless, she told her judges: “I saw them with these very eyes, as well as I see you.”<sup>99</sup>

While these stories of saints have been often questioned about their historical accuracy, the testament to the ability of children to have spiritual experiences becomes part of the history itself. Whether or not they actually happened, does not negate the fact that historically the idea of children being spiritual existed for many people in the Catholic tradition. Karl Rahner takes the spiritual lives of young children seriously and refers to them as “juvenile saints,” who he describes as “young people whose really heroic virtue has been acknowledged by the Church.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *The Life of Saint Brigitta*, (2006, 13 March 2006); available from <http://www.holycross.edu/departments/visarts/projects/kempe/related/stb.htm>.

<sup>99</sup> Herbert Thurston, *St. Joan of Arc*(The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume VIII, 1910, 22 March 2006); available from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08409c.htm>.

<sup>100</sup> Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. III (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1967), 14.

In addition to the stories of childhood from the saints throughout the history of the Catholic tradition, there have also been several appearances of Mary, the mother of Christ, to the faithful. Many times she has appeared to children. For those who believe in the apparitions of Mary, these children have had true spiritual experiences much deeper than most adults would ever expect. They were able to connect with the divine presence of God. These children, like the saints above were often punished and corrected for having visions, and yet thousands of people in their communities and around the world have believed their stories.

Saint Bernadette Soubirous was a poor child who was often sick suffered from asthma.<sup>101</sup> One day, while out gathering firewood at a grotto in Lourdes, France, with two other little girls, a woman appeared. “I was afraid. I stepped back. I wanted to call the two little girls; I hadn't the courage to . . . Then I thought of saying my prayers.”<sup>102</sup> Mary appeared to her eighteen times and today that grotto, discovered by a child, is one of the most visited pilgrimage sites in the world.<sup>103</sup>

Mary is also believed to have appeared to the children at Fatima, Portugal. The children were, “Lucia, almost ten; Francisco, nine; and Jacinta, only seven.”<sup>104</sup> Nearly seventy thousand people witnessed the “miracle of the sun” which is believed by many to be proof of the appearance of Mary to these children.<sup>105</sup> Pope John Paul II beatified

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<sup>101</sup> Bill Dodds, *Mary, Her Miracles and Apparitions* (St. Paul: A Carillon Publication), 17.

<sup>102</sup> Abbe, Francois trochu, *Saint Bernadette Soubirous* (Rockford: Tan Books and Publishers, 1954), 43.

<sup>103</sup> Dodds, *Mary*, 17.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26.

Francisco and Jacinta Marto at the altar of the Fatima Sanctuary on May 13, 2000, before an estimated one million people.<sup>106</sup>

At first the people of the town of Megjugorie, thought the teens who professed of seeing a vision of Mary were evil and lying, “You are not holy...How dare you suggest you have seen the Mother of God! It's blasphemy.”<sup>107</sup> However, many witnessed the children in a state of ecstasy and believed. “No one had seen anything but the six (children) in their ecstasy, bathed in an immense light . . . They all saw the light... From that moment on, all the parishioners followed the children and they believed them.”<sup>108</sup> Later, the children were tested psychologically and all passed the test.<sup>109</sup>

While some do not believe in the apparitions of Mary, they have been documented throughout Catholic history and the fact that children’s spiritual experiences with Mary, God and prayer have been recorded, must be recognized as significant. As Leo Madigan so poetically states:

Until the beatification of Francisco and Jancinta, the child, in religious thinking, had been relegated to the status of incipient adult. Since Lourdes and La Sallette, those appearances of Our Lady's whose devotion has been approved by the Church have been made almost exclusively to children, which suggests that heaven wants us to reorder our thinking, to revert back to the mind of Christ. . . . The message of Fatima has many faces, but this one of spiritual childhood, exemplified in the Marto siblings, is the most overlooked.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Leo Madigan, *The Children of Fatima* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc., 2003), 283.

<sup>107</sup> Janice T. Connell, *The Visions of the Children: The Apparitions of the Blessed Mother at Medjugorie* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 6.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>110</sup> Madigan, *Children of Fatima*, 281.

The children listed above are only a few throughout history who have been examples of a deep, innate spirituality where they had their own unique relationship to God.

Believers in the Catholic Church were not the only ones to acknowledge the spirituality of children. John Wesley, founder of the United Methodist Church, believed that children were capable at very early ages of knowing God.<sup>111</sup> Wesley wrote in his diary, on May 5, 1759, “There have been several occasions when we have observed children of all ages, from three years to teenagers, come under the power of the Holy Spirit. Some of the very small children have drawn pictures of heaven and angels to show their teachers and parents what they saw during those experiences.”<sup>112</sup> And again he noticed the spirituality of young children, and records it in his diary on September 9, 1770: “The flame began to spread and within a short time all the children from 1st grade through 12th grade were in circles praying for each other. Many were crying out to God. Teachers came to watch and began to weep as they saw God move upon the children.”<sup>113</sup> On June 6, 1772 he acknowledged that some children might even possess a greater spirituality than adults, “Yea, many children here have had far deeper experiences, and more constant fellowship with God, than the oldest man or woman at Everton.”<sup>114</sup> Wesley not only observed the deep innate spirituality of children, but found their stories so remarkable and moving that he recorded the accounts in his diary.

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<sup>111</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater, “John Wesley and Children,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 295.

<sup>112</sup> David Walters, *Children Aflame: Accounts of the Historic Wesleyan and Modern Revivals with Children* (Taylorsville, South Carolina: Faith Printing Company, 1995), 12.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

The Black Women's Movement was "one of the most active and effective social reform movements" in America.<sup>115</sup> These women began with the assumption that a child's nature was innately "sweet, faith, truthfulness."<sup>116</sup> They believed children came into their care already spiritually aligned with God and their task was to nurture these children and help them develop "physically, mentally and spiritually."<sup>117</sup>

Marie Montessori was a woman who is credited with revolutionizing education.<sup>118</sup> She was a devout Catholic and much of her secular work was founded in her deep faith.<sup>119</sup> She pointed out the disadvantage a child has is because they "possess knowing and willing faculties, which are greater than their ability to express themselves."<sup>120</sup> She was another person who acknowledged the innate spirituality of children although she referred to the spirit of the child being their "personality."<sup>121</sup> She wrote that children possess, "the beauty and dignity of a creativity that can never be erased and for which [their] spirit, pure and sensitive, exacts from us a most delicate kind of care."<sup>122</sup> She believed that a child was a spiritual being in the present tense. They were

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<sup>115</sup> Marcia Y. Riggs, "African American Children, The Hope of the Race: Mary Terrell, the Social Gospel, and the Work of the Black Women's Club Movement," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 365.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>118</sup> Theresa Carson, "Marie Montessori: A Love Story," *Catholic Digest* (2000), 89-93.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Carson, *Marie Montessori*, 51.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

a wonder *now*, and possessed a dignity and beauty that needed to be honored, respected and nurtured.

The child, instead of being a burden, shows himself to us as the greatest and most consoling of nature's wonders! We find ourselves confronted by a being no longer thought of as helpless, but one whose dignity increases in the measure to which we see in him the builder of our own minds; [he is] the greatest marvel of the Universe, the human being.<sup>123</sup>

She refuted any connection of original sin with the spirit of a child, and instead chose to uplift them as spiritual examples following the words of Christ, when she said:

“How have we been able to remain under the mistaken impression,” she challenges her peers, “that a child should be judged according to the evil which [he or she] does, and that education should be directed according to the gloomy stands of “human” justice? When Jesus was teaching us about love, He pointed to the child as an example for us, and as a guide to the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>124</sup>

The impact of Marie Montessori and her work and writings, in developing the understanding of the child, not as a weak, spiritually void person, or as having original sin, but as a work of wonder and spiritual being cannot be emphasized enough:

Maria Montessori made a great contribution to the world in drawing attention to the importance of children as humanity's future. She emphasized the need to understand our way of relating to children and the environments that we provide for them. As a teacher, she articulated the importance of spiritual values for children and of looking at the child as a miracle of creation.<sup>125</sup>

In more recent history as a result of the research of such leading researchers as Rebecca Nye, Robert Coles, Klaus Issler, and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, the innate

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<sup>123</sup> Grace, *Eyes of the Child*, 6.

<sup>124</sup> Carson, *Marie Montessori*, 90.

<sup>125</sup> Grace, *Eyes of the Child*, 16.

spirituality of children is beginning to be documented. While these studies are important, the concept of studying the spirituality of children is still new. Eugene C.

Roehlkepartain's research emphasizes:

Within the domain of spirituality in childhood, there has been relatively little systematic attention to conceptualizing and understanding the perspectives that the world's religious traditions bring to the topic. A search of articles catalogued in the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) Religion Database (1993-2003) illustrates the gap in the field. Of the 305,498 articles, books, and dissertations catalogued, only 2,705 include "child" as a key word (and many of these titles are not relevant). Furthermore, only 120 entries included key words of child, youth and spiritual. Many of these entries are book reviews or are practice-oriented articles, not articles that explore religious or theological themes.<sup>126</sup>

He concludes:

How spiritual development unfolds may be as important to personal and social well-being as physical, cognitive, and emotional development. Yet spiritual development is probably the least understood of these human capacities.<sup>127</sup>

Issler, after studying children and their innate spirituality asserts that, children are similar to adults in that "they are persons created in the image of God and thus welcomed into experiencing a genuine relationship with God appropriate to their developmental abilities."<sup>128</sup>

Rebecca Nye, in a three part study of the spirituality of children at the University of Nottingham, discovered three important facets of the innate spirituality in children:

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<sup>126</sup> Roehlkepartain, *Perspectives*, 125.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>128</sup> Klaus Issler, "Biblical Perspectives on Developmental Grace for Nurturing Children's Spirituality," in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2004), 54.

First, each child communicated through: *an individual signature*, an authentic style of their own . . . second, children seemed to have a range of predictable as well as unexpectedly sophisticated mental strategies through which they serviced their spiritual thoughts and feelings. Third, a further insight of the analysis yielded was that children recognized their spiritual thoughts, feelings, and experiences as profound, significant and inspiring as an immediate experience, but assumed they were alone in thinking like this and anticipated being able to grow out of it and moving on to more worthwhile things.<sup>129</sup>

She further concludes that:

Many of these had explicitly led them to recognize God, not because they had been *told* that, but because they had discovered it, felt, or experienced first-hand God's relation to them.<sup>130</sup>

Asserting children as being innately spiritual and capable of having the ability to connect with God, has been demonstrated throughout history first by the Judaism which assumed the innate spirituality of children and named it in the rituals which marked their life passages. This was followed by children who demonstrated and lived out, deep innate spirituality. Finally, the innate spirituality of children was observed by many people who spent time with children and took the time to notice and listen to them. As Rabbi Sandy Sasso summarizes the results of the historical data so well: “The truth is that from the time they are born, our children have the gift of faith—a soul.”<sup>131</sup>

### Theologically

The concept of innate spirituality, or the acknowledgement that children can and do have the ability to connect with God, has been supported by many theologians.

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<sup>129</sup> Nye, *Christian Perspectives*, 94.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>131</sup> Brussat, *Children's Spirituality*, 276.

Despite the influence of the Greco-Roman notion of children as being incapable of *logos*, and the widely accepted notion of original sin, making children much too sinful to have a relationship of any depth with God, there have been theologians and faith traditions who have embraced the innate spirituality of children. Some speak directly about children and for some the inclusion of children must be assumed based on their being included as a part of all creation.

Judaism holds that because God made humans in God's own image, people come into the world as a blessing and free from original sin. As Harold Kushner writes, "*Human beings are different from all other living creatures. That is not a scientific statement; it is a religious one.*"<sup>132</sup> He stresses that this "difference" is explained in the creation story:

The Bible conveys that difference in its very first chapter, when it describes God creating all other animals, fish, and birds, by decree ("and God said, 'Let there be . . . ' and there was . . ."). But the first human beings are created by a special act of divine providence, formed by God's own hands, brought to life by an infusion of God's own breath.<sup>133</sup>

Because humans are formed from this divine providence and are set apart from other creatures, he believes that they have a "moral dimension." The moral dimension is the part of humans that can connect with God and choose either right or wrong as a result of that relationship. "Because of the uniqueness of human beings," Kushner explains, "we can be good or bad, where animals can only be obedient or messy."<sup>134</sup> The moral dimension is part of humans whether they can articulate it or not, *it just is*. People have

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<sup>132</sup> Harold S. Kushner, *To Life! : A Celebration of Jewish Being and Thinking* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of America, 1993), 181.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

the ability, because they are created as unique beings, not only to live in the presence of the divine presence, but to make choices about their lives based on that experience and relationship. Children, who are created holy, can connect with God because of the moral dimension which is there, even before it is taught and learned.

Abraham Joshua Heschel is another Jewish theologian who shares the belief that being created by God, in God's own image makes all people holy:

To meet a human being is a major challenge to mind and heart. I must recall what I normally forget. A person is not just a specimen of the species called *Homo sapiens*. He is all of humanity in one, and whenever one man is hurt we are all injured. The human is a disclosure of the divine, and all men are one in God's care for man. Many things on earth are precious, some are holy, humanity is holy of holies.

To meet a human being is an opportunity to sense the image of God, the presence of God. According to a rabbinical interpretation, the Lord said to Moses: "Wherever you see the trace of man, there I stand before you."<sup>135</sup>

Heschel distinguishes between humans and other creatures noting that humans have a given transcendence. It is not a scientific distinction; it is a holy one. He refers to it as a "divine spark" in the soul that is a gift, but must be tended or it will go out:

We cannot understand man in his own terms. Man is not to be understood in the image of nature, in the image of an animal, or in the image of a machine. He has to be understood in terms of transcendence, and that transcendence is not a passive thing; it is a challenging transcendence. Man is always being challenged; a question is always being asked of him. The moment man disavows the living transcendence, he is contracted; he is reduced to a level on which his distinction as a human being gradually disappears. What makes a man human is his openness to transcendence, which lifts him to a higher level than himself.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Heschel, *No Religion Is an Island: Abraham Joshua Heschel and Interreligious Dialogue*, (accessed 22 April 2006); available from <http://www.cs.auckland.cc.nz/%7Ealan/chaplain/heschel.html>.

<sup>136</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, "Choose Life!," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, no. January (1966).

People, according to Heschel, are transcendent because God creates them. It is not a learned way of being; it is a given, a reality. They can relate with God and be aware of the presence of the divine because they are created in the holy image and are holy. He emphasizes that this holiness is not a learned skill but a way of being: “Just to be is a blessing—Just to live is holy.”<sup>137</sup> While he did not speak directly about children, it is safe to assume that for Heschel, children, who are part of humanity, share in the same holiness of adults. Their connection with God then, is not given to them by learning and study, but it is their being. They, as a part of all humanity, are able to relate to God because they are holy and made in God’s image. They are capable of having a relationship with God that is real.

Friedrich Schleiermacher was a theologian who spoke directly about children. He believed that children came into the world, “naturally innocent and unencumbered by original sin.”<sup>138</sup> In fact, it was the evil in society and adults that threatened to “spoil the natural goodness of children.” In his play, *The Celebration of Christmas*, through which he communicated much of his theology, he speaks of the child possessing “pure revelation of the divine.” This was not a taught skill, it was gift they had been given from God and if left to flourish and grow, trusting the “genius of nature,” the child would need no instruction about how to be a good person.<sup>139</sup> Schleiermacher acknowledged that children were not only capable of having a deep relationship with God, but were created with this revelation of the divine built in. They had a pre-wired innate spirituality which

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> DeVRIES, *Be Converted*, 334.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 342.

allowed them to connect with the presence of God. It was only society and evil that could prevent this communication from happening.

Horace Bushnell is described as, “the quintessential American Theologian of childhood.”<sup>140</sup> Much of his work described the role of church and parents in the spiritual development of children. He did, however, believe that the “seeds of faith exist in the heart even of a newborn child.”<sup>141</sup> This innate spirituality existed in the heart of a newborn and in the child even before the important work of Christian Education took place.

Karl Barth, while not considered an expert on the spirituality of children, did address the subject. He believed that children had a relationship with God that should not be taken lightly. He said that it was God’s will that children, along with all humanity, were created to be partners with God.<sup>142</sup> He insisted that, “under no circumstances should they be identified with an inherited original sin.”<sup>143</sup> And while he did not directly explain his views on the innate nature of the soul of children, he did imply that at their core was joy and that freeing that joy was the task of the adults in their lives. He called the joy a child possessed at their core “eager readiness,” and urged parents and teachers not to “destroy it by the way we teach.”<sup>144</sup> This joy and eager readiness was not something

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<sup>140</sup> Margaret Bendroth, “Horace Bushnell’s Christian Nurture,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 350.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> William Werpehowski, “Reading Karl Barth on Children,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 390.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 396.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

taught to children but rather simply the way they were made. Children, like all humanity, were wired with joy to grow toward and enjoy the presence of God.

Karl Rahner is “undoubtedly the most important Roman Catholic theologian in the twentieth century.”<sup>145</sup> While he acknowledged that sin was real, he rejected the notion of original sin as being biologically transmitted.<sup>146</sup> He believed that an awareness of God was present in the core of every human being, including children.<sup>147</sup> Speaking directly about children he believed that children were capable of a very real relationship with God because of this core of awareness. He writes, “The child is a human being from the very beginning of his or her existence. A child does not simply grow gradually into a human being; he or she *is* a human being. In the unfolding of one's personal history, one simply realizes what one already is.”<sup>148</sup> The child was a spiritual being, and had relationships with God, even if they were not aware of it. Spiritual growth for the child, and all people, consisted in realizing the spiritual being they had been all along. For Rahner, God's grace had a large role in this realization. People had the capacity to know God but it was God's grace, or God reaching out to and touching the individual, that enabled a person to be aware of their reality as a person of God. Each person had an “experience of grace from within,” and this allowed the person to be open to God.<sup>149</sup> The period before a person

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<sup>145</sup> Joas Adiprsetya, *Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Western Theology: Karl Rahner*(2/18/06 2005, 18 February); available from [http://people.bu.edu.wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt\\_themes\\_800\\_rahner.htm](http://people.bu.edu.wwildman/WeirdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt_themes_800_rahner.htm).

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Hinsdale, *Infinite Openness*, 419-421.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 522.

<sup>149</sup> Phil LaFountain, *Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Western Thought: Karl Rahner (1904-1984)*(accessed 18 February 2006); available from [http://people.bu.edu.wwildman/WierdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt\\_themes\\_800\\_rahner.htm](http://people.bu.edu.wwildman/WierdWildWeb/courses/mwt/dictionary/mwt_themes_800_rahner.htm).

became aware of God was referred to by Rahner as an “unthematic experience” because it was not yet articulated.<sup>150</sup> While people have this innate ability to be open to knowing God and recognizing God’s presence, they also have the freedom to accept or reject God. Spiritual growth happens as a person accepts who they already are, and finds connection with God, or “transcendence.” Children, for Rahner, were capable of having a very real transcendent experience.

Meister Eckhart, a mystic and a typical example of the theology of the mystic tradition, believed that by looking inward, a person would discover who they were created to be.<sup>151</sup> The “little spark” of God was inside each created being, including children, and could never be destroyed:

The seed of God exists in us. Given a hard worker and a good director, it thrives apace and grows up into God whose seed it is, and its fruit is likewise God's nature. Pear seed grows up into pear tree, nut seed grows up into nut tree—God seed into God, to God. But if the good seed has a lazy worker and an incompetent director, then weeds spring up and strangle that good seed and by shutting out the light and prevent it growing. And yet, says Origen, a great authority, “Since God himself has sown, dropped in and gotten into us this seed, therefore it may be covered and lost to view, but it can never be destroyed or die out in itself; it glows and sparkles, lightens and burns, always making for God.”<sup>152</sup>

To further explain his theology, he used the metaphor of an artist making a statue out of clay or stone. Meister said the artist, “does not put the image in the wood; he chips away the wood which hides the form. He gives the wood nothing, he takes away; . . . and there appears what was hidden.”<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> O'Neal, ed., *Writing and Sayings*, introduction.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 96.

This *seed of God* is a gift, Meister believes, from God, and given to each person. Children are given this gift as well as adults. It is not a lesson to be learned, or a maturity level that must be reached, it just is. Children at any age must then be connected to God.

Richard C. Cabot, instructor in Clinical Medicine at Harvard Medical School, one of the founders of American psychotherapy, and a forerunner in the development of Clinical Pastoral Education for pastors, uses similar language to Meister in his support for an innate spirituality:

I mean by religion the deepest that there is in any human being. When you reach the core of any man, you reach, it seems to me, the divine spark in him, that is, you reach his religion. That center, that core as I have called it, lies behind and issues in all that he does . . . The point of view of religion is one of hope and confidence in the fundamental rightness of things.<sup>154</sup>

Another example of spirituality being given to all people as a gift is found in the theology of the Quaker church. While there is not a specific creed of the Quaker religion, there are *underlying principles* that most Quakers would agree with. Probably the most well known doctrine of Quaker theology is the idea of the “Inner Light.”<sup>155</sup> The inner light refers to the light of God that is within each person. Because everyone has the inner light, God speaks to each of us directly; however, it is only through silence and listening to the heart that people would be able to hear God.<sup>156</sup> “This light exists within every person and represents the continuation of the light shone in Jesus himself. In essence, the

<sup>154</sup> Rachael Rosner, “James Jackson Putnam and the Legacy of Liberal Protestantism in Early American Psychotherapy or Psychotherapy and the Case of the Missing Ministers,”(2000, 16 April 2006); available from <http://htpprints.yorku.ca/archive/00000018/01/putnam.htm>.

<sup>155</sup> *Quakers: The Religious Society of Friends*, (accessed 18 February 2006); available from <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu.nrms/quak.html>.

<sup>156</sup> Dr. Steve Sjuggerud, *Inner Light* (Answers.com, 2/28/06 2006, 18 February 2006); available from <http://www.answers.com/topic/inner-light>.

inner light is Christ. Quakers believe that this inner light has existed in every person ever created.”<sup>157</sup> Because the Quakers believe so strongly in the inner light belonging to each person born, they were strong, early advocates for believing that children are capable of innate spirituality and of connecting with God:

Friends have always had a refreshingly radical outlook on the role of children in the church. Quakers in the seventeenth century were early opponents that children were born into sin. They held that children are spiritual beings by virtue of “the Light that enlightens everyone born into the world.” They valued each child's inborn capacity for knowing God, and sought to affirm and nurture that capacity, while not denying the all too human tendency to fall prey to temptation. Although children rarely felt led to speak in Quaker meetings for worship, their spoken word was received with respect, as it still is today. There are stories of how children held meetings on their own during the years of persecution in England, when all of their elders were in prison.<sup>158</sup>

Because of the deeply entrenched Greco-Roman notion that children did not have *logos*, they were assumed to be incapable of innate spirituality. The doctrine of original sin, made it impossible for a child to be anything but sinful. The theologies of the rabbis, theologians, mystics and faith traditions, such as the Quakers, cited in this paper, challenge these views. They begin from a blessing based position where people, including children, are created in the image of God. Because they are made in the image of God, they cannot be other than God's own child. Long before they can articulate what their relationship with God is, it is there. Children, who are not always old enough and articulate enough to describe their relationship with God, are nonetheless created in God's image and as such, are capable of innate spirituality. They, because they are created in God's image and because they are holy children of God, possess, as all of humanity does, the ability to connect with the divine presence of God.

### Biblically

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<sup>157</sup> *Quakers: The Religious Society of Friends*, (accessed 18 February 2006); available from <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu.nrms/quak.html>.

<sup>158</sup> *Thoughts on Children and the New Worship Group*, (Friends General Conference, 2006, 12 January 2006); available from [http://www.fgcquaker.org/ao/toolbox/thoughts\\_on\\_children.htm](http://www.fgcquaker.org/ao/toolbox/thoughts_on_children.htm).

Biblically there can be little doubt that children possess an innate spirituality and can connect with the divine presence of God. The first story of children in the Bible begins in chapter four of Genesis with Cain and Abel, who both connect with God and have unique relationships with God. They talk to God, bring offerings to God and Cain is held accountable for killing his brother by God. There are no adults intervening for the children, nor are there stories about the boys being instructed by their parents about God. They each have an innate spirituality with God.

In the thirty-seventh chapter of Genesis, Joseph is portrayed as a child who received visions of the future by God through his dreams. This beginning of a deep connection with God through dreams is the beginning of a life where God remained central and which eventually helped Joseph save the people of Israel. His father did not question his ability to receive dreams and visions from God, but rather corrected him for *sharing* them with his brothers.

The book of Exodus describes the birth of Moses, who eventually saved God's people from slavery in Egypt. At the time of his birth, his mother, "saw that he was a godly child," and hid him for three months (Gen 2:2). His mother noticed the innate spirituality of Moses at the time of his birth. There is also a story reported in the Talmud about Miriam who was given the gift of prophecy, while still a young child herself, at the time of Moses' birth: "In the future my mother will give birth to a son who will save Israel. At the time when Moses was born, the whole house was filled with light. Her father stood up and kissed her on the head. He said to her, 'My daughter, your prophesy

has been fulfilled.’<sup>159</sup> Not only was Moses’ innate spirituality acknowledged at birth, Miriam’s gift of prophesy was acknowledged, as well.

In the third chapter of the book of First Samuel, Samuel, a child who is living in the temple, under the care of Eli, the priest, hears God calling in the night. Samuel mistakes the call of God as Eli calling him. Eli recognizes that it is God who is calling Samuel and he tells the boy, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak Lord, for thy servant hears.’ ”(I Sam 3:9). Eli does not seem amazed or angry that God speaks to a child. He is not surprised that Samuel can connect with God. When Samuel shares what God told him, Eli, who is clearly not upset or questioning of the child’s ability to hear God, responds, “It is the Lord” (I Sam 3:18). Samuel’s relationship with God continues to grow, “And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.” Samuel becomes the one, as an adult, who finds and anoints king David, but his relationship with God began in his childhood.

David, who later became King of Israel and from whose lineage Jesus descended, had the ability to relate to God as a child. In the seventeenth chapter of Genesis, David is portrayed as a young shepherd boy who has more courage and faith in God’s ability to slay Goliath than his older brothers, the soldiers in King Saul’s army and even more than King Saul himself. As he prepares to fight the giant, David proclaims, “You come to me with a sword and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, who you have defiled. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand ... that all this assembly may know there is a God in Israel”(I Sam 17:44-47). While the adults in the story are amazed at a boy being able to slay a giant, they do not seem amazed at his being capable of having a relationship with God.

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<sup>159</sup> Young, *Jewish Theologian*, 5.

One of the most powerful examples of the innate spirituality of a child is found in the first chapter of Jeremiah. God speaks to Jeremiah saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jer 1:5). But Jeremiah, insecure about his young age, responds, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do know how to speak for I am only a youth” (Jer 1:6). God speaks once again saying, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth;’ for to all to whom I send you you shall go, and whatever I command you you shall speak. Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord” (Jer 1:7). In this story, God makes three things clear. First, is that Jeremiah, a child, was consecrated and holy even while still in the womb. Second, is that God has faith that a child can hear and follow God’s commandments. And third, that God is present with this child even while he is, to quote Jeremiah, “only a youth”.

Another child who exhibited innate spirituality was Daniel. In the first chapter of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar, of Babylon, orders that boys who were, “youths without blemish, handsome and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, learning, and competent to serve in the king’s palace” (Dan 1:4) be brought to the palace and be trained in the ways of the Babylonians. Daniel, one of the chosen, does not forsake God in the midst of the temptations of the palace, and God, as a result gives him the ability to understand visions while still a boy (Dan 1: 17b). Daniel and his three friends, Hanani’ah, Mishe’al, and Azari’ah find favor with the king and “in every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them better than all the magicians and enchanterers that were in all his kingdom”(Dan 1:20). Daniel and his young friends have an innate spirituality which is recognized even by a

King who worshipped a foreign God. In the *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, the writer makes a point of noting that there is little discussion in the “older traditions” about the “unshakable faith and courage” that Daniel displayed as a child.<sup>160</sup>

In the First Testament of the Bible, there is an assumption that children are capable of innate spirituality. There are stories of children who are deeply spiritual and the adults in their lives do not question it. In fact, parents are commanded to teach children about God so that they will know of God’s goodness and commandments as early as possible. “He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach their children”(Ps 78:5). Children are thought fully capable to learn about God, and yet the teaching is to be done with gentleness and ease. Parents are instructed to teach their kids at all times, “when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise” (Deut 6:7).

A child's initiation into Judaism generally will begin very early. Even the very young can be taught to recite the *Sh'ma*, as the Torah instructs, “You shall teach it . . . unto your children.” In four separate places in the Torah, God says that it is a father's responsibility to recount for this offspring the story of the Exodus from Egypt.<sup>161</sup>

Children in the First Testament were expected to be able to comprehend the commandments of God and their relationships with God and were not criticized or questioned. The innate spirituality of children finds support in the First Testament.

The notion of children being capable of a relationship with God continues into the Gospels and is found in the story of the birth of Jesus. In the first chapter of Luke, Mary,

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<sup>160</sup> Buttrick, ed., *Interpreter's Dictionary*, 762.

<sup>161</sup> Robinson, *Essential Judaism*, 155.

after hearing from an angel of God that she is expecting, goes to find support and comfort at her cousin Elizabeth's home. Elizabeth is also expecting a child, John. As Mary arrives, she greets Elizabeth and, "when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb"(Lk 1:41). John the Baptist, while still in the womb, recognizes the divine. John is later described as a child who, "grew and became strong in spirit"(Lk 1:80). This mirrors the description of Christ who "grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him"(Lk 3:40).

Another story, which demonstrates the innate spirituality of a child, is the story of Mary and Joseph being unable to find Jesus, age twelve, in Jerusalem during the Passover, which is told in the second chapter of Luke. When Jesus is finally located, he is sitting among teachers learning from them. While in this story, the teachers are amazed at his answers; the custom of adults taking time to listen to and teach children is not uncommon.<sup>162</sup>

Jesus assumes that children are spiritual beings. "Truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,"(Mt 18:3) implies that children *already* have knowledge and great wisdom about God and the kingdom. Jesus asks people to become like children, as they are *now*, not as they *will be* in the future, or *could be* with the proper education or after achieving a certain age. Jesus invites people to become as a child, *now*. While Jesus is not specific about how to become like a child and what that might look and feel like, he clearly sees a spirituality in a child that is a present reality. "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven," (Mt 19:14) again encourages adults to understand the innate spirituality of children that Jesus, while not specific and detailed

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<sup>162</sup>*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 45.

about it, clearly acknowledges. Note that the word “belongs” is in the present form. Jesus does not say the kingdom *will belong* to children, or *might belong*, or even *will belong at a certain age* or *when they complete their studies*. Jesus uses the word *belongs* and in doing so acknowledges that it belongs to them now.

According to Andrew Baker, a biblical linguist, the words of Christ about children found in Matthew 19:14b, express not only that the kingdom of God belong to children now, but always and forever.

In examining the original Greek text of Mathew 19:14b, the operative word upon which we should focus our attention in this command which Christ gives his disciples is, in the original Greek, *gar*; the English translation of which is “belongs” (the kingdom of heaven is “for” such as these: etymology: middle English, from Old English; akin to Latin *per* through, *prae* before, *pro* before, for . . . )

In linguistic terms, we can see that this word holds an intransitive sense in the original Greek and subsequent English translations. Contemporary translations including the most widely published NRSV have employed the word “belongs,” to articulate an intransitive sense of propriety of the celestial kingdom which Christ confers upon children in this passage.

The importance, however, is not the verbal inflection in this case (belongs,) but rather the lack of tense in the preposition, (for.) Christ does not suggest that the kingdom of heaven would be objectively apportioned, nor does Christ appear to indicate that the kingdom of heaven had been historically conferred at a previous juncture. As clear as our indication stands in the original text, the recurring exegetical theme of propriety is a non-subjective, timeless, current state in which necessarily no beginning occurs, and in a like manner, no end is suggested or foreseen . . . <sup>163</sup>

Children, in Jesus’ eyes, have a present, real spirituality. And this spirituality, this present ability to relate with God, is made manifest as Christ welcomed the children brought to him to be blessed and “laid his hands on them” (Mt 19:13). “Such action does

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<sup>163</sup> Andrew Baker [abaker@mccormick.edu](mailto:abaker@mccormick.edu), RE: Matthew 19:14b. [Email to [abaker@mccormick.edu](mailto:abaker@mccormick.edu)]. (29 July 1996).

not imply a simple passing encounter with the children, but a personal interest in each child.”<sup>164</sup> And it is important to note that the message of the saying about children are noted by the three synoptic gospel writers, Mark, Luke and Matthew, who by the inclusion of these sayings, must have gathered that they were important.

While not speaking directly or theologically about the innate spirituality of children, the Bible clearly supports it by offering examples of children in both the First and Second Testaments who possessed it, by instructing parents to teach children, implying that children are capable of it, and with the words of Jesus who, while not speaking in great theological detail, acknowledged an innate spirit in the children by speaking in the present tense about them, and laying hands on them.

### Conclusion

The innate spirituality of children, while finding support historically, theologically and Biblically, has not been the primary model of spirituality for children. As a result, children have not been given the time, attention and spiritual direction they deserve. Without an understanding that they are capable of innate spirituality, their needs will go unnoticed and neglected. “We must cultivate our children's relationship with God, believing they are capable of loving, relating to, and obeying Him with sensitivity and depth.”<sup>165</sup>

### **Children: Needing and Benefiting from Pastoral Care in Times of Crisis**

Crisis is a fact of life. We live, we die and it is inevitable that we will experience crisis at one time or another in this cycle of life. The same is true of children. While we

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<sup>164</sup> Witvliet, ed., *A Child Shall Lead*, 23.

<sup>165</sup> Cheri Fuller, *When Children Pray: How God Uses the Prayers of a Child* (Sisters: Multnomah Publishers, 1998), 45.

tend to think of childhood as a happy carefree time of life, children will experience pain, hardship, poverty, death, challenges and difficulties.

In the United States, one child is born into poverty every forty seconds, one in eight children has no health insurance and receives food stamps; one in seven does not graduate high school; and one child is confirmed abused or neglected every thirty-five seconds.<sup>166</sup> Further, “3,381 children less than age thirteen have AIDS and 1,895 children less than thirteen are living with HIV. Persons aged thirteen to twenty-four account for 15 percent of reported HIV cases.”<sup>167</sup> “Since 1972, one million children every year have seen their parents divorce . . . half of all children will witness the breakup of their parents’ marriage. Of these, close to one half will also see the breakup of a parent’s second marriage . . . ten percent of children of divorce will go on to witness three or more family breakups.”<sup>168</sup> “Although suicide is relatively rare among children, the rate of suicide attempts and suicide deaths increases tremendously during adolescence. Suicide is the third-leading cause of death for 15- to 24-year-olds, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), surpassed only by accidents and homicide”<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Patricia Zalaznik, “Aids and HIV Infection: A Continuing Crisis for Schools,” in *What Will We Do? Preparing a School Community to Cope with Crises*, ed. G. Stevenson Robert, Death, Value and Meaning Series (Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 109.

<sup>168</sup> Divorce Reform, *Divorce Rates in Families with Children*(Americans for Divorce Reform, 17 April 2006); available from <http://www.divorcereform.org/chilrate.html>.

<sup>169</sup> Kids Health for Parents, *About Teen Suicide*(Nemours Foundation, 2006, 17 April 2006); available from <http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/suicide.html>.

and “the current adolescent suicide rate in the United States is approximately twelve per 100,000.”<sup>170</sup>

In addition to these statistics, children face bullying at school, the deaths of loved ones, friends and family, illness, school pressures and learning disabilities, and everyday stress. Children are in crisis and face crisis on a regular basis. Over one million children in the United States are in some type of therapy and one third of them have been diagnosed with two or more psychiatric disorders.<sup>171</sup>

Children with parents serving in the military face a unique set of issues. In addition to worry about the safety of a deployed parent and the grief over a death of a parent serving in the military, “Military children tend to move on a regular basis. With each of these moves, these children are faced with many losses: loss of friends, loss of home, loss of school, loss of familiar people (dentists, doctors, neighbors, and babysitters), and loss of familiar places (schools, library, neighborhood, recreational facilities), and loss of security.”<sup>172</sup>

Violence among children and young people has increased significantly causing stress, crisis and pain to many. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have reported that “almost 5000 teenagers die from non-self-inflicted gun shot wounds each year. Data released by the National Center for Health Statistics corroborate this finding.

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<sup>170</sup> Diane Ryerson and John Kalafat, “The Crisis of Youth Suicide,” in *What Will We Do? Preparing a School Community to Cope with Crises*, ed. Robert G. Stevenson, Death, Value and Meaning Series (Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 91.

<sup>171</sup> L.A. Warner & K.J. Pottick, *More Than 38,000 Children Diagnosed with Multiple Mental Health Problems* (New Jersey: Rutgers University, U.S. Department of Health and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2004), 1.

<sup>172</sup> Linda Reed Maxwell, “Schools and Military Crises,” in *What Will We Do? Preparing a School Community to Cope with Crises*, ed. Robert G. Stevenson, Death, Value and Meaning Series (Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 153-154.

Their data show that one in four deaths among teenagers is caused by firearms and that only motor vehicle accidents account for more teen deaths.”<sup>173</sup>

Kenneth Erikson notes the lack of self-esteem present in children and teens today. Seventy percent of children in kindergarten report having a good sense of self-esteem. By fifth grade that percentage has dropped to only twenty percent and by twelfth grade it has dropped to less than five percent.<sup>174</sup>

These statistics demonstrate the stress, pressure and pain many children are facing each day. Our children and teens are in a state of crisis. Crisis is defined by Rabbi Daniel Roberts as, “the disruption of the equilibrium of normal daily living.”<sup>175</sup> David K. Meagher defines crisis as a “serious or decisive state of things. In terms of an individual or group, crisis is an acute emotional upset arising from situational, developmental, or social sources resulting in a temporary inability to cope through usual problem solving devices. Crisis occur when a person’s inability to cope with an event such as an emergency leads to an experience of stress that is so severe that s/he cannot find relief.”<sup>176</sup> Robert G. Steveson, a leading expert in the education field, states, “Crises do not necessarily occur only during, or in the wake of, a particular event. The lives of young people are filled with ‘pressures.’ These pressures can cause some of these young people to believe they have less control over their own lives. Increasingly our young

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<sup>173</sup> David K. Meagher, “School Based Grief Crisis Management Programs,” in *What Will We Do? Preparing a School Community to Cope with Crises*, ed. Robert G. Stevenson, Death, Value and Meaning Series (Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 45.

<sup>174</sup> Kenneth A. Erickson, *Helping Your Children Feel Good About Themselves: A Guide to Building Self-Esteem in the Christian Family* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1994), 8.

<sup>175</sup> Rabbi Daniel A. Roberts, “Religious Education as an Aid in Crisis Intervention,” in *What Will We Do? Preparing a School Community to Cope with Crises*, ed. Robert G. Stevenson, Death, Value and Meaning Series (Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 70.

<sup>176</sup> Meagher, *Crisis Management*, 47.

people show an inability to deal with loss, both present and possible future.”<sup>177</sup> His definition of crisis includes understanding that, “On the most basic level, an event, situation, circumstances is a crisis if *we believe it is*.”<sup>178</sup>

For many children and teens, the crises they face are non-stop. Some face verbal, physical and sexual abuse daily at the hands of parents, friends or neighbors. Others face bullying each day at school with no recourse, for fear of retaliation from the bully once she/he gets punished. Still others have learning disabilities or unresolved grief issues that cause daily stress and strain. The grief these children experience becomes deep-seated anger and they are referred to as *imploded children*. These children are described as those children who “possess hidden rage and explosive anger.”<sup>179</sup> These children pose the greatest risk to seriously hurting themselves or another child.

