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DEEPENING A SENSE OF SPIRIT: A STUDY OF SPIRITUAL CARE
VOLUNTEERS IN THE RURAL CLINICAL SETTING

by

Linda Joan Ormson

A project dissertation submitted to the Faculty of St. Stephen's College in partial
fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

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DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to my husband Jack Edward Ormson

Nov 1st 1946 – April 20th 2011

I will always be thankful for your support for all my educational endeavours over our 37
years of fun, laughter and hard work together.

I will miss you forever!

ABSTRACT

This study has explored the concept of how one's sense of spirit has deepened by providing spiritual care to patients and residents in a rural hospital, hospice and long term care facilities. Using an organic inquiry method of research, the researcher's story begins this study from her passion of wanting to explore "how by helping others," one's spiritual life can be transformed. The researcher is a Chaplain for a 100 bed hospital in rural southern Alberta.

Eight spiritual care volunteers took a spiritual care training program and then worked in spiritual care for a minimum of 12 weeks visiting patients and residents. These spiritual care providers volunteered to be interviewed for this study.

From the interviews five themes emerged from the data to reveal how these participants of the study have had their sense of spirit deepen. These themes are: increased prayer life, closer connection to God, increased self-confidence, improved relationships with others, more gratitude and less-judging behaviours. The sub-theme of time was also a pattern which emerged from the data. Direct quotes from the participants are used throughout the interviews to substantiate the claim of transformation by the research participants. This study will add to the body of knowledge on spiritual formation and help fill the gap in understanding how people of faith can deepen their sense of spirit by caring for other people in need.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This paper has been an opportunity to look back over these past many years and see where I have come, what I've learned about myself and God. Using theological reflection I have pondered the ways in which I and the research participants have changed and grown. I have chosen a research method for this research called Organic Inquiry. The essential aspect of this research method is the inclusion of the researcher's story. The Organic Inquiry process seeks to know in-depth about the experience as exploratory and discovery orientated. Therefore this study includes the researcher's story, stories from the participants and also invites the Spirit as part of this study. Spirit is considered to be partially responsible for the transformation of the researcher and study participants. The question I wish to answer is: "How has one's sense of spirit been deepened or transformed by providing spiritual care to patients/residents in the clinical settings of hospital, long term care or hospice?"

An analogy frequently used to explain Organic Inquiry is from nature. Jennifer Clements uses the idea of planting a seed, watching it grow and finally producing fruit for harvest to demonstrate the process of knowing and transformation.¹ Since the researcher's own experience is what starts this process, I wanted to use a metaphor closer to my own experience and one which adds passion and richness from my own personal story. I have chosen to use the creation of a quilt as the analogy to understand how I

¹ Jennifer Clements, "*Organic Inquiry: Research in Partnership with Spirit*" (2002) Accessed August 2009. <http://www.itp.edu/resources/divinefeminine/research-organic.php>

have grown and changed from my experiences as woman of faith, nurse, chaplain and my personal story. This introduction shares how I have been transformed by providing spiritual care to patients in need. Further chapters will explain who the spiritual care volunteers are and hear stories of their own deepening of spirit. The journey leading to transformation is a personal and powerful one. Having many of the volunteers share their story of providing spiritual care to those in need is moving and empowering.

Throughout my years of studying for my Doctor of Ministry degree at St. Stephen's College, I have quilted many queen size quilts. Every winter for the past 7 years, my 85-year-old Mother and I have hand stitched a quilt together. Creating a quilt from scratch is a lot like working on my Doctor of Ministry degree. You begin with choosing a design that you would like to piece together. This design is usually one that challenges you, yet one with which you feel comfortable. There are hundreds of quilt patterns to choose from, such as "log cabin," "double wedding band" or "the around the world," which is my choice that I wish to use as the metaphor for this paper. In an around the world quilt pattern, one block of fabric sits at the very centre of the quilt. All other blocks continue to go around and around this centre piece. Metaphorically, I see this centre piece as me. Next, you go to the fabric store and pick out several fabrics and colours. Colours are chosen that enhance the pattern and ones which you feel best suit your tastes. You begin to build your quilt by cutting the pieces of fabric into blocks. The blocks are literally the building blocks of the quilt. The blocks are then sewn together on a sewing machine to make quilt squares. Placing the quilt squares to the pattern you have

chosen is what creates the design. When enough quilt squares are made, they are sewn together to make the top of your quilt.

My mother and I have a quilt frame on which we spread out the quilt top, batting and bottom sheet. All the quilting is done within the confines of this framework. The quilt frame holds everything in place. The batting is what gives the quilt warmth, comfort and bulk. The bottom sheet holds the batting in place. Other important elements that are used for the creation of a quilt are: good lighting which illuminates the quilt top so you can see where you are sewing; the thimble is also important as it protects your finger, supports and guides the needle as you stitch; the needle pulls the thread along as the quilter makes the stitches; the stitches tie the entire quilt together. When finished, each quilt is as unique as the quilter who created the quilt. When my Mother and I finish a quilt, it feels like I have just completed a *magnum opus*, a great work. As I look over all the small stitches I realise that during this time of hand sewing, I have been reflecting as I sew from one block of fabric to the next. Blocks are like the raw knowledge. When the blocks are sewn together into quilt squares, one can now see things in a different way. This opens up new insights which are reflected upon as the thread makes its way in and out through the fabric.