With the pressures and pain of grief, loss, abuse and violence facing children and teens today coupled with Stevenson’s observation that young people are lacking tools to cope with circumstances they face each day, it is clear that our children and teens are in a state of crisis. The church can be a source of healing and hope for them as well as a place where they can find coping skills and skills to heal. Unfortunately, responding to the needs of children and teens by the church from a spiritual basis, has been lacking throughout history.

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<sup>177</sup> Robert G. Stevenson, “Schools and Crisis,” in *What Will We Do? Preparing a School Community to Cope with Crises*, ed. Robert G. Stevenson, Death, Value and Meaning Series (Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 16.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> William Lee, “Preparing the School Community to Cope with Violence,” in *What Will We Do? Preparing a School Community to Cope with Crises*, ed. Robert G. Stevenson, Death, Value and Meaning Series (Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 134.

Dennis Benson, a leader in the ministry to children in the church, addressing the issue of children in times of need, said, “Most psychologists concede that the front lines of counseling are held by the neighbor, friend or clergy. Yet the church community as a whole does little to support and nurture this basic ministry of caring . . . looking back over my experience with children in the church, I have to admit that I spent lots of time patting children on the head.”<sup>180</sup>

Robert Buckingham, a doctor whose work with dying children is unparalleled, writes of the dangers when children cannot express their pain to safe adults:

Children who are not permitted to show feelings of grief over the loss of something or someone important to them have no choice other than to fall back on more primitive measures of defense, most often the denial of the pain of loss. Children have a right to grieve without apology or shame.<sup>181</sup>

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, the pioneer of death and dying, calls children the “forgotten ones.” It is not that adults do not care about them; there are few who feel comfortable talking with them about death. They end up being invisible and left out of the healing process.<sup>182</sup> She cautions that children who do not have safe places to express their grief experience difficulty in later life:

Children who grow up without the opportunity of expressing their natural anger end up repressing resentment and rage, wishing to retaliate, wishing for revenge, and ultimately, genuine hating. They may appear very meek and obedient on the surface, but like a temporarily dormant volcano, this anger will erupt sooner or later. These are the children who keep up a good “front” and “out of the

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<sup>180</sup> Dennis C. Benson and J. Stewart, *The Ministry of the Child* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978), 52.

<sup>181</sup> Robert W. Buckingham, *A Special Kind of Love: Care of the Dying Child* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 98.

<sup>182</sup> Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., Inc, 1969), 178.

blue” become very vicious. In their early adulthood, such people may kill harmless, innocent people “for no reason,” thereby beginning to express their rage and revenge after having it bottled up for years, sometimes decades.<sup>183</sup>

James G. Friesen strongly urges adults to take seriously the wounds that occur during childhood and to understand the ramifications if such wounds are not cared for:

Study after study finds the same compelling conclusion. About one third of us have been traumatized as children in the form of physical or sexual abuse, many more suffer from the absences of good things that are necessary for emotional maturation, and *help is not usually available*. School failure, depression, anxiety, poor self-esteem, chronic physical illness, violent behavior, and disturbing sexual urges are some of the common after effects of childhood traumas. When they go untreated, the children carry these effects along with them into adulthood. Woundedness, dividedness, isolation, and oppression are the result of leaving the trauma wounds unnoticed and unhealed. Too many people continue to suffer throughout their lives because they receive no attention for the effects of early abuse.<sup>184</sup>

He further explains that children need a community of loving adults to help this to happen:

They really need for the people who love them to encourage them to find out where their pain is coming from, and to accompany them on their path to recovery. Without the help of a caring community around them, their woundedness, dividedness, isolation, and oppression will prevent them from getting to wholeness.<sup>185</sup>

Sandra Elders adds that children can cope and heal explaining that, “It has been established that the *intensity* and *duration* of stress resulting from the adverse circumstances of loss can be decreased. This can be accomplished through: mastery of

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<sup>183</sup> Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Children and Death: How Children and Their Parents Can and Do to Cope with Death* (New York: Touchstone, 1983), 73.

<sup>184</sup> James G. Friesen and others, *Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You* (Pasadena: Shepherd's House, Inc., 2000), 11.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

coping skills, support, attitudes which accompany feelings of hope, and the knowledge that the experiences of grief are normal.”<sup>186</sup>

Robert G. Stevenson has found common healing elements to programs that:

- \*help students by increasing feelings of self-worth and existing programs can be a resource in times of crisis.
- \*show students how they can draw on support systems, such as family, friends, educators and/or religious advisors,
- \*help students develop a belief that they have an internal center of control over events in their lives, allow students to feel more secure in a hostile world.
- \*assist students to identify and cope with feelings of guilt which may accompany significant loss,
- \*explain the process of grief, which helps people recover from bereavement,
- \*explain that even when everything is done in the "right way" crisis can still occur and that a crisis (whether it be due to a death, or a change in family structure, or illness) is not necessarily anyone's fault.<sup>187</sup>

And William Lee, an expert on the topic of *imploded children*, states, “Healing can begin with the sharing of experiences, speaking about the unspeakable, empowering the self to name those events, making meaning of the meaningless.”<sup>188</sup>

The church could be a place where children and teens come in times of crisis, to receive care. The techniques mentioned above as having been proved useful could be used as well as ritual, prayer and sound theology. As Rabbi Daniel Roberts so beautifully summarizes:

It is religious beliefs that help people make sense of a turbulent world. In times of crisis we turn to faith to make sense of catastrophes, to understand the death of loved ones. In time of

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<sup>186</sup> Sandra Elder, “Support Groups in the Community,” in *What Will We Do? Preparing a School Community to Cope with Crises*, ed. Robert G. Stevenson, Death, Value and Meaning Series (Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 164.

<sup>187</sup> Stevenson, *Creating a ‘Safe Room’*, 10.

<sup>188</sup> Lee, *Preparing the School Community*, 135.

trouble we particularly look for answers when we find life mysterious or when we sense that we have no control. Deep within us we need to believe that the world we live in makes sense, that there is a pattern to it. We look to religion to explain that pattern. We seek wholeness. This is why religion and the religious institutions are the place to handle crisis.<sup>189</sup>

Pastoral care for children and teens facing crises is a needed model in the church today and providing it has historical, biblical and theological foundations within the life of the church.

Historically

### **Informal Lay-Based Care**

For healing to occur, children in crisis need safe places to express their pain and a loving community to support them. It seems only logical that the church would be a place where this would happen. Historically, there were two types of pastoral care; informal lay-based care, and the formal system of pastoral care developed by the church. Informal pastoral care was the concern and care-giving that lay members of a church community provided for each other. Baking pies for visitors, taking food to a home following a death, and forming supportive communities among Sunday school classes are examples of the informal pastoral care. Informal pastoral care toward children most likely happened in these arenas where they were loved and cared for by the community of faith, and primarily by the lay leaders such as Sunday school teachers, the pastor's wife, and other church members.

As Doctor Donald Rogers reminds us, pastoral care for children used to be given, in many instances, by the dedicated Sunday school teacher:

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<sup>189</sup> Roberts, *Religious Education*, 70.

Once upon a time, and only a generation ago for many, children could go to Sunday school and be sure of one thing—their teacher would be there. In the midst of the whirling, almost circus-like impression that the whole church had on a child, there was one certain stable point, the teacher. Those who experienced that dependable relationship and that warmth and care look back now after many years of distance and remember those teachers.<sup>190</sup>

As early as the 1700's John Wesley, founder of the United Methodist Church, notes the care done for children by Sunday school teachers. "There have been several occasions when we have observed children of all ages, from three years to teenagers, come under the power of the Holy Spirit. Some of the very small children have drawn pictures of heaven and angels to show their teachers and parents what they saw during those experiences."<sup>191</sup>

In times of crisis, Sunday school teachers and others who took the time for them most probably met the needs of children. However, because of the informal nature of this care, little documentation about it has been done. Many adults can relate stories of caring adults who reached out to them in times of crisis and pain, but others can cite cruel remarks and painful comments made by Sunday school teachers and others during times of crisis.

The author personally recalls Mrs. Huges, her third grade Sunday school teacher who taught her to say and believe the words of *the Lord's Prayer* with such care and holiness. Being a sick child, she later recited that prayer daily as a source of comfort and hope. This Sunday school teacher provided much needed pastoral care. On the other hand, the author recalls another teacher who was teaching about the early church martyrs.

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<sup>190</sup> Donald B. Rogers, *In Praise of Learning*, ed. Ezra Earl Jones, Into Our Third Century (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 24.

<sup>191</sup> Walters, *Children Aflame*, 12.

The author expressed that she might have denied her faith if faced by a lion. The teacher began to yell and explained how evil the author was and how little faith she had resulting in a deeply spiritual wound.

Since little formal documentation has been done about this lay-based pastoral care, one can only hope that the majority of these people, working so closely with children in times of crisis provided the same level of love, care and sensitivity as Mrs. Hughes. However, because of the lack of documentation, and the lack of written instructions for how pastoral care was to be given to children, we can only assume and hope, that children were cared for in time of crisis with kind words and hugs from caring adults in their communities of faith.

There is one source of written pastoral care provided by lay Sunday school teachers, parents and friends. It is found in the words of the children's hymns. Many of the best known were written and taught to children in the eighteen hundreds. These songs taught children of a loving, caring and protective God and a relationship with Jesus which would provide a pastoral care foundation during times of crisis.

The song, *Jesus Loves the Little Children*, written in 1864 and sung to the tune of a civil war song,<sup>192</sup> taught children that they were loved by God, regardless of social standing, race, or whatever problem they were facing.

Jesus Loves the Little Children  
Written By: Unknown  
Copyright Unknown

Chorus:  
Jesus loves the little children  
All the children of the world

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<sup>192</sup> *Christian Child's Prayer*, (Wikipedia, March 3, 2006, 17 April 2006); available from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus\\_Loves\\_Me,\\_This\\_I\\_Know#Jesus\\_Loves\\_the\\_Little\\_Children](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_Loves_Me,_This_I_Know#Jesus_Loves_the_Little_Children).

Black and yellow, red and white  
 They're all precious in His sight  
 Jesus loves the little children of the world

Verses:  
 Whether you're rich or whether you're poor  
 It matters not to Him  
 He remembers where you're going  
 Not where you've been

If your heart is troubled  
 Don't worry, don't you fret  
 He knows that you have heard His call  
 And he won't forget

All around the world tonight  
 His children rest assured  
 That He will watch and He will keep us  
 Safe and secure<sup>193</sup>

The children's song, *Jesus Loves Me*, was written in the mid-eighteen hundreds by Anna Bartlett Warner, who started writing after her father lost his job. This song was considered so powerful in teaching children about God's love and power, that missionaries used it with new converts, as well.<sup>194</sup> The words to the song, while simple, are quite profound as they remind children how deeply loved they are. In times of crisis, the first and third verses must have provided much comfort.

Jesus Loves Me  
 Words By: Anna B. Warner  
 Music By: Wm. B. Bradbury

Verse One:  
 Jesus loves me! This I know,  
 For the Bible tells me so.  
 Little ones to Him belong,

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<sup>193</sup> Kiddiddles, (Stairway to Heaven Web Design Service, July 11, 1999, 17 April 2006); available from <http://www.kiddiddles.com/mouseum/j008.html>.

<sup>194</sup> *Jesus Loves Me*, (Christian History Institute, 2004, 20 March); available from <http://chi.gospelcom.net/GLIMPSEF/Glimpses/glimps062.shtml>.

They are weak but He is strong.  
 Yes, Jesus loves me!  
 Yes, Jesus loves me!  
 Yes, Jesus loves me!  
 The Bible tells me so.

Verse Three:  
 Jesus loves me! loves me still,  
 When I'm very weak and ill;  
 From His shining throne on high,  
 Comes to watch me where I lie.  
 Yes, Jesus loves me!  
 Yes, Jesus loves me!  
 Yes, Jesus loves me!  
 The Bible tells me so.<sup>195</sup>

These hymns illustrate an informal theology and pastoral care given to children in the informal settings such as home and Sunday school. Doctor Lisa Hess, suggests that beyond the *words* of these songs, another type of care was provided as the community of faith bonded while singing them. This non-verbal pastoral care happened and reinforced the message of the words.<sup>196</sup>

While not well documented, the informal pastoral care provided by lay members of the church cannot be overlooked as an important part of the history of pastoral care for children.

### **Formal Pastoral Care**

The second model of pastoral care is the formal model, developed by the clergy and official church leaders. In this history, better documented, we do find instances where children received pastoral care. We also find a rich history of changes and shifts in the understanding of the meaning and the practice of pastoral care.

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<sup>195</sup> Kiddiddles, *Stairway to Heaven*.

<sup>196</sup> Dr. Lisa Hess shared her thoughts during a dinner conversation April 25, 2006.

In Judaism, a strong emphasis was placed on pastoral care, not as something to discuss, but rather as a way of “being with.” This is evidenced in the First Testament where there was a strong emphasis on hands-on, direct care for those who could not care for themselves. Rabbi Mendy Hecht, writing about the treatment of orphans and widows, reminds readers that the commandment of God, “You shall not afflict any widow or orphan” (Ex 22:22), is considered a *tzedakah*, which is what Jewish people were and still are required by God to do. It is *doing the right thing for God* when the widows and orphans are cared for.<sup>197</sup> In fact, God feels so strongly that they should be cared for that the scripture continues, saying, “If you do afflict them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword” (Ex 22:23-24a). In Jewish thought, caring for the less fortunate, the poor, the oppressed and those that need special care was an expected responsibility and taken seriously. In the Jewish community an emphasis was placed on hands-on care for those who needed it most.

This commandment for *tzedakah* became formalized through the rituals which were developed to teach people how to provide the expected hands-on care God required. The rituals provided structure and gave direction for people to care for others. These rituals were expected to be done especially at milestones in life such as the birth of a baby, a child reaching the age of Bar-mitzvah and Bat-mitzvah, and during and following a death.

The Talmud says that there are two moments in human life over which one had no control, the moment one is born and the moment

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<sup>197</sup> Rabbi Mendy Hecht, *What Does the Torah Say About How to Treat a Widow or Orphan?* (AskMoses.com, 1998, 17 April 2006); available from [http://www.askmoses.com/qa\\_detail.html?h=180&o=100](http://www.askmoses.com/qa_detail.html?h=180&o=100).

one dies. In between those two moments shrouded in uncertainty, a Jew will experience many Sabbaths, but the moments he will experience most directly, no less sacred, are the events that mark the individual lifetime, from birth to death (and perhaps beyond). Judaism has its own way of recognizing and commemorating these moments.<sup>198</sup>

Through these rituals pastoral care was, and still is, given in very concrete, caring ways. A prime example of care being done through ritual is during the time of mourning for a death. In the Jewish community a group of trained people, the *Chevra Kaddisha*, from the congregation come to the home and prepare the body in a loving, respectful manner. “They wash the body with warm water from head to foot . . . never place the body face down, is dressed in white burial shrouds (tachrichim).”<sup>199</sup> Members of the community then sit with the family and guard or watch over the body as a sign of respect.<sup>200</sup> The pastoral care given as the body of the loved one is treated with such deep respect and the care given to the family as the night passes is a hands-on, caring ministry. It is a ritualized, structured form of pastoral care.

Following the actual funeral service, the friends and relatives and rabbi, form two lines through which the family of the deceased walk and the traditional words of comfort, *Hamakom y'nachem etchem b'toch sh'ar availia tziyon ee yerushakayim*, meaning, *May God comfort you*, are said to them over and over as they leave. The time of *shiva* then begins at the home for a period of seven days where food and comfort are expected to be given. The call for presence, for making house calls, for doing *tzedakah* is expected and

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<sup>198</sup> Robinson, *Essential Judaism*, 138.

<sup>199</sup> Lisa Alcalay Klug, “Saying Goodbye to a Loved One: Jewish Funeral Customs” (United Jewish Communities, 2006, 10 February 2006); available from [http://www.ujc.org/content\\_display.html?ArticleID=1598](http://www.ujc.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=1598).

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

the ritual allows the care to happen.<sup>201</sup> In Judaism, people were and still are taught, through ritual, how to give pastoral care to those in need.

These same types of rituals are used at the celebration of all other life events. Even on the first day of school, children are given a book with a treat tucked inside to ritualize how proud the parents are of them because they are starting school.<sup>202</sup> And children are given a ritualized blessing at each Sabbath by their parent.<sup>203</sup>

These rituals enabled people, lay and clergy, to reach out and care for others and at the same time reminded them of God's presence in the midst of their life and in times of crisis. It gave them a form and outline to follow. The rituals gave them the tools to provide needed pastoral care to one another effectively. Children were present and often the primary focus of these rituals.

Like most of Jewish tradition, there is little written explanation about these rituals. The focus is on *doing* rather than *explaining* and so the hands-on pastoral care taught through these powerful rituals comes not through explanation but through observing.<sup>204</sup> The tradition of these rituals has been passed down from person to person and is still used in Jewish communities today.

During the second century, as the Christian church was forming, the pastoral care done was an extension of the Jewish model emphasizing care for the oppressed, the poor, the widowed and the children. The early church spent much time, energy and resources caring for the widows and orphans. In the sixth chapter of the Book of Acts, the widows

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, *Introduction to Judaism*, 53.

<sup>203</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1088.

<sup>204</sup> Young, *Jewish Theologian*, 271.

are being neglected and seven men are chosen to care for them. In the First Letter of Paul to Timothy, Paul encourages the faithful to “honor widows” (I Tim 5:3). Later in the same chapter, he insinuates that the cost of caring for widows is costing the church much and began encouraging family members to provide care for any widows in their family so that “the church may not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are real widows” (I Tim 5:16).

During the time of persecution of the early Christians, pastoral care was done primarily for one another within the Christian community. It was a time of hands on care for each other.<sup>205</sup> However, with the reign of Constantine and the acceptance of the theology of original sin, the nature of pastoral care changed from the care for one another through action, to salvation of the soul. “The first signs of pastoral care centered around keeping their flock from heresy, lapsing and superstition.”<sup>206</sup> Pastoral care became the work of the clergy, who were the doctors of curing sin. Sins were referred to as a sickness needing to be cured and a system of penances was designed. These were created as a sort of *medicine* for sin. People, who had sinned, would do the prescribed tasks or pay the correct price for a *cure* for the illness of sins. The priest became a doctor for the sick sinner and it was only through the help of the doctor/priest that one could rid oneself of the sin.<sup>207</sup>

The discipline of the Latin Church in the middle ages is laid down in the so-called “Penitential Books.”(390) They regulate the order of penitence, and prescribe specific punishments for certain sins, as drunkenness, fornication, avarice, perjury, homicide, heresy,

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<sup>205</sup> G. R. Evans, ed., *A History of Pastoral Care* (London and New York: Cassel, 2000), 59.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-65.

<sup>207</sup> Thomas O'Loughlin, “Penitentials and Pastoral Care,” in *A History of Pastoral Care*, ed. G. R. Evans (London and New York: Cassel, 2000), 94.

idolatry. The material is mostly derived from the writings of the fathers, and from the synodical canons of Ancyra (314), Neocaesarea (314), Nicaea (325), Gangra (362), and of the North African, Frankish, and Spanish councils down to the seventh century. The common object of these Penitentials is to enforce practical duties and to extirpate the ferocious and licentious passions of heathenism. They present a very dark picture of the sins of the flesh. They kept alive the sense of a moral government of God, who punishes every violation of his law, but they lowered the sense of guilt by fostering the pernicious notion that sin may be expiated by mechanical exercises and by the payment of a sum of money.<sup>208</sup>

This concept of pastoral care continued, unquestioned through the ages, and was reinforced at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, where a creed, entitled, *The Catholic Faith*, reminded priests and laity that the “correct presentation of Christian doctrine was regarded as the most important pastoral care that could be offered to people. Salvation came through a right understanding and acceptance of God’s saving work in Jesus Christ, and salvation surpassed everything else in importance.”<sup>209</sup> The salvation had to be given by a trained priest and pastoral care, at least formally, became something *done to* a sinner by an authoritative, trained priest. Pastoral care became something the laity was no longer expected or believed to be qualified to provide.

In the twelfth century, as the pilgrimages to Jerusalem and holy wars began, the Templars and Hospitallers began providing care for those who found themselves ill, or injured as they traveled. This type of pastoral care resembled the older style of hands-on care. Instead of focusing on care for the sinful soul, they provided a physical, hands-on care.

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<sup>208</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume IV: Mediaeval Christianity. A.D. 590-1073 (1882, 16 April 2006); available from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc4.i.viii.i.html?bcb=0..>

<sup>209</sup> O’Loughlin, *Penitentials*, 94.

It is here that the first pastoral care of children is mentioned:

As well as describing the way the sick and poor should be cared for, the Rule of 1182 also laid down that abandoned children should be received and nourished. The description given by the anonymous cleric implies that the Hospitallers expected to receive such children quite regularly, either brought in but those who found them or left secretly by mothers who could not cope. Nurses were employed at a salary of 12 talents a year to look after these infants in their homes.<sup>210</sup>

The care of these orphans found such popularity among people in Europe that they sent money to continue it and the excess money collected helped fund the war.<sup>211</sup>

The Middle Ages continued to embrace the idea of salvation for the sinful soul as the primary focus of pastoral care. However, when the Black Plague broke out in 1348, the care of the sick and burials of the dead, by necessity, became the new focus.<sup>212</sup> It is estimated that the death toll, during the three years of the plague killed anywhere between twenty-five and fifty percent of the population of Europe.<sup>213</sup> A man, living through the plague, describes the death:

Such was the multitude of corpses brought to the churches every day and almost every hour that there was not enough consecrated ground to give them burial, especially since they wanted to bury each person in the family grave, according to the old custom. Although the cemeteries were full they were forced to dig huge trenches, where they buried the bodies by hundreds. Here they stowed them away like bales in the hold of a ship and covered them with a little earth, until the whole trench was full.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Malcomb Barber, "Hospitallers and Templars," in *The History of Pastoral Care*, ed. G.R. Evans (London and New York: Cassel, 2000), 154-155.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>212</sup> William J. Dohar, "Since the Pestilence Time: Pastoral Care in the Later Middle Ages (1300's)" in *A History of Pastoral Care*, ed. G. R. Evans (London and New York: Cassel, 2000), 179.

<sup>213</sup> EyeWitness to History.com, *The Black Death, 1348*(2001, 22 April 2002); available from <http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/plague.htm>.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

He continues, describing the effect the plague had on clergy:

In this suffering and misery of our city, the authority of human and divine laws almost disappeared, for, like other men, the ministers and the executors of the laws were all dead or sick or shut up with their families, so that no duties were carried out. Every man was therefore able to do as he pleased.<sup>215</sup>

The Black Plague elicited an older model of pastoral care; one where the sick and dying were ministered to with the ministry of presence. However, following the plague, the dictates of the *Fourth Lateran Council 1215* reemerged as the accepted model of pastoral care. Martin Luther, with his famous *Ninety-five Theses*, challenged the council and particularly the use of the penance system; however, theologically he agreed with the notion that pastoral care for the soul centered on the healing of the sinful soul. So, during his lifetime, little changed in the way pastoral care was practiced. A person still needed the priest to cure them of their sins. However, Luther's concept of the *priesthood of all believers* did set the stage for later models of shared pastoral care among laity.<sup>216</sup>

In the sixteenth century, John Calvin practiced a model of pastoral care where the “interrelationship between the pastor and people” was central.<sup>217</sup> This was not a popular concept and he received a great deal of criticism about his pastoral skills. He is, however, remembered as the “pastor of souls” because of the care, through relationships, that he gave to members of his congregation during his twenty-seven year ministry.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Cornick, *Post-Enlightenment*, 241.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> John K. Baumann, *John Calvin as Pastor*(Monmouth College, 1997, 16 April 2006); available from [http://department.monm.edu/classics/Speel\\_Festschrift/baumann.htm](http://department.monm.edu/classics/Speel_Festschrift/baumann.htm).

When most people think of John Calvin they probably think of a monumental theologian, a distinguished preacher, a leader of the reformation in Switzerland, and a major commentator on most of the books of the Bible. Most people may not think of Calvin as a pastor, yet he was above all a pastor, concerned with shepherding those in his flock. He certainly was a great theologian, a deeply appreciated preacher and lecturer, and a prolific writer, but his pastoral care for people permeated all he did. His focus on pastoral ministry is evident in the opening words of the Geneva Catechism which speak of the chief purpose of human life as coming to know God, which knowledge is to enable people to glorify God through their lives.<sup>219</sup>

While Calvin was criticized for his views about pastoral care being relationship based, he was beloved by his congregation and ministered to them with deep love and affection. He answered their questions, listened to their needs, and “he comforted those who grieved and lifted up the brokenhearted.”<sup>220</sup> There is even one story of Calvin’s deep pastoral care for a colleague whose nephew was sick and dying. Calvin went to the bedside of the dying boy, and with no fear of catching whatever the child was dying of, sat with him and paid for all of the costs of his nurse and funeral after he died.<sup>221</sup> This story is one of the few that directly speak of pastoral care being done for children by clergy.

Calvin, while certainly not the norm of his day, marks the beginning of a shift from pastoral care as simply being the *salvation* of sinful souls to a *relationship* between the pastor and the people.

Another pastor who challenged the concept of pastoral care as forgiveness for original sin was Jonathan Mayhew, a noted American clergyman and minister at the Old

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

West Church, Boston, Massachusetts.<sup>222</sup> He was a liberal Congregationalist who believed that by celebrating the good in people, they would do what was correct in the eyes of God. His pastoral care was a celebration of the good in those he ministered to.<sup>223</sup>

Even though some pastors such as Calvin and Mayhew challenged the prevalent pastoral care model, the view of pastor/priest as the authoritarian who could save a sin-sick soul, remained the primary model. “Clerical authority did not preclude genuine sympathy. But there was no question about the authority: The minister undertook a pastoral conversation not as an equal but as an expert with high social standing.”<sup>224</sup>

A shift in pastoral care began to happen in the mid-eighteen hundreds, when the nature of church became more social and relationships between church members and between the pastors and their congregations became an important factor. Ministers were expected to visit homes and in those visits, people began telling pastors intimate details about their lives. Without the formal sin and confession model, many pastors felt overwhelmed and were not sure how to respond.<sup>225</sup>

At this same time, psychoanalysis, pioneered by Sigmund Freud, was starting to become an accepted discipline. Clergy and pastoral theologians saw this as perhaps a way to better understand the spiritual needs and motives of their parishioners.<sup>226</sup> While Freud

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<sup>222</sup> *Jonathan Mayhew*, (Encyclopædia Britannica Online 2007, 9 May 2007); available from <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9051599/Jonathan-Mayhew>.

<sup>223</sup> E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 98.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 126-130.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

rejected prayer and exorcisms as ways to help people,<sup>227</sup> his theory, that by examining childhood experiences and listening to a patient, the therapist might be able to bring healing to their patient, was an intriguing concept. The first serious group of pastors to explore psychotherapy as a tool to help them with pastoral care was a group of Episcopalians at the Emmanuel Church in Boston that formed in nineteen hundred and five.<sup>228</sup> At the same time, some medical doctors began exploring the use of psychotherapy in their work. Most noteworthy were Mortin Prince and James Jackson Putnam.<sup>229</sup> However, the true explosion of psychotherapy did not begin until this group from Emmanuel Baptist Church began, not only using it as part of their pastoral care work, but also having a great deal of success. They even published a journal, *Psychotherapy*, which helped communicate their work and its success to popular culture.<sup>230</sup> In fact, this group was so successful in healing patients emotional needs and had started so many Emmanuel-type centers in a short period of time, the doctors “feared they had committed professional suicide” by allowing ministers to do this work. There was a backlash against ministers doing psychoanalysis, with doctors, especially James Jackson Putnam, leading the outcry.<sup>231</sup>

One physician, Richard C. Cabot, was not convinced that physicians were the proper ones to do this work. He envisioned a system where doctors and ministers would

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<sup>227</sup> Jerry Adler, “Freud in Our Midst,” *Newsweek*, March 27, 2006, 43.

<sup>228</sup> Holifield, *History of Pastoral Care*, 201.

<sup>229</sup> Rosner, *Legacy of Liberal Protestantism*.

<sup>230</sup> Holifield, *History of Pastoral Care*, 202.

<sup>231</sup> Rosner, *Legacy of Liberal Protestantism*.

work together providing care for the bodies and souls of people and thereby be far more effective in their help:

So a patient may be treated by ordinary physical methods alone; but if, without giving up anything that medicine has taught us so far, we work upon the social, moral and spiritual side of each patient's nature, I think we shall see in the future, through the alliance of medicine with the minister, the social worker or the educator, or by such a reform of medical men as will make them include and treat all sides of human suffering, a far greater help for the diseases with which our bodies are burdened.<sup>232</sup>

By the 1920's and 1930's, eighty percent of clergy reported that during their pastoral visits they often had conversations with their parishioners who began to share their personal problems during the visit. Half of the clergy also reported, "that they had a hard time making their pastoral calls count for something; many said they felt lost when asked to intervene in family difficulties."<sup>233</sup>

When the Second World War broke out and chaplains were sent overseas, they realized how little training they had actually received in pastoral care for hurting men. The soldiers complained that the chaplains knew little about "curing their hurt souls" and the chaplains looked to seminaries and asked them for help and training.<sup>234</sup>

Seminaries responded and a rush to provide theological training to pastors began. "The movement to improve pastoral care became a veritable crusade, and the economy was expansive enough to permit some expansive results. In 1939, few theological schools had even bothered to teach counseling courses that would introduce students to the newest psychological theories. By the 1950's, almost all of them did, over 80 percent

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Holifield, *History of Pastoral Care*, 219.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

were offering additional courses in psychology, and at least 80 percent could list at least one psychologist on their faculty.”<sup>235</sup>

At the same time that seminaries were beginning to teach pastoral counseling, Dr. William A. Bryan, Superintendent of the Worcester State Hospital, Worcester, Maryland, hired Anton Boisen to begin a department of pastoral care at the hospital. Boisen and his team began studying through hands-on listening to patients, how pastoral care could best be given.<sup>236</sup>

Meanwhile, Dr. Richard C. Cabot was still focusing his energy on finding ways for clergy and doctors to work together to bring healing to people who needed it most. He worked with Harvard Theological Seminary pleading for *clinical* training for pastors to be given in addition to the theological training they received. He compared providing both based on the training medical students were receiving.<sup>237</sup> Others shared the vision of these men and eventually, like minded people, including Lutherans, Congregationalists, Unitarians and Southern Baptists came together and formed Clinical Pastoral Education.<sup>238</sup>

CPE is international today, with clergy and graduate students in theology coming from a number of countries throughout the world along with the certification of international clergy. CPE has grown in 80 years to include over 3,300 members that make up the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, with some 350 ACPE Accredited CPE Centers, and about 600 ACPE certified faculty members (called CPE Supervisors). There are 118 Theological Schools as members, and 21 Faith Groups and Agencies who are

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>236</sup> Rev. Robert Leas, *A Brief History*(The Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc., 2006, 16 April 2006); available from <http://www.acpe.edu/cpehistory.htm>..

<sup>237</sup> Ibid..

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

partners with ACPE. The model of education that CPE represents is a vital part of theological education today.<sup>239</sup>

According to Rachael Rosner, the development of Clinical Pastoral Education marked an end to the confusion about whether doctors or ministers should do psychotherapy with parishioners. She concludes that the medical doctors continued developing psychotherapy and pastors took a pastoral counseling route.<sup>240</sup> As a result, pastoral theologians began to distinguish pastoral counseling as a special form of pastoral care. By *pastoral care*, they referred to the broader range of pastoral duties such as preaching the word of God, educating the congregation, and providing programs. *Pastoral counseling* was a more specific activity resting on the knowledge of the psychotherapeutic traditions.<sup>241</sup>

Pastoral counseling became a legitimate form of pastoral care for hurting and wounded people. New areas for specialized ministry opened up as a result. Pastors could now specialize in chaplaincy or as private counselors. “By the 1950s, almost 500 full-time chaplains were serving in general hospitals; at least 200 more worked in mental hospitals; and in the Veterans Administration alone there were 241 clergy as chaplains.”<sup>242</sup>

The emergence of psychotherapy, and the wisdom it brought, shifted pastoral care from being simply the act of saving people and healing their sinful souls, to include care for an individual’s personal issues. The challenge became discovering ways to help

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Rosner, *Legacy of Liberal Protestantism*.

<sup>241</sup> Holifield, *History of Pastoral Care*, 273.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

people find wholeness, mental and spiritual wellness, and strength, in the midst of everyday life.

There were many positive changes to the practice of pastoral care and to the training of clergy, because of the development of psychotherapy. But still the notion that an authority figure was the only one who could heal the person needing help remained. In the church, the pastor was the authority figure, and in psychotherapy, it was the therapist. Freud believed that by observing a patient closely, the trained professional could find their problem and heal them. Pastors who adopted a therapeutic approach in pastoral care followed his lead. The pastor was the authority and only they could heal the wounded soul.

In the mid-nineteen fifties, as psychotherapy continued to develop, new branches arose. One of them called “Individual Psychology,” was created by the work of a psychologist, named Carl Rogers.<sup>243</sup> Rogers believed that a client (a word he developed to replace the commonly used word patient) possesses a “strong drive to become mature, socially adjusted, independent, productive, and relies on his own force, not on his own powers for therapeutic change.”<sup>244</sup> Rogers, whose early work grew out of working with schizophrenic children, believed that the role of the therapist was to trust the client’s nature and to have what he called, “unconditional positive regard” for the person.<sup>245</sup> This technique of Roger’s became known as Client-Centered Therapy which can best be described as:

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<sup>243</sup> Adler, *Freud*, 48.

<sup>244</sup> Carl Rogers, *Significant Aspects of Client-Centered Therapy* (1946, 24 February 2006); available from <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Rogers/therapy.htm>.

<sup>245</sup> “Person-Centered Therapy” in *Connecting with Kids* (2003).

The humanist psychologist Carl Rogers developed Client-Centered Therapy (CCT) in the 1940s and 1950s. It is used to help a person achieve personal growth and or come to terms with a specific event or problem they are having. CCT is based on the principal of talking therapy and is a non-directive approach. The therapist encourages the patient to express their feelings and does not suggest how the person might wish to change, but by listening and then mirroring back what the patient reveals to them, helps them to explore and understand their feelings for themselves. The patient is then able to decide what kind of changes they would like to make and can achieve personal growth. Although this technique has been criticized by some for its lack of structure and set method it has proved to be a hugely effective and popular treatment. CCT is predominately used by psychologists and counselors in psychotherapy.<sup>246</sup>

Rogers himself described the process:

Unlike other therapies in which the skills of the therapist are to be exercised upon the client, in this approach the skills of the therapist are focused upon creating a psychological atmosphere in which the client can work. If the counselor can create a relationship permeated by warmth, understanding, safety from any type of attack, no matter how trivial, and basic acceptance of the person as he is, then the client will drop his natural defensiveness and use the situation.<sup>247</sup>

The impact that Rogers made on the psychiatric community is immense, and his influence can also be seen in pastoral counseling. The role of pastor became reshaped as the one who *journey's with* as opposed to the one who *has all the answers*. By trusting what Rogers calls the “strong drive” and what could be referred to theologically as the *innate spirituality* of a person, the therapist, minister or lay person is free to listen and be with, trusting that the person will find healing and wholeness. “The counselor's empathetic, non-judging attitude of ‘positive regard’ would assure people that they were accepted as they were and thus permit them to feel and to articulate the experiences they

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<sup>246</sup> Rogers, Significant Aspects of Client-Centered Therapy .

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

had denied or distorted. The counselor's support of the personality's innate forward movement would result in the growing ability of people to accept themselves and to transcend the burdens imposed by an un-accepting culture."<sup>248</sup> A young pastor summarized his experience using this style of pastoral care:

Instead of demanding less of the counselor's personality in the situation, client-centered counseling in some ways demands more. It demands discipline, not restraint. It calls for the utmost in sensitivity, appreciative awareness, channeled and disciplined. It demands that the counselor put all he has of these precious qualities into the situation, but in a disciplined, refined manner. It is restraint only in the sense that the counselor does not express himself in certain areas that he may use himself in others. Even this is deceptive, however. It is not so much restraint in any area as it is a focusing, sensitizing one's energies and personality in the direction of an appreciative and understanding attitude.<sup>249</sup>

Listening and *being alongside with another* was, because of the great influence of Rogers, now an acceptable way to do pastoral care and counseling. Because the process is seen as journeying with, the ability of lay to provide pastoral care once again became accepted and possible.

It is no coincidence that, at the same time as Rogers' work was being embraced, Spiritual Direction, which had been originated by the monastic orders to help members be mindful of ridding themselves of sin, made its way into the mainstream protestant church. Spiritual Direction focuses on intimacy with God, not on the solving of clinically identified psychological problems. Directees are led to hear the Holy Spirit (the 'real spiritual director') calling them back onto the right path. The director's role is one of

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<sup>248</sup> Holifield, *History of Pastoral Care*, 298.

<sup>249</sup> Rogers, *Significant Aspects of Client-Centered Therapy*.

coming alongside, rather than dictating a program.”<sup>250</sup> This form of pastoral care reinforces Rogers faith in the client’s ability to heal when provided a safe environment to do so. In Spiritual Direction, the directee can be trusted to find their own connection with God and the steps they need to take to find wholeness. The roles of the therapist for Rogers, and the spiritual director are similar. In both instances their role is to *journey with* and listen while the client or directee discovers their path to wholeness and healing.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminded spiritual leaders of the power of listening rather than doing all the talking and directing when he said, “Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because Christians are talking when they should be listening. He who no longer listens to his brother [or sister] will soon no longer be listening to God either . . . One who cannot listen long and patiently will presently be talking beside the point and never really speaks to others, albeit he be not conscious of it.”<sup>251</sup>

The need for psychiatry and spiritual care providers to work together is of vital importance. Today there is growing interest in the ways pastoral care and psychology can work together. Psychologists and psychiatrists are beginning to articulate the need for *soul care* as well as psychological care. Pastors and laity are continuing to define their work and to put into words exactly what pastoral care is in relationship to the soul. Much work and dialogue in and between both disciplines needs to be done.

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<sup>250</sup> Chris Armstrong and Steven Gertz, *Christian History Corner: Got Your 'Spiritual Director' Yet?*, 4-28-2003(Christianity Today International, 5-03-03 2006, 16 April 2006); available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/117/51.0.html>.

<sup>251</sup> Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 72.

While many psychologists express a need for spiritual work, less than one-third who were polled responded that they would “incorporate religious matters as part of their treatment plans.”<sup>252</sup> An extensive search of data bases shows a lack of direct study in the area of psychology and children’s spirituality:

As evidence, Benson, Roehlkepartain, and Rude (2003) searched two broad social science databases, Social Science Abstracts and PsychINFO, to determine the extent to which religion and spirituality were being addressed in published studies between 1990 and July 2002. Even with broad criteria—and no effort to screen for quality or depth—less than 1% of the articles on children and/or adolescents catalogued in these two databases addressed issues of spirituality or spiritual development.<sup>253</sup>

Transpersonal psychology is one form of psychology which offers a psychological approach to the spiritual needs of people. “Transpersonal psychology has contributed significantly to understanding that a person is more than just a physical, emotional and mental entity, and is in fact, a soul.”<sup>254</sup>

One area where the psychiatric community is leading the way toward mental and emotional health for all people is in the area of the specific needs of children when dealing with crisis and pain. They are developing methods of therapy specific to the needs of children.

Play Therapy, which was adapted from the work of Carl Rogers, is one of the best-known and most widely used methods. It was designed by Axline who encouraged

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<sup>252</sup> Clarence Leung, “Practical Applications of Spirituality to the Practice of Psychology,” in *Spirituality and Psychological Health*, ed. Betty Ervin-Cox Richard Cox, and Louis Hoffman (Colorado Springs: Colorado School of Professional Psychology Press, 2005), 264.

<sup>253</sup> Roehlkepartain, *Theological Perspectives*, 127.

<sup>254</sup> Daryl S. Paulson, “Existential Spirituality and the Personality,” in *Spirituality and Psychological Health*, ed. Betty Ervin-Cox Richard Cox, and Louis Hoffman (Colorado Springs: Colorado School for Professional Psychology Press, 2005), 155.

therapists to create safe spaces where children could express their feelings openly and honestly through play. Play therapy provides children a safe space where they are free to express themselves openly using symbols, toys and role-play with puppets and dolls. Through observation, the therapist tries to figure out what the root cause of the problem might be.<sup>255</sup> In addition to this model the psychiatric community is exploring better and newer ways to help children in times of crisis. Sandbox therapy, diet, and the role of medications are all being explored as possible ways to help children in crisis and pain.

However, the increasing study of and development of drugs being used to solve psychological issues has many wondering about the future of psychology. A recent article in *Newsweek* recently commented, “The ability to tinker directly with the brain synapses, through drugs, holds the promise of making psychoanalysis redundant for some conditions.”<sup>256</sup> And Stephen Kiesling, editor-in-chief of *Spirituality & Health* magazine wrote, “We [Americans] have been taught to accept that the root of our unhappiness has been pinpointed: an imbalance of a brain chemical called serotonin in our synapses. We are told we can correct this imbalance with pills called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors—SSRIs—such as Paxil. Balance our serotonin, and we will be back on the path to happiness.”<sup>257</sup>

It is important that dialogue and cooperation between the psychiatric community and the religious communities continue. There is a danger with the increased use of drug therapy that the body-soul connection might be lost to medical treatment alone.

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<sup>255</sup> *Play Therapy UK -- Axline Principles of Play Therapy*, (PTUK Ltd., 2004, 15 March 2006); available from <http://www.playtherapy.org.uk/AboutPlayTherapy/AxlinePrinciples.htm>.

<sup>256</sup> Adler, *Freud*, 45.

<sup>257</sup> Stephen Kiesling, “Whole Body Happiness; Here's How,” *Spirituality & Health*, June 2006, 110.

In the case of Attention Deficit Disorder in children, and because of the high rate of diagnosis, “ranging from 1 percent to 14 percent (Szatmari, Offord, Boyle, 1989), although usually quoted as 3 to 5 percent (American Psychiatric Association, 1994),”<sup>258</sup> it has been observed that more and more medical doctors are prescribing drugs to these children without even consulting a mental health professional. The cause of this trend, according to Doctor Mark L. Wolraich, a leading expert, is that there are “simply not a sufficient number of mental health clinicians to provide the necessary care.”<sup>259</sup> The lack of mental health care professionals who work with children is not only present in cases of children suffering from Attention Deficit Disorder, but it is a problem with other diagnosed issues, as well. The rate of diagnosis of childhood mental illnesses is growing faster than the rate of professionals trained to work with them.<sup>260</sup>

Because of the new reliance on medications to cure mental illness, the lack of professionals trained to work with children and adults and the increasing opinion that the body, brain and soul can be treated separately, there is the very real possibility that the connection between body and soul might be lost.

Thomas Moore recently wrote:

With the onset of modernistic attitudes in society, our medicine took a turn toward the mechanical and chemical. Whereas a spiritual healer might see the sick person as a blend between body, soul and spirit, we separate the body out and treat it as though illness had nothing to do with our emotions and the ways we understand our experiences. We have made great advances in the limited sphere of an isolated body, but we still have much to learn

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<sup>258</sup> M.D. Mark L. Wolraich, *Attention Deficit Disorder: Current Assessment and Treatment Practices* (2006 About.inc: A part of the New York Times. Co, 2006, 17 April 2006); available from <http://add.about.com/library/weekly/aa1119z.htm>.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid .

<sup>260</sup> Pottick, 1.

about the connection between specific emotions and particular illnesses.<sup>261</sup>

During this time of continued transition within the medical and psychological communities, and with the increased need for professionals trained to work with children, it is imperative that the religious community continue its own work developing models and theologies toward an understanding of the ways spirituality, pastoral care and members of the faith community can work together with mental health professionals and the medical communities. Without continued dialogue the possibility exists that the spiritual piece of healing will be lost.

Within religious communities there are few theories, if any, which focus on providing spiritual care to children during crisis. While, throughout history, pastoral care was given informally to children, there were not specific styles or models of pastoral care developed to use with them. The religious community and the psychological community have worked collectively throughout history to help people in times of great crisis.

The area of child psychology is a relatively new field and yet they see the need for developing new and improved ways to help children in crisis. The church must also acknowledge that faith, God, and spiritual care have an important role to play in the care and healing of hurting children. We need to begin developing and designing pastoral care models appropriate to the spiritual needs of hurting children.

The statistics at the beginning of this section of the paper provide evidence that the children in our lives are in crisis. When they find themselves in times of crisis, they can call upon God and their faith to help them cope. The Center for Attitudinal Healing has used prayer and spirituality as a tool for healing for the past twenty years and find it

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<sup>261</sup> Thomas Moore, "Care of the Soul: The Soul of Medicine," *Spirituality & Health*, June 2006, 10.

helps the children immensely. One child, speaking of the care they had received there said, “Most of us found that praying was of great help. It made us not feel alone. It helped us to find faith and hope that we were safe. When we put everything in God’s hands it helped us to know that everything would be okay. It really made the fear go away. It made us happy and peaceful inside.”<sup>262</sup>

Another teen, who was recovering from “self injury”, describes the healing effect of her faith community: “Now I’m trying to use my religion to get help,” she says. “I get a lot of healing by going to the temple because it is probably the one place that I truly feel okay about myself.”<sup>263</sup>

The church needs to take the spiritual needs of children in times of crisis seriously and provide spiritual care designed to meet their specific needs. The Discipline of the United Methodist Church, paragraph 1118(c) states that the General Board of Discipleship which is charged in the development of needed ministries within the church and shall provide “an integrated and coordinated approach in development of resources for all ages within the church, including children and that those resources must provide for “comprehensive Children’s Ministries for and with children.”<sup>264</sup>

Such ministries shall include, but shall not be limited to, the following: Sunday school and Vacation Bible school, weekday ministries for pre-school and elementary ages, fellowship and neighborhood groups, Scouting ministries, and short term studies and activities within and outside the church facilities. Ministries should focus on biblical foundations, prayer and spiritual

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<sup>262</sup> The Center for Attitudinal Healing, *There Is a Rainbow Behind Every Dark Cloud* (Milbrae: Celestial Arts, 1978), 82.

<sup>263</sup> Marilee Strong, *A Bright Red Scream* (New York: Penquin Putnam Inc., 1998), 15.

<sup>264</sup> Harriett Jane Olson, ed., *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1996), 48.

formation . . . and celebration of significant moments in children's lives.

Responsibilities may include such supportive tasks as: assisting congregations to be advocates on behalf of children; assessing the status of ministries with children in the United Methodist Church; **collecting and disseminating pertinent data on issues, models, and programs that inform the leaders in congregations and church structures to strengthen the quality of life of children** [emphasis mine].<sup>265</sup>

One area where the quality of children's lives needs to be strengthened is in the area of pastoral care designed specifically to meet the spiritual needs of children in crisis. The psychiatric community has already started working in this area and the church must, once again, follow their lead. We must, as a community of faith, design pastoral care which will meet their needs while at the same time not straying from our core belief that God is with people in times of crisis and pain. With God's help, children will be better able to cope and heal from whatever crisis they might face.

David Tracey describes the need for spiritually based pastoral care, and also projects what he feels will result if the need is ignored:

The job of religion, in a therapeutic sense, is to keep the second self alive, to "save" our souls from atrophy, repression or loss. Parents and teachers should be supporting this quest, since knowledge of the soul is now a life or death issue. "Loss of soul" can undermine our life in an instant. It can cause us to be disturbed, depressed, and confused. When soul is lost, the sense of meaning and purpose goes out of life, as if the life-blood has drained from its face. If the soul is unattended, and yet everything else is going fine, our lives can shrivel up and disappear like withered fruit on the vine.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>266</sup> David Tracey, "Spiritual Perspectives on Suicidal Impulses in Young Adults," in *Spirituality and Psychological Health*, ed. Betty Ervin-Cox Richard Cox, and Louis Hoffman (Colorado Springs: Colorado School of Professional Psychology, 2005), 110.

Rachel Kessler, in her book, *The Soul of Education*, writes as a forward to her book:

In the United States, we have a series of “prevention wars” on drugs, teen pregnancy, youth suicide, and violence. But the spiritual void—the emptiness, meaningless, and disconnection many students feel—is a root cause long left out of the analysis and cure. Only recently, and particularly after the epidemic of schoolyard massacres of the late 1990s, are policymakers and social scientists beginning to recognize our neglect of the soul of young people in schools and in our national life.<sup>267</sup>

It is important that a pastoral care model for children be under-girded with strong theological and biblical foundations.

### Theologically

Theologically, the need for children to receive pastoral care in times of crisis is supported by the views of Liberation Theology, which began in Latin America and addresses the needs of the powerless to find hope in God who sides with and frees the oppressed.<sup>268</sup> This grass roots theology calls for the church to stand on the side of the oppressed and fight for their liberation especially in third world nations.<sup>269</sup> The Liberation theologians seek not for a “powerful word *about* God,” but for a “powerful word *from* God.” It is God that liberates the oppressed and downcast.<sup>270</sup> In recent years,

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<sup>267</sup> Rachael Kessler, *The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School* (Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000), xi.

<sup>268</sup> Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, *A Concise History of Liberation Theology* (Orbis Books, 16 April 2006); available from <http://www.landreform.org/boff2.htm>.

<sup>269</sup> Encyclopedia.com, *Liberation Theology* (Highbeam Research, Inc., 2006, 10 March 2006); available from <http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/l/liberati.asp>.

<sup>270</sup> Robert T. Osborn, *Jesus and Liberation Theology* (Christian Century Foundation, 1976, 16 April 2006); available from <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1842>.

Liberation theology began to encompass more than those who lived in third world conditions and was applied to “race, culture and gender.”<sup>271</sup>

While children in crisis have not traditionally been named as those who need liberated, they are many times victims. Adults who refuse to listen to them and take their hurts and wounds seriously victimize them. Sometimes, they have been victims of physical and emotional abuse. Some live in poverty. Some come from homes of such great wealth, they suffer from the overindulgence of things and do not have the time and attention they need. They suffer from learning disabilities and psychiatric disorders. Sometimes, even well meaning parents, wrapped up in their own pain about a death or divorce, unintentionally neglect the child’s emotional self and create oppression for the child. Sometimes the child is afraid to upset a parent by expressing their emotions and so they create their own internal oppression.<sup>272</sup> Children are many times powerless to change their environment. The home they live in and the situations they find themselves in are often caused by others and yet because of their age, they have no options but to try and survive. They don’t have options such as *moving out of the house where dysfunction happens daily*, or *quitting the school where they are bullied on a regular basis*. Children are often the helpless victims of pain. In addition to hurts caused by family, school and other outside causes, children, as adults do, often find themselves oppressed by pain, fear and hopelessness caused by the death of a loved one or by the sudden loss of employment by a parent. These instances are unavoidable parts of life and yet bring with them pain and suffering.

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<sup>271</sup> Pablo Richard, *Liberation Theology in the New International Context* (EPICA, 2004 2003, 16 April 2006); available from <http://www.epica.org/Library/millennium/richard2.htm>.

<sup>272</sup> Healing, 31.

The message of liberation theology as applied to children is that God hears their pain and desires that they be freed from the oppression that it causes. As Shelley Campagnola states, “The child is powerless, voiceless, defenseless, claimless, forgotten and forsaken. The child is the one who is brought to Jesus, not one who assumes access. The child is the one pulled out of the gutter by the hand that says he does not belong there even when everyone else says he does.”<sup>273</sup> Liberation theology encourages that the oppressed be lifted out of the dark and into the light of healing and wholeness. Children who find themselves oppressed because of life circumstances or because of grief or despair from death, divorce, or hurt of any kind, need liberated.

Andrew Park Sung has written about the theology of Han. He notes that the church has created theologies for those who have sinned, but not for those who have been sinned against. “Salvation,” he writes, “is for sinners and liberation is for the sinned against.”<sup>274</sup> When the liberation does not happen, the sinned against develop *han*, which is a “rupture of the soul,” which, if left unattended and cared for, festers and grows into deep-seated spiritual distress.<sup>275</sup>

In Liberation theology and for Andrew Sung Park, help comes from two places. First, is in the acknowledgment that pain and suffering are real for a victim and Christ’s suffering on the cross is the symbol representing this pain. “Jesus’ cross does not reveal a God who causes human suffering, but rather a God who suffers alongside us.... The cross

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<sup>273</sup> Shelley Campagnola, “Unless You Become as One of These: Biblical Perspectives on Children’s Spirituality,” in *Children’s Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2004), 87.

<sup>274</sup> Andrew Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 4.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

offers healing to victims who see God's solidarity with them."<sup>276</sup> Frank D. Janzow beautifully describes the role of the cross theologically in the lives of victims, when he writes, "The Christian message brings a unique revelation to all life's victims: God cares deeply for those who suffer unfairly. The one who created us feels our plight and hurt. The cross of Jesus is the proof."<sup>277</sup>

The cross and the suffering of Christ is only the first part of the story of liberation. First Christ suffers and even dies, but then, the resurrection follows. Second, the resurrection is the ultimate symbol that life follows death, light overcomes the darkness and God's will to liberate can overcome oppression in any form. As Joyce Rupp proclaims, "Jesus risen is a proclamation of 'Hello.' He is a witness to us . . . we can be raised from empty places of loss and can experience something new within us. Jesus risen proclaims: 'Stay close to the Father when you suffer from goodbyes. Lean on his love and believe in his power . . . to raise you from your dark and lonely places.'"<sup>278</sup>

Liberation theology asserts that God will liberate victims of sin, oppression and pain. This promise applies to the poor and oppressed of third world nations, but also to children who find themselves oppressed by the pain and trauma of crisis. The message of Liberation theology calls the adults in their lives not to simply talk about liberation, but to take a stand and work toward liberating them from their pain and crisis. A pastoral care model developed to help children in times of crisis would be such a step.

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>277</sup> Frank D. Janzow and James M. Bickel, *Cup of Sorrow - Cup of Joy: Perspectives on Suffering* (Waukesha, Wisconsin: Ascension Lutheran Church, 1415 Dopp Street, Waukesha, Wisconsin 53188, 1992), 15.

<sup>278</sup> Joyce Rupp, *Praying Our Goodbyes* (New York: Ivy Books, 1988), 49.

## Biblically

Biblically, God is powerfully portrayed as one who hears the cries of the downcast and sorrowful and who desires their health and happiness. The first story in the First Testament involving children is such an example. Cain is jealous of his brother Abel and kills him. God appears and says, “What have you done? The voice of your brother is crying out to me from the ground”(Gen 4:10). God hears the cry of a murdered child. Clearly, God hears the cries of hurting children. Cain, then, who has caused his own trouble by killing his brother, is distraught after being punished by God and fearful. “My punishment,” Cain cries out, “is greater than I can bear” (Gen 4:13b). God hears his pain and has mercy on him and forbids anyone to kill him. God even liberates the child who has caused his own oppression.

In the twenty-first chapter of Genesis, Hagar, the servant of Sarah and the mother of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, has been cast out of her home. She and her baby face certain death in the wilderness. An angel appears to the hopeless mother saying, “Fear not; God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him fast with your hand; for I will make him a great nation” (Gen 21:17b-18). God loves a hopeless child and gives him the promise of a great future.

In the story of Abraham being called by God to sacrifice his son, Isaac, God sends an angel to stop him. God releases a bound child. Abraham called the place, “God will provide; as it is said to this day. ‘On the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided’ ”(Gen 21:14). On the mount of God, children shall be released from whatever binds them.

The people of Israel cried to God to save them from the oppression of Pharaoh and God responded by sending Moses to lead them into freedom. “Then Moses stretched

out his hand over the sea; and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground” (Ex 14:21-22a). God freed the people who had cried out to him and released them from oppression and hardship.

As noted in the above section, God tells Jeremiah, a youth, that God will go with him and protect him. “Be not afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord” (Jer 1:8). Clearly, God does not expect this child to journey without God’s help and no matter what hardships Jeremiah faces God promises to *deliver* him.

God, in the First Testament is clearly a God who loves the oppressed and those in pain and frees and heals them. “The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds . . . Great is our Lord, and abundant in power” (Ps 147:3 & 5). Marcia Bunge reminds us that, “there are many biblical passages and examples in the tradition that remind us that children are also orphans, neighbors, and strangers who need to be treated with justice and compassion. There are numerous biblical passages that explicitly command us to help widows and orphans--the most vulnerable in society.”<sup>279</sup> Story after story in the First Testament demonstrates the needs of children to be liberated and also the willingness of God to liberate them from pain, suffering and death.

In the Second Testament, it is Mary, the mother of God, who proclaims God to be the one who has “scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,” and “exalted those of low degree” (Lk 1:52). Andrew Sung Park says that these words spoken by Mary are “in line with the spirit of the Hebrew Bible.” Mary, as one who would greatly

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<sup>279</sup> Bunge, “Historical Perspectives on Children in the Church: Resources for Spiritual Formation and a Theology of Childhood Today,” 50.

influence her son, captured the heart of Christ's ministry in her magnificent foretelling that he would "care for the well-being of the poor, the sick, the widows, and the aliens."<sup>280</sup> In fact, healing ministry was an integral part of the work of Jesus:

Healing of sickness and other forms of human brokenness is a central motif in the New Testament. Nearly one-fifth of the four gospels deal with stories of Jesus' healings. His critics probably felt he spent too much time with the sick, the burdened and the disturbed. But the importance that he attached to this aspect of his ministry is crystal clear. Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick, (Mark 2:17) showed the orientation of his ministry.<sup>281</sup>

Jesus specifically heals children several times in the Second Testament. In the books of Mark and Matthew, the story is told of an epileptic boy being brought to Jesus to be healed. "And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly" (Mt 17:14).

One day, the story is told, that a ruler of the synagogue, Jarius, begged Jesus to heal his daughter who was about to die. Jesus follows him, but they arrive at the house too late and the girl has died. "Taking her by the hand he said to her, 'Talitha cu'mi;' which means, 'Little girl, I say to you arise.' And immediately the girl got up and walked (she was twelve years of age)," (Mk 5:41-42).

In John 4:46-53, Jesus heals the son of a Roman official and in Matthew 15:21-28, he heals the child of a Canaanite woman. Jesus seems to heal all children, including those outside of his own Jewish faith community. Jesus spent much time healing those who needed it and he included many children in his healing ministry.

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<sup>280</sup> Park, *From Hurt to Healing*, 110.

<sup>281</sup> Clinebell, *Pastoral Care*, 61.

When the children are brought for Jesus to bless, the disciples try and turn them away but Jesus welcomes them and blesses them (Mt 19:13-15). Providing pastoral care for children will take time and energy, and many adults will not see the significance of spending time with children, but clearly Jesus did.

Jesus also speaks of a child saying, “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me;”(Mt 18:5). Adults who take the time to welcome and listen to the children in crisis will surely be receiving Christ. As children are healed through a process of pastoral care during their times of crisis, the ministry of Christ toward children will certainly live on.

Christ’s ministry to hurting children and to the oppressed was one expression of God’s desire that healing and hope follow pain and even death. Christ’s own being as the light of the world further proclaims biblically God’s desire that healing and pain be overcome. The writer of John proclaims, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (Jn 1:4).

Jesus’ death on the cross and his resurrection proclaim God’s power to lift up the broken, wounded and oppressed. “From the very first word at the dawn of creation, ‘Let there be light,’ to the infant’s cry in the Bethlehem night when the Savior was born, through the groan of the cross and the shout of resurrection, God speaks the word that lifts us up, gives voice to the cry for help, and comes to rescue, restore, save and heal.”<sup>282</sup>

### Conclusion

Children are in crisis. They have deep spiritual and emotional needs. The church needs to respond to these needs in ways that relate directly to the spiritual needs of

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<sup>282</sup> Janzow and Bickel, *Cup of Sorrow*, 59.

children in pain and crisis. Historically, the church has worked closely with the medical and psychological communities, while at the same time developing spiritually based ministries such as Clinical Pastoral Education, to meet the psychological needs of adults. A similar model could be created to articulate and give shape to the spiritual needs of children.

Theologically, Liberation Theology, reinforced by the theology of Han, provides a basis for the notion that children oppressed by stress, mental illness, economic and social inequity, death, divorce and any hurt a child might experience deserve liberation. Liberation theology calls people of God to stand up for the oppressed and powerless. Unless adults speak out for the spiritual needs of children in crisis, the spiritual care they need will not happen. Children are oppressed not only by the crisis, but by the fact that no model for their spiritual care has been developed for them to use.

Biblically, in the First testament, God hears and responds to children in pain and sorrow with great care and concern. In the Second Testament, Jesus is the model of healing for children. He heals many children, even those who do not share his faith base. His resurrection is the ultimate symbol for the light shattering darkness in whatever form it presents itself, and the promise that life always follows death. This message of hope is one children in crisis could cling to and use for hope, comfort and healing.

### Summary

I began this paper with three main assumptions: That children are blessings, meaning they are people of great worth and value; that children have an innate spirituality, meaning they can and do have the ability to connect with the divine presence

of God; and that children need and would benefit from pastoral care in times of crisis. While there are sound biblical, theological, and historical data to support these assumptions one must acknowledge that none of the three assumptions have been the dominant voices within the Christian church. Even so, the fact that much of the data finds roots in ancient Judaism, the early Christian Fathers, in the Bible, and the fact that they have persisted, indicates that they must be an important part of the historical and theological life of the church.

As this paper was written, and as these quieter, yet equally solid, foundations were discovered, the author was reminded of the story of Abraham being called by God to sacrifice Isaac, found in the book of Genesis:

After these things God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you” (Gen 22:1-2).

So Abraham and all the men and servants with him do as God tells them without questioning. Abraham gets supplies and certainly, those with him know what he is preparing to do. The only one who asks a question is Isaac who wonders where the lamb for the sacrifice is. Abraham has clearly heard what he believes is the voice of God telling him to kill his son. But as he is about to slay Isaac, he again hears God’s voice calling and saying:

But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” He said, “Do not lay a hand on the lad or do anything to him:” . . . And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it as a burnt offering instead of his son. (Gen 22:11-13).

The first voice of God told Abraham to kill his son and the second told him not to.

Working on this paper two distinct voices speaking throughout the history of the Christian church were discovered. One spoke of original sin, of children being incapable of having relationships with God until they reached a certain age, and biblical passages speaking of children as less than full adults. The other, quieter voice, spoke of original blessing, of the capacity of children to have deep meaningful relationships with God, and biblical passages that lift children up as blessings and those who already live in the kingdom. The second voice, like the one in the story of Isaac and Abraham, might be the voice that unbinds children from the oppression of fear, grief, pain and sorrow. And this voice, is calling the author to develop a model of pastoral care for children which will begin with the assumption they are a blessing and people of great worth, and that they can and do have the capacity to connect with God and find hope, healing and comfort in times of crisis and pain.

Another story that illustrates the quieter voice of God being listened to is the story of Elijah, hiding in a cave, which is written about in First Kings:

And behold the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (I Kings 19:11b-13).

The author concedes that the church would benefit from listening to the still small voice of God, who has been and is still, speaking of children as blessings, to be cherished and cared for. In the fast paced life of people today, with pain and crisis overwhelming

adults and parents, and with a theology and history within the church which has taken little time to reflect about and speak out for the rights and needs of children, it is time to hear the still small voice of God. Throughout history, theology and in scripture, if the church's people listen closely enough, God can be heard calling out that, indeed, children are a blessing, that they are capable of having relationships with God, and that they need ways to connect to God and find healing and hope in times of crisis and pain.

Unfortunately, reality for many children is that they are in crisis, bound by fear and pain, and have nowhere to seek the spiritual help they need. More than ever, these hurting children need to connect with God and find the healing they deserve. There is not a model of pastoral care for children in crisis that the author has been able to find.

Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture provides the basic structure for a pastoral care model.

The theological, biblical and historical foundations, which have been lifted up in this paper, provide the foundation for developing a pastoral care model for children using the basic components of Blessing Based Spiritual Nurture.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **METHODOLOGY**

As was established in the third section of the last chapter, children and teens are in crisis. The numbers of children and teens facing the divorce of parents, death, loss of family income, and military deployment of parents are staggering. With the daily stress of schoolwork, making and maintaining friendships, and the hectic pace of life today, the numbers become overwhelming. Children need pastoral care to be offered to them in times of crisis. However, there has not been a pastoral care model designed specifically for use with children. Nor has there been adequate study about how the spiritual life of children can be strengthened and used in times of crisis. David Hay summarizes the lack of study well when he wrote, “I now want to turn my attention to what we already know from the investigations of children’s spirituality. Immediately we run into snags, the most important of which is the shortage of competent research.”<sup>1</sup>

The author has been providing pastoral care to children for the past twenty-five years in informal settings. During the past six years, since founding First Steps Spirituality Center, she has provided structured yet intuitively based one-on-one pastoral care to children in crisis. However, this model had not been studied in an academic way. How children responded during times of pastoral care, how the model itself helps children and the role of the spiritual support provider had never been fully understood.

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<sup>1</sup> David Hay, *The Spirit of the Child* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006), 49.

The hypothesis for this project grew out of the need for the model used at First Steps Spirituality Center to be studied and articulated for use in other settings and by others than the author herself.

### **Hypothesis**

The author proposes that an in-depth study of the method of the pastoral care developed and used at First Steps Spirituality Center will result in a greater understanding of how and why the process helps children and teens during times of crisis. It is also hypothesized that an understanding of the method would enable the process of pastoral care with children to be articulated and taught to others.

### **Research Methods**

After thoroughly studying various research methods and consulting the works of others who had studied the spiritual lives of children such as the works of Rebecca Nye and David Hay,<sup>2</sup> Donald Ratcliff,<sup>3</sup> and various psychological studies focusing on the spirituality of children, the author decided that a qualitative methodology was best.

### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is most simplistically defined as a method that “uses methods of data collection that are not quantitative.”<sup>4</sup> This method was chosen because of the nature of children’s spirituality. The use of questionnaires and interviews of children did not seem appropriate for a number of reasons. First, children often lack the vocabulary to

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Ratcliff, ed., *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> *Qualitative Social Science Research Methodology*, (North Caroline Wesleyan College, 2006, 5/31 2006); available from <http://faculty.ncwc.edu/toconnor/308/3081ect09.hym>.

express deep emotions and pain and this is exaggerated in highly emotional times of crisis. Second, the children coming to First Steps Spirituality Center come from many different religious backgrounds. In fact, some have no formal involvement with religious communities. The lack of common vocabulary when speaking about God might also hinder the truth of what they might say if questioned directly about faith experiences.

Qualitative research uses “unreconstructed logic to get at what is real – the quality, meaning, context, or image of reality of what people actually do, not what they say they do.”<sup>5</sup> This study was developed to realistically capture the experiences of children during pastoral care sessions and as such, this model seemed best suited for the project.

Qualitative research also allowed for the research to be interpreted including feelings and nuances, or “theoretical sensitivity,”<sup>6</sup> along with some hard data and allows a “hermeneutic phenomenology”<sup>7</sup> where the events of experiences are allowed to speak for themselves. Since there are few studies about children in pastoral care settings, it was important for the integrity of the study to set aside pre-conceived conclusions and be as neutral as possible and for the words and experiences of the children to be allowed to *tell their own story*.

It must be acknowledged that since the study was done by the author, who was at the same time the one offering the pastoral care to the children and teens, it would be impossible to be totally neutral. However, an independent observer might not have

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Steve Borgatti, *Introduction to Grounded Theory* (2006, 31 May 2006); available from <http://www.analytictech.com/mb870/introGT.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*, (phenomenologyonline.com, 2005, 8-26 2006); available from <http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/glossary/glossary.html>.

noticed insights and nuances of the children's responses. Even with the bias noted, there is still value in the findings of this ministry project.

### The Data

To get a full understanding of the children's experiences and the role that the spiritual support provider played, it was decided that verbatims and drawings of ten children would be collected and analyzed. The author planned to compare and contrast the studies so that a cross-unit comparison could be made.<sup>8</sup> The result would be both qualitative data and also quantitative charts for later comparison.

A random selection of children was needed to assure unbiased selection. The workweek of September 12, 2006 was set aside and each child and their parents who came to First Steps Spirituality Center for a spiritual support session was invited to participate in the study. The first ten children who were asked agreed to participate. They were assured that their names and any circumstances that might reveal their identity would be changed in the paper to assure that their confidentiality would be maintained. Each child and their parents were asked to sign a permission slip (see figure 1). If the child's parents were divorced both biological parents were asked to sign the permission slip.

All of the pastoral care sessions of each of the ten children were written into detailed verbatims. Copies of any drawings or pictures were placed and labeled with each verbatim. The total number of spiritual support sessions that were provided to the

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<sup>8</sup> *Case Studies*, (North Carolina State University, 2006, 5-31 2006); available from <http://www2.chass.ncsu.edu/garson/pa765/cases/htm>.

children were examined . A total of ten children were studied, with a total number of fifty-one spiritual support sessions recorded (see chart 3).

### *Coding the Data*

Using Margot Ely’s suggestions, the verbatims were color coded to begin to find categories, and then relationships between them were discovered and charted.<sup>9</sup> “Essentially what we are doing,” according to Ely, “is condensing the bulk of our data sets into analyzable units.”<sup>10</sup> The data was condensed into usable tables, graphs and quotes that could be studied. The major problem with qualitative research is not in the amount of data collected (in this case the data was over one-hundred pages). The problem according to Harry F. Wolcott is “winnowing material to a manageable length, communicating only the essence.”<sup>11</sup> The material was winnowed into a usable group of themes, charts, graphs and snippets of the verbatims that supported each theme.

### Triangulation

To address the problem of bias by the author being, at the same time, the spiritual support provider and researcher, the use of triangulation was employed. First, she used the technique of “investigator triangulation” where the data collected is looked at by an “evaluation team that consists of your colleagues within your program area/field of

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<sup>9</sup> Ruth Vinz Margot Ely, Maryann Downing, Margaret Anzul, *On Writing Qualitative Research: Living by Words* (Philadelphia: RoutledgeFalmer, Taylor and Francis Inc., 2001), 162.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Harry F. Wolcott, *Writing up Qualitative Research*, Qualitative Research Methods Series vol. 20 (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1990), 18.

study.”<sup>12</sup> The author invited the context associates required for this Doctor of Ministry program to meet, examine the data and give input. This group included a psychologist, a licensed social worker, a teen who had received care through First Steps Spirituality Center, and a volunteer working with Teen Heartbeat, a program that ministers to teens surviving suicide.

“Theory triangulation” was also used in which people from similar fields of study are brought together and “individuals from different disciplines or positions bring different perspectives.”<sup>13</sup> Dr. Fred Michel, Medical Director of Pikes Peak Mental Health, Colorado Springs, and Charon Nelson, a licensed clinical psychiatric nurse practitioner met three times for input and study. The theories of published psychologists and play therapists were taken into consideration, as well.

### **Conclusion**

After the collection of data and coding was complete, it was charted, observations were written, and the themes and findings defined. These will be shared later in this document. The findings will be presented and conclusions made. Suggestions for further studies will also be offered.

There are many challenges whenever one attempts to take the spiritual life of a child, including their pain, fears, wonder and sacred experiences, and speak of them scientifically. Plus, trying to find universal themes and patterns from such individual

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<sup>12</sup> Lisa A. Guion, *Triangulation: Establishing the Validity of Qualitative Studies* (2002, 2006); available from <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid..

experiences is a daunting task.<sup>14</sup> While doing this research the author made every attempt to present the material in a factual manner while at the same time preserving the spirituality inherent in experiences of the children and teens.

“In the end, the only way an accurate map can be drawn is to listen to what they have to say and, from what we hear, to create an empirical account of childhood spirituality. By trial and error we will be able to identify the omissions, assumptions and mistakes that we have made and, eventually to create a coherent scientific picture.”<sup>15</sup>

This research represents the author’s attempt at drawing an accurate, sensitive map of the experiences of children and teens in the process of spiritual support.

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<sup>14</sup>Adler, *Freud*, 51.

<sup>15</sup> Hay, *Spirit of the Child*, 64.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FIELD EXPERIENCE**

As is stated in the hypothesis, the purpose of this study is to capture in great detail elements of spiritual support sessions so that the effectiveness of it can be understood and components identified which could then be articulated to others. The spiritual support sessions offered by the author at First Steps Spirituality Center were created through hands-on ministry with hurting children and teens. The flow and structure of the sessions were developed intuitively and used for the past six years by the author. The belief is that by studying spiritual support in a formal way, the results will bring greater clarity about how and why spiritual support helps children in crisis and will allow this pastoral care method to be used by others in the future.

In order to study this, ten children and their families were asked to participate by allowing the verbatims of their spiritual support sessions to be examined and used. The children were selected randomly during one specified week where the first ten children calling for care were asked to participate in the study. All ten of the first ten children asked, agreed to participate. Each child and their parents signed a permission slip and were told that the material from their verbatims would be used in ways allowing them to remain anonymous. Several of the children told the author that she could use their actual

names but it was explained that this would not be proper. The children then asked to “make up their new name” which the author allowed. Disney character names were quite popular.

Once the ten children had been selected, their conversations, actions, drawings and prayers were typed into verbatims. All of the sessions conducted with the children were recorded in verbatim style so the number of sessions per child varied according to the number of times they had received spiritual support. This was intentionally done so that long-term and short-term patterns could be studied.

The one hundred plus pages of verbatims were then coded marking themes, prayer types, relationship, responses of the spiritual support provider and child, and the symbols used were due noted. Soon patterns began to emerge and the data was further explored.

Once general patterns had emerged and the author had a good understanding of the material, a group of her context associates convened and gave input and suggested further patterns to explore. Among the suggestions was the idea of looking at the parallels between a psychotherapy session and a spiritual support session. The following pages contain a summary of the data collected, along with an analysis of it, and the final outcome.

### **Spiritual Support**

The verbatims helped clarify the elements present in a spiritual support session. A description of a typical spiritual support session follows. When a teen or child is in crisis, a parent calls and makes an appointment for the child. Sometimes teens will make their

own appointments, but this usually only happens after the initial meeting which their parent has set up.

At the appointed time, children arrive at First Steps Spirituality Center, which is located in downtown Colorado Springs in an old brick building and which has the look and feel of an old western motel. At the top of the stairs is a small wooden door with a large window panel covered by a lacey curtain. The door had originally been solid but to assure that parents could “look in” on sessions and for the protection of the children, the door was replaced by a large window. The lacey curtain was chosen so that the parents could see in but the children still felt an air of privacy.

The child is greeted by the spiritual support provider and the parents and child are invited into the children’s listening room. Some parents choose to stay for the entire session and other’s leave after a few minutes. In subsequent sessions, parents usually wait in the hall while their child works with the spiritual support provider.

The room itself is very cozy. It is designed to be warm, inviting and interesting to a child. There is a small white table in the center with four chairs surrounding it. There is a small window facing a brick wall that adds a sense of privacy to the room. There are bookshelves lining one wall filled with candles, oils, religious symbols such as crosses and a Native American smudge stick, and prayer tools such as crayons, a spiritual sandbox, musical instruments and other objects that are used by the children to help them focus and spend time in prayer and reflection if they so choose to. A large sandbox sits on top of a small refrigerator and a carved Bear, as tall as most of the children, holds a sign that reads, “Welcome.” There are stuffed animals, marbles, jars of rocks and buttons, and pinwheels. On the walls are a picture of Jesus laughing, two angels sitting on a cloud, a

sketch of a child and several nature pictures of humming birds and sunsets. The objects sitting on the shelves are there either to help the children express their feelings or for use as prayer tools. Prayer tools are tangible objects designated for prayer and used by the children to help them focus and increase their time spent in prayer. Prayer tools will be described in further detail later in this document.

On the center of the table is a set of Holy Listening Stones which are a tool developed by the author six years ago. They allow children to begin, through the use of symbolic language to put their feelings into words. There are twenty-five actual stones in each set and each stone has symbol on it. Various symbols are placed on each stone, such as a heart, arrows pointing in different directions, a broken heart, a circle, a swirl symbol, a footprint, a tear and a smile (see illustration 1). Also on the table is a small yellow plate filled with homemade cookies.

As the children enter the room they are invited to sit in any of the chairs and are told a bit about First Steps Spirituality Center by the spiritual support provider. The conversation usually begins with, "This is First Steps and this is a place where kids who hurt for a variety of reasons come to talk and share their feelings. Some kids have experienced a divorce, others have lost a loved one to death, some are having issues at school and some are just plain old sad!" Then they are told that Grandma Genny who cares about them, even though she will never meet them, baked all the cookies. They are invited to have a cookie if they want.

A typical spiritual support session has four parts. The welcome, described above, is followed by Holy Listening which is where the spiritual support provider invites the children to share their feelings. Drawings, the Holy Listening Stones and conversation

help this to happen. Then if the children want to, they are invited to enter a time of prayer. Prayer includes activities such as writing their prayer on a special sheet of paper, lighting a candle or making their prayer in a sandbox. After the prayer the spiritual support provider offers a blessing, which is a time to ask God to be with the children. During the blessing a child is asked to name a symbol they would like for their blessing and to choose the oil or water they would like. The child names a symbol and oil and then the symbol is made on their forehead and both hands while a prayer is spoken on their behalf.

Not all of the children participate in prayer time or want a blessing and the child's wishes are always respected. No child is forced to talk, say a prayer or receive a blessing.

The same pattern is followed during each session and with each child. The session is not varied because of the issue the child has brought or because of the age of the child.

### **Data Collected**

After securing permission for ten children and their families for the verbatims from spiritual support sessions to be studied, over one hundred pages of verbatims were typed and coded. The following is a summary of the data collected. First the ages and religious background of the children were noted. The children, whose names have been changed to protect their anonymity, included Bell, six years old, who rarely attended church with her grandparents; Brett, thirteen years old, who attended a very fundamental, non-denominational church regularly; Emily, nine years old, who attended at United Church of Christ Church on a regular basis; Jasmine, seven years old, who had no church experience; John, eleven years old, who attended the United Church of Christ regularly; Layla, six years old, who had no church experience; Rianna, thirteen years old, who had

no church experience; Ryan, six years old, who attended a non-denominational charismatic church; Seth, four years old, who attended the United Church of Christ; and Tony, three and a half years old, who had no church experience (see chart 4).

In summary, the ten children ranged in ages from three and one half to thirteen. There were five girls and five boys and of the ten, five attended church regularly, four had no church attendance and one had been to church, but not on any regular basis. It should be noted that while the religious backgrounds and ages of the children varied, each child was willing to pray, receive a blessing and all ten expressed belief in God.

The reasons the children sought spiritual support was varied. Four of the children were struggling with their parent's divorce, one child was coping with her parent's drug abuse and adjusting to living with her grandparents, one child had a hard time with change, one child had lost a parent to cancer, another lost her parent to suicide and another had a parent attempt suicide, but survive (see chart 4).

As the verbatims of the children were coded, several categories became apparent. The role of the spiritual support provider, which was not originally, in the authors' opinion, very vital, became a central theme in the study. The relationship established with the children, her theology, her affect, and the responses made to the children during spiritual support sessions were charted. The importance of this role and the characteristics of a spiritual support provider were highly visible and became an important part of the data.

The patterns and structure of each session was also coded and studied. Beyond the four steps used at First Steps Spirituality Center and noted above, there seemed to emerge a pattern which was much more detailed. This was examined and compared to other

disciplines where people are brought to heal such as church and psychologist's offices to see if there was any correlation. Much of the session involved silence and the times of silence verses conversation were graphed.

The verbatims were rich with symbols used during both conversation and prayer times and these were examined and studied. Lists of symbols used and their meanings were compiled. The types of prayers chosen by the children and the role of God evidenced in their words, drawings, and prayers during their healing process were also documented. The symbols that the children chose for their blessings and their explanations about the symbols were also charted and examined. A graph of their overall emotional progression was compiled to discover if any pattern or signs of healing presented themselves.

Once the various charts and graphs were studied as a whole, a structure became apparent which revealed what happens in spiritual support and what role the spiritual support provider plays in its success as a means of pastoral care for children. The results of the coding process and examples of each theme taken from the verbatims and drawings of the children will be presented. Validation for the findings will also be cited from experts within related fields where appropriate.

Throughout the paper the author has chosen to refer to the children using their code names. Names are used because giving a child a number seemed to make them less than human and every attempt has been made to present the children as people with feelings and needs instead of data to be studied. Also, any quotes made by the children were gathered during their spiritual support sessions. To help with anonymity, the dates of sessions have not been included and some details have been modified where needed.

Where modifications were made, the essences of the children's thoughts and reflections have been honestly retained to the best of the author's abilities. The words used by the children are their own words, and as such, the grammar, spelling and words chosen have been preserved even where errors exist to retain the *voice* of the child.

## **Findings**

As the data was being collected the author was most concerned with defining and studying the structure of a spiritual support session and the role of child within it. However, through studying and coding, the role and characteristics of the spiritual support provider became equally important. It became apparent that the work of pastoral care requires relationship between the child seeking help and the one offering care. As a result of this new revelation, the findings of the data will be described in two parts. First, the characteristics of the spiritual support provider will be described followed by the structure of a spiritual support session. Next, the findings of the results of such care in the

### **Characteristics of the Spiritual Support Provider**

Before describing the characteristics and role of the spiritual support provider found through this study, it must be noted that one of the realities of this study is that the author also provided the spiritual support given to the children. So in one way, the author is describing herself and as such, cannot be totally unbiased. Further studies might be done as additional spiritual support providers, using the model presented in this paper, are observed. That being said, a strength of the author being the spiritual support provider is

that she can reveal her spiritual core, thoughts, and the theology from which she works, honestly.

Qualities observed in this study of a spiritual support provider include: a deep faith in God's ability to bring light in the midst of darkness and healing and strength in times of crisis; a belief in the innate spirituality of the children; the ability to create a relationship with the children; the ability to create an emotional atmosphere where the children felt accepted and cared about which included having an accepting and warm attitude toward the children; and good listening skills. Empathy and the ability to express to the children that he or she is connecting with them emotionally were also present. These characteristics were discovered from the verbatims and from self-introspection and journaling on the part of the spiritual support provider as well as consulting literature from a variety of people who work with children in related fields of study.

### **Characteristic One: A Deep Faith in God**

The first characteristic observed was a deep faith in God's ability to bring light into darkness and to bring healing, strength and hope in the midst of crisis. This biblical truth takes what could be approached as simply *secular therapy* into a *spiritual realm*. There are obvious overlaps in methods with secular therapies, as will be described later in the document, but what sets this work apart is the belief on the part of the spiritual support provider that God is the One who will heal, bring comfort and strengthen the children.

The role of the spiritual support provider was as the one who sits with the children, journeys with them in their pain, hears their needs and helps them find their

spiritual strength in times of crisis believing that God is present for guidance and comfort. As the scripture states, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (Matt 18:20). The role of the spiritual support provider is to *gather*, with great faith, with the children and in so doing provide a holy space where Jesus can work within the child.

Tim Kinsella describes this shift, that occurs when one realizes that what others may see as ordinary as actually extra-ordinary because it is holy, as creating a “Liminal Space.”<sup>1</sup> Mr. Rogers, of the Public Television show, *Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood*, reinforces this idea as he described the work he did with children in an article explaining that “... ‘spirituality’ set the show apart from some of the more frenzied children’s programs. It hints at the grace that Mister Rogers says he wants to broadcast throughout the land. He calls the space between him and that one little buckaroo “holy ground.”<sup>2</sup> The spirituality and *holy ground* Mr. Roger’s describes, as being the difference between a secular television for children and a spiritual one, reflects the same dynamic of the spiritual support provider transforming, through a deep belief in God’s presence, counseling into spiritual support.

### **Characteristic Two: A Solid Belief in the Innate Spirituality of Children**

In addition to a strong faith in God, the spiritual support provider was found to have a solid belief in the innate spirituality of the children. This is defined earlier in the paper as a “child’s ability to connect to the divine.” Based on this theology, the role of

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Kinsella, *On Liminality*(1-14 2007); available from <http://www.theinterpretersfriend.com/Terpsnet/16.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Wendy Murray Zoba, *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*, March 6, 2000 (Christianity Today 2000, 13 March 2006); available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2000/003/1.38.html>.

spiritual support provider allowed the children to lead each session while trusting and respecting their pace and choices. The spiritual support provider's role became one of support, listening and journeying with the children. The spiritual support provider was a partner, not a savior. The spiritual path of children was as varied as their height, weight and abilities. The finding that only five percent of spiritual support sessions involve any type of didactic teaching (see chart 4), indicated that the spiritual support provider did not guide the session or have any pre-made curriculum for what should happen during a session. Rather, she opened a sacred space where the child was comfortable enough to explore and find the spiritual strength they needed. Nearly half (45%) of the responses to children were probing questions to help the child articulate their pain and crisis. Nowhere in the verbatims did the spiritual support provider attempt to solve the children's problems for them (see chart 5). Examples of the types of questions taken from the verbatims and asked by the spiritual support provider were, "What happened that made you believe that?" "Are you sad about that?" "How do you feel about that?" "Is it hard for you?" and "What happened that made you so angry?"

These questions were said with great empathy, respect and trust in the children. Believing in the innate spirituality of the children, the spiritual support provider sought understanding and clarity without any implied judgment. This allowed the children the opportunity to express what Rebecca Nye's research into the spirituality of children described as the "individual signature" where a child's unique understanding of their situation and God's role in it can be expressed.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Rebecca Nye, "Christian Perspectives on Children's Spirituality: Social Science Contributions?" in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2004), 93.

Carl Rogers, the pioneer in *client-based psychotherapy*, describes the faith in the clients he saw in his psychotherapy practice. The similarities with a belief in the innate spirituality of the child during spiritual support are striking.

This experience which releases the growth forces within the individual will come about in most cases if the following elements are present.

- (1) If the counselor operates on the principle that the individual is basically responsible for himself, and is willing for the individual to keep that responsibility.
- (2) If the counselor operates on the principle that the client has a strong drive to become mature, socially adjusted, independent, productive, and relies on this force, not on his own powers, for therapeutic change.
- (3) If the counselor creates a warm and permissive atmosphere in which the individual is free to bring out any attitudes and feelings which he may have, no matter how unconventional, absurd, or contradictory these attitudes may be. The client is as free to withhold expression as he is to give expression to his feelings.
- (5) If the therapist uses only those procedures and techniques in the interview which convey his deep understanding of the emotionalized attitudes expressed and his acceptance of them. This understanding is perhaps best conveyed by a sensitive reflection and clarification of the client's attitudes. The counselor's acceptance involves neither approval nor disapproval.
- (6) If the counselor refrains from any expression or action which is contrary to the preceding principles. This means refraining from questioning, probing, blame, interpretation, advice, suggestion, persuasion, reassurance.<sup>4</sup>

Along with the deep belief in the innate spirituality of the children, the session was allowed to unfold as the children guided without the spiritual support provider editing, or stopping the flow. Deep respect in the abilities of the children was observed.

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<sup>4</sup> Carl Rogers, *Significant Aspects of Client-Centered Therapy* (1946, 24 February 2006); available from <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Rogers/therapy.htm>.

This is what Mr. Roger's called the "gritty stuff." He describes how easy it would be for people to avoid painful topics with children but that children need to deal with it, no matter how uncomfortable the adult may feel.<sup>5</sup>

Several times, in the sessions with the children, the spiritual support provider felt tempted to ease the child's pain and point out the *happy things*. Times such as when Bell, a six year old, with huge tears forming in her brown eyes, exclaimed, "Mommy doesn't love me!" and when Bret, a pre-teen described a note he had posted on his school locker that read, "I have been torn in two pieces. Someone help me!" and when Jasmine, a seven year old, knowing that her parent had completed suicide said, "I have this huge hole in my heart—a big empty space and it hurts and I am wondering if it will ever stop hurting!" were challenges when the spiritual support provider was tempted to *fix* the child rather than *trust* their ability to find their own strength and healing.

By allowing the children to talk and share, even in those times when it was uncomfortable, the spiritual support provider expressed to the children her deep faith in the innate spirituality of the children and the respect she had for them. Once again Carl Rogers Client Centered approach summarizes, "In person-centered therapy, the client determines the general direction of the therapy, while the therapist seeks to increase the client's insight and self-understanding through informal clarifying questions."<sup>6</sup>

The spiritual support provider trusted in the innate spirituality of the children as the spiritual support provider asked questions that helped the children discover on their own their spiritual strength without solving the problem for them. She did this regardless

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<sup>5</sup> Zoba, *Be My Neighbor*.

<sup>6</sup> *Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders/ Person-Centered Therapy*, (2000, 25 April); available from <http://health.enotes.com/mental-disorders-encyclopedia/person-centered-therapy/print>.

of how difficult hearing a child's pain might have been. This same concept is described in Play Therapy, one of the only models developed specifically for use with children. In Play Therapy the adult is trained to be a *witness* to the child's work and not to make assumptions or interpret their feelings based on their own bias.<sup>7</sup> The role of witness rather than guide allows the child the freedom to create and discover what *they* need to find rather than what the adult *assumes* they need. The same was observed as the spiritual support provider demonstrated enough faith in the innate spirituality of the children to allow them to lead the session. Rebecca Nye describes the relationship created when an adult allows a child the space to be unique and open as a time of "mutual respect," where the "difficult process entering the gap in understanding takes place."<sup>8</sup>

Often the children would ask, "What do you think I should do?" And the response by the spiritual support provider was always the same, "You are the smart one, not me! You can figure out what to do!" In these times, when a solution could have easily been given, placing the responsibility and expressing faith in their abilities allowed the child to maintain control and demonstrated her belief in their innate spirituality and the trust she had in their abilities.

While it might have been more time efficient and emotionally easier for the spiritual support provider to *rescue* the children and *help* the children, it would not have increased understanding and could possibly take away a children's own power and strength. Believing in the innate spirituality of the children allowed the spiritual support

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<sup>7</sup> Susan Lane, "Holding the Space," *Sand Tray News* Spring (2000), 10.

<sup>8</sup> Nye, *Christian Perspectives*, 84.

provider to have faith that through *being with* and *journeying with* the children, they would find the strength they needed to cope and heal from crisis.

### **Characteristic Three: The Ability to Create an Atmosphere of Care**

A third important characteristic of the spiritual support provider was the ability to create an atmosphere where the children felt accepted and were able to open up freely and express their pain. As mentioned earlier, Rebecca Nye would call this creating an atmosphere of “mutual respect.”<sup>9</sup> This is also described by Carl Rogers:

The third distinctive feature of this type of therapy is the character of the relationship between therapist and client. Unlike other therapies in which the skills of the therapist are to be exercised upon the client, in this approach the skills of the therapist are focused upon creating a psychological atmosphere in which the client can work. If the counselor can create a relationship permeated by warmth, understanding, safety from any type of attack, no matter how trivial, and basic acceptance of the person as he is, then the client will drop his natural defensiveness and use the situation.<sup>10</sup>

Through examination of the verbatims, it became apparent that the spiritual support provider created a relationship, similar to one described by Rogers, with the children through creating a psychological atmosphere of warmth, understanding and safety, first, by creating a space that was *child friendly* physically and then, by being genuine and open in her approach. The physical space, as described earlier, was a small, cozy room filled with things such as marbles, sandboxes, rocks, stuffed animals, religious symbols, comforting pictures and other items children think are pretty. The space itself was designed to communicate to the child that the room was created specifically for

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*.

children and that the spiritual support provider is aware of things they enjoy and find interesting. Children made comments upon entering the room like, “You like rocks? I collect them too!” and “Oh I see, this is a holy room,” and “You must like kids, huh?” Without using words the children, upon entering the room often scanned the walls and smiled or visibly relaxed.

There were no distractions in the room. Each object was placed in the room for a reason. For example, the candles were used for prayers; the stuffed animals were there so that the children could talk to them and share their feelings; and the carved bear was there to hold their prayers until they returned. Beads and string were not for making necklaces for fun but rather to make prayer beads out of. The variety of objects gave the children the freedom to make choices about how they could and wanted to best express themselves. This attempted to honor their personal tastes. There was clay and drawing materials for children who liked to express themselves artistically, magnets, rocks and a magnifying glass for scientifically minded children, and sandboxes, paper and pencils for quieter children who needed to process their thoughts before speaking. There were no games or things to distract them. Each object had the specific purpose of helping the child express him or herself.

With faith in the innate spirituality of the child, these objects were used as tools to help the children express their pain and connect with God. So while the objects were child friendly, comforting and welcoming for children, they also communicated non-verbally the belief in their capability to lead the session, find their own strength and expressed to the child the faith and trust that the spiritual support provider had in their ability to express their pain in their own unique way and find their spiritual strength.

There was no phone or computer in the room so that the child was assured that they had the complete attention and respect of the spiritual support provider. This attempted to say to the child that they were important, deserved to be heard and that what they had to say was sacred and would not be interrupted. The importance of absolute presence with the child is described in an article about the therapists' role in sandbox therapy. Susan Lane, an expert in the area says, "We have a responsibility to respect and fully attend the work at hand. At best, the absence of attention and respect will render the process ineffective. At worst, it can cause emotional harm, communicating a clear message to the child that he or she is not worthy of time, attention or respect."<sup>11</sup>

On the table of the spiritual support children's room are Holy Listening Stones which are designed to capture the attention of children based on their love of symbols. The children often asked about them early in the conversation and commented regularly that they were, "so cool!"

The homemade cookies helped create an atmosphere of care and warmth. The children asked things such as, "Who bakes these cookies?" After being told that they were baked by Grandma Genny because she cares about hurting children they responded with comments like, "Wow—she cares about me and she doesn't even know me?" and "She must really know what children like!" and "Tell her thank you—that is so nice of her." The appreciation of the cookies was made by each child at least once and by the majority of them each time they visited.

Beyond the physical atmosphere, the spiritual support provider, through her welcome and greeting of the children, expressed her care for them. Children are very

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<sup>11</sup> Lane, *Holding the Space*, 10.

perceptive and this care must be genuine and honest in order for the child to respond. Early in the process of client-based therapies it was debated whether or not it could be used with children because the “sensitivity of children” makes them “experts at detecting a lack of sincerity or genuineness.”<sup>12</sup>

Carl Rogers described three interrelated attitudes that a psychologist needed to truly help a patient feel safe and relaxed enough to open up. These included: congruence; unconditional positive regard; and empathy. Congruence refers to the therapists’ openness and genuineness—the willingness to relate to clients without hiding behind a professional facade. Therapists who function in this way have all their feelings available to them in therapy sessions and may share significant emotional reactions with their clients.”<sup>13</sup>

During Spiritual Support sessions these attitudes appeared to be equally important. Congruence, as defined by Rogers, is the *absolute openness* of the spiritual support provider. As the children were greeted, the spiritual support provider smiled and conveyed her care with words such as, “I am so happy to see you!” and “Thank you for coming, it must have been hard to come to a place and talk to someone you have never met before about your hurts,” and “I haven’t seen you in so long! I am so glad you are here.” These phrases were said with complete sincerity and warmth or relationship with the child would not have occurred.

Evidence of a positive relationship with the spiritual support provider being formed was found in each of the children’s verbatims. The initial conversation with each child was examined. When the children first came for spiritual support, six of the ten

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<sup>12</sup> “Person-Centered Therapy,” in *Connecting with Kids* (2003).

<sup>13</sup> Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders/ Person-Centered Therapy.

were angry, shy or didn't want to be there. The other four welcomed the opportunity to talk and share. Trusted adults who told them it would help them referred three of those four children. The referral seemed to help. After the initial meeting, nine of the children were happy when they returned during the second session and continued to be happy to see the spiritual support provider. One child was neutral during the second session but warmed up at session three.

An example is Rianna, a teen whose mother had recently died. As she arrived for her first session she would not make eye contact with the spiritual support provider, let her hair cover her face and refused the offer of a homemade cookie. During her second session she was not hostile but didn't act excited to see the spiritual support provider either but by the end of the session, as she was leaving, she gave the spiritual support provider a spontaneous hug. At the third session she was excited to see the spiritual support provider and trusted her enough to show her the self-cutting she had done on her wrists. In a phone call a week later she said, as she hung up, "Love ya!"

Another example is Seth, a four year old whose sister had come to the center for spiritual support. He waited in the waiting area with his mother. However the spiritual support provider always greeted him by name and offered him a cookie. After a few weeks he requested his *own time* with the spiritual support provider.

Tony, a three year old, was very upset and crying because he did not to talk during his first session but at the second greeting he ran and hugged the spiritual support provider and couldn't wait to get into the children's room.

Layla, six years old, after having only one session with the spiritual support provider exclaimed, “I can tell you anything!” and shared her *deepest secret*, that she still sucked her thumb sometimes, with the spiritual support provider.

In the ten verbatims studied obvious relationship between the spiritual support provider and the children was evidenced. This was also apparent when all ten of the first ten children asked, agreed to allow the author to use their verbatims in this Doctor of Ministry project.

Unconditional positive regard, the second attitude needed by the spiritual support provider, is the absolute belief in the innate spirituality of the child as discussed above. Rogers explains that this is communicated to a client by a “willingness to listen without interrupting, judging or giving advice.”<sup>14</sup> Creating an atmosphere of unconditional positive regard during spiritual support was obvious in the verbatims. In a thorough study of the conversations between the spiritual support provider and children (see chart 5) there was not one example of the children being shamed, corrected or judged. Responses included probing questions (45%), compassion given to the child (21%), and affirmation (27%). No time was spent judging the children, their families or their thoughts and feelings. It was rather, used to help the child be honest, open and find their spiritual strength (see chart 5).

Examples of probing questions have been given above. Compassionate responses included such phrases as, “Oh my, I am sorry that happened to you,” and “I can understand why you are angry about that,” and “That must have been so scary!” Examples of affirming responses include, “No, you can say things like that—if that is

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

how you feel, I want you to say it!” and “you are so brave to share these difficult feelings with me,” and “I am so proud of you!” and “Wow—look how you are figuring this out!” Following these comments, the children tended to open up even more.

An example of this is found in a verbatim of a session with Emily, a nine year old, whose parents had recently divorced. During the session she began to look sad and upset. When asked if she wanted to talk about it, she shook her head “no” and started to cry quietly. After a time of silence, the spiritual support provider gently touched her arm and said, “It must be upsetting because you are starting to cry, which, by the way, is okay. That is what I am here for—for you to be able to get your feelings out.” She wiped her eyes and smiled a confident smile. “Well,” she began, “you know we have to get traded off at restaurants now because when Daddy came to our house he was so mean and yelled at Mommy and my sister and I got so scared! And this time it was the worst thing that ever happened in the whole divorce!” She continued describing the event.

Another example is found in a session with Bret, a pre-teen struggling with his parents divorce. During the first part of the session he was describing the way his parents kept putting him in the middle of their arguments and his stress was clearly visible, but he was hesitant to name it. He was worried that complaining about the pain it was causing him was, in his own words, “bad.” After telling the spiritual support provider he felt like he was being “bad” she responded with compassion. “No—you are letting your feelings out and that is good.” His eyes tear up and he says, “God, it is just so hard to hear this crap all the time!” Because of the compassion, he was able to express his truest feelings about a terrible situation. This dynamic was found in each of the children’s verbatims at least once.

Holy Listening was discovered to be the heart of communicating to the children that they were respected and cared about. Through listening without judging, scolding or leading the conversation the spiritual support provider expressed deep faith in the children's abilities and allowed the emotional space for the children to discover their own truths and their own strengths. Scott Peck describes listening as "total concentration upon another" and "a manifestation of love in the broadest sense."<sup>15</sup> He further describes it as the "discipline of bracketing," where the listener sets aside all their own problems, worries and assumptions to be totally present with another and sense it "involves bracketing, it also involves a temporary total acceptance of the other."<sup>16</sup> This was demonstrated to the children not only by the spiritual support provider listening, but also because the responses made encouraged the children to keep talking and demonstrated to the child that he or she was truly being heard. The probing questions helped the children clearly say what they meant, the compassionate responses helped the children know that they were being taken seriously and the affirmations helped the children feel empowered to keep talking (see chart 5). The questions conveyed a sense to the children that the spiritual support provider was listening and at the same time wanted to hear more about what was being said. She was not simply *listening*, but truly desired to *hear* the child. Comments such as, "Wait a minute, I think I am missing something. Tell me again what happened," and "Thank you for sharing this story with me. I know it must be hard but it helps me understand how you are really feeling," and "This sounds important. Can you explain it to me in another way so I can understand?" are examples of questions that

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<sup>15</sup> M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled and Beyond: Spiritual Growth in an Age of Anxiety* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), p.50.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

conveyed to the children that what they had to say was very important. Sometimes the simple phrases such as “Why?” and “Tell me more about that,” were all that was needed.

While the children were present, every effort was made by the spiritual support provider to give sole attention to them and their needs. This seemed to convey to the children that they were extremely cared for.

Along with the ability to listen to the children, honoring their times of silence was also an important characteristic of Holy Listening. Through the study of times of conversation and silence (see charts 6 and 7), silence was observed 30% of the time the children were in their session. Kay Lindahl, in her book written specifically about learning to listen, reminds readers that “the six letters that spell L-I-S-T-E-N” are the same letters that spell S-I-L-E-N-T.<sup>17</sup> Sitting with the silence rather than responding or questioning the child, allowed the child time and emotional space to formulate their thoughts and go deeper in their sharing.

The Reverend Russell Dicks, who was an early pioneer in the development of chaplaincy and helped create Pastoral Clinical Education, described the importance of listening while offering pastoral care to adults. He noted that times of silence were important during times of listening and described these times of “quietness” as “the period in which the patient discovered his or her own growing edge.”<sup>18</sup> This was discovered to be the case in several verbatims. Many times after a period of silence the children would share something they found difficult to approach either because of the fear of being *bad* for saying it, or because they had difficulty finding the words to express

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<sup>17</sup> Kay Lindahl, *Practicing the Sacred Art of Listening: A Guide to Enrich Your Relationships and Kindle Your Spiritual Life* (Woodstock: SKYLIGHT PATHS Publishing, 2003), 18.

<sup>18</sup> E. Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America: From Salvation to Self-Realization* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 237.

it, or because the pain had built up inside of them to a point where they were almost afraid to name their pain. The time of silence gave them the space to formulate their words and face their fears. When the truth was named and was met with acceptance and not corrected, the child was freed to continue exploring even deeper. Absolute positive regard was established, through allowing times of silence where the children could gather thoughts and think deeply without aid from the spiritual support provider, on a deeper level.

Examples of this are found in the verbatims as the children would, after a period of silence, open up further and share with the spiritual support provider their deeper feelings. John, an eleven year old, drew a picture of his mom and dad who were going through a divorce. As he drew his anger was obvious. When he finished, he was hesitant to share with the spiritual support provider. When, after a time of silence, he shared the picture he was obviously embarrassed that he had drawn such an angry picture of them. The spiritual support provider, without any hint of disapproval simply said, "They look like scarecrows to me." Relief washed over John's face and he said, "They are! They have no brains and they are stupid!" These words needed to be said and yet until this moment he had been hesitant to express anger towards his parents constant arguing in front of him.

Bell, a six year old, seemed very happy when she arrived for her session. She was smiling, hugged the spiritual support provider and asked for a cookie. Then she was silent for a long time and said, "Mommy is in jail. She did a bad thing and she had to go to jail." Without shock or judgment of her mother, the spiritual support provider simply asked probing questions about how Bell was feeling.

Holy listening takes much energy and this was the case with the spiritual support provider who often found herself very tired after meeting with a child. Scott Peck describes the energy required in Holy Listening:

Many people think listening is a passive interaction. It is just the opposite. Listening well is an active exercise of our attention and, by necessity, is hard work. It is because they do not realize this or because they are not willing to do the work that most people do not listen well. When we extend ourselves by attempting to listen and communicate well, we take an extra step or walk an extra mile. We do so in opposition to the inertia of laziness or the resistance of fear. It always requires hard work.<sup>19</sup>

Times of self care, between sessions to walk outside, to eat one of the homemade cookies or make a phone call to a trusted friend, were beneficial to the spiritual support provider. Weekly meetings with a therapist friend and sharing her stress were also needed so that exhaustion and burnout were avoided.

Listening is encouraged in all forms of therapy, however, Holy Listening truly *becomes holy* when it is based on the belief that God is present in the conversation. The spiritual support provider attempted to be aware at all times and that by listening to the child, she was creating a sacred space where God was present. Dietrich Bonhoffer states that when a person no longer listens to another and instead spends the time talking, that the person stops listening to God as well.<sup>20</sup> Cari Jackson describes the sacred aspect present in Holy Listening when she says, “When two people are deeply listening to one another, we sense that not only are they present to each other, but they also are present to

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<sup>19</sup> Peck, *Road Less Traveled*, 50.

<sup>20</sup> Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 72.

something beyond their individual selves--some call it spiritual, holy or sacred.”<sup>21</sup>

Through listening intentionally to the children and by responding with probing questions that express the desire to hear more, the children experienced the sense of absolute positive regard, love, care and concern. The environment enabled the children to be honest and explore their pain and strength.

The results were evidenced in several verbatims. A picture that Bell drew during her spiritual support session was a series of bright green dots all different sizes and scattered over the page. When asked about the dots she explained that each dot represents a person who loved her. A big green dot in the middle of the page represented the spiritual support provider. Proudly she pointed to the circle and said, “And, of course, you love me!”

Another example of the deep connection felt by a child toward the spiritual support provider was found in a verbatim of Bret. He called the spiritual support provider on the phone said, “I wanted to call and tell you what is going on because I know you would be worried sick about me!”

Another example is from a verbatim of Jasmin. The session happened to fall on the first anniversary of her father’s birthday. She had brought a small calculator with her to the session and had been playing with it while she talked. Turning her attention toward the spiritual support provider she said, “Oh, I almost forgot to tell you. I brought this calculator with me. You want to use it? It was my dads. He used it all the time.” Reaching out and gently touching the calculator, the spiritual support provider replied, “This is a very special calculator. Thank you for allowing me to touch it.” “No,” Jasmine

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<sup>21</sup> Cari Jackson, *The Gift to Listen, the Courage to Heal* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 2003), 8.

said very animatedly, “Go ahead, use it! I mean not *everyone* gets to touch it but I want you to.” Then her eyes filled with tears.

Layla, a six year old, grappling with a suicide attempt by her father, verbalized her trust in the spiritual support provider when, after a long period of silence, she asked, “Can I tell you something so scary?” “Yes,” came the response. “Well,” Layla continued, “I have nightmares that Daddy died. I don’t want to tell anyone about these types of things but I can tell you—I can tell you anything! That is for sure! I can’t tell my friends because they don’t totally know how to take it. And Mommy gets too upset when I tell her, but you understand these things and I feel better when I tell you. When I tell my friends, I feel (pause) well, you know (pause) sort of like a weirdo because they look at me like I am one! And my mom is so stressed I don’t want to tell her. And I know he will be okay and not die but the dreams still scare me and I don’t like them.”

After listening quietly the spiritual support provider responded, “Sometimes when we tell our bad dreams, they tend to go away.” Layla smiled and said, “This is what I thought and even though I don’t like to tell people these awful things, I knew I could tell you, that is for sure!”

Beyond the verbal clues given by the children in their verbatims, the relationship of trust and care between the children and spiritual support provider was evidenced in the spontaneous gestures of love and trust the children would show during their sessions. A close examination of hugs given spontaneously to the spiritual support provider (see chart 3) shows that 70% of the children gave the spiritual support provider a hug as they left beginning with the first session. These hugs were not asked for but rather spontaneous gestures of gratitude and appreciation. During, and following, the first

session 30% of the children did not hug the spiritual support provider. However, by the second session 90% of the children gave a hug and only one child did not. By the third session 100% of the children gave a spontaneous hug. With time, care and the building of a relationship of mutual respect, all of the children cared enough about the spiritual support provider to give her a hug as they left.

The phrase, "I love you," was rarely used by the children and never initiated by the spiritual support provider. However, five of the ten children told her that they loved her at least once during the total time they came for spiritual support (see chart 3). Four of the five children said it following their blessing.

Jasmine, a seven year old, dealing with the aftermath of her father's suicide, was very nervous at the beginning of her first spiritual support session. She was clearly distraught and expressed many times how scared she was to talk about her pain. She was able to open up and as she received her blessing the spiritual support provider said, "Jasmine, it was so brave of you to come here and share your feelings. I ask God to bless you and be with you and help you to heal from this pain." With a large smile and look of great appreciation that finally she had been able to express her pain she said, "I love you!" and gave the spiritual support provider a warm hug.

During her second spiritual support session Layla, a six year old, had been able to share some very private spiritual experiences she had been having with God which she described as happening *in her heart*. During her blessing the spiritual support provider emphasized that the spirituality of Layla had been recognized and respected by saying, "God, please bless Layla and may her heart always be filled with your light, love and

holiness. Amen.” A big smile broke out on her face and Layla said, “I love you!” and gave the spiritual support provider a hug.

Rianna, a thirteen year old struggling with her parents’ death, shared during her third spiritual support session that she had been cutting on her arms and was perhaps feeling suicidal. The spiritual support provider felt that she needed to share this with her parent and needed to see a psychiatric specialist. Rianna was afraid to tell her parent and it was agreed that she, with the spiritual support provider, would tell her parent before she left the session. The parent was told, the referral to a psychiatric professional was made. As Rainna began to leave the session, she turned to face the spiritual support provider and said, “Can I still come and see you even if I go see your friend?” The spiritual support provider said, “Of course so. I hope you do!” Rianna burst into tears, hugged her and said, “I love you!”

Hugs were given 86% of the time by the children to the spiritual support provider. The words “I love you” were rarely spoken and yet half of the children were moved at least once during their total sessions to say it. The relationship of care and respect was validated by the warmth and love the children showed toward the spiritual support provider.

Empathy was another important characteristic of a spiritual support provider. This was obvious in the verbatims where, as stated earlier, 21% of the words spoken by the spiritual support provider were compassionate. In addition to compassionate statements, there were also many times when facial expressions and touch conveyed compassion. When children would start to cry, the spiritual support provider would give them a compassionate little squeeze on the hand or wipe their tears with the back of her hand in a

way that said, “I share your pain.” Often the spiritual support provider would be so moved by the honesty and courage of a child that her eyes would tear up or her cheeks grew flushed with compassion. At the end of each session the children most always hugged her and in that hug was conveyed compassion and care.

Max vanManen describes what he labels, “mensenkennis” which is a kind of wisdom where an adult has the capacity to intuitively relate to a child’s emotional self: “In ordinary life one generally acknowledges that some people possess more of this sensitive insight into human nature than others. Mensenkennis is a kind of wisdom about how people are and how they tend to act or react in specific situations—the significance of people's frailties, strengths, difficulties, inclinations, and life circumstances. It is a practical type of knowledge of how people's actions relate to motives, intentions, emotions, feelings and moods.”<sup>22</sup> The spiritual support provider expressed empathy to children, where the children were not simply given sympathy, which might possibly lead to them feeling helpless, but rather, in a way that the children felt understood and that the adult knew how they were feeling. Empathy became supportive and empowering.

An example of this empathy used with mensenkennis was found in Bret’s verbatim. Trying to explain how the stress from his parent’s divorce was interfering with his concentration at school he said, “I just can’t think. My head is all messed up! I am lazy! I look at the test and I am like, ‘What is this?’ and ‘I just don’t care. I’m lazy.’” Empathizing with Bret, the spiritual support provider responded, “You keep saying you are lazy. This doesn’t sound to me like a kid who is being lazy to me.” Bret, clearly relieved said, “Really?” “No,” she continued, “it sounds to me like you are really stressed

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<sup>22</sup> Max vanManen, *Pedagogy, Virtue, and Narrative Identity in Teaching* (08/26/06 1994, 09/18/06 2006); available from <http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/max/articles/virtue.html>.

from this divorce and are having a hard time concentrating.” Bret responded obviously uplifted, “Yeah, that is how I feel but my mom and counselor keep telling me I am just being lazy.”

By empathizing and using *mensenkennis* the spiritual support provider was able to strengthen her bond with Bret by demonstrating that she understood him—*really* understood him.

### **Summary**

For the children to be able to do the spiritual work required in spiritual support, a relationship of trust, care and honesty with the spiritual support provider needed to be established. The characteristics described above: possessing a deep faith in God’s ability to bring light in the midst of darkness and healing and strength in times of crisis; a belief in the innate spirituality of the children; and the ability to create an emotional atmosphere where the children felt accepted and cared about, including, having an accepting and warm attitude toward the children, good listening skills, empathy and the ability to express to the children that he or she is connecting with them emotionally, appear to be necessary components of spiritual support. While the children guided much of the work done in the session, the work is not done in isolation. Relationship with the spiritual support provider was primary. Children, when facing crisis are filled with doubts, fear and uncertainty about their abilities to survive. Through creating a safe environment physically and emotionally, the spiritual support provider created a space where the children felt safe and empowered to explore.

The characteristics described here are a starting place for understanding, however, as was mentioned earlier, an independent study of other spiritual support providers, besides the author, would help further define the characteristics needed for a spiritual support provider to be effective.

### **The Components of a Spiritual Support Session**

As described above, the process of spiritual support at First Steps Spirituality Center had been described as a general process of the Welcome, Holy Listening, Prayer and Blessing. However, through close study of the data the structure of a spiritual support session, the mechanics of a session, became much more defined and the specific structure began to emerge. In this section of the document, an overview of the newly defined and understood process of spiritual support will be described and then, each part will further be described in detail.

#### **Overall Structure**

Each of the children involved in this study came to the center with different sets of circumstances, were of various ages and had their own unique personalities. At the same time, while the basic structure of Welcome, Holy Listening, Prayer and Blessing were used with each child; each session was shaped by the individual needs and personalities of the children. It was surprising to discover that, even with these individual differences, patterns arose which, after careful coding, were discovered to create a much more in depth structure and patterns that occurred in each session. The discovered

structure, while similar to the original structure, brings the underlying mechanics to the surface for better understanding.

The detailed structure was discovered to consist of three stages: the Opening Phase, which included the arrival and initial conversation; the Discovering Phase that began with the introduction of symbols that lead to a discovering conversation and eventually to the core statement; and the Affirmation Phase where the children engaged in prayer and received a blessing (see figure 2).

This structure was found to follow what Erving Goffman describes as the “framing of an experience.”<sup>23</sup> In his writings he describes how a theatrical performance that transforms people is designed. It begins very emotionally light and moves to the climax and then the resolution. The movement creates an inverted arc, beginning light, getting heavy and ending happy. The theatrical production begins light and as people become more and comfortable the play can deepen because people are willing to go to the deeper and darker places leading to the climax. Following the climax, people need time to adjust and settle their emotions so that they are ready to leave this experience and return to the *real world* again. To have people leave the theater directly after the climax would be psychologically unnerving and their experience would be viewed as painful and traumatic instead of entertaining.

This same structure can be applied to a worship experience, though Goffman does not write about worship. Following the basic pattern of worship in the United Methodist

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<sup>23</sup> Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

Book of Worship,<sup>24</sup> the framing pattern described by Goffman is followed. There is the “Entrance,” which is defined as a time of “greetings, music and song, prayer and praise.”<sup>25</sup> This is a *light* time of gathering and welcome. This is followed by the time of “Proclamation and Response,” where the worship service moves into a deeper, meaningful time with God. This section culminates in the sermon, where illumination of God’s word takes place.<sup>26</sup> Following this is a time of Thanksgiving and Communion, which is designed to be an even deeper spiritual time spent with God.<sup>27</sup> And as the people leave they receive the “Sending Forth” which is described as “dismissal, blessing and going forth.”<sup>28</sup>

In the worship pattern is the same *inverted arc* describing the theatrical experience of Goffman. The service begins light and moves deeper and deeper toward God and then with the dismissal and blessing the people are brought back up emotionally so that they can go forth into the world. The goal of worship is that through the structure and experience found within the structure, the people might be strengthened and transformed by the presence of God. And hopefully, when worship is done well, the people look back at the experience as a positive one they desire to repeat, rather than something causing them trauma of any kind.

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Anderson Langford III, ed., *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 15.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-31.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.

According to Doctor Fredrick Michel, a nationally known children's psychiatrist and the Medical Director of Pikes Peak Mental Health Association in Colorado Springs, the psychiatric community follows a similar pattern.<sup>29</sup> A person needing psychiatric care begins their sessions with their "Initial Presentation," when the mood and atmosphere is light. This is followed by a time of deepening conversation where, using a particular model of psychiatric care, the client gains deepening insight into their issues. The therapist then reiterates the insight and allows the client to begin to move out of the depth of their experience. The session ends with an affirmation of the client. It is important, according to Doctor Michel for this structure to be followed because without an initial time of trust building the client would not feel safe to go into the deep places of their psyche. Then, without a time of reiteration and affirmation, the client would be too emotionally shaken to go back out into the world. This could leave lasting psychological scars and do even further damage.

The structure of the spiritual sessions follow this *inverted arc* pattern paralleling the Goffman structure of a theatrical experience, the basic pattern of worship and the structure found in psychological care sessions (see figure 3). In all three of the structures the structure itself enables people to enter a *liminal space* which is defined as a period of transition, where a person is able to move from one state of being and into a space where they can explore, be free to be authentic and enter into a sacred space.<sup>30</sup> After entering the depths of the liminal space they are then brought back out of it and readied to go out again into the world and their everyday lives while being transformed by the experience. The structures found in Goffmans' theory, presented in the worship structure and in

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<sup>29</sup> Dr. Fredrick Michel, interview by author, Colorado Springs, CO, 1 January 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Kinsella, *On Liminality*.

psychological sessions, also appeared to be present in the spiritual support structure (see figure 4). It also appeared that it was through the use of symbolic language that children were able to move into the deep places of liminal space and finally name their pain. It was then prayer and blessing that readied them to leave, transformed. The structure will now be described in further detail using examples from the verbatims and drawings of the children.

### Stages of Spiritual Support

As described earlier, the stages of spiritual support that emerged from this study include the Opening Phase, Discovering Phase and Affirmation Phase. These phases began in a non-threatening manner and helped lead the children into deeper conversation where they were able to articulate their Core Statement and then move into the Affirmation Phase. These stages will be described in this section of this document in great detail using examples from the verbatims of the children, their use of symbols and any diagrams or drawings they created.

#### **Opening Phase**

The Opening Phase of a spiritual support session contains two elements, the Arrival and Initial Conversation. During this phase the children arrived, were greeted warmly, offered the homemade cookies and were engaged in light conversation happened. The importance of this phase seemed to be that the atmosphere of care, unconditional positive regard, warmth and relationship was established.

#### *Arrival*

While the arrival phase of spiritual support may simply be considered a *time when the children arrived*, it was discovered to be a highly important time. As discussed in the

earlier section of the characteristics of a spiritual support provider, before words with the children were even spoken, the room itself, designed to be appealing and comforting to children, began to establish an atmosphere which communicated to the children that this was a place designed *just for children* where whoever created it was attuned to their needs and understood their likes and dislikes. The homemade cookies sitting in the middle of the table created an atmosphere of relaxation, warmth and comfortableness. The Holy Listening Stones, also set in the middle of the table along with the sandbox, objects placed strategically on shelves and the pictures hanging on the wall let the children know that this was place where they could explore and wonder, and do so in ways appropriate and comfortable for them. One child entered the room and said, “Wow—this is more like a living room, or my grandma’s house than an office. It isn’t what I expected it to be.” The room itself conveyed to the children that were being invited into a safe, warm, child-friendly space.

During the first session with each child, the initial conversation began with a warm welcome, explanation that the cookies had been baked by Grandma Genny who cares for hurting children even though she has never met them, and a brief description of First Steps Spirituality Center. A typical explanation was, “I am glad you are here, but I know it might be hard and you might be wondering what we do here. Well, lots of children come here and each of them has a hurt of some kind. They might have lost a loved because of death, they might have an illness of some kind, they might be having trouble at school, or their parents might be going through a divorce. And this is a place where they come to let their feelings out.”

Note that there was no discussion about it being a spiritual place and no talk about God in the initial statement. However, often the structure was explained and the words prayer and blessing were used, but no didactic explanations were given. The structure was described as, “What we will do, while you are in here, is (smile) eat cookies of course! Then you will have a time to share your feelings. I have ways to help you do that so don’t be nervous about that part. Then, if you want to, you can spend time in prayer and I can give you a blessing as you leave, but only if you want to. I will show you how the prayer and blessing work later.”

If the children appeared to be angry that they had been brought for spiritual support or seemed uncomfortable in any way, the spiritual support provider often acknowledged it. This was another way that she conveyed to the child that she was attuned to their feelings and that this would be a safe place to explore their feelings. Of the ten children, four were happy to be there and six were very shy, angry, and visibly uncomfortable when they arrived for the first session.

The children who were most happy had experienced a previous relationship with the spiritual support provider such as attending the church she was a pastor at. When Ryan, a six year old, arrived for his session, the spiritual support provider recognized him from a workshop she had led. His eyes lit up when he saw her and she knew her recognized her, as well. “Hi! I am glad to see you,” she said with a big smile. “Do you remember me?” “Of course I do. Mommy told me I could tell you about my new house,” he replied. Because of the prior relationship, even though it had been a brief one, Ryan was ready to jump right in and start talking.

As mentioned earlier, Seth, a four year old, after watching his sister have her own sessions with the spiritual support provider, had asked to have his own session. He proudly, and without any hesitation, walked in the children's room, sat down, took a cookie from the plate and smiled! "So," said the spiritual support provider who smiled back at him, "you wanted your *own* session with me?" Clearly proud of himself and ready to begin he said loud and clear, "Yep!"

Layla, a six year old, had no hesitation as she entered the room. Looking around and clearly pleased with what she saw, she said, "Oh, so this is a holy room and you must be a holy woman." Surprised at the greeting, the spiritual support provider replied, "Well, yes, this is a holy room and I suppose I am a holy woman." Layla excitedly replied, "Oh you are—I know! I can tell!" The spiritual support provider smiled with wonder at this child, and Layla smiled back. Following a moment of shared silence the spiritual support provider asked, "Do you know why you have come here?" Layla replied, "Yes, Mommy told me that I could talk to you and I could tell all the things on my heart and you would listen to me." Layla's mother is a therapist and perhaps that helped her arrive in such a comfortable mood. However, her delight with the room and her deep spiritual insight helped bring an immediate atmosphere of trust between her and the spiritual support provider.

Bell, a six year old was greeted with, "Hello Bell, how are you?" to which she responded with a yell, "I don't know! I don't want to talk to you!" She was then asked if she would feel more comfortable if her grandmother, who had brought her to the session, came into the room with her. "No!" she yelled, "I want to go home!" After peeking into the room and seeing the cookies waiting on the table for her she decided to come in.

Her trusted school counselor referred Jasmine, a seven year old, to First Steps Spirituality Center and even though she had wanted to come, she was visibly uncomfortable when she sat down across the table from the spiritual support provider. After a brief explanation about the process, the spiritual support provider said, "This is a place where you can talk about whatever has hurt you." Jasmine replied, "What if I don't want to?" "You don't have to," the spiritual support provider assured her. She thought for a few moments and her silence was honored. Then she said, "Well, Mrs. Cook [her counselor] said you could help me. Did it help other kids?" "Yes," was the reply. Smiling and sitting up straight in her chair, Jasmine said, "Okay, I will talk." The spiritual support provider smiled and said, "First though, do you want a cookie?" Jasmine smiled a huge smile, took a cookie, bit it, and began sharing her story.

John, an eleven year old, politely entered the room and gave a slight nod. The spiritual support provider began, "I am glad you came to talk to me. I hope it will help you feel better. Did your mom and dad make you come or did you want to?" He looked down and his cheeks began to turn red. He sat in silence for a few minutes and then looked up sheepishly and said, "Honestly?" The spiritual support provider smiled, shook her head and said, "Yes, you can tell me. It won't hurt my feelings." "Okay," he said honestly, "they made me come." "I thought so, you don't act *thrilled* to be here," the spiritual support said in a non-judgmental, gently playful tone of voice, "Of course, no one ever comes here and is like, 'Oh yeah, I want to talk about my feelings and about my parents divorce!'" John smiled and the spiritual support provider returned his smile and the conversation began.

Often by acknowledging the uncomfortable feelings of the children, an unspoken understanding between them built rapport and trust. After the first session nine of the children were happy during the initial conversation of phase one. One teen still seemed tense at the second session but by the end of it, and during further sessions, she was happy and more relaxed.

No explanation about the process was given at any of the sessions other than the first one. The welcome in later sessions was quite brief and consisted of a greeting, sometimes a hug and often the children asked, “Do you have cookies?” The reply was always, “Of course!”

While the length of the greeting was short, it conveyed to the children that they were welcome, that the room had been set for them, that they were special and cared about and that this would be a place where they could safely explore their feelings, and that the spiritual support provider was very glad they had come!

It must be noted that the attitude of the children, during the arrival and at those sessions following the first session, was often happy and upbeat. Regardless of the cause of the pain the child might have been working on later in the session, they initially appeared to be carefree and happy. Their mood did not seem to matter because during the arrival and greeting the task that was accomplished was welcoming the child and creating a safe space.

Charon Nelson, a psychiatric nurse practitioner, working in private practice in Colorado Springs, describes a similar phenomenon in her therapy with children. “As the children arrive, they always have an ‘initial presentation,’ which is the way they *think* they should look and act. We all do it. We feel crummy and yet wear a smile and act like

we are just fine! That is what the children come to therapy like, they have been acting like everything is okay for a long time, sometimes years, and so they come to therapy looking like everything is fine. Hopefully I can, in our session, help them *drop the mask* and be real.”<sup>31</sup>

The carefree happy attitude of the children during the arrival phase is normal and was seen in each of the children.

### *Initial Conversation*

Following the arrival and greeting, time was spent in conversation helping the children relax and to provide time for a relationship to be built. At first observation, this time might appear to be wasted, but it is an important time of building rapport between the children and spiritual support provider and serves as a transition time where the children, who have arrived with their *mask on*, relax enough to begin to take the mask off. The initial conversation during the first session was filled with questions about their likes and dislikes, the grade they were in, their hobbies and their family structure, such as the number of siblings and if they had any pets. During following sessions the children usually had something to tell the spiritual support provider that had happened to them that day. For example, Rianna, thirteen years old, often shared stories about her latest boyfriend or a story about something she had done over the weekend. Tony, four years old, would often tell about something fun he had played or watched on television. Once he shared about a hot air balloon festival his dad had taken him to.

As the sessions continued the time of initial conversation became shorter and shorter. This seemed to indicate that the children did not need it as much, and with time

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<sup>31</sup> Charon Nelson, Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner, interview by author, Adams Mountain Café, 28 December 2006.

became more and more comfortable moving into deeper conversation without this *warm-up* time.

During the initial conversation the children were given emotional space to relax, settle down and began taking off their mask.

### *Summary*

The Opening Phase of Spiritual Support was composed of the arrival and greeting of the children and the initial conversation with them. While often brief in length, this phase communicated, through verbal and non-verbal means, that the children were welcome, that the space was physically and emotionally safe for them to share their feelings and began establishing a relationship of care, absolute positive regard, and rapport between the children and spiritual support provider.

### **Discovering Phase**

The second phase of a spiritual support session that emerged from the research was the Discovering Phase. During this phase the children were able to move from the initial presentation into a safe place where their feelings were accepted without judgment and where they could begin to acknowledge, articulate and finally name their pain. This phase took the most time and often comprised about 75% of the time of the entire session. As the children talked they seemed to move from one feeling to the next and there seemed to be little identifiable connection between thoughts. Eventually, through this process of naming their pain and their pain being accepted without judgment, they

were able to articulate a *core statement*, which was a summary and very succinct statement of their deepest emotions.

The introduction of a symbolic way to express their pain allowed the children to move into this deeper phase. In her research, Rebecca Nye discovered that a central way an adult can help a child is to “help the children ‘become aware of their awareness’ and to reflect on this experience in the light of the language and culture within which it emerges.”<sup>32</sup> The role of spiritual support provider in the Discovering Phase seemed to be in helping children discover means by which they could articulate their feelings. Then, through the process of Holy Listening, allowing the children to move at their own pace, and when absolute total regard and care was given by the spiritual; support provider, as was described in great detail as important characteristics, the children were able to recognize and name their pain.

Through this period of discovering the children were allowed to find the truth of their reality. Often this place of truth was a difficult and uncomfortable place for children to go. The children in the study were often frightened to name their pain for fear that it was a “naughty” thing to be angry and expressed that they “did not want to hurt anyone’s feelings.” As a result, they had chosen to hold in those feelings rather than share them, thus those pent up feelings created harm to themselves emotionally, and sometimes physically.

Robert Buckingham, a medical doctor who has studied and written extensively about grief and children makes the following statement about the importance of allowing children opportunities to name their pain: “Children who are not permitted to show feelings of grief over the loss of something or someone important to them have no choice

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<sup>32</sup> David Hay, *The Spirit of the Child* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2006), 143.

other than to fall back on more primitive measures of defense, most often the denial of the pain of loss. Children have a right to grieve without apology or shame.”<sup>33</sup>

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, a psychiatrist and one of the first people to study grief in children, concurs, saying, “Children who grow up without the opportunity of expressing their natural anger end up repressing resentment and rage, wishing to retaliate, wishing for revenge, and ultimately, genuine hating. They may appear very meek and obedient on the surface, but like a temporarily dormant volcano, this anger will erupt sooner or later. These are the children who keep up a good ‘front’ and ‘out of the blue’ become very vicious. In their early adulthood, such people may kill harmless, innocent people ‘for no reason,’ thereby beginning to express their rage and revenge after having it bottled up for years, sometimes decades.”<sup>34</sup>

William Lee, an expert in dealing with school crises, such as school shootings, has noticed a rise in what he calls, “imploded children,” which he defines as, “those who have victimized or who have experienced violent loss,” and who had held their feelings inside until it developed into “hidden rage and explosive anger.”<sup>35</sup> He writes that healing “begins with the sharing of experiences, speaking about the unspeakable, empowering the self to name those events, making meaning out of the meaningless.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Robert W. Buckingham, *A Special Kind of Love: Care of the Dying Child* (New York: Continuum, 1983), 98.

<sup>34</sup> Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Children and Death: How Children and Their Parents Can and Do Cope with Death* (New York: Touchstone, 1983), 73.

<sup>35</sup> William Lee, “Preparing the School Community to Cope with Violence,” in *What Will We Do? Preparing a School Community to Cope with Crises*, ed. Robert G. Stevenson, Death, Value and Meaning Series (Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 134.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

Andrew Park, a theologian writing about Han writes, “By bottling up our anger inside, we suffer from anxiety, depression, despair, and various kinds of psychosomatic illnesses.”<sup>37</sup> And Carl Jung called it “the root of evil” when a person refused to acknowledge the parts of themselves that they wished were not there, “the part of our mind that we wish were not there,” which he referred to as, “refusing to meet the Shadow.”<sup>38</sup>

The primary result of the Discovering Phase was that it enabled the children to explore their pain in a safe, accepting, warm environment while in relationship with a caring, trusted adult and to name their pain in a core statement, thereby releasing the pain. Again, Buckingham stresses that a primary need of grieving children is the help and relationship with a “supportive adult.”<sup>39</sup> With the help of a supportive spiritual support provider, during this phase, the child was allowed to express their pain.

The shift between the Opening Phase, where the talk was *light* and focused on random topics usually about things unrelated to the children’s pain, was created by the introduction of symbolic tools. These tools included inviting the child to draw or color their feelings, the use of Holy Listening Stones, a pop can analogy used by the spiritual support provider and symbols the children brought with them such as poems, their own drawings from home, or objects they carried into the session with them.

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<sup>37</sup> Andrew Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 53.

<sup>38</sup> Peck, *Road Less Traveled*, 74.

<sup>39</sup> Buckingham, *Special Kind of Love*, 98.

## The Use of Symbolic Language

The use of symbols in helping children create their realities and name their pain has been acknowledged by several professionals. In 1965, in a pioneering study of the spiritual lives of children, Marcia Bundl used drawing as a means of helping the children in her study express their feelings about God acknowledging that drawings had “advantages over speech as a means of expression, because of the children’s verbal and conceptual ability.”<sup>40</sup>

Richard Cox, a psychologist, explains that the use of symbols to express oneself allows a person to “bridge the gap from the internal to the external,” and explains that symbols help people explore what they “feel inside” and bring it to the “outside.”<sup>41</sup> He further adds that adults who work with children need to have an understanding of their symbolic way of communicating which he labels, “developing a symbolic awareness” if children’s feelings are to be heard and understood.<sup>42</sup>

Elisabeth Kubler Ross, in her work with children says that children often express their deepest emotions using “symbolic language” and that adults who want to help them need to be aware of and understand this.<sup>43</sup>

In her book about treatments for children who self-mutilate, Marilee Strong, citing the work done by researcher Levenkron, writes that teens who cut themselves will

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<sup>40</sup> Hay, *Spirit of the Child*, 56.

<sup>41</sup> Richard H. Cox, “The Developmental Stages of Spirituality: A Proposed Paradigm,” in *Spirituality and Psychological Health*, ed. Betty Ervin-Cox Richard Cox, and Louis Hoffman (Colorado Springs: Colorado School of Professional Psychology Press, 2005), 38.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>43</sup> Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, 179.

continue doing so until they find other outlets for their feelings such as drawing and journaling. This is important because, once they “create a vocabulary of emotions” and can “say it,” they “can handle it.”<sup>44</sup>

These professional observations correlate with the findings of this study. Children were often not able to *put their feelings into words* or to *name their pain*, in nearly all of the verbatims, until given a symbolic tool to use. Once the tool was introduced the children moved from the Opening Phase to the Discovering Phase.

During the first spiritual support session the spiritual support provider, to help the child move into the Discovering Phase, introduced one of the symbolic tools. Younger children were often asked to draw while older children were introduced to the pop can analogy or the Holy Listening Stones. After the first session the children themselves often requested to use symbolic tool to *show their feelings*. In fact, eight of the ten children requested to *show* their feelings rather than talk about them during their series of sessions. Three of the children asked to show their feelings 100% of the time while the other four children asked to use a tool 63% of the time. Of the two children who did not ask to use tools, both were teens and extremely verbal and dramatic. One of them did not ask to use a symbolic tool and the other would bring symbols with her such as a drawing of a tattoo she wanted to get, or a poem she had written and so, while she did not ask to use a tool, she did initiate their use by bringing her own to the sessions. If she was included, then of the total number of children requesting to express themselves using symbolic tools, 90% of the children found it easier to share their feelings using symbolic language rather than simply through discussion.

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<sup>44</sup> Marilee Strong, *A Bright Red Scream* (New York: Penquin Putnam Inc., 1998), 172.

There are hundreds of tools available for children to use at First Steps Spirituality Center, however, the tools used by the children in this study were drawings, use of Holy Listening Stones, a pop can analogy introduced by the spiritual support provider and then referred back to by the children, and various symbols the children brought with them. Holy Listening Stones were used as the primary tool in 43% of the sessions, drawings were used as the primary tool 40% of the time, the pop can illustration was used or referred to by the children 9% of the time and the children brought their own tools from home 8% of the time. Examples of the use of these tools will be described below.

### *Drawings*

All ten children used drawings as a way to express themselves. Sometimes they drew pictures of their families. At her first session, Bell drew her family. She had recently gone to live with her grandparents because of her parent's drug use. Her picture has her parent on one side of her and her grandparents on the other. Her arms are stretched out and it looks like she is about to be pulled apart. "This is what I feel like," she said, "like I want my mommy but also I want my grampy and grammy." Then she drew a small baby under the people and said, "I wish I was a baby again!"

John drew a picture of his parent's faces. They had been arguing over custody, child support and other matters in front of him and his drawing reflected his anger. He drew two scarecrow faces and said, "This is how they are—dumb for fighting all the time."

Seth drew his family as a school of fish. "We used to swim together, but now we swim apart. I only swim with daddy at his house and mommy at her house."

Some of the pictures were of feelings. After living with her grandparents for several weeks and feeling less sad about not living with her parent, Bell drew ten bright green (her favorite color) dots on the sheet of paper. One by one she gave each dot a name of someone in her life including her parent, grandparents, friends, teacher, the spiritual support provider and her dog. “See, there are one-two-three-four-five-six-seven-eight-nine-ten dots,” she says as a smile breaks out on her face, “I thought I wasn’t loved, but I am. See? Ten times!”

Emily, struggling to find peace in the midst of the divorce of her parents drew a large blue ocean. In the middle was a shark’s fin coming directly at the child who yelled, “Help! Shark!” “This is how divorce feels,” said Emily as she burst into tears.

Jasmin, struggling with the loss of her parent’s suicide, asked to draw during each session and she drew a series of hearts. Each heart had two parts. The red part of the heart symbolized her happiness and the green portion showed her silence. Sometimes the heart was nearly all green, while another time it would be half red and half green and sometimes it would be all red. These hearts became very important to her. She needed, she would say, “to show you my feelings because my words can’t say this.” One time the spiritual support provider found a note under her door. Jasmine had dropped it off sometime the night before. The note expressed that she was feeling better and underneath the writing was a heart divided into happy and sad parts (see illustration 2).

Tony, a three year old drew his feelings of anger. He drew what looked like different colored tad poles with eyes (see illustration 3) and pointing to each of them he said, “This is anger, this one is anger and this one is anger. See? I have this manys angers

inside of me!” John drew his anger as a fiery devil and lightning hitting his head (see illustration 4) to describe the pain of his parents divorce.

Some of the pictures included descriptions of God. Emily drew a beautiful rainbow shooting out of a heart. When asked about the drawing she said, “It tells that I am the heart and a rainbow of love surrounds me. See? Mom is one ray of the rainbow. And dad (points to another ray) and my brother (points again) and you [the spiritual support provider] and see? God is the sun making the rainbow!”

Jasmine drew two hearts. One was her usual red and green heart. The second heart was like the first except, that instead of it being two colors, it was all red. A line down the middle divided it. One side was labeled “Jesus” and the other was labeled, “God.” Pointing to the red and green heart she said, “You see, this is how grief makes you feel. See how sad that heart is. And then (points to the red heart) Jesus and God fill your heart with so much love, you feel all love and no pain.”

Sam drew a rainbow and under it was a monkey holding his hands up high. When asked to tell about the picture he said, “This is me, a monkey. I am sad because my grandpa died. That is he laid down and he’s dead and I am praying to the Lord and the Lord is a rainbow so I feel a smile now. I am okay. I am happy because I point to God.”

Drawing allowed the children a symbolic language to express their thoughts. Once they drew their feelings they could express them with words.

### *Holy Listening Stones*

As described earlier, Holy Listening Stones were created several years ago by the author of this study to help children, symbolically, put their feelings into words. The stones (see illustration 1) are a set of twenty-five river rocks with various symbols on them. The stones are always sitting on the table of the children's room at First Steps Spirituality Center and have been used in hundreds of other settings, as well.

The children in this study found the rocks intriguing and usually asked about them before the spiritual support provider mentioned them. Several children would look at them, pick one up, and say, "What are these?" The spiritual support provider would explain them by saying, "They are Holy Listening Stones. They have different symbols on them and they help you to tell me how you feel. The symbols can mean anything. (Picks up the tree symbol). See this one? Some kids choose it and say, 'This is a tree and it is strong and I am strong.' Another child picks this same stone and says, 'See this is a tree and it has no roots and when my parents divorced it was like my family's roots got cut off.' And another child will pick this *same* rock and say, 'This is bomb, and that is what it feels like to be yelled at all the time.' See how they work? Would you like to try them?"

All ten of the children wanted to try them and as stated earlier, they were used more than any of the other tools. The children chose the stones either by looking at them and choosing the one that best described their feelings or by shutting their eyes, choosing a random stone and then giving it a meaning. Fourteen stones were selected by the children in this study. The stones used and the interpretations the children gave to them are listed below (see illustration 1 and chart 8):

*Smile Stone:* One child picked it up and said, “I feel happy.” Another child turned it upside down and said, “I used to be happy but now I feel like this!”

*Tear Stone:* One child, describing her healing said, “I used to cry so much and now I hardly cry anymore.” Other children gave responses such as, “I cry when I hear Mommy and Daddy fighting,” and “I cried when Mommy was arrested.”

*Cloud Stone:* One child described it as a “flower blooming” saying, “That is how I feel now that Daddy has come home again.” Another child, describing how difficult it was to concentrate at school said, “My mind feels like this. It feels clouded.” And a child trying to deal with her father’s suicide said, “The sun doesn’t shine anymore!”

*Broken Heart Stone:* One child said, “My heart is healing,” and others said, “My heart breaks when I think about it,” and “My heart is completely broken about this!”

*X Stone:* One child said, “If you added lines to this it would be a star because I am getting better and shining again!” Another child said, “This is like an X, like I can’t be happy anymore.”

*Footprint Stone:* One boy trying to deal with a major change in his life said, “This is God’s footstep and I am following God.” Another child said, “This is foot stomping on my happiness. That is what it feels like, like my happiness is getting stomped on!”

*Heart Stone:* One child said, “I feel loved by so many people, even though Mommy doesn’t love me, eleven others do love me!” Another said, “This is peaceful and I am feeling peaceful about this now.” One boy, feeling very badly, said, “I just don’t feel like anyone loves me!”

*G Stone:* One child said, “This is for God and God loves me.” Another said, “This is Grandpa and he loves me!” One boy turned the G sideways and said, “See this is a racetrack and I was going along fine and then I hit a wall.”

*Wave Stone:* “This reminds me of the fun I had at the beach with my Dad before he died,” one child commented. Another said, “These are the mountains and the mountains bring you peace.” Another child said, “I am being tossed around on waves of fear.” Another said, “My mom and dad fight and it feels like this!”

*Sun Stone:* One child said, “This reminds me of a hug” and another said, “This is for the sun shining and the sun is God!” One child said, “The sun used to shine, but it doesn’t anymore because my mom and dad are fighting.”

*Tree Stone:* One child said, “This is my cat’s paw and my cat always cares about me.” Another child turned it sideways and said, “This is the palm of God’s hand holding me.” Another child said, “This is a tree without roots and it is about to fall over and that is how I feel.”

*Shut Eyes Stone:* One child turned it upside down and said, “These are God’s eyes and they are watching over us.” Another said, “This is for peace and I need peace at home!” Another child said, “These are eyes and when I am sad, I get in trouble.” Another said, “These are the eyes of sadness. These look like my daddy’s eyes. I am worried about him because he is sad!”

*Question Mark Stone:* This stone only evoked one response from the children. They chose it and said, “I have a question about . . .” or “This reminds me that I have questions about . . .”

*Arrow Hitting Wall Stone:* “This is a star of hope!” one child said. Another said, “This is an arrow hitting a wall and I was just fine and then, bam, divorce!”

*Swirl Stone:* One child, struggling with words to describe his feelings picked up the stone and with relief, said, “This is unstabalized and that is how I feel.” Another child said “This is swirley and it is how I feel—swirley and sick!” And a third child said, “I hate this one! I feel like this!”

As is apparent in their responses all of the fourteen stones were interpreted as both happy and sad feelings, except for the Swirl Stone that was only interpreted negatively. The variety of interpretations seem to indicate that the stones gave words to whatever individual feeling the child might have been experiencing. The child gave meaning to the stones based on what they were feeling at the time.

John, an eleven year old, after being asked how he was feeling about his parents divorce simply shrugged his shoulders and said, “I’m okay.” After the stones were introduced he was able to share his feelings about his parents divorce. He closed his eyes and randomly chose three stones; the Smile Stone, the Heart Stone and the Question mark Stone. He carefully looked at each stone and then said, “This one,” pointing at the Smile Stone, “is that I am happy because they [his parents] don’t live together anymore.” Following a long period of silence, he picked up the Heart Stone saying, “This reminds me that they still both love me.” And finally, after another period of silence, he picked up the Question Mark Stone and said, “The question mark reminds me that I have questions about how they [his parents] ever got to this point. I mean, they have been fighting for so long and I wonder what started the fight in the first place.” He sat in silence and touched the Four Arrow Stone. “Do you want to do more stones?” the spiritual support provider

asked. “No, but I do want to tell you about this one. This is Mom and Dad going their own ways and not fighting any more.”

Ryan, a six year old, was trying to explain his feelings around his babysitter from birth moving to Texas. He was quite upset and agitated as he tried to express his pain with words. He could not find the words he wanted and sat in his chair mostly sighing and making emotional faces. When asked if he thought the rocks might help, he began looking at the plate with all twenty-five stones on it and as he talked he would pick certain rocks.

He picked up the Smile Stone and said, “I am happy Miss Jane is moving because her husband couldn’t find a job here and he got one in Texas, plus her daughter lives in Texas and so she can be close to her daughter and also her husband will have a good job. So I am happy for her.” Then he sat in silence looking carefully at the stones and picked up the Smile Stone, turned it upside down and said, “But I am also sad because I will only see her like three times a year—and I just love her and (long pause) she is just a very good friend!” His eyes began to tear up while he sat quietly and then chose the Foot Stone and said, “But you know, I believe she is following God’s footprints and going where God needs her.” He immediately picked up the Crooked Arrow Stone and continued, “This is her path and it is sort of not easy. And I can’t help her. I wish she didn’t have to go this way to Texas.” Without a break, he put down the Crooked Arrow Stone and picked up the Question Mark Stone and continued, “And I am feeling questions (pause) like will everything be alright? Will she be safe on her way to Texas? Will they get there safely? It is long way to Texas!!” He sat quietly for a few minutes pondering his question and with great care chose the Wave Stone and said,

“This is unstabalized!! You know like, I am unstablized about this. She says she is happy but I can feel sadness—she is not like herself—it bugs me! I feel unstabalized—you know?” The spiritual support provider spoke for the first time in a long time affirming his feelings saying, “I bet it feels awful!” He replied, “It does—I mean—she is my friend!” He looked at the stones and his eyes filled with tears once again. He sat for a long time with his sadness and then chose one last stone, the Closed Eyes Stone, and said, “But you know, no matter where she goes—she is staying in God’s eyes! God will be with her!” With great finality, he pushed the plate of stones away from him.

Over the course of the sessions, there were many times when an obvious shift took place between the number of stones interpreted as sad and negative feelings and the number of stones interpreted in positive ways were noted. As the children started feeling better with their situation and were coping better, they tended to see more and more positive characteristics in the stones.

At her first session, Layla, a six year old, dealing with a suicide attempt by her parent chose two stones. After choosing the Broken Heart Stone, she said, “This one is me. I am broken hearted and I feel really bad that Daddy is sick! It is still sort of broken even after God told me Daddy would live.” Then she chose the Sun Stone and said, “Before this happened, I felt like this . . . but then it was like everything turned black and the sun disappeared, especially when Mommy screamed! Everything was dark and black.”

At a later session Layla chose more stones. First she chose the Heart Stone and said, “I am loved and my daddy will come home [from rehab] soon.” Then she chose the Cloud Stone and said, “This is a flower and my flower won’t bloom until my daddy

comes home for good. It is blooming a little because he is coming home very soon!” Then she chose the Tree Stone and said, “This is my dog’s paw and my dog helps me not feel so sad. He makes me not feel lonesome because he cuddles on the couch and cares about me. He understands how I feel.” Comparing the later interpretations of Layla’s stones with her earlier ones, indicated that she was feeling better and had found hope.

Jasmin told the story of her pain over her father’s death by stacking three Holy Listening Stones on top of each other. She placed a Heart Stone on the table first and placed the X Stone on top of it and the Swirl Rock on the very top of the pile. She said, “See this is like pressure. Grief feels like pressure and sometime I feel like I am getting smushed. See I felt my love (showed the Heart Stone) but now I don’t because my daddy killed his self (placed the X stone on the heart) and it is like this (placed the swirl back on top of the pile), like my love is just being sucked away.”

The use of Holy Listening Stones proved to be a valuable and an effective way of helping children express their feelings. The listening response of the spiritual support provider allowed the children the time and emotional space they needed not only to express their feelings, but also to process them in deep and meaningful ways.

### ***Pop Can Analogy***

The Pop Can Analogy was often used during the first session to convince children, using a symbol they could all relate to, that the expression of their feelings was a healthy thing to do. This was used especially with the children and teens that most clearly felt they did not need to be there at all and did not see the need to talk.

Using the verbatim of Jasmine, a seven year old whose father had completed suicide, the pop can analogy will now be explained. The spiritual support provider sometimes used a real pop can but in this situation she simply drew one and said in a playful voice, “Okay, now I am turning you into a pop can! You are not a person anymore. You are a pop can. We all have bubbles in our pop cans, you know, those things that bug is but we can deal with, like doing homework when we don’t want to and when our mom makes us clean our room, stuff like that.”

“Oh yeah, I get it!” Jasmine replied.

“Do you want to show me your regular bubbles?” The spiritual support provider said as she handed Jasmine a pencil.

“Sure.” She sat quietly thinking and said, “Okay, I have three regular bubbles. My mom makes me do the dishes, I have to get up early and go to grandma’s house so mom can get to work on time, and my little sister follows me around all the time.”

“Great,” the spiritual support said, and continued, “Now, when something happens to us like our dad killing himself, it is like someone came along and shook you!” She started to shake the drawing of the pop can, and then said, “Do you know what happens to your insides when they get shaken?”

“Yes—it fills up with bubbles until it almost explodes! Want me to draw them?”

“Sure!”

Jasmine started drawing bubbles in the can and filled every space with them.

“Perfect,” the spiritual support provider praised her. “Now what would happen if you always kept the lid tight on this pop can and never let the bubbles out?”

“Oh, that’s easy,” Jasmine said, “it would explode.”

“Right, and have you ever exploded?” the spiritual support provider asked.

Jasmine thought for a few seconds and said, “Well, I yelled at my friend at school today and all she did was accidentally step on the back of my shoe. That was an explosion. And (paused and thought and looked ashamed) sometimes I hit my little sister and that is an explosion.”

“Those are great examples and that is what happens if you never let your bubbles out. Now, what if you never exploded and just kept holding those bubbles in? Do you know what would happen?” the spiritual support provider asked.

Jasmine quietly thought for a long time and said, “Well, I think all the bubbles might pop and the soda would go flat.”

“You are so smart! And going flat feels awful. You don’t care about anything and you are sort of like, ‘Who cares about school? I don’t,’ and, ‘I don’t want to play or anything. I just want to sit here and never move.’”

Jasmine looked shocked and said, “I never hope I feel that way!”

“You won’t,” the spiritual support provider explained, “because you are going to figure out ways to get those bubbles out! When you let your bubbles out, you won’t explode and you won’t go flat. Want to figure out a way to get your bubbles out?”

“Sure!” Jasmine said and then started describing things she liked to do and ways she thought she might be able to start getting her bubbles out. Her list included talking to her school counselor, drawing, laughing with her friends and dancing to her favorite hip-hop songs.

In later sessions Jasmine would refer back to the pop can analogy. Once she brought the spiritual support provider a gift. Looking inside the flowered gift bag the

spiritual support provider discovered a very long (about four feet) and thin (two inch) pink yarn creation. Jasmine told her that she had made her a scarf using her fingers and said, “While I knit I put all my sad feelings into each stitch and I get my feelings out. It is a great way to get my bubbles out of my pop can!”

During one of her last sessions, Jasmine asked for a pencil and drew two pop cans side by side. She filled one can with lots of bubbles and said, “See this is how I was feeling when I first came here.” Then in the other can she drew only three bubbles and said, “And this is how I feel now. See I am getting better!”

Bret was unwilling to share any of his feelings saying politely, “I don’t mean to be rude, but I don’t need to be here. I don’t need to talk to anyone.” After being shown the pop can analogy he said excitedly, “Oh yeah, that is how I feel, exactly how I feel. I mean it is like I am filled with bubbles and they are killing me! You know what I did? I made a sign and hung it my locker.”

“What did it say,” the spiritual support provider asked.

“It said, ‘I’ve been torn into pieces—someone help me!’”

The pop can helped Bret to start sharing his pain that had been bubbling up inside him.

Rianna was hostile when her father forced her to come and talk. She would not say a word and so the spiritual support provider used the pop can analogy with her. She glanced at the drawing out of the corner of her eye and would not answer any questions. After the illustration was finished there was a long time of silence. Then, Rianna commented with very little emotion, “I see what you mean. I might be going flat.”

Later she shared with the spiritual support provider that one of the ways she had been “getting her bubbles out” was by cutting herself in a form of self mutilation and that

she was going “so flat” she thought of killing herself. A referral was made to a psychiatrist.

The pop can analogy was developed because an everyday object became a symbol of the need for the expression of feelings in positive ways. The children responded well to it and used the *pop can language* in later sessions to describe how they were feeling and to gage if they were feeling better or worse.

One child, a brother of one of the children used in the study, had spent several months working through his parents divorce. He had not been to the center for nearly a year but had asked for a visit to work on a friendship issue. He told in great detail about this friend who had been being mean to him and even pushing him. The spiritual support provider acknowledged the difficulty of the situation and then asked him how he felt.

“Don’t worry,” he replied, “I am getting my bubbles out. I am not a pop can ready to explode or anything!”

### ***Unique Symbols Brought by the Children***

Often the children in the study would bring a symbol with them to the session. In most cases they did not say anything about the symbols but would simply get them out and play with them, almost like a newly engaged woman flashing her ring for others to notice. When asked about the symbols, the children would light up and gladly share them. These symbols ranged from drawings the children did at school with ink on the front of their hand, a poem they had written and printed to share, the scribbles on the front of their notebook, music they wished to share, or drawings of tattoos.

Bret, a thirteen year old, kept playing with his MP3 Player during the session and finally said, “Do you know why I brought this? I found a song that describes how I am

feeling and I thought you might want to hear it.” The spiritual support provider put on the headphones and he played a song about feeling better in the midst of pain. She was then able to explore his feelings using the lyrics of the song.

Rianna, a thirteen year old, had been struggling because she did not spend more time with her mother before her death from cancer. She brought two symbols on two separate occasions to express her feeling to the spiritual support provider.

The first was a poem she had written in her journal. The poem was quite long and her pain was reflected in her poetry:

“A Poem From My Heart”

I really want to cry and I wish that I didn't know why. I feel as if I'm dying inside. My emotions are twisted in my head. Running all around wishing I was dead, I'm lucky I'm here. I'm hanging on a thread. I hope that one day, everyone will know how I feel and know that it is real. While I'm sitting here, with thoughts crossing my mind. Praying that one day I will see her again. I know that she is here, she is very, very near. I hope she knows that I really, really miss her everyday . . . sending my love to her for it is ever on the way. As I sit here pondering, thinking if she knows I'm alive . . . wanting her to know that love is on her side. I hope she's doing good. I hope that she's even giving God a word on why he should let me in even though all I really do is sin. Sometimes I try, but still wonder why. I feel I want to cry and at the same time I want to die.

A poem from my heart for only a few eyes to see hoping that one of them might get how I really, really feel!

After reading the poem, the spiritual support provider told her how painful it must be for her. Rianna was relieved to finally have shared, what she called, her “true feelings” with someone who cared.

Later, Rianna brought a picture of a tattoo she had spent hours designing (see illustration 7) and she explained its symbolism. The praying hands in the center were

because she knew her “mother was in heaven” and “if she prayed hard enough and stopped doing bad things she would get to heaven, as well.” The background was made of roses because her mother loved roses and they had placed roses on her coffin with a ribbon saying, “We love you.” Roses reminded her not only of her mother but also of her undying love for her. At the bottom was a space for her mother’s name and date of her death so she would “always remember the date and never forget to pray on that date each year.”

Rianna, after ending her self-mutilating cutting, would use the scars on her arms as a symbol of her healing. “See,” she would say while looking at her healing wrists, “I felt so bad that I cut. See I was really upset at first and made these deep cuts. Then I made these when I felt upset but nothing like the first pain and now they are almost healed—see? I am getting better!”

Jasmine, a seven year old, dealing with her father’s suicide, reached into her pocket, pulled out a rock and said, “I brought this to show you.”

“It is beautiful! What is it?” the spiritual support provider said.

Lifting it up so that the spiritual support provider could get a better look Jasmine said, “See how it is shaped like a tear? It is a tear of fear.”

“Really,” said the spiritual support provider, still admiring the rock, “Are you afraid of something?”

“Yeah—I was thinking. When my dad cut his self to death I had my mom to take care of me, but what if my mom kills herself? Who would take care of me then?”

Jasmine had used this *tear of fear* as a symbol of the fear that her mother might also kill herself and her fear of losing another parent. The symbols used by the children could be any objects that helped them express their feelings.

### **Core Statement**

The result of spending time discovering their feelings, with the aid of symbols and after trust and relationship with the spiritual support provider was established, was that the children were able to make their *core statement*. The core statement was short and marked the end of the discovering phase. This statement was as deep and honest as the child was going to be during the session. This core statement was where the children named their pain. As was discussed earlier, the naming of pain rids the children of it. Andrew Sung Park, in his theology about Han, describes this as he writes, “To be aware of and accept our anger, we need to locate its source. Doing so does not mean that we are trying to rationalize our anger, but rather we wish to understand its real source. By honestly facing our anger, we can find a handle for resolving an anger-provoking cause.”<sup>45</sup>

The core statement was the naming, not only of the pain, but also of the deepest emotion felt by the children. Typically it was pain that was named during the first few sessions but often after a few sessions the statements moved to ones reflecting hope, peace and healing.

This progression was seen in every child. Although it must be pointed out that depending on what happened that specific day or week in the children’s lives, the core statements could be hopeful during one session and despairing again in a later session.

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<sup>45</sup> Park, *From Hurt to Healing*, 56.

The emotions of the children would go up and down, but overall, the core statements did reflect moving from pain and despair to hope. This progression will be discussed in a later section.

Some of the core statements were filled with anger and pain. John, an eleven year old said of his parents, who spent much time during the course of the their divorce arguing in front of him, “They have no brains and they are stupid and I am sick of it!” Jasmine, speaking of her father’s suicide said, “I am mad at Dad because he left me! I mean, I know he was sick and all, but I am still mad!” Rinanna, who lost her mother to cancer, said, “I am mad at God for killing my mom!” Tony, a three year old who was tired of being shuffled back and forth from his mom’s house to his dad’s house yelled his core statement, “I don’t want to go to Daddy’s!”

Some of the core statements were filled with fear and sadness. Tony simply pointed to a tear shaped Holy Listening Stone and said, “I feel this! It is a sad, sad tear.” Seth, a four year old struggling with divorce said, “I am sad...because of I am sad because my mom and dad had a divorce.” At a later session he simply said, “I am so tired!”

Rianna, a teen, said, “I feel horrible! And this [cutting] is the only thing that makes me feel better.” At a later session she again shared her deep pain, “I just thought, ‘Okay, there are better ways to get your pain out and why should I hurt myself?’ But my God, it is so hard!”

John, an eleven year old, pointed to the swirl Holy Listening Stone and said, “This is how my head feels–like hypnotizing and spinning instead of straight.”

Some of the core statements expressed worry or concern. Jasmine said, “When my dad cut his self to death I had my mom to take care of me, but what if my mom kills herself? Who will take care of me?”

Layla, six years old, visited her father who was in a rehabilitation center. The visit went well but she kept saying that he had “sad eyes” and her core statement was, “I am still worried about him.”

Ryan, whose babysitter was moving, spoke about his concern for her. “She says she is happy,” he said, “but I can feel her sadness. She is not herself. It bugs me. I feel unstabalized, you know?”

In later sessions the core statements tended to be more positive. Tony, a three year old said excitedly, “That is how I feel—really happy!” Rianna, who had been cutting and using alcohol to numb her pain, said, “I am going to stop all this bad stuff and get back to my good stuff!”

John tried to think of something that he wanted to talk about during a later session but couldn’t think of anything. “I am happy. I don’t have any problems to talk about.” Then he paused and smiled and said, “Wow, I never thought I would say that again!”

There was a distinct shift in the mood of the children after their core statement was spoken. Some were obviously relieved and felt better once they said it. This was visible in their body language. They would take a deep breath and let it out with a sigh of relief, smile or even a laugh. For other children, making the care statement made them uncomfortable. They would look down, get up from their seat and start walking around the room or fidget. Typically the spiritual support provider would acknowledge their

discomfort and tell them how proud she was of them for sharing it and naming their pain. Often she reminded them that naming their pain is difficult but will help them get better.

Once the core statement was made, the children were done talking and ready to move into the next phase, the Affirming Phase.

### *Summary*

During the Discovering Phase, the longest phase of the process, the children were, with the support of the spiritual support provider and the use of symbols, able to explore their feelings and began to acknowledge and articulate them. In 90% of the sessions, the introduction of symbolic tools helped the child move from the *light* sharing in the Opening Phase and into the feelings surrounding their pain in the Discovering Phase. When those feelings were met with acceptance and as they were encouraged to keep sharing, their honesty grew and they became more confident with sharing.

In studying the conversations during the Discovering Phase it often seemed to be going from one point to another without much focus. However, as the conversation continued in a rather difficult to follow or random seeming pattern, and without being shaped by the spiritual support provider, eventually the children would say, in a very concise manner the core of their feelings. This is where the children finally *named their pain*. This naming of the pain, when the children made their core statement, marked the end of the Discovering Phase.

### **Affirmation Phase**

The Affirmation Phase contained two components, prayer and blessing. This phase was a rather short one taking about 20% of the total time. The phase followed the

core statement. That crucial moment of complete honesty and vulnerability for the children.

In the previous two phases, the relationship was primarily between the children and the spiritual support provider. While the spiritual support provider was aware that God was present in the session and worked hard to listen to the children and God at the same time, the child primarily related one-on-one with the spiritual support provider.

During the Affirmation Phase the children's focus was redirected and they were invited to spend time with God in prayer or reflection and they were blessed and prayed for by the spiritual support provider. The time of prayer and blessing are optional for children coming to First Steps Spirituality Center. No child is ever forced to pray or to receive a blessing. However, in this study, all ten children prayed and received a blessing. One teen refused to pray at the first session because she was angry with God, but asked to pray at the second session and continued to pray in all her other sessions. Another very young child did not want to pray during his first few sessions because he was very excited to receive a blessing. He had heard about blessings from his sister who had come to the center previously. But he prayed in several of his later sessions.

During the Affirming Phase the children were given space to reflect about their core statement and sit with the feelings they discovered and articulated during the previous phase. Through the time of prayer and receiving the blessing a ritualized space was created for God to strengthen, reassure, and create peace within the children.

The role of the spiritual support provider remained as the one who journeyed with the children and, as a trusted adult, they created a safe space where the children could spend time safely and securely in prayer.

## Prayer

The time of prayer allowed the children to connect with God following the most vulnerable, honest time of their session. After naming their pain, the children entered prayer time. They were invited to use a “Prayer Tool” which were developed by the author to help children spend time in prayer. The use of prayer tools was incorporated to help children slow down and focus and also to allow them to use their natural use of symbolic language as they prayed. Prayer tools include such things as drawing, softly ringing a chime, lighting a candle and reflecting while it glows, tracing a labyrinth or shape, or listening to music. The Prayer Tools fill the shelves of the children’s room and children select whatever they would like to use. They are also invited to simply say a prayer with words. Of all the children’s prayers, 98% included use of a prayer tool and were contemplative in nature. Most of the time spent in prayer was silent. Only 2% of the prayers were spoken (see chart 9). Many of the children spoke while they prayed using a prayer tool while creating a free flowing dialogue with God. Only one child chose to say their prayer as a formal verbal prayer.

During the time of prayer the children tended to focus inwardly, their bodies and faces relaxed, an air of peace was observed. After the time of prayer the children expressed that they “felt better!” and often commented that they experienced the presence of God.

Rabbi Daniel Roberts describes the peace found through contemplative prayer and reflection as he writes, “During moments of crisis we feel most alone, vulnerable, helpless and out of control. We desperately seek what religion has to offer: stability, a

sense of hope that tomorrow *will* be a better day, that there is a God who cares, and the wherewithal to gain control over our emotions.”<sup>46</sup>

Mother Theresa also spoke of the need for silence when finding God. She said, “We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature—trees, flowers, grass—grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence . . . we need silence to be able to touch souls.”<sup>47</sup>

Saint Theresa of Avila spoke of the “Prayer of Quiet” as being a time where God comes to a person. The person does not go to God through silence but rather, God comes to the person during times of silence and reflection.<sup>48</sup>

The prayer time for the children was filled with silence as they spent time with God. They, of course, could speak if they wanted and often after they were done they explained their prayer or shared what they prayed about, but the majority of the time in prayer was a time of silence. The spiritual support provider also prayed during this time.

### Prayer Tools

During the sessions studied, only one child chose to pray using words. Bret, a thirteen year old, said, “I am going to say this prayer out loud so you can hear it. God, help my parents to get along and not make this [their divorce] ugly—well, uglier than it already is.”

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<sup>46</sup> Rabbi Daniel A. Roberts, “Religious Education as an Aid in Crisis Intervention,” in *What Will We Do? Preparing a School Community to Cope with Crises*, ed. Robert G. Stevenson, Death, Value and Meaning Series (Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 71.

<sup>47</sup> “A Tribute to a Modern Saint – Mother Theresa,” (11/04/2006); available from <http://www.cyberindia.com/india/mother.htm>.

<sup>48</sup> Carolyn Stahl Bohler, *Prayer on Wings: A Search for Authentic Prayer* (San Diego: LaMedia, 1990), 117.

The rest of the children chose various prayer tools that have been divided into seven categories: manipulatives, sandbox, candles, writing and drawing, Breath Prayer, chimes and music, and prayer shawl. The use of these tools and examples of the children's prayers will be given. Each child who comes to First Steps Spirituality Center is given their own set of prayer beads and which will be discussed as well.

The author's assumption is that the majority of children coming to the center for spiritual support were most familiar with spoken prayers. However, the prayer tools were the way they chose to pray the vast majority of the time. A study of why children chose the prayer tool they did was not studied in this paper but it is an area where further study could be done.

*Prayer Beads.* Prayer beads (see ill. 6) are made by a group of woman at Broadmoor Community Church, Colorado Springs, and given to each child at their first spiritual support session. The beads are kept in a large clear bowl, are made of various colors and have different charms at the ends of them. The children are invited to find a set they would like to keep and use. The beads are explained to the children and can be used for use during the breath prayer, as a scriptural mantra where a line of scripture is repeated over and over, or the children are welcome to create whatever prayer for them they find useful.

All ten of the children in this study were given prayer beads. One child used the beads to do the breath prayer. Another hung their beads in a rear view mirror of their car and used them as a reminder that God was with her. Another child slept with her beads by her bed and said it helped her to sleep. One child, struggling because she felt unloved by

her mother, made her beads the “Prayer beads of love” and assigned a name of someone who loved her to each bead.

The extent to which the children used these beads was not tracked by this study, but it was obvious that the prayer beads were special to the children. They mentioned them often and several asked for another set to give to a friend who was in need.

*Prayer Manipulatives.* Manipulatives is a term used by teachers describing the hands-on tools they use to help children grasp abstract subjects such as math. The child is given a set of manipulative, such as five pennies. They are invited to lay two pennies on the table and then to place three more and to count them. As they count to five, they have used their manipulatives to learn addition.

The term manipulative in regard to prayer tools is similar. The children were given something to hold and as they hold it, it allows them to focus their attention, settle down, and spend time with God in quiet prayer. They also give the children a symbolic way to speak with God. The use of symbols were important in helping the children communicate with the spiritual support provider and it can be assumed that the choice of prayer manipulatives also gave the children a symbolic language to speak with God and to express their feelings to God. Prayer Manipulatives were chosen by the children 25% of the time (see chart 9).

Bell, a six year old, chose clay as her prayer manipulative and sat in silence making balls out of it. She carefully made thirteen balls and then divided them into two piles. One was a pile of eleven and the other of two. She sat quietly picking up and putting down each ball of clay. Then she smiled and said she was finished. When asked

what her prayer was about, she said, “I made eleven balls of happy and only two balls of sad. I showed God how happy I am now!”

Bret, a thirteen year old, asked if he could use the Holy Listening Stones during his prayer time. He explained, “I want to write with them.” With great care he chose certain stones and arranged them in his own creative order. Then he would sit and look at them and switch some of them for different ones. He sat for a long time staring at the symbolic sentence he had written. Then he smiled and said he was finished. When asked if he would tell about the prayer, he pointed to each stone and said:

“Okay here is my prayer,” he said while he pointed at two stones with arrows on them. “I pray that mom and dad go their own separate ways and stop asking about each other and worrying about what the other one is doing and if he has a girlfriend.” He pointed at the Question Mark Stone which he placed in the center of the other two stones and continued, “I am asking God to help me find the right words to tell them how much they are hurting me by putting me in the middle. I am not sure what to say, but God will help me.” Then he pointed to the Circle Stone and said, “And when they stop talking about each other and when they go their own ways, I will be whole again and healed—like see how this stone is round and whole? I will be whole again.”

John, an eleven year old, struggling with his parents divorce and mother’s substance abuse issues, asked to use magnetic sticks and ball bearings for his prayer during a later session. He quietly made the letters A-C-D-C out of the sticks and sat staring at them for a very long time. Then he took the letters, rearranged them vertically and created another shape (see illustration 6). He again sat for a long time staring at the new shape and even began to cry. When asked to explain what had happened, he said, “Well first I made A-C-D-C because that is my favorite band and I play their music and feel better. And then I made a rocket ship and said to God, ‘I wish you could fly us all up with you and make my mom better so I could spend more time with her.’”

Jasmine, a seven year old, used an eagle that balanced on its beak and looked like it was flying as her prayer manipulative. She laid it on the table and then looked at it with tears in her eyes. Then she lifted it and let it balance on her finger and fly. She did this several times and each time the eagle was lifted higher. When asked to explain her prayer she said, "Well this is me, a little eagle who can't fly anymore because her daddy killed his self. But see? God makes her happy and flying again!"

The same child used a small clay baby as her prayer manipulative in a later session. She held it and cried and said in a very soft voice, over and over, "Please let me know daddy still loves me and is holding me."

Ryan chose a beautiful blue marble for his prayer manipulative. He simply sat looking at it in the light and rolling it around in his hand. Explaining his prayer he said, "This is a beautiful marble and you just have to stop and look at it because it is so pretty. And I am trying to slow down and not rush so much and this marble reminds me to stop and be slow."

Tony, a three year old, chose a rainbow colored stuffed turtle and held it while he prayed silently. After he finished he hugged the turtle and said, "This turtle is so pretty and it is a rainbow and I feel better when I hold him." Tony also used a caterpillar puppet that transformed into a butterfly. He had been telling about how angry he was about his parents divorce and he sat with the caterpillar and said, "I am angry, I am angry! But now, (and he turned it into a butterfly) I am happy and I can fly. Right God?"

Layla, a six year old, used a ball that is made to get big and then very small. She opened it big and little breathing in and out slowly as she did. She explained, "It is like

praying with your heart instead of with words – like listening to God. It is holy and lovely.”

The Prayer Manipulatives could be anything in the entire room and the children chose what they wanted, subscribed a meaning to them and used them for prayer.

*Candles.* Candles have been a liturgical symbol of God’s light shining through the darkness for ages. They also were a favorite prayer tool used by the children. They were used 17% of the time (see chart 9). The shelves of the room are filled with candles in all shapes, colors and sizes. Many times the child would ask to use a candle and simply sit quietly in its light.

Rianna, a teen, chose candlelight most of the time because it reminded her of her mom and how much her mom liked candles. She would sit and cry as she watched the light flicker.

Ryan, who had moved to a new home and found it to be large and overwhelming lit a candle and asked God to bring light into his big house. The spiritual support provider gave him an electric candle to take home and use to bless his home. He was very happy and excited!

John, struggling because he had not seen his mother in several weeks, used a set of rainbow candles. As the spiritual support provider lit each candle he gave them each a name. The red one was for his mom, the green for dad and when he finished he said, “And then see...this is all lit by God. God is all the lights together.”

*The Spiritual Sandbox.* The Spiritual Sandbox was also a favorite prayer tool used by the children. It was used 17% (see illustration 9) of the time. In the children’s room are actually two sandboxes. One is a small Zen sandbox and the other is in a Tupperware

container about two feet by two feet. There are no instructions given to the children on how to use the sandboxes.

Bell, a six year old, chose the large sandbox and sat quietly stirring the sand with her hands. She made a huge smiley face, laughed and covered it up. She repeated this several times. When asked what her prayer was about she said, "I am happy and I was showing God!"

Jasmine used the large sandbox as well and would make a heart in it and then add a broken line down the center. She would sit silently looking at it and then smooth over the broken line. She explained, "My heart was whole and then it broke because daddy killed his self and I want God to heal it." Another time she used the sandbox and placed a stone in the center and then covered it with sand. She did this over and over. "This is a sad stone. This is my sadness and I am asking God to cover my sadness and make it go away."

Layla used the small sandbox and as she created her prayer she talked aloud. After making a person with a very large head in the sand she explained, "My prayer to God is this: I feel so lonesome and my sadness is so big it feels like it is going to fall off my body. I feel like my head is swirley with sadness and loneliness and it feels like it is going to fall off and smush or maybe be so full it will explode." She sat silently for two or three minutes and then continued, "Now God," she said wiping out the body and replacing it with a better proportioned body with a cross in the center, "I want you to make me feel like this. That is what I am praying to God."

Rianna, a teen, simply sat silently making hearts in the sand and crying. The hearts she explained reminded her of her mom's love.

Tony, a three year old, whose parents were divorcing and very angry at each other, used the large sandbox and made monsters in it. Then he would wipe them away and say, “God, make everybody be nice!”

*Writing and Drawing.* Children love to draw, and thus drawing and writing their prayers was a popular choice. They wrote or drew their prayers 14% of the time.

Jasmine often drew hearts to show her grief during the Discovering Phases of her sessions. Many times her prayer would be to draw a healed heart with no sadness left inside it. Once she said, “This is the heart of God and Jesus and while I colored I asked God to fill my heart [with healing] while I colored it.” She also used dissolving paper and often spent much quiet time writing things she wanted to tell her dad before he died. She would draw him flowers and poems and then dissolve them saying, “Now God is taking these to heaven to Daddy.”

John, struggling with divorce, drew a picture of himself being pulled on each side by his parents. He dissolved it saying, “God help me to get out of the middle of their fights. Make them leave me alone!”

Rianna used the dissolving paper when she was feeling guilty about not spending more time with her mother before she died. She tore a small piece and wrote, “I am sorry” on it and then cried as she watched it dissolve. She did this over and over.

Layla drew a picture of her family in great detail. When she finished she said, “This is my prayer. This is me and Mommy and Daddy and my brother and we are happy now and Daddy’s eyeballs are happy. That is my prayer to God.”

Jasmine quietly copied each Holy Listening Stone from the set lying on the table onto a sheet of paper. Then she, with great care, circled some of the stones and put an

“X” through others. When she finished she said, “I used to feel all these feelings but now I am mostly happy so I ‘X’ed out’ all the sad ones except one because I am still a little sad and I left all the happy ones. This is how I feel and God knows it now.”

*Breath Prayer.* The breath prayer is one of the only prayers that was taught to the children. It is explained simply as, “You breath in light and love and breath out anything you want to be rid of or give to God.” This prayer type was asked to be used 14% of the time.

John sat quietly breathing in and out several times. He visibly became peaceful and still. After he finished he said, “I love this way to pray because I can do it at school and no one will ever know I am praying.” He also used the prayer beads at a later session to help him breath in and out ten times.

Seth, a four year old, liked the breath prayer and asked if he could use the minute hourglass as his prayer tool. He turned it over and while the sand moved from one end to the other, he quietly sat breathing in and out very intentionally. His shoulders relaxed and he started to smile about half way through.

*Chime and Music.* The children’s room had musical instruments in a large basket. There were drums, tambourines, bells, a harp and a single note chime with a small mallet to strike it with. In this study, the children used music as a prayer form 7% of the time.

John brought his phone and kept playing with it over and over. Finally, he explained that the song on it was going to be his prayer because it made him feel better. During his prayer time he listened through headsets to his prayer song.

Bell used the single note chime. She played the single note over and over and each time she struck the chime she would say, "Help Mommy to love me. Make Mommy love Bell."

Jasmin, dealing with her father's death, also chose to use the chime. "God, help Daddy get used to heaven," she said as she rang the chime one time. "Help him to see me again," she said ringing the chime one another time. "Help him to know all the stuff he needs to know," she said ringing the chime once again. "Help the sickness in his head," she concluded, as she continued ringing the chime several more times while sitting in silence.

*Prayer Shawl.* On a shelf in the children's room are prayer shawls folded neatly beside a jar filled with buttons, pins and beads. If a child asked to use it for their prayer time, they were invited to place symbols on it as a prayer and then take it home to use there.

Tony, a three year old, struggling with living in two homes, carefully looked in the jar and chose three smiley face beads and a heart shaped bead. "See," he explained as he pointed to each bead, "Mommy loves me, Daddy loves me, and God loves me. And I love everybody and I love God!" The prayer shawl was gently placed around him and he sat happy and very still for a few minutes. As he left, he ran to his mom yelling, "Hey Mom, this is a hug from God! And I can keep it!"

Jasmine chose a heart button, a star button, a small white pearl shaped like a tear, and a diaper pin. Then she took a small blank tag and wrote on it, "God will help you heal." She placed the heart button in the center of the prayer shawl and laid the others in a circle. As she sewed them on, she said, "The heart is because Daddy is in my heart. The

star button reminds me that Daddy is watching over me in heaven. The pearl is a little drop of good memories. The baby pin reminds me that love will always hold me close to Daddy. And the cross is because Daddy died and Jesus died and they both still love me. And I put the heart in the center because, you see, love is the very center of everything and from love, rainbows grow! That is how you heal – you keep love in the center and healing grows like a rainbow.”

### **Prayer Results**

Prayer is an intimate experience for people and the results of what happens during prayer must be cautiously approached. There is a certain mystery associated with prayer and while God’s presence could often be felt and experienced as the children prayed, analyzing another persons experience can be presumptuous and arrogant. Therefore, the author of this paper approaches describing the experiences of the children’s prayers in this study cautiously.

During the times of prayer the children shifted their attention away from the spiritual support provider and spent time with God. However, they enjoyed praying and were proud to share their prayers with the spiritual support provider after they had finished. The children demonstrated their trust and relationship with the spiritual support provider as they shared their very personal and private prayers. As the spiritual support provider received the prayers without correction, and thanked them for sharing their prayers, the children grew in confidence about their ability to pray. At first they would timidly ask to pray and were hesitant to choose the tool they wanted to use. By the second and third session, they confidently chose the tool they wanted and shared without

hesitation. The prayer tools seemed to help the children stay focused and communicate their feelings to God. While a variety of tools were used, those that involved tactile touch were most popular.

During prayer time the children often demonstrated both in their body language, where their body posture and faces would relax, and with their words, that this was a time when they could connect with God in a very personal and intimate way. They looked to God for strength, hope and comfort for themselves and others, and believed that God would help them in times of pain. Often they expressed that God was already helping them and healing them.

Similar results are found at the Center for Attitudinal Healing where prayer is used on a regular basis. The children wrote, “Most of us found that praying was of great help. It made us not feel alone. It helped us to find faith and hope that we were safe. When we put everything in God's hands it helped us know that everything would be okay. It really made the fear go away. It made us happy and peaceful inside.”<sup>49</sup>

Once the children completed their time of prayer, they were asked whether or not they wanted to receive a blessing.

## **Blessing**

Following the time of prayer, the children were asked if they would like a blessing. “A blessing is a prayer I say for you,” the spiritual support provider would explain, “You have done great work and I am so proud of you and I want you to know that God will be with you as you leave here and continue to grow and heal.”

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<sup>49</sup> “There is a Rainbow Behind Every Dark Cloud,” ed. The Center for Attitudinal Healing (Milbrae: Celestial Arts, 1978), 89.

In this study all ten children wanted to receive a blessing. They were shown a shelf with several tiny bottles filled with different oils, gels and water and asked which of them they would like to have used. The children would smell them, admire the bottles they were in and then select the blessing oil they liked best.

They were then invited to share with the spiritual support provider what symbol they would like to use. The symbol, it was explained to them, could be placed on their hands or forehead or both their hands and forehead while the blessing was being made. Eight of the children received their blessing on the forehead and hands. One child wanted the forehead area blessed and one wanted the blessing on his hands only.

The children would be invited to stand facing the spiritual support provider who would look into their eyes, and while saying the blessing, placed their requested symbol on their hands or forehead. The blessings were personal and related directly to whatever the children had articulated during the session. For example, Bell had struggled wondering if she was truly loved by her mother. Acknowledging her pain the spiritual support provider blessed her saying, “God, Bell loves her mommy. Help her to feel loved in return. I bless you, Bell, in the name of the Creator, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.”

During his session, Brett realized that, despite their wrong choices and the pain caused by his parents during their separation and divorce that his parents did love him very much and love would heal him. The blessing echoed his newfound truth: “Bret, you are such a loving person. God is proud of you for loving even in the midst of your pain. May God’s light and love surround you now and always. Amen.”

Emily struggled with three problems during her session. She was having a difficult time concentrating on her math work, her parents continued to fight, and she

worried she would be sad forever. The blessing honored her concerns: “God, I ask you to bless Emily and ask you to help her do well on her math problems. I ask you to help her parents to stop fighting and I ask you to bring her happiness again. Amen.”

Layla shared that she had not told many people that God spoke to her heart. Her blessing reassured her that she had been heard and believed. “Layla,” the spiritual provider said, “you have heard God. May you continue to hear God and may God be with you, your mom, your dad and your brother, and may your dad continue to heal. God bless you. Amen.”

The words of the blessing reassured the children that they had been heard and it honored their feelings. Allowing the children to name the symbol to be used during the blessing also empowered the children to, once again, name what they needed or expected from God.

An analysis of the blessings and symbols used revealed that the children asked for a symbol representing happiness 33% of the time (see chart 10). One child asked for a “bunny,” because she said, “bunnies are happy.” Another child asked for a “rainbow” because “rainbows are happy and so am I even though I am still a little sad.” A boy asked for a “happy face” because, he said, “I am feeling happier every day.” Another child asked for an “eagle,” because “eagles can fly and I want to fly again.”

Another 33% of the symbols requested communicated the children’s belief that God would help them or would be with them through the pain (see chart 10). One child asked for an “upside down smile and then a real smile,” because, she explained, “You know, God will turn my sadness into happiness again.” A little girl said, “I chose a “G” for God because God will help me.” The same child, at a later session, asked, “Could you

make a heart for my heart? Because that is where God speaks to me and that is where I hear God.”

Hope was the theme of 23% of the blessing symbols requested (see chart 10). “I want a heart,” a little girl said, “because I want my daddy spot to stop hurting so much!” “I want a circle,” said one boy, “because a circle is love – a circle of love and not of hate. I want my parents to stop fighting and love each other.” Another child asked for “an ‘X’ turned into a star because,” she explained, “It is like this big ‘X’ of sadness will go away.”

Peace was a requested symbol 7% of the time (see chart 10). “I want a peace sign so I can have some peace finally!” exclaimed one child. Another child asked for a “butterfly because they fly so sweet and peaceful!” A young child wanted Nemo, the fish cartoon character, “because,” he explained, “he swims all calm and peaceful and that is what I want.”

And 4% of the children wanted a symbol that reminded them to continue letting their feelings out and not to “hold them in” at home and school (see chart 10). “I want a puff of air to remind me to let my feelings out,” said a teen boy. Another child requested, “a pop can so I can remember to let my feelings out.”

Of all the symbols, the heart and rainbow were the ones most often requested. The heart was requested 23% of the time followed closely by the rainbow, 21% of the time. The cross was selected 15% of the time. These top three symbols comprised 59% of all symbols requested while the remaining 41% were diverse and included such images as angels, math problems, bubbles, stars, a football, a sun, a sea monster, the palm of God’s hand, and a candle (see chart 10).

Following the blessing the children usually gave the spiritual support provider a hug and expressed that they were glad they had come or were feeling better. The role of touch during and following the blessing seemed significant. The children enjoyed the touch and wanted a symbol made on their skin. They often looked the spiritual support provider directly in the eyes and hugged her after the blessing. In fact, nearly 100% of the hugs given by the child to the spiritual support provider were given following the blessing.

Joyce Rupp describes the power of touch and blessing in her work with adults.

Jesus could so easily have healed, and sometimes did, without the touch of his hand. But so often he stretched out his hand and the vibrancy of his being was power indeed for those who needed healing . . . We cannot pray the ache out of one another but we can bless it with the touch of our hands, the gift of our touch, hug and our embrace. When we do this, we give the ache in the other permission to go on its way. Touch fills a person's being with the energy of bonding and love. Without ever saying a word, the message is given: "I care. I am here for you. Here is some strength of mine to go on; here is some love to energize you now when you need it so much." Touch connects one to another in care, makes contact with heartache, centers love, concentrates spiritual energies, warms the cold or exhausted spirit. Touch can penetrate barriers of despair, anguish, hardness or bitterness. A kiss on the cheek, a quiet embrace, arms linked or hands held are powerful movements in our ritualization of goodbyes.<sup>50</sup>

The time of blessing seemed to be an important time of relationship between the children, God and the spiritual support provider. The children were invited to choose a blessing which was a symbolic way of expressing what they were hoping for, needing, expecting and waiting for. All of the symbols chosen contained an element of hope and expectation (see chart 10). The spiritual support provider, by never correcting the child or asking them to choose a different symbol, honored once again, their innate spirituality.

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<sup>50</sup> Joyce Rupp, *Praying Our Goodbyes* (New York: Ivy Books, 1988), 89.

The blessing was a ritualized way of closing the session and at the same time reminding the children that they were strong and would survive with God's help whatever crisis they might be facing.

### **Summary**

During the last phase of a spiritual support session, the Affirming Phase, the children were given the emotional and spiritual space to process all that was discovered and articulated during the Discovering Phase. Through the use of prayer and blessing the children were able to connect with God and receive whatever they needed from God. The use of ritual, using prayer tools during prayer and receiving a formal blessing, seemed to help the child become stronger and find hope in the midst of their pain.

Joyce Rupp, in her work with grieving adults, describes a similar process as the one followed in the Affirming Phase. She begins by explaining that a person needs to name their pain before they enter into the prayer process. "We also name the pain," she writes, "This is a moment of honesty for ourselves as we enter into the prayer process."<sup>51</sup> During a spiritual support session a child has just named their pain and is invited to enter a time of prayer.

Rupp describes the time spent in prayer as she writes, "The second step in praying a goodbye is one that our Western culture does not encourage and one which many adults need to develop on all levels of life: taking time to reflect. To give ourselves

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 78.

to reflection is to become comfortable with slowing down, with stillness, with solitude and aloneness, with not being afraid to look inward or go deeper.”<sup>52</sup>

The time of prayer and using the prayer tools, allowed the children to spend time in quiet reflection, where they could slow down and simply be in the presence of God. During this time of prayer and reflection, the mood, posture and words of the children moved from the despair of sadness, stated so plainly in their core statements, to words of hope and anticipation that life would get better.

Doctor Fred Michel compared the healing work done during the Affirming Phase with the structure used during a psychiatric session. “During a psychological session people uncover deep truths and go into scary places. It would be irresponsible and even dangerous to just leave them in that dark place and send them back into the world. The last minutes we spend with a client is spent in helping them recover their strength and preparing to face the world again.”<sup>53</sup>

The Affirmation Phase allowed the children, through ritual, prayer and formal blessing, to find their spiritual strength and readied them to leave the session and the safety of the space and return to their everyday lives.

### **Spiritual Progression Observed**

The process of spiritual support described above was the process used in all of the individual sessions with the children and teens. Many times at the end of one of the sessions the children would exclaim that they “felt better” and were glad they came. However, the goal of this study included observing and articulating the results of the

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>53</sup> Dr. Fredrick Michel, interview by author, Colorado Springs, CO, 2 January 2007.

spiritual support sessions over time. To measure the results of the children spending time in spiritual support, the core statements made by the children at the end of the Discovering Phase were examined side by side. The emotional progression of each child was also charted (see chart 11). In addition, all of the statements the children made about God being in the midst of their healing were examined.

Two main results were determined. First, all ten of the children used in this study moved from an emotional state of despair into one of hope and gained a sense that they would survive. And, second, each child felt that God was present in the process.

### Moving from Despair into Hope

Words such as healing and recovery are common words used to describe what happens after a person begins recovering from pain, loss and grief. Yet the fact remains that while these grieving people are no longer in the pain they faced during the initial part of their grief, they are forever changed because of the pain they have encountered. The author assumed that the children of this study would describe their progress toward the end of their spiritual support sessions as moving away from and out of their grief, leaving it behind. She was surprised to discover that instead, they described how the pain had not totally left them, would probably never completely leave, and at the same time they had a growing awareness that they would survive and even find happiness again. In psychological circles this awareness that a person can go on and live again happily, while still acknowledging that the pain often remains in some form and that it may never fully go away is called “integration.”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Charon Nelson, Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner, interview by author, Colorado Springs, CO, 26 December 2006.

James G. Friesen and his associates working at the Shepherd's House, a place which provides pastoral counseling for grieving adults, distinguishes between healing and growth as the result of experiencing grief. Expecting a person to heal and become as they were, as if they had not experienced a loss, is unrealistic. Instead, Friesen suggests that recovery from grief is "facing and embracing all the pain in our lives, so that we will gain maximum growth: learning lessons, gaining power, and looking for ways to help others do the same."<sup>55</sup>

The children in this study described their progress, not as moving completely out of and away from their pain, or returning to normal, but rather as the awareness that even in the midst of their pain they would survive, be happy again and be all right. They moved from despair to hope.

For example, Bell, a six year old, struggling with her mother's drug addictions, made the following core statements:

Session #1: "I miss Mommy!"

Session #2: "Nine other people do love me!"

Session #3: "I am this many [counting out four Holy Listening Stones] happy and only this many {one Holy Listening Stone} sad."

Session #4: "I am so happy living with Grandma and Grandpa. It is peaceful you know? Like no yelling, no screaming and no idiot boyfriends. Of course, I miss mom but a child shouldn't have to live like that—do you think?"

While she began in total despair and sadness, by her final session she acknowledged that the pain from living without her mother was real and still a part of her

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<sup>55</sup> James G. Friesen and others, *Living from the Heart Jesus Gave You* (Pasadena: Shepherd's House, Inc., 2000), 36.

reality, she also expressed her happiness with her life at her grandparents home and that as a child, she deserved a good and happy life.

Jasmine, a seven year old struggling with the suicide of a parent made the following core statements during her first five spiritual support sessions.

Session #1: “I miss him [her dad] and I feel like this [points to the crooked smile Holy Listening Stone] and I think about it all the time.

Session #2: “I have this big hole in my heart—a big empty space and I am wondering if it will ever get better.”

Session #3: “You know how it is—like you are happy but at the same time deep inside you are still sad—but it doesn’t stop your happiness—you are still really happy—happy and at the same time sad.”

Session #4: “I am mad at Dad because he left me. I mean, I know he was sick and all, but I am still mad!”

Session #5: “See I am mostly happy, but right here [points to her heart] it still hurts from sadness.”

Jasmine began her sessions in great despair and eventually determined that it was possible to still be sad over her father’s death and also be happy. In later sessions she determined that she had learned so much about grief that she would “help others to feel better.” As she arrived for a session, she handed several sheets of paper to the spiritual support provider. She had written on the top of each sheet, “My Feelings Are . . .” and had drawn lines across each page so that words could be written neatly on them. “What are these?” the spiritual support provider asked. “They are to help other kids get their feelings out. I made them and you can make copies of them and give them to sad kids and

it will help them. I want to help others feel better and I know lots about it because I have done it!”

During the first two sessions, John, whose parents were divorcing, felt nothing but sadness and had no hope for ever being happy again. Articulating his feelings, he drew two circles. In one he made a very tiny slice of a pie shape, colored it in and said, “This is how much of the time I am happy.” He colored in 90% of the second circle and said, “This is how much of the time I am unhappy.” In later sessions he began to tell how God was with him, how he knew his parents still loved him, and finally he said, “It is pretty simple. I will draw it.” Again he drew two circles. One was divided in half and one side was colored in. “Okay, at first I was unhappy at least half of the time. And now I am like this.” He pointed the second circle which only had a tiny, tiny fragment colored in and said, “I am happy most of the time with just a tiny piece of sadness.”

Layla, whose parent had attempted suicide, had a deep sense of God being with her family during each of her sessions. At the last session she described how even though she was still worried about her father because he still had “sad eyes” she knew God would help her and she could “still be happy and play and have fun.”

Emily came to her first session in tears and while telling about an argument she had witnessed between her parents, exclaimed, “It was the worst thing that has ever happened in the whole divorce!” She believed that her parents would never stop arguing and that there was no way she would ever feel better again. During her second session she broke down sobbing and said, “I am just so tired of everybody hating everybody!” During a later session she expressed that there “might be hope” that she could be happy again but was still feeling cautious as she said, “I need to see if it lasts.” During the next

session she said that she was feeling better and could maybe be happy again. And during her final session she said, when telling about how she was feeling, "It is weird. I am so sad and at the same time I feel really peaceful. I will be okay even though divorce happened."

Rianna, a teen whose mother died of cancer, struggled openly with her anger toward God for "killing my mom." At her last session, she said, "Oh, and remember how I felt about God before? Well, God is back to where he was before. I mean I don't pray everyday or anything, but I never did and anyway, I am not angry anymore. I mean, I wish mom was here, but I am not mad at God anymore. I don't know why, but I'm not."

Seth, a four year old, coping with his parents divorce also displayed integration and hope. At first, he was very sad and often laid his head down on the table saying, "I am so tired of divorce." At a later session he summarized his feelings saying, "I am sad. Because of my mom and dad had a divorce. But I am also happy because Daddy don't yell at Mommy and he said she is his friend."

After comparing the core statements of all ten of the children, there was a definite progression from despair into a place where they acknowledged the ongoing nature of grief and that they still would have times of pain and grief, but at the same time, they began to find hope and happiness in the midst of their pain. Seth, a three year old seemed to summarize it best when he said, "I used to be sad all the time but now I am cookie! You know, everyone likes cookies and I am happy like a cookie! And mommy and daddy don't get along and they got a divorce, but they still can like cookies!"

In addition to the children finding a sense of hope while still acknowledging the reality of their pain, they also expressed that God was with them in their journey. Only one child, as noted earlier, expressed anger at God and she eventually found peace with God again. The remaining nine children expressed through prayer and comments that God was an active part of their journey.

The prayers of the children contained many instances when God seemed to be actively present with them (see chart 11). And throughout the sessions, the children would express their faith that God was with them. God was described and approached by the children as: One who listens and helps, One who brings comfort, peace and happiness, and makes us whole again, and, the Light that shines and heals.

### **One Who Listens and Helps**

In 25% of the prayers, the children asked God to help them. Bell rang a little chime during her first session and quietly asked God over and over to “Make Mommy love Bell.” Jasmine took a small eagle and laid it on the table. She would lift it over and over asking God to help her “fly again!”

In 19% of the prayers, the children asked God to help another person. Brett placed a Holy Listening Stone with four arrows on it on the table and said, “I am praying that Mom and Dad will go their own ways and stop asking about each other and stop worrying about what the other one is doing and whether dad has a girlfriend or not.” He also prayed, as quoted above, “God, help my parents to get along and not to make this ugly—well, any uglier than it already is!”

Forty three percent of the children demonstrated, in prayer, a presence with God. Many would sit and cry and express after their prayer that they “knew God was with them.” And 14% asked God for comfort. Emily sat in the light of a candle, cried and simply said, “God help me feel better.”

Bell made sixteen balls of clay and carefully laid them in two piles. “See God,” she proudly expressed, “I am eleven happy and only two sad!”

Jasmine wrote her prayer on dissolving paper, placed it in a bowl of water and said, “Okay, go to heaven and tell God and my daddy what I said!” She also asked for God’s help as she used a chime for her prayer tool and as she chimed it she prayed, “God help my daddy get to heaven. Help me to see him again. Help him watch over me. Help him to know all the stuff he needs to know. Help the sickness in his head.”

Emily came to the session very upset about not understanding her math at school and she chose magnetic sticks for a prayer tool. She made several numbers out of them and said, “God help me understand math.”

### **One Who Brings Comfort, Peace, Happiness and Makes Us Whole Again**

Jasmine described how God, along with her hard work and bravery, helped her find happiness again. She explained, “Well, when you first have your dad die, you are like a bird that can’t fly and if you talk and let your bubbles out, then you start to fly and after a lot of hard work and being brave enough to let your feelings out, you can really fly. God helps me to fly, really fly and be happy, happy enough to fly!”

Following the death of her grandfather, Emily made a set of prayer beads. At the next session she said, “Those prayer beads really work. Especially at night when I can’t sleep. I get those out, pray, feel better and I can sleep again.”

She also described praying alone in her room and said, “When I go in my room and pray, I am sad, but my heart starts to glow peace. It is weird, I am sad and at the same time my heart glows peace.” Later, after being asked where she thought the peace was coming from, she explained, “Well, Mommy and Daddy aren’t fighting as much anymore, but the peace comes from God. I mean, you are upset and when you get very still, God gives you peace.”

Jasmine used a sandbox for her prayer tool and sat making broken hearts in the sand. Then she would wipe them away and replace them with whole hearts. “God will help my heart feel better,” she said. She also asked for a smile as a symbol for her blessing saying, “Make it an upside down smile first and then a right side up smile. You know, ask God to make me happy! God will!” During another session, Jasmine held a small clay baby in her hand and gently rocked it saying, “This is me as a baby and God and Daddy are holding me and I am getting so much better—so much better!”

Ryan, struggling with adjusting to a new home, new baby and new school asked to have the tree symbol from the Holy Listening Stones as his symbol for his blessing. “You see, “ he said, “it is the palm of God’s hand and that is where I rest when I am upset!”

Brett struggling with his parents divorce used several Holy Listening Stones and placed them on the table. The stone with arrows asked God to help his parents stop arguing, a question mark stone told God he wasn’t sure what to do to get better and then

he placed a circle stone on the table and said, “This is for wholeness. And when God makes my parents stop arguing all the time, I will be whole again—like how this rock is round and whole. I will be whole again, someday!”

Twenty percent of the children described God speaking audibly to them. Jasmine, struggling with her fathers’ suicide described how she heard God speak to her. “I just need to know, why would he leave me? I am not mad about it, I just need the truth. I just needed to know and so God told me! And God told me not to be mad but just to know. It is like this blue stone (picks up a blue stone). This is the blue sky and when I look at the sky I can really hear him talking to me.” “What does he say?” the spiritual support asked. “Well,” Jasmine explained, “ it is sort of Dad and sort of God saying, “I am with you and you will be okay and I love you and I am watching over you.” I mean it isn’t their voices, it is them talking to me. You know how it is. Like it is them but not their voices but you just know because you hear it. You know! And ever sense he died and he talks to me, I know I will be okay and God tells me to and so I really know.”

During another session, Jasmine again spoke of God talking to her. She asked the spiritual support provider if her parents were alive or dead. When the spiritual support provider shared that her parents had both died Jasmine asked rather matter-of-factly, “So you hear your dad and God talk to you at the same time? And when you look at the stars you see the light of their eyes shining down?”

Another time she told of witnessing a fight between her mother and a male friend. When the argument began to get violent Jasmine went into her room and reported that God spoke to her saying, “I love you and I am protecting you!” “I heard it, “ she said, “and I felt better! You know I think God speaks to all people, but they don’t believe it is

God because they don't listen, but I do and I can hear God. Everyone could hear God if they just listened. I listen in my heart and there is God telling me I will be okay."

God also spoke audibly to Layla, a six-year-old child whose father had attempted suicide. She was telling about the day when her mother found her father, who had been missing overnight, and she described the fear she felt as she heard her mother scream. The spiritual support provider asked her if she had started to cry and Layla replied, "I almost did but then I heard God. God said, 'Layla, I know you think your daddy is going to die, but he isn't. He is very sick but he will not die!' And so I didn't cry because God told me that."

At a later session, she once again told of hearing God. "Well, I am one of those special people who can hear God talk. I hear God talk but not in my ears. I hear God in my heart and then to make sure it is God I say, 'Is that you God?' And God says, 'Yes.' I can hear him in my heart, not in my ears. And he says, 'Are you stressed?' and I say, 'Yes. I am scared.' And he says, 'It will be okay. Relax and trust me.' And then I can relax...and do you know what else God told me? God told me that daddy tried to kill himself, but he won't die and he will be okay."

At another session she again told of how God comforted her. "God comes to me and says, 'Are you okay?' He just checks on me and makes sure I am okay. And I say, 'I love you.' You know when God checks on you, he already knows the answer so you just have to say, 'I love you' or 'Thank you.' You should always say thank you to God because God cares enough to check on you and tell you things like your dad is going to be okay."

### **One Who is Light in the Midst of Darkness**

Seven out of the ten children referred to God as light. Sometimes this was in the form of rainbows or the sun or as simply light, but it was a recurring theme as they described how God was present in the midst of their journey.

Emily asked for a cross as the symbol for her blessing and when asked why, she responded, “Because it is a symbol of Jesus and it is his light that brings me peace.”

At a later session she drew a picture of a rainbow surrounding a heart and described it’s meaning, “It tells me that I am the heart and a rainbow of love surrounds me. See, Mom is one ray (points to the red ray of light) and Dad is one ray (points to the orange ray) and my brother is this one (points to the yellow ray) and you [the spiritual support provider] are this one (points to the green ray) and see, God is the sun making the rainbow.” At a later session Emily sat in the light of a rainbow candle saying, “My life was so dark and sad but God’s light shines and it is okay.”

Tony, a three year old always requested a rainbow as the symbol of his blessing and said, “I just want a rainbow because it makes me feel better.” After being asked what symbol she would like for her blessing, Jasmine said, “I want a candle for light to shine in my heart and take all the pain away—not just for me but for other people who have grief too.”

For a prayer, as was described earlier, Jasmine made a prayer shawl. She placed a heart button in the center and placed the other symbols in a rainbow shape around them. Then she said, “You see, love is the center of everything and from love, rainbows grow. That is how you heal—you keep love in the center and healing grows like a rainbow.”

John chose a cloud for the symbol during his blessing and explained, “Life has been cloudy—like rainy and stormy—you know—everyone fighting and yelling but then God brings the sun back out. It isn’t out yet, but it will come!”

Layla, while describing her feelings chose the Sun Holy Listening Stone and said, “Before this happened I felt like this (points at the stone) and then it was like everything turned black and the sun disappeared, especially when Mommy screamed. Everything was dark and black, but it better now because of what God said to me. The light is back again.”

Seth, a four year old, struggling with his grandfather’s death, drew a picture of a rainbow with a monkey under it. Explaining it, he said, “It is me—me as a monkey. I am sad because my grandpa died—that is he laid down and he’s dead and I am praying to the Lord and the Lord is a rainbow so I feel this (points to a smile holy listening stone) now. I am okay. I am happy because I point to God.”

Ryan asked for a star as a symbol of his blessing. He was upset because his only babysitter was moving to Texas. “I want a star because I want God’s light to shine on her path and show her the safe way to Texas.”

### Spiritual Integration

As stated above, psychologists refer to integration as the time when a person understands the reality of their situation and, at the same time, has the sense that they can still go on, survive and even thrive in the midst of their ongoing pain.

In this study, through using the ritual of the spiritual support sessions over a period of time, the children all achieved what the author has chosen to call, *spiritual integration* (see figure 5). Spiritual integration is what all ten children in this study

achieved: a sense that though their pain would continue, they could survive and be happy. The awareness of the presence of God and the use of ritual distinguishes spiritual integration from the integration psychologists describe. Through the creation of an emotionally and spiritually safe setting and by using a ritualized pattern the children were enabled to honestly name their pain, be heard by a caring, compassionate adult, spend time in prayer and receive a final blessing. During this process spiritual integration occurred. The children had a profound sense that God was with them in the midst of their pain and that even though the pain continued, they could not only survive, but live and be happy in the midst of it.

### **Summary**

Nine of the ten children expressed that they felt God's presence with them during their journey through grief and crisis. Only one teen felt anger with God and was unaware of God's comfort. However, she participated in prayer time and would sit quietly in the light of a candle. During the last session she expressed that she was no longer angry with God and they were "okay." The other 90% of the children described God in a variety of ways through prayers, drawings, and conversations. It was clearly apparent that God's presence was helpful and a source of hope, comfort and strength for them. Through the process of ongoing spiritual support, and with the awareness of God's presence, the children were able to move from despair to hope and became aware that even in the midst of pain, grief and crisis they would survive and could once again be happy. The result of spiritual support, in this study, was spiritual integration.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY

Each day children in our churches, schools, communities and world experience death, divorce, blended family issues, unwanted pregnancies, military deployment of a parent, learning disabilities, homelessness, poverty, violence, physical challenges, relocation, being bullied, school pressure, and dysfunctional family situations. Attempted and completed suicides, self-mutilation, eating disorders, the use of drugs and alcohol, and risky lifestyle choices are all increasing among the child and teen populations.

Children are more and more often finding themselves in places of hopelessness, despair and chaos with few options for care. There is a shortage of mental health professionals, and teachers and school counselors find themselves overwhelmed with testing and class sizes and are unable to provide one-on-one care. Often, smaller hurts get overlooked until they balloon into problems that can no longer be ignored.

It is these children that Christ calls us, his followers, to care for when he says, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt. 25:40b). These children, who find themselves overwhelmed by life’s struggles and who are suffering and without help, are the *least among us*.

The church, that is, the people of God, is in an ideal position to help these hurting children find renewed hope and new life, for our basic theology holds that “the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it” (Jn 1:5). Our theology is

that Christ died only to be raised from the dead to life eternally. Children can find great comfort and solace knowing that there is no problem in life, no hurt, no pain that the light of God cannot outshine.

However the church as a whole has failed to take seriously the innate spirituality of children and the role that their spirituality could play in their ability to find hope, comfort and peace from God during times of crisis and pain.

After much research and study, the author was unable to find a model specifically designed to provide pastoral care to children. There is little evidence that pastoral care was offered to children by the church historically nor is the church offering any today. There is theological, biblical and historical support for the author's assumptions that children are blessings to society, have an innate spirituality, and need and deserve pastoral care which provide a foundation that pastoral care could and should be offered to children. However, a model of pastoral care for children cannot be located.

The author founded First Steps Spirituality Center in 2000 with the mission to provide spiritual support to hurting children and teens at no cost. The model used at First Steps Spirituality Center was an organically grown model developed by the author as she spent time listening to and learning from the hurting children and teens who she had worked for the past twenty five years of ordained ministry. While it is a model of pastoral care, it has never been studied in a formal way. After discovering that it is possibly one of the only pastoral care models designed for use with children, the author chose to study it as her Doctor of Ministry Project.

Using a qualitative method of research, the verbatims of ten children who had come to First Steps Spirituality Center for a variety of reasons and who were selected by a random process, were coded, studied and the results were explained in Chapter Five.

## **Findings and Conclusions**

### **The Characteristics of the Spiritual Support Provider**

The pastoral care model used at First Steps Spirituality is called One-On-One Spiritual Support. The author, prior to this study, assumed that most of the work done in one-on-one spiritual support was done by the hurting child. However, after studying it, it became apparent that the role of the spiritual support provider was extremely important. During spiritual support sessions a child is able to name their pain and spend time with God. Both of these are extremely personal and often difficult to do so a child needs the space, both emotional and physical, to be able to go into emotional and spiritual places that they would rather avoid. The spiritual support provider is the one who creates the spiritual, emotional and physical space of safety and acceptance so that the child will name their pain and begin the process of recovery.

Characteristics of the spiritual support provider discovered in this study included: a deep faith in God's ability to bring light into the midst of darkness and healing and strength in times of crisis; a belief in the innate spirituality of children, meaning a belief that a child has the capacity to connect with God; the ability to create a relationship with the child; the ability to create an emotional atmosphere where the child felt accepted and cared about; a warm and accepting attitude toward the child; good listening skills; empathy and the ability to express to a child that he or she understands them.

Most of the work done by the spiritual support provider was Holy Listening where the child received the complete attention of the spiritual support provider and was totally accepted and never judged or diagnosed. In addition to listening, the spiritual support provider did very little teaching. Responses given during the time of conversation were 45% questions to probe deeper into understanding, 21% compassionate responses to assure the child that they were being understood and empathized with, 27% affirming responses telling the child they were very brave to talk about their pain, and only 5% of responses made were didactic in nature (see chart 5). The majority of the didactic responses explained the structure of the session to the children during the first visit.

The role of the spiritual support provider was not one of a teacher, but rather as the one who journeyed with the child, creating a safe space, emotionally and physically, where the child was able to explore and name their feelings honestly and have the opportunity to connect with God in the safety of the space.

### The Spiritual Support Structure

The structure of spiritual support initially was described as having four parts: Holy Listening, Making a Sacred Space, Prayer, and Blessing. After studying the model closely though, these parts were much too simplified. In reality, the spiritual support session could be broken down into three phases: The Opening Phase, The Discovering Phase and The Affirming Phase. Each of these phases could be further divided as follows: The Opening Phase included the arrival and initial conversation; The Discovering Phase included the use of symbols and discovering conversation and ends as

the core statement is made; The Affirmation Phase included prayer time and blessing (see figure 2).

### **Spiritual Support as Ritual**

Through study of this model it became apparent that the three individual phases had unique contributions to the process, and yet were woven together to create a ritualized pattern following the liturgical movement of a worship service. Much as the flow of worship moves the congregation, using the call to worship, songs and prayers, to the moment where the *Word is made flesh* through sermon and communion, so the ritual of spiritual support, in phases one and two, is designed so a hurting child can move from the Opening Phase, through the Discovering Phase and finally to name their pain in the core statement, where their pain is *made flesh and spoken*.

Once the word is made flesh in worship, the closing hymns and benediction ready the people to go back into the world as transformed people of God. Following the core statement, the child through phase three, the Affirmation Phase, through prayer and blessing is also readied to leave the safety of spiritual support and go back out into the world, also transformed and strengthened in some way.

And as it is in worship, the people are called to be transformed through the ritual and the word becoming flesh, so does this process of one-on-one spiritual support seem to lead the children from despair into a hope and a sense that they can survive (see figures 3 and 4).

## Discovered Stages of Spiritual Support

Below are descriptions of the stages discovered and a summary of learning discovered in each phase. It would be remiss to begin describing the structure without acknowledging the importance of silence. While not a phase in and of itself, silence was a deeply healing part of the process. Nearly 30% of each session (see chart 6) was spent in silence and it was after times of silence when children would begin to articulate deeper, more vulnerable feelings. Much of the silence occurred during the Discovering Phase and during prayer time. In times of crisis, it seemed that the children needed quiet space to start articulating their feelings and face their pain. It was also during the silence of prayer that many shared that they were starting to feel better or found peace.

### **The Opening Phase (Arrival and Initial Conversation)**

Prior to the study, this phase, the shortest phase, seemed to be less important than some of the later phases, however through this study it was discovered to be vitally important. It was during this phase that the children began to trust that the spiritual support session was a place where he or she could be safe and could share their pain without fear of embarrassment or correction. Before words were ever spoken, as the children arrived, the room was designed to be a child-friendly space and communicate to the children that this was a place *designed just for children* and that whoever created it really likes and understands children. The objects on the shelves, the small cozy space, and the look and feel of the room all communicated safety and care. On the table in the

center of the room were homemade cookies which again communicated care and comfort to the children.

The initial conversation began with a warm welcome where the child was told verbally and shown non-verbally how glad the spiritual support provider was that they had come. Children who were uncomfortable at the first session were also welcomed and their discomfort acknowledged.

The time of initial conversation was also a time where the children shared whatever they wanted to share and was given time to relax, settle down and move from the business of everyday into a place of calm and quiet. Children shared about their day, things that might be happening the next day such as a field trip or test at school, or they might have shared a new song they had saved on their phone. Often they told a funny story.

During the Initial Phase, there was no pushing or probing for the children to share anything about their pain. It was simply a time of connecting and building trust. Once the children felt welcomed and realized that this was a safe place and that they were cared for, they were ready to move into the next phase.

While initially thought to be a rather unimportant stage, the importance of the initial phase should not be overlooked. It is during this phase that the foundation of trust, openness and care was created between the spiritual support provider and the children. Without this trust it would be impossible to move into the Discovering Phase, where the children moved even deeper into their pain. However, when the trust and relationship was established in the Initial Phase the children moved into the next phase easily.

### **The Discovering Phase (Symbols, Discovering Conversation and Core Statement)**

The Discovering Phase is the longest phase of spiritual support lasting about 75% of the total time of the session. During this phase it was discovered that the children were able to move from a time of initial conversation and onto naming their pain, which they expressed as their core statement. The naming of pain, according to many experts, is the way a person can start to heal. Once pain is named it will no longer cause the pain it did while being bottled up. Holding feelings inside is one of the major contributing factors to long-term issues.

The naming of pain was made possible through the use of symbols in the form of spiritual manipulatives that helped the children put their feelings into words. There are several reasons why the symbols were important during this process. During times of crisis there are often not words to describe the pain and feelings associated with it. Children have a limited vocabulary and so they have an even more difficult time describing their feelings. They also fear that some of their feelings might be naughty or bad and so they might not verbally communicate things they feel might get them into trouble. The third reason the symbols were found to be helpful is because children have a natural love of symbols and were more comfortable *showing* their feelings than *talking about* them.

The spiritual manipulatives used by the children included: drawings which the children chose to use 40% of the time; Holy Listening Stones (a tool created by the author for use at the center (see illustration 1), chosen 43% of the time; Pop Can Analogy used 9% of the time; and symbols brought by the children including poems, music, figurines and tattoos, used 8% of the time.

With the aid of these tools the children were able to find symbolic expression for their feelings and began to articulate them. As the children shared their feelings and the feelings were received by the spiritual support provider with care, compassion and understanding, the children were able to go deeper and deeper and become increasingly honest and open.

The progression of the discovering conversation was not always an easy period to document. Often the children would appear to be talking about unrelated topics or jump from feeling to feeling and situation to situation. There was no attempt on the part of the spiritual support provider to guide or shape the thoughts of the children or the direction of the conversation. The children shared and the spiritual support provider listened and communicated care and understanding. During this phase, while the spiritual support provider was not always able to see progress toward the core statement, the children seemed to explore aloud their different emotions and thoughts about the situation and eventually, the children would make a *core statement*.

The core statement served as a succinct summary of the children's deepest feelings. Prior to this study the author was unaware that each session of spiritual support contained a moment when the children said the truth, the core of what they felt clearly. The core statement marked the end of the second phase and was as far as the children were willing to go during that session. As soon as the statement was made, the children would breathe a sigh of relief, begin to fidget, physically stand up and start to move around, or ask an unrelated questions such as "What will we do next?" The core statement became very important for the study because it was used to measure the long-term effects of spiritual support.

In summary, the Discovering Phase used symbols in the form of spiritual manipulatives to help the children express their pain. As they were able to express it and received caring, compassionate feedback from the spiritual support provider, they were able to go deeper and eventually would make a core statement where their deepest pain, at least for that session, was named. It was no longer held inside. After the process of discovering their feelings using the spiritual manipulatives, and once the core statement was spoken, the children were ready to move into the next phase, The Affirmation Phase.

### **The Affirmation Phase (Prayer and Blessing)**

The third phase of a spiritual support session is the Affirmation Phase and while it is a brief session lasting about 20% of the total time of a session, it was an important phase. Once the children had made their core statement, it was a very vulnerable time for them. The prayer time created a space for the children to sit with, contemplate and pray about their feelings and find acceptance, not from the spiritual support provider, as was the case in the two previous phases, but from God. During this phase the children's attention moved away from the spiritual support provider and the time became an intimate time between the children and God. After the time of prayer, the spiritual support provider gave the children who desired it, a blessing. The time spent in prayer and blessing helped the children recover from the core statement and prepared and strengthened them to leave the session.

It must be noted that no child coming to First Steps Spirituality Center is ever forced to pray or receive a blessing. However, in this study all ten children chose to pray.

One child refused during her first session because she was angry at God but asked to pray at each remaining session.

The children were invited to use “Prayer Tools” which were developed by the author to help children pray. The use of prayer tools enabled the children to slow down and focus, and also allowed them to use their natural use of symbolic language as they prayed. Prayer Tools also helped the children increase their time spent in prayer. This time of silence and reflection was a time the children took seriously and often reported feeling better after they had finished.

Prayer tools used included drawing, softly ringing a chime, lighting a candle and reflecting while it glowed, tracing a labyrinth or shape, or listening to music. The Prayer Tools fill the shelves of the children’s room and the children selected whatever they would like to use. They were also invited to simply say a prayer with words. During the prayer times, the children used a prayer tool 98% of the time and were contemplative in nature. Most of the time spent in prayer was silent. Only 2% of the prayers were traditional prayers using words and without a prayer tool (see chart 9). Many of the children spoke aloud while praying using a prayer tool and created a free flowing dialogue with God.

During the time of prayer the children would often visibly relax, change in mood from a sad to a lighter mood, and often reported feeling better after their prayer time. It was not in the scope of this study to understand exactly what happened during this private prayer time, but the children seemed to connect with God and reported feeling better after they finished. Further study on the exact nature of the prayer time would be welcomed and encouraged.

After the children finished praying they were invited to receive a blessing. The blessing was a time where the children were invited to choose an oil, lotion or water to be anointed with. They were also invited to “name a symbol of their blessing.” The naming of a symbol again allowed the children to use their symbolic language and to identify what they needed or wanted from God.

The heart and rainbow were the most requested symbols. The symbols chosen by the children could be categorized into four main categories: symbols asking God for happiness were requested 33% of the time; symbols asking God to help them were requested another 33% of the time; symbols of hope were chosen 23% of the time; symbols seeking peace were requested 7% of the time; and 4% of the symbols were ones that reminded them to continuing getting their feelings out at home (see chart 10).

The blessing was a time of intimacy shared between the spiritual support provider, the children and God, as God was invited to be with and go with the children. The blessing affirmed the child and reminded them of how strong and wonderful they were. With the children’s strength affirmed and God’s presence invoked and promised, the children were able to leave the safety and quiet of the spiritual support session and go back out into the world where they would again often return to the crisis and chaos of their pain.

The three phases described above are the discovered structure of a spiritual support session. The strength of the structure seems to be that it provided a ritualized way for the children to safely move from saying the things they were expected to say and away from avoidance of pain into a place of complete honesty, the core statement, and then have their feelings affirmed gently through prayer and blessing, while also being

given the emotional and spiritual space, often in silence, to reflect, discern and sit with their feelings.

The sessions, individually, seemed to help children feel better and each child in the study chose to return several times. If they had not felt accepted and safe while sharing such intimate and deeply personal feelings, they would not have come back or would have refused to talk. Instead, after the first spiritual support session, they would return excited and ready to do the ritual of spiritual support again.

### Spiritual Progression and Spiritual Integration

While the children seemed to feel better at the conclusion of each individual session, the author wished to discover what the long-term effects of repeating the ritual of spiritual support over time would be. The core statements from each session were charted side by side and examined for any patterns that emerged. Each statement the children made about God's role in their journey was also coded to determine if the children identified God as helpful.

The initial assumption of the author was that the children would speak of and describe healing as moving away from pain and into complete happiness. Since there was no teaching or lectures about how God might be on the journey to healing and since the religious backgrounds of the children varied, she did not expect much awareness of God's role to be articulated by the children. Both of these assumptions proved to be wrong.

## **Moving From Despair to Hope**

The children did not express that they were *healed from the pain* they had been experiencing. Rather, they explained that they *believed the pain would never go away fully but that they knew that they could survive it and be happy again even with the remaining pain.*

This revelation from the children created a new understanding about how crisis and pain in the lives of children truly works. Many experts assert that once a person experiences pain of any kind, they are different than they were before. They may be happy again, they may function normally, but they are a changed person.

The children in this study had endured many pains. One lost her father to a suicide, one had been rejected by her mother and was now living with her grandparents, one had lost her mother to cancer, one's father suffered from mental illness, five were surviving messy, painful divorces and one could not tolerate any kind of change. Their lives had been forever changed and yet in the midst of it, they understood that they could be happy again, and could continue to live and that even though sadness, chaos, and pain would remain, they could still live and be happy. All ten of the children in this study found this reality and expressed it over time.

From a purely psychological perspective, this would be called integration and is the goal of much of psychology. However, what set this integration apart from the psychological view is that it was accompanied by a deep sense that God was in the midst of their pain, as well.

## **God in the Midst of Pain**

There was no teaching about God's role in the midst of pain and crisis during the spiritual support sessions with the children. The only direction given was that children were invited to pray and were asked if they wanted a blessing. All ten of the children did pray and receive blessings. God, and God's role during the children's journeys was spoken of often and by all ten children.

One teen, whose mother had died of cancer expressed anger at God during her earliest sessions, but as time progressed she began to pray and later told the spiritual support provider things were okay again with God.

The other nine children spoke regularly of God and God's presence in their journey. The statements about God were categorized into three descriptive phrases based on what the children said. God was experienced as: the One who listens and helps; the One who brings comfort, happiness, peace and makes us whole again; and the Light that shines in the darkness.

The children described God through a variety of means; in prayers, drawings, and during conversations, and it was clearly apparent that God's presence was helpful and a source of hope for them. Their experiences with God seemed very concrete, were always filled with hope, and there was never a fear of God.

The children in this study all expressed that God had been with them in the journey and that God had and would continue to help them, bring light into their darkness, or comfort them when needed.

## Spiritual Integration

The spiritual progression observed in the children was very noticeable. They came to their first sessions filled with despair and hopelessness and through time arrived at two important conclusions. First, that even in the midst of pain, they could survive, and second, that God was present with them and would help them, comfort them and was a great source of hope for them. These two factors combined to create what the author has chosen to call, *spiritual integration*, where the children had a profound sense that God was with them in the midst of their pain and that even though the pain continued, they could not only survive, but live and be happy in the midst of it.

When Jeremiah was called by God he expressed fear because, as a child, he was afraid and God comforted him saying, “Be not afraid for I am with you to deliver you” (Jer. 1:8). During the first spiritual support sessions the children were afraid and unsure that they could survive the pain and chaos in their lives, but by the conclusion each child expressed that they believed God was with them and they could survive even though the pain continued and might never fully end.

At the start of this study the author expected that some of the children would heal and others would not. She envisioned healing as a child moving beyond and out of their pain. The surprise of this study was that what the children received was not complete healing or resolution from their pain, but rather, spiritual integration. They were able to connect their spirits with God’s hope, comfort, and presence, and they discovered that they could survive the pain even if the pain and hurt never fully left them (see figure 5).

A biblical depiction of spiritual integration is probably found most profoundly in the story of the resurrection of Christ recounted in the book of John. Thomas, one of his

disciples, has heard that Christ has risen, that life has overcome death and that light has shined through the darkness, but refuses to believe until he sees Christ for himself. Jesus appears to Thomas saying, “Peace be with you . . . Put your finger here and see my hands; and put out your hand and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing (Jn 20: 26b).

In this encounter with the risen Christ, a biblical model of spiritual integration is illustrated. Through experiences of death, pain and crisis, wounds occur just as the wounds of Christ were made through his crucifixion. Through the resurrection, in the moment when one realizes that the light shines through the darkness and that life overcomes death, the wounds are still present. They don’t go away. The wounds remain. The pain might forever have changed a person, but life and life abundant continues.<sup>1</sup>

This story of Christ’s resurrection illustrates the spiritual integration that the children in this study experienced. Even though they had been wounded in some way, and even though the wounds remained, they realized that they could survive and live happy and full lives.

Through the process of spiritual support, and going through the ritual of the spiritual support sessions time after time, the children in this study found through sharing their feelings in a safe, compassionate place with a spiritual support provider who deeply cared for them, and through spending time in prayer with God and being assured that God’s blessing was upon them as they left, that even in the midst of pain, they could survive and live happy lives.

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<sup>1</sup> This realization occurred during a conversation while the author was sharing the results of her works with Reverend Todd Spencer, the Youth Minister at First United Church, Colorado Springs.

Spiritual integration is illustrated by John's self-portrait. After spending several sessions in spiritual support, he drew a picture of his face (see illustration 8) and on one side is a frown and tears streaming down his face. On the other is a smile and eyes bright and open. Then, connected to the head is a crown. When asked about the drawing, John began to explain it, "Well, this whole divorce and not seeing my mom is so sad and it still is. I never thought I would be happy again, but now I am happy—really happy! And you know why? Because God—that is why I drew this crown—for God—and God is who makes you happy even when you are sad at the same time. But it is okay. It is better than okay. I am happy." John described his own spiritual integration. He is still sad, the stress and pain of this parent's divorce goes on, but at the same time, he is happy and God is in the midst of it.

Jesus told a story about a house built on stone and when the storms of life came, that house stood and did not fall. The children in this study experienced the storms of life, and for most of them, the storms will never completely stop raging. Yet through it all they found the rock, the stability, and the spiritual integration that they needed to stand and grow. They did not fall.

### **Bias and Suggested Future Studies**

In this study, the author is at the same time the researcher and the one providing the spiritual support. Every effort was made to be honest about her feelings and attitudes, but bias was obviously present. Further studies using observers as the researchers are suggested to test the accuracy of these findings.

Another question that kept emerging as the study was done was the impact of the personality of the spiritual support provider. Children seemed to like coming to their sessions and were willing to open up and be honest about their feelings. The question that emerges is: do they open up because of the personality of the spiritual support provider or does the process itself lead the child to be honest and explore their feelings? To truly understand the answer to this, the author believes additional studies would need to be done, using a variety of spiritual support providers and the model as described.

In this study all ten of the children reported feeling better by the end of the study and all ten felt the presence of God in the midst of their journey. More studies need to be done to confirm that this large percentage of children would feel better and feel God's presence by receiving spiritual support. Perhaps studies done in different geographic and ethnic settings would also be helpful, as well as studies done for specific age groups.

In conclusion, the author assumes and hopes that children who receive spiritual support while still young, and soon after a crisis has occurred, will not only find tools to cope with the immediate crisis but also will have tools to use later in life when another crisis occurs. Studies that track the children from the time of initial spiritual support for the following several years would test this assumption and would provide valuable information about the long-term results of children receiving spiritual support.

### **Conclusion**

The author was unable to find any pastoral care models designed to use with children and therefore created one and used it informally for the past six years at First Steps Spirituality Center. This study chose to explore that model of spiritual support and

the findings provide hope. Through the ritualized three stage process of spiritual support, and with the assistance of a spiritual support provider, the children of this study were able to achieve spiritual integration, the sense that even in the midst of ongoing pain and trauma, they could, with God's presence, survive and be happy.

As stated earlier, this study, since it was done by the author herself, studying her own model, needs to be repeated using different spiritual support providers in a variety of geographic areas and with different cultural groups before the findings can truly be embraced. However, these findings do provide a solid understanding of the structure of a spiritual support session and a model has been developed and articulated which can be used as a basis for further exploration and study.

Jesus once said, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to the least of these my brethren, you did to me." (Mt. 25:40b). Children who face pain, crisis, and fear are the *least of these*. There has not been, as far as the author could determine or find, a pastoral care model designed to help children, *the least of these*, during times of crisis, pain and hurt. It is the hope of the author that this model might serve as a starting place where the church can begin to provide spiritual care and pastoral care to children in times of crisis.

Rabbi Daniel A. Roberts beautifully reminds us that in times of crisis, the church and religious communities are the ones to help:

It is religious beliefs that help people make sense of a turbulent world. In times of crisis we turn to faith to make sense of catastrophes, to understand the death of loved ones. In time of trouble we particularly look for answers when we find life mysterious or when we sense that we have no control. Deep within us we need to believe that the world we live in makes sense, that there is a pattern to it. We look to religion to explain that pattern.

We seek wholeness. This is why religion and the religious institutions are the place to handle crisis.<sup>2</sup>

The religious community has the opportunity to help hurting children and teens in times of crisis. The prayer of this author is that we will respond as the Church and those who understand the truth: the light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it, and, that after death comes the resurrection. Children need the hope, the comfort, and the faith in tomorrow that only God can give them. May we hear their need and respond.

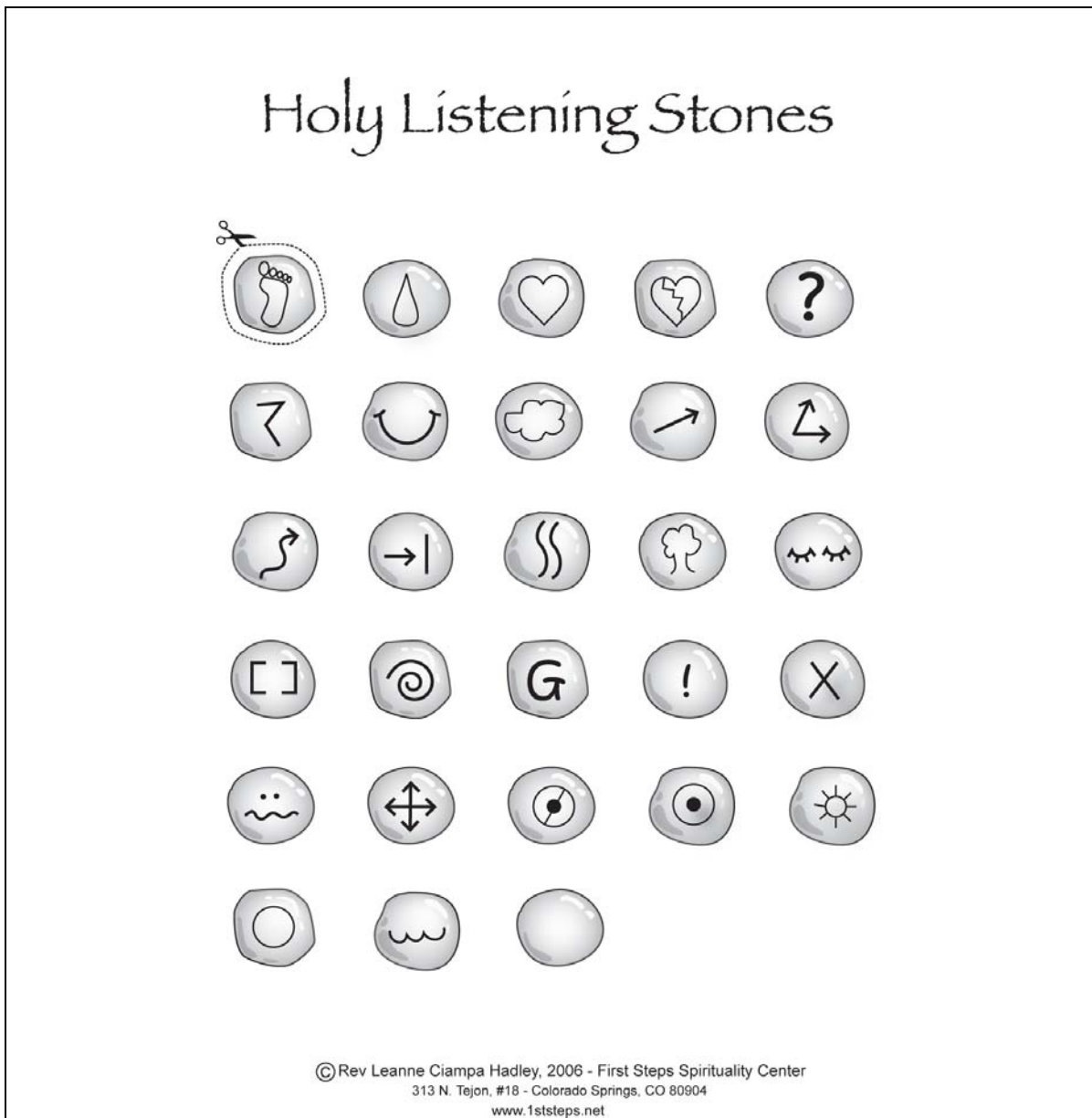
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<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Daniel A. Roberts, "Religious Education as an Aid in Crisis Intervention," in *What Will We Do? Preparing a School Community to Cope with Crises*, ed. Robert G. Stevenson, Death, Value and Meaning Series (Amityville, New York: Baywood Publishing Company, Inc., 2002), 71.

**APPENDIX A**  
**ILLUSTRATIONS**

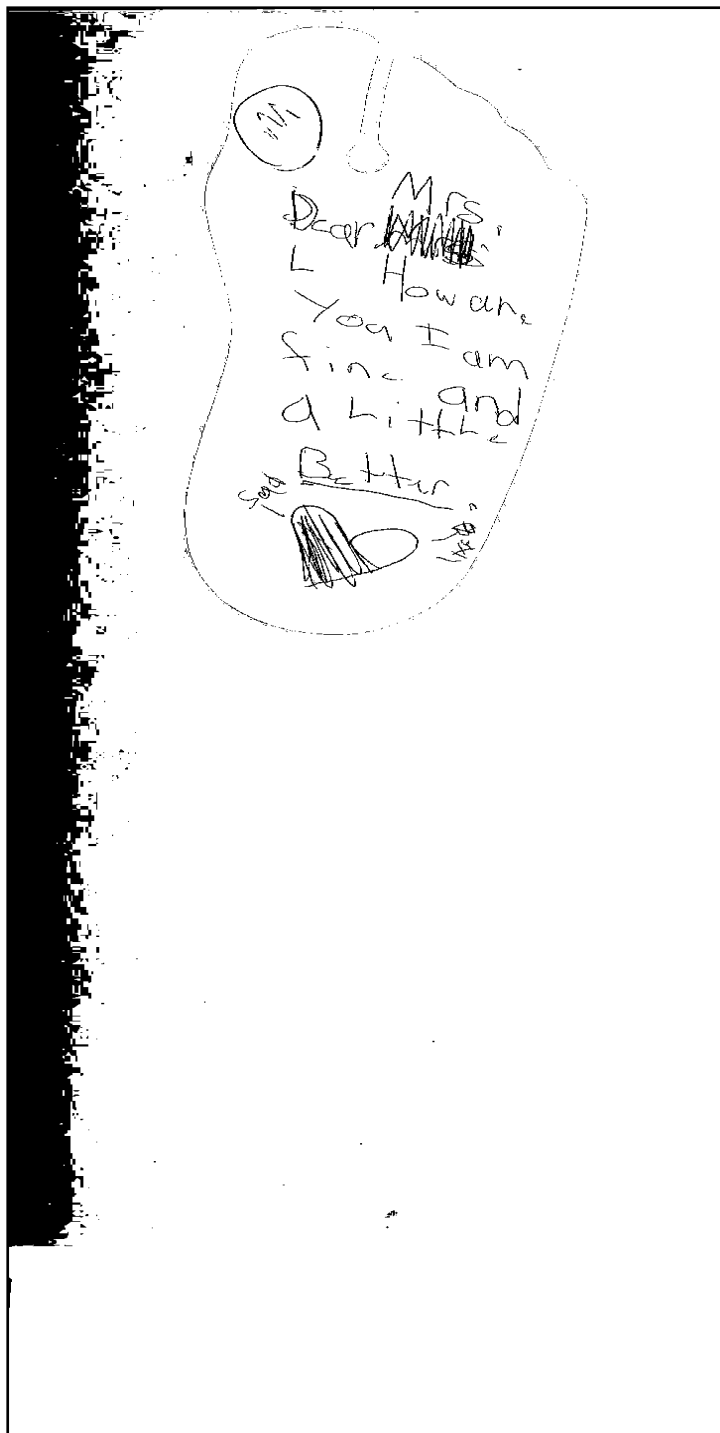
Appendix A: Illustration 1

Holy Listening Stones

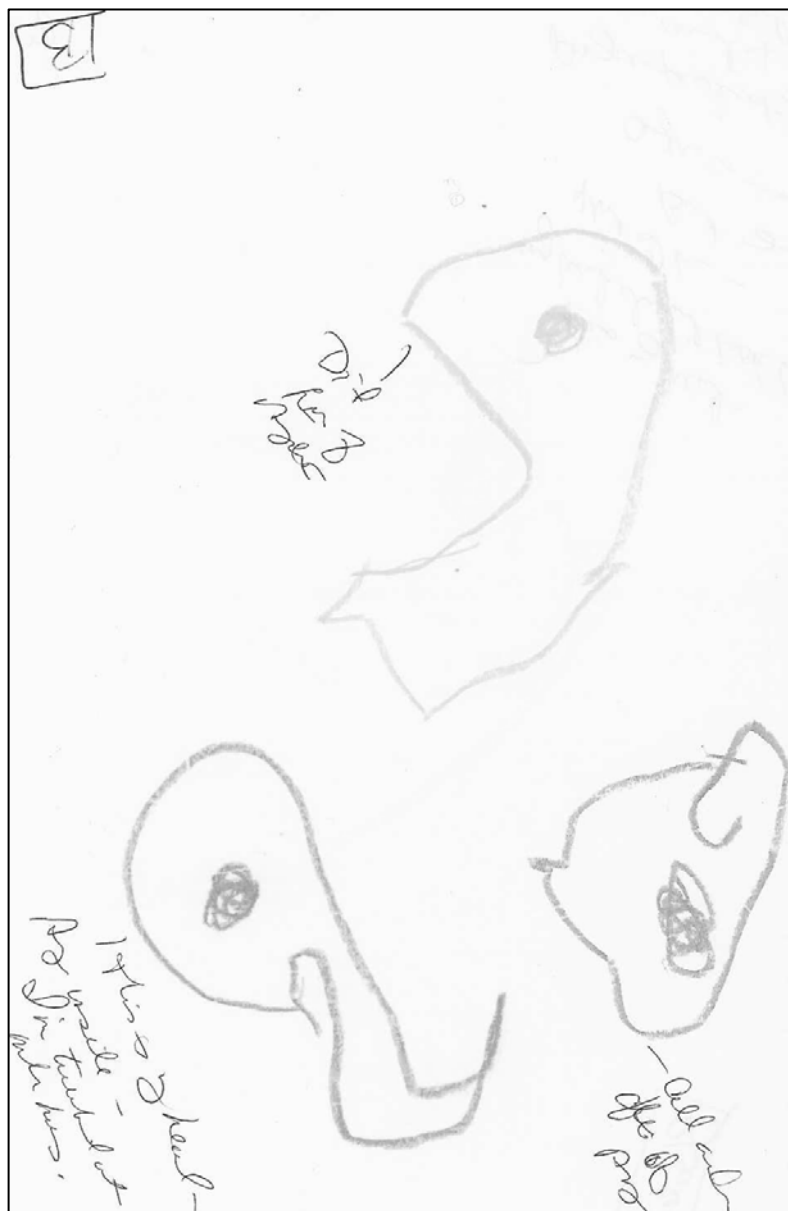


Appendix A: Illustration 2

Jasmine's Note

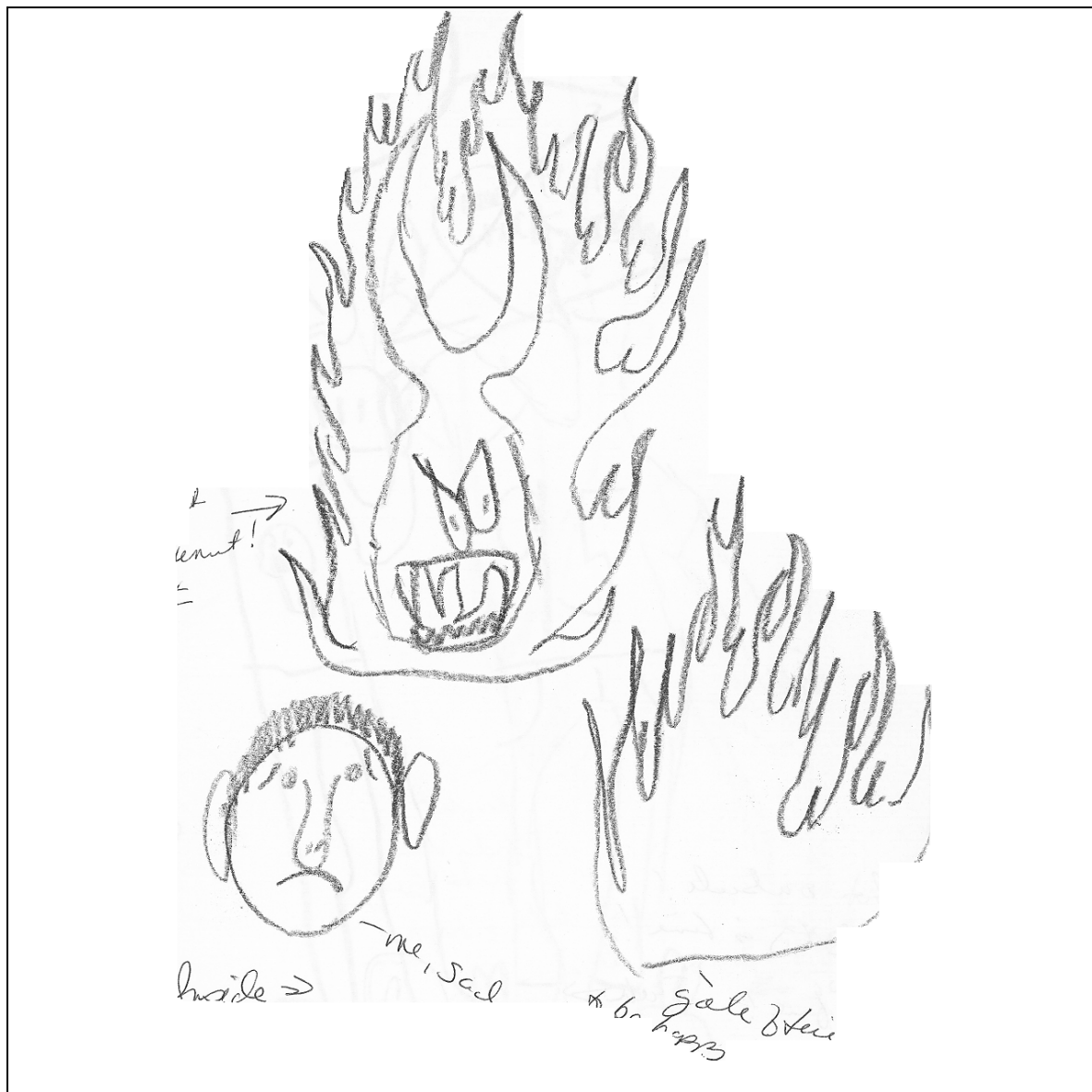


Appendix A: Illustration 3  
Tony's Drawing



Appendix A: Illustration 4

John's Drawing




## Appendix A: Illustration 5


## Prayer Beads

### Prayer Beads...


Materials:



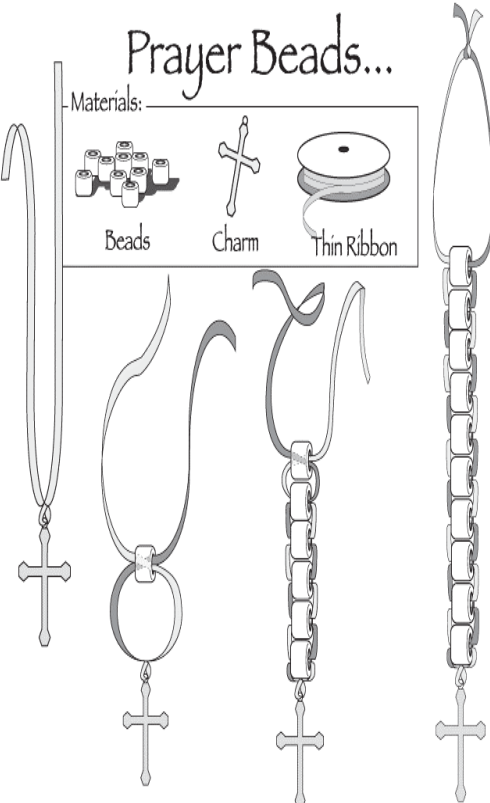
Beads



Charm



Thin Ribbon



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313 N. Tejon, #18 - Colorado Springs, CO 80904  
[www.1ststeps.net](http://www.1ststeps.net)

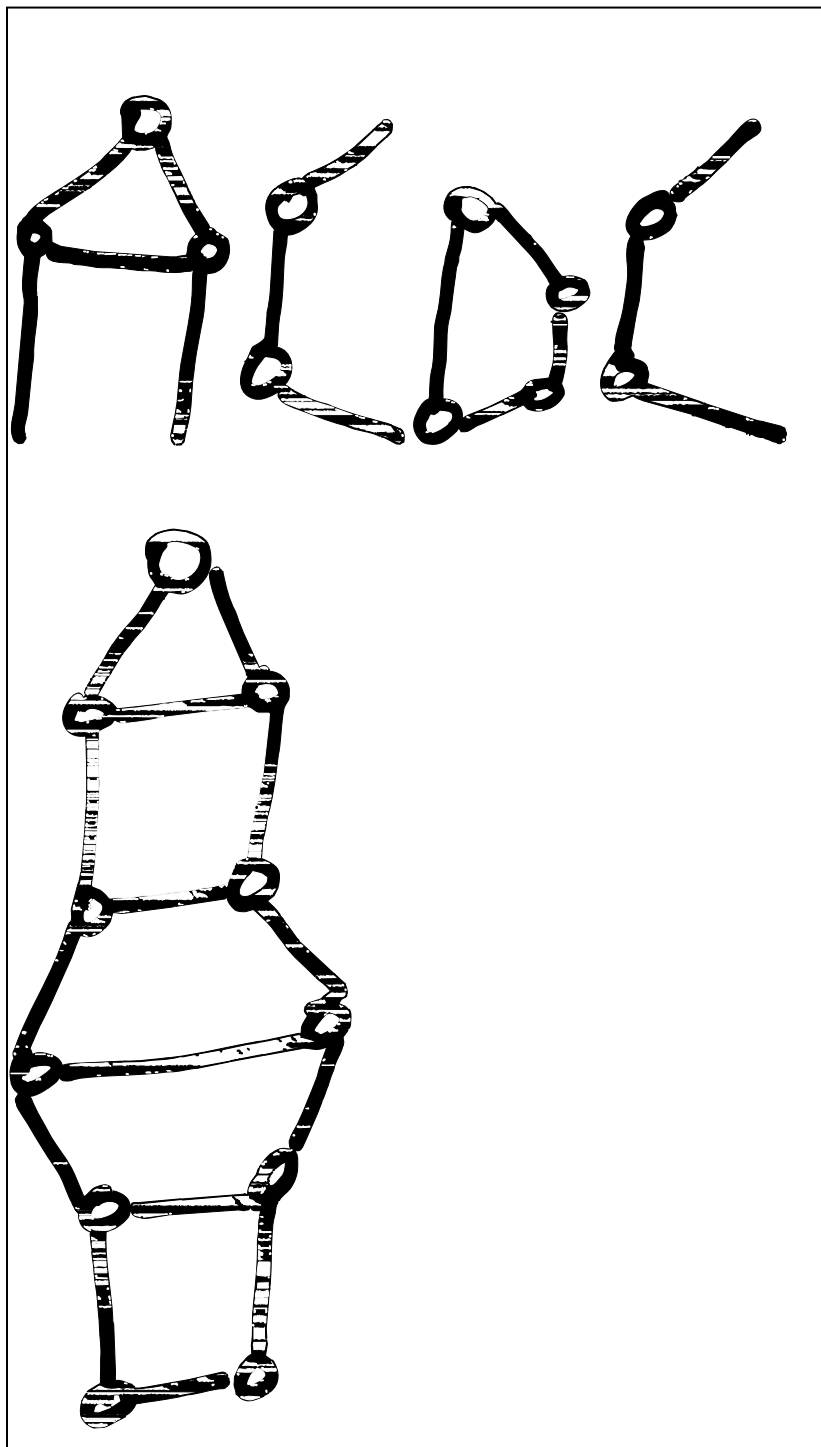
- 1 Select a number of beads (5-10) that you want. Each bead can represent something or someone you want to remember to pray for, or things you want to give thanks for.
- 2 Select a cross charm for the bottom of your prayer beads.
- 3 Cut 20" of ribbon, string on your cross, and tie once (1/2 knot).
- 4 String one 'arm' of your ribbon through the first bead, then string the other arm of your ribbon through in the opposite direction (the ribbon will actually cross while going through the bead.)
- 5 Repeat step 4 with the rest of your beads. When all desired beads are strung, tie a knot at the ends of the two ribbon arms.

\*There should be some slack left in the ribbon so the beads can slide back and forth as you pray!

- 6 Now the beads are ready to be used. They can be used in many ways to help you pray.

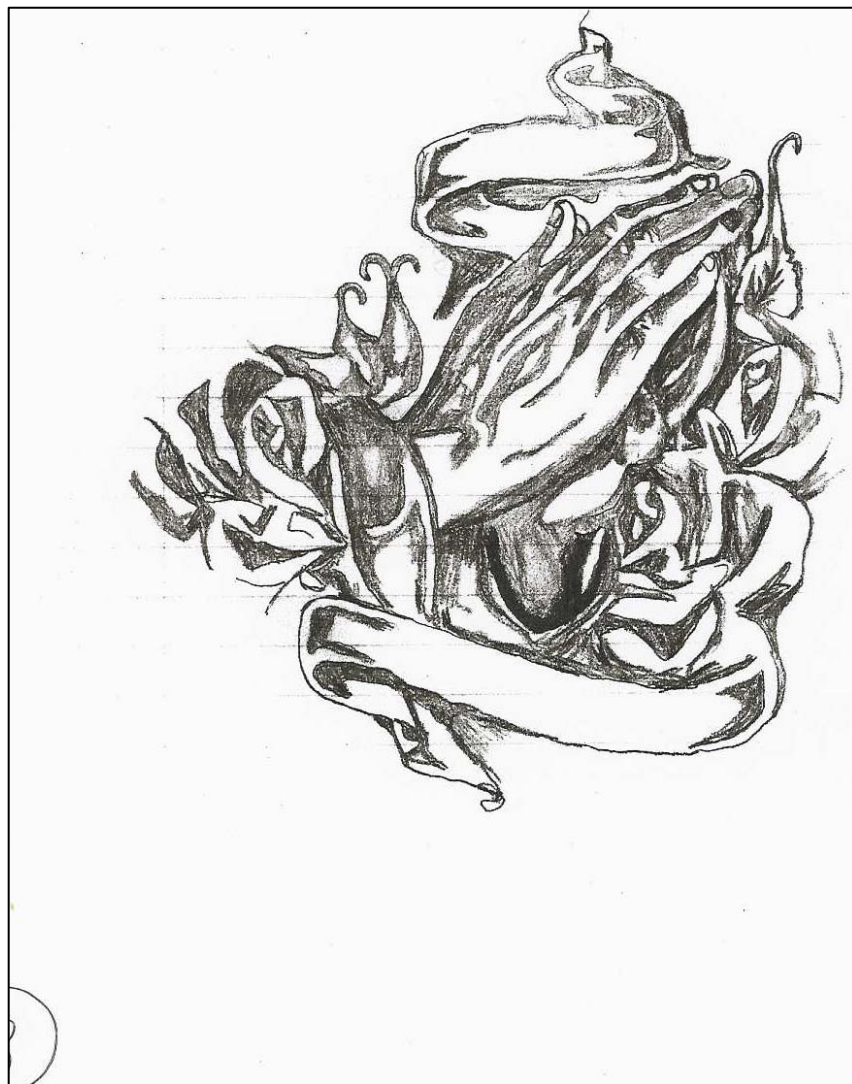
Appendix A: Illustration 6

John's Prayer



Appendix A: Illustration 7

Rainna's Tattoo



Appendix A: Illustration 8

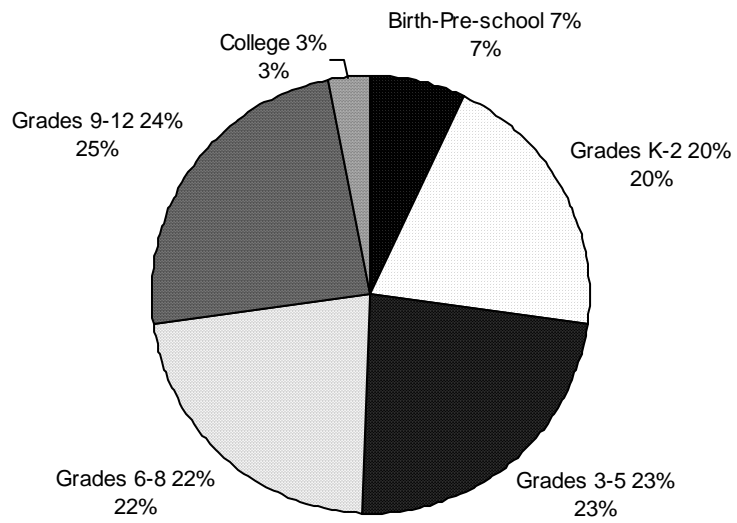
John's Self Portrait and Example of Spiritual Integration



**APPENDIX B**  
**CHARTS AND GRAPHS**

Appendix B: Chart 1

Ages of Children Receiving Spiritual Support at  
First Steps Spirituality Center



## Appendix B: Chart 2

## Reasons for Receiving Care at First Steps Spirituality Center

Reason for Seeking Care	Percentage of those Receiving Care
Death	25%
Divorce	19%
School Issues	8%
Anger	8%
Abuse	7%
Self Esteem Issues	6%
Adopted/Foster Care Issues	5%
Drugs/Alcohol	4%
Family Stress	4%
Terminal Illness	4%
Military Issues	2%
Relocation	2%
Spiritual Questions	2%
Self Mutilation	2%
Parent in Prison	1%
Eating Disorders	1%

## Appendix B: Chart 3

Number of Sessions Studied and Physical and Verbal Care Responses

Child's Name	Child's Age	Sessions Studied	Hugs Given By Child	I Love You Said By Child
Bell	6 years	5	5	2
Bret	13 years	3	2	0
Emily	9 years	4	4	0
Jasmine	7 years	11	9	1
John	11 years	6	6	0
Layla	6 years	3	3	1
Rianna	13 years	9	9	2
Ryan	6 years	3	3	0
Seth	4 years	4	4	1
Tony	3 years	3	2	0
Total		51	47	5 of the ten children

## Appendix B: Chart 4

## Children Studied: Age, Reason for Seeking Help and Religious Affiliation

Name of Child	Age	Reason for Visit	Religious Affiliation
Bell	6 years	Drug use by Parent	United Methodist Occasionally
Bret	13 years	Divorce	Non-denominational Regularly
Emily	9 years	Divorce	United Church of Christ Regularly
Jasmine	7 years	Parent Suicide	None
John	11 years	Divorce	United Church of Christ Regularly
Layla	6 years	Parent Attempted Suicide	None
Rianna	13 years	Parent Died of Cancer	None
Ryan	6 years	Issues around Change	Non-denominational Regularly
Seth	4 years	Divorce	United Church of Christ Regularly
Tony	3 years	Divorce	None

Appendix B: Chart 5  
Responses made during Spiritual Support Sessions by Spiritual Support Provider

Name of Child	Age	Probing Questions	Compassion	Affirmation	Explanation/ Didactic
Bell	6 years	43%	29%	28%	6%
Brett	13 years	33%	30%	28%	5%
Emily	9 years	39%	28%	28%	2%
Jasmine	7 years	38%	42%	36%	4%
John	11 years	36%	27%	25%	6%
Layla	6 years	40%	12%	33%	8%
Rianna	13 years	42%	7%	32%	10%
Ryan	6 years	54%	18%	24%	1%
Seth	4 years	69%	9%	15%	4%
Tony	3 ½ years	51%	16%	21%	8%
Averages		45%	21%	27%	5%

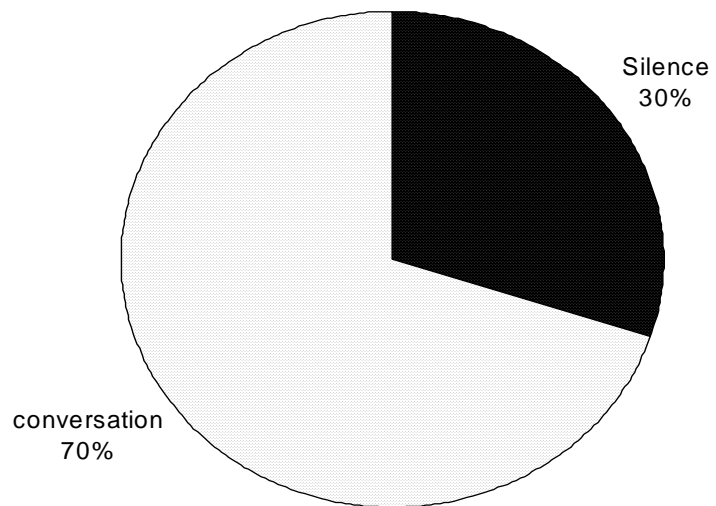
## Appendix B: Chart 6

## Contrast Between Times of Silence and Conversation

Name of Child	Ages	Silence	Conversations
Bell	6 years old	43%	57%
Brett	13 years old	40%	60%
Emily	9 years old	31%	69%
Jasmine	7 years old	33%	67%
John	11 years old	29%	71%
Layla	6 years old	32%	68%
Rianna	13 years old	13%	87%
Ryan	6 years old	31%	69%
Seth	4 years old	20%	80%
Tony	3 ½ years old	29%	71%
Averages		30%	70%

## Appendix B: Chart 7

Pie Chart of Times of Silence and Conversation



Appendix B-Chart 8  
Examples of Responses of the Children Studied to the Holy Listening Stones

Type of Stone	Positive Response	Negative Response
Smile/ frown	"I feel happy."	"I am not happy anymore."
Tear	"I don't cry anymore."	"I cry about..." "I am sad."
Cloud	"I am like a flower blooming."	"My mind feels clouded." "The sun doesn't shine anymore."
Broken Heart	"My heart is healing."	"My heart breaks when..." "My heart is broken."
"X"	"If you added lines, this would be a star because I am getting better and shining again."	"This is like an X, like I can't be happy anymore."
Footprint	"This is God's footsteps and I am following God."	"This is foot stomping on my happiness."
Heart	"I feel loved by..." "I feel peaceful about..."	"I don't feel like anyone loves me."
"G"	"This means God and God is with me." "This is for grandpa and I love him."	"This is a race track. I was going along and it was fine and then I hit a wall."
Wave	"It reminds me of fun I had at the beach." "These are mountains and mountains give you peace."	"I am being tossed around on waves of fear." "My mom and dad fight and it feels like this."
Sun	"This reminds me of a hug." "This is for the sun shining and the sun is God!"	"The sun used to shine, but it doesn't anymore because my mom and dad are fighting."
Tree	"This is my cat's paw and my cat always cares about me." "This is the palm of God's hand."	"This is a tree without roots and it is about to fall over and that is how I feel."
Shut eyes	"These are God's eyes watching over us." "This is for peace and I need peace at home."	"These are my eyes when I am sad and get in trouble!" "These are eyes of sadness."
Arrow hitting wall	"This is a star of hope!"	"This is an arrow hitting a wall and I was just fine and then, bam, divorce!"
Swirl	No positive responses	"This is unbalanced and that is how I feel." "This is swirly and it is how I feel—sick and swirly." "I hate this one, I feel like this!"

## Appendix B: Chart 9

## Types of Prayers Used by the Children

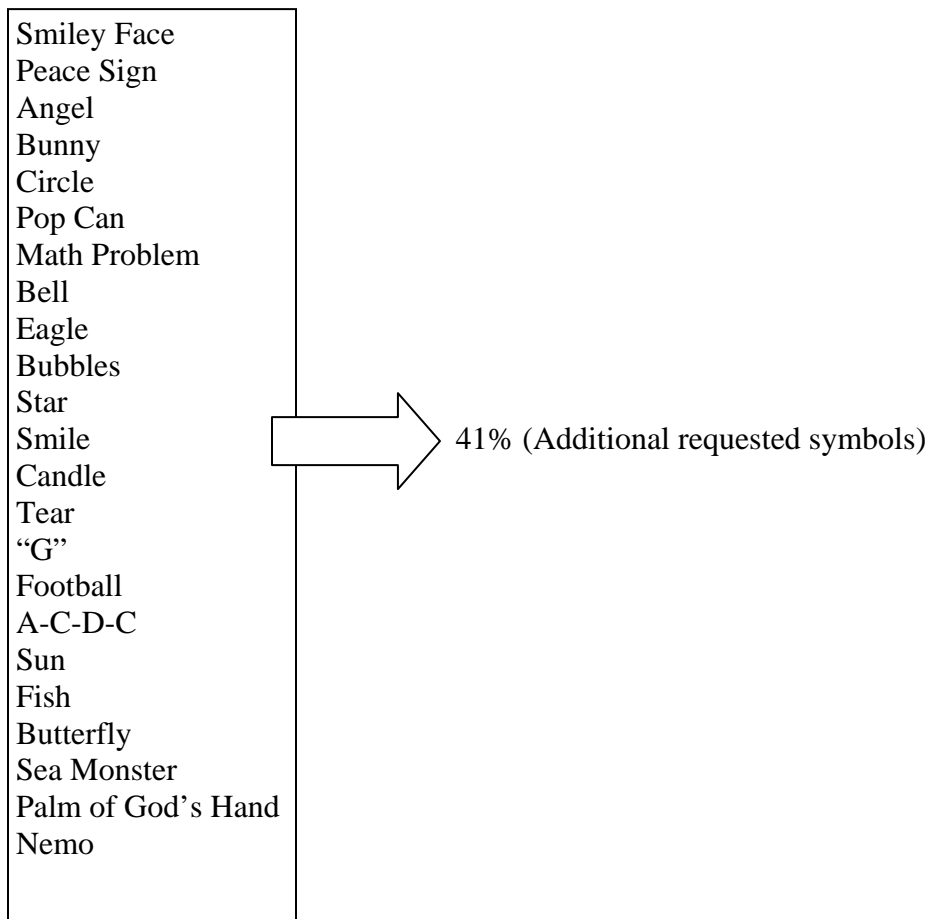
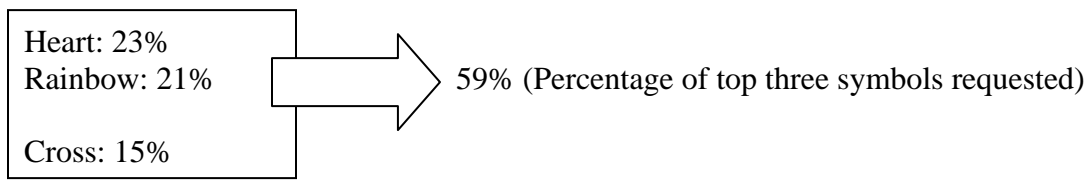
Manipulatives	25%
Candles	17%
Sandbox	16%
Writing/Drawing	14%
Breath Prayer	14%
Chime/Music	7%
Prayer Shawl	5%
Spoken Prayer	2%

Appendix B: Chart 10

Percentages of Symbol Themes Requested for the Blessings

<b>Happiness or Seeking happiness</b>	<b>God is with me and/or will help</b>	<b>Hope</b>	<b>Seeking or finding Peace</b>	<b>Reminder to get feelings out</b>
33%	33%	23%	7%	4%

Symbols Used During Blessings:



## Appendix B: Chart 11

## Spiritual Support Progression Observed

	Bell	Bret	Emily	Jasmine	John
Session 1	Despair	Despair	Despair	Despair	Despair
Session 2	Feeling Loved	Sense of Control	Happy and sad can happen at same time	Still sad but realizes lessons can be learned	Despair
Session 3	I can be happy and sad	I can be happy even in divorce	Sees God in midst of pain and happiness	Grasping that you can be happy and sad	Angry
Session 4	Resolved it is okay to be happy and sad		Realizes how strong she is and can help others	Hopeful that she will survive	Feels God in midst of pain
Session 5			Resolves that she can be happy at same time	Resolved that I can be happy and sad	Happy and sad and knows God is helping
Session 6				Dad and God is with me	Gives control to God
Session 7				Understands sadness will pass	Mostly happy but also sad
Session 8				Mostly happy but worried about future loss	Believe God is with him to help make it better
Session 9				Sad again	God helps and will heal others
Session 10				Believes God is in the midst and will help	
Session 11				God helps and heals others	

## Appendix B: Chart 11 (continued)

## Spiritual Support Observed

	Layla	Rianna	Ryan	Seth	Tony
Session 1	Sad but aware God is with her	Angry with God	Moves from despair to feeling God's presence	Sad	Sad
Session 2	Very sad and knows God is helping her	Needs forgiveness	Moves from overwhelmed to finding peace with God	Despair	Upset
Session 3	Worried about Dad but knows that she can be happy again	Feeling happy again and still sad	Moves from sadness to trusting God's presence	Realizes God is in midst of pain	Realizes God is helping him
Session 4		Resolves that happiness and sadness will always be		Hopeful that God is helping him and his parents	Feeling better and God is helping
Session 5		Feeling loved		Comforted by God's presence	Feeling better and God is with him
Session 6		Proud that she can deal with her pain and cope			
Session 7		Happy again even though sadness lasts			
Session 8		Happy and still a little sad/ Hopeful she will heal			
Session 9		No longer angry with God and acknowledges God's help			

## Appendix B: Chart 12

## The Children's Prayer Experiences During Spiritual Support Sessions

Name	Age	Asked God to Help themselves	Asked God to Help Others	Demonstrated Presence with God	Asked God for Comfort	Angry at God
Bell	6 years	0%	50%	50%	0%	0%
Brett	13 years	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%
Emily	9 years	14%	0%	57%	29%	0%
Jasmine	7 years	42%	8%	33%	17%	0%
John	11 years	17%	50%	17%	16%	0%
Layla	6 years	25%	13%	37%	25%	0%
Rianna	13 years	0%	0%	75%	0%	25%
Ryan	6 years	20%	30%	40%	10%	0%
Seth	3 years	0%	20%	60%	20%	0%
Averages		19%	25%	42%	14%	2%

**APPENDIX C**  
**FIGURES**

Appendix C: Figure 1

Permission Form

Permission Form

I, the parent of \_\_\_\_\_, give my permission for Leanne Ciampa Hadley of First Steps Spirituality Center, Colorado Springs, to use the conversations, drawings, and any observations she made during the spiritual support sessions held with my child and Leanne for study in her Doctor of Ministry project through United Theological Seminary. I understand that all names and details will be changed to protect the anonymity of my child and family.

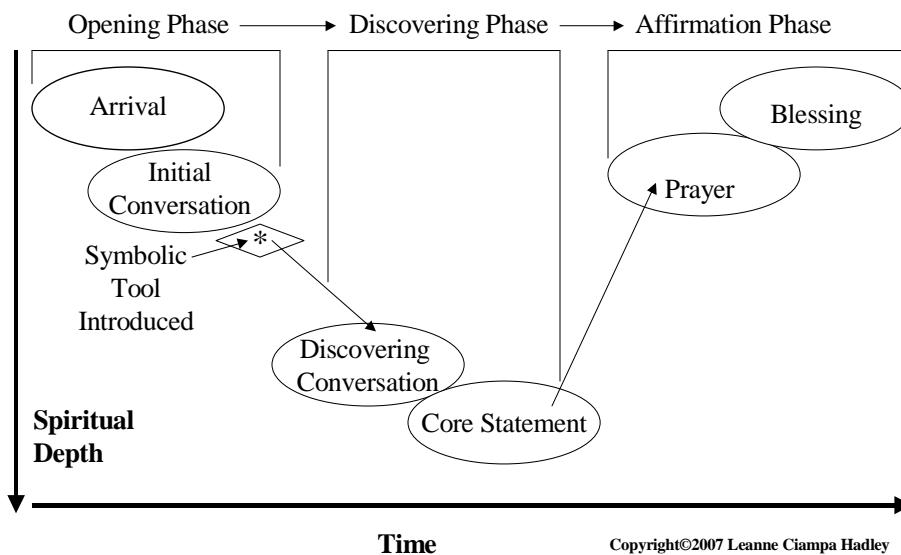
\_\_\_\_\_ (Parent's signature) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

I \_\_\_\_\_, understand that Leanne will be using our talks and my drawings in a paper she is writing for her Doctor of Ministry Project. It is all right with me. I understand that she will change my name and anything else so that people reading the paper will not know it is me that she is talking about.

\_\_\_\_\_ (Child's signature) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

Appendix C: Figure 2  
Stages of Spiritual Support

**Spiritual Support: A Pastoral Care Model for Children**



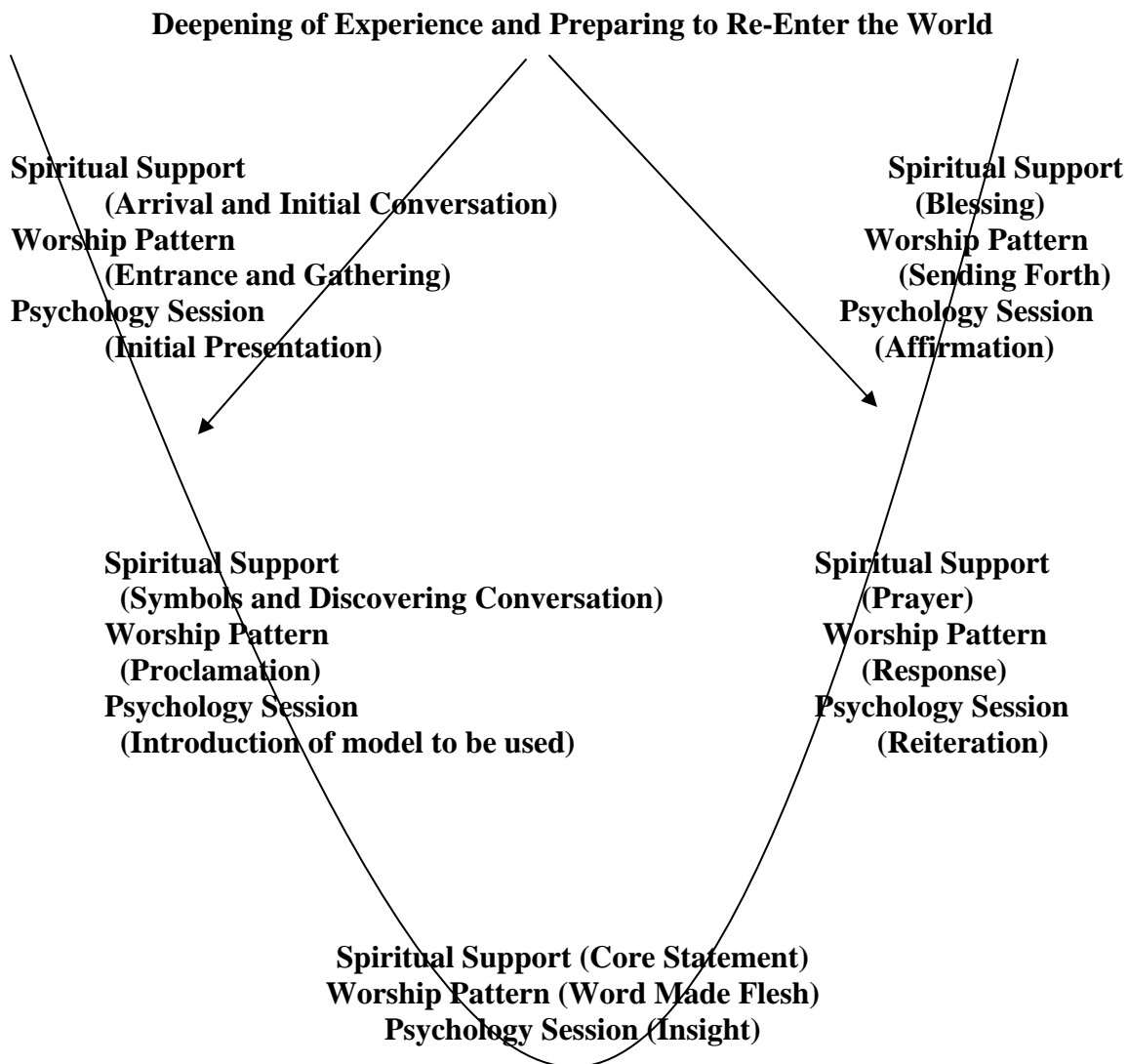
## Appendix C: Figure 3

## Comparison of Interdisciplinary Terminology

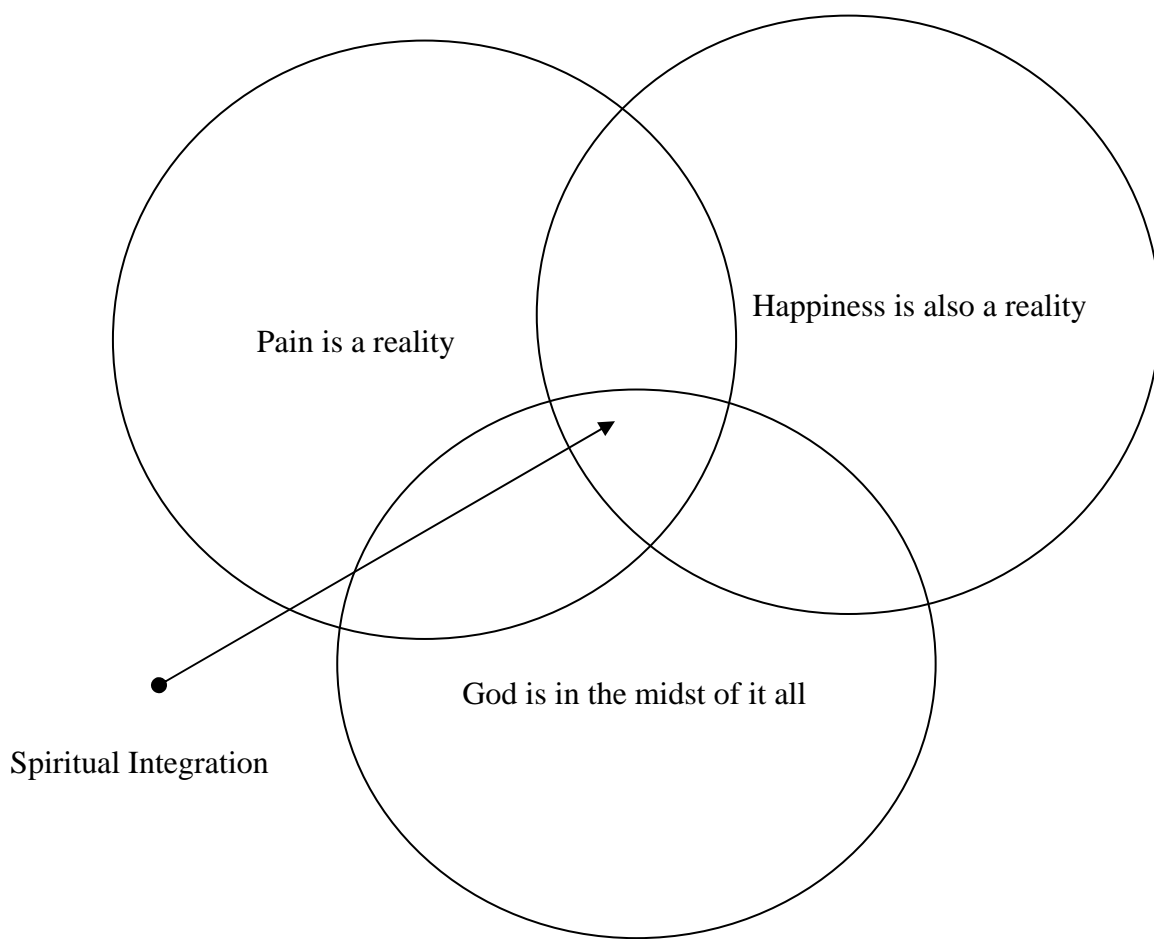
<b>Spiritual Support Stage</b>	<b>Worship Component</b>	<b>Psychological Concept</b>
Arrival and Initial Conversation	Entrance	Initial presentation
Symbols, Discovering Conversation & Core Statement	Proclamation  & Word Made Flesh	Psychiatric Model Used  & Insight
Prayer	Response	Reiteration
Blessing	Sending Forth	Affirmation

## Appendix C: Figure 4

Comparative Structure Based on Goffman's Framing Concept



Appendix C: Figure 5  
Spiritual Integration Model



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