As mentioned, throughout this introduction I am attempting to metaphorically build a quilt with all the pieces of learning from my Doctor of Ministry program, personal and ministry context and share how my sense of spirit has deepened from these experiences. I feel passionate about understanding change and growth as people spend time with people in need. I want to know if other caregivers feel the same as I.

In February 2007 I began working at the High River Hospital as chaplain. At the time there were two spiritual care volunteers who came in each week and spent time with the residents on the second floor nursing home. Over coffee one afternoon, both of these volunteers shared that they had no idea what spiritual care looked like in this setting and what they were supposed to be doing with the residents. Further they shared that they felt like spiritual failures to the residents, themselves and to God. This fifteen minute discussion turned into the focus of my dissertation project. I then fashioned my Doctor of Ministry journey around learning everything I could to help me develop a spiritual care resource guide and training sessions for new spiritual care volunteers at the hospital. I eventually took this training program to other communities and hospices in southern Alberta. Through all this experience of working with new spiritual care volunteers and continuing to provide additional workshops for the trained spiritual care volunteers, I could feel myself growing towards God. When I began my Doctor of Ministry program I was not sure of my direction for the dissertation, but God had placed me right where I needed to be. Like a plant deprived of sunlight, when the light finally appears, the plant now turns and faces the illumination and all is well. That is what I felt like when I realised where and what I was to be doing; creating a spiritual care training program to help the volunteers develop their sense of spirit. For the past four years I have grown right alongside these wonderful giving people. It is they who have helped me build this quilt. I have learned a great deal about myself and with this research I wish to explore what the spiritual care volunteers have also learned. My question hopes to answer how they have been transformed, changed by providing spiritual care.

To the best of my ability, I modelled and taught who I am and what I believe spiritual care to be to the spiritual care volunteers. As this research is founded on the experience of the researcher I would now like to share my story of growth and change.

CHAPTER TWO

INTRODUCTION TO THE QUILTER: LINDA'S STORY

For as long as I can remember I have heard the words of the prophet Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you...”² God’s presence is something that I have just known and something that I have always longed to know better. The twentieth century mystic and author Evelyn Underhill would say that having a conversation with God should be as natural as breathing itself.³ Having a prayer life or conversation with God has been part of my life as a child. I always attended the nearest Sunday school or Vacation Bible School by myself throughout the summer months. My five other siblings were not interested in matters of spirit as I was. As my parents came from different Christian traditions one of my highlights was when my family would visit my grandparents in Saskatchewan or in southern Alberta and I would attend church with them. I was very aware of the differing liturgical styles, the ritual or lack of it, the statuary of the Catholic Church and the powerful pastoral prayers in the Mormon Church. I liked the feeling of these caring communities and wanted to belong.

²Jeremiah 1.3, New Revised Standard Version.

³ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism, The Nature and the Development of Spiritual Consciousness* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999), 194.

Caring for others was a very strong value for me even as a child. So by the time I was ten years old, I had made two decisions about my life. First, I was going to be a nurse when I grew up and the other, to come to know God more intimately. As I got older I borrowed books from the library to read about God. As I reflect back upon this part of my life, I cannot think of a time when I did not feel connected to God.

In my early twenties, married with one child, I developed ankylosing spondylitis which is an inflammatory arthritis of the spine and weight bearing joints. I was advised not to have any other children, but our daughter came along anyway. With frequent pain and swollen knees I wasn't supposed to go into nursing, but I did, as I still felt called. My story is of a living parable; perhaps titled, "The Parable of the Driven Spirit." Crossan says that parables bring not peace but a sword and are meant to change us, not reassure us. Parables are not just story but an event.⁴ During this time my husband and I found a faith community where our children could come to know God. We became members of a joint church offering the United Church of Canada and the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ. The Disciples tradition celebrates the sacrament of communion at each worship service. As part of the worship service, members of the congregation offer meditations and prayers at the communion table before the clergy commences with the words and blessings over the Holy meal. Eventually, I became an elder of our church and found myself standing up at the table each Sunday to offer a short meditation of my story where God had touched me during the week. This experience made a real difference in my spiritual journey. I was finally coming to know God more intimately. I also realised that this was the starting point where I would begin to mentor

⁴ John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1988), 32-41.

others. After worship, both men and women would come up and speak to me, sharing how my story had touched them. I was making a difference to other people of faith through the power of story.

Reflecting back from this point I now see myself as a dispeller of myth. As a disabled woman, I had completed my bachelor of nursing degree with distinction and became the second woman chair of our church. Yes, I was a living parable. Crossan shares that parables are stories which shatter the deep structure of our accepted world.⁵ Not long after, I enrolled in the Master of Arts in Spirituality and Liturgy degree program at St. Stephen's College. Despite having hip replacements and other surgeries, using my cane and wheelchair (her name is Ruth) at times, I completed this program. I was twenty-three when I developed arthritis and many people were uncomfortable with me forging ahead into nursing. They thought I would fail. The myth that people who are handicapped should look ill and not be contributing members of society let alone taking advanced education courses was off the charts of normalcy. During this time I could feel my identity coming to full bloom. My identity is the convergence of all the facets of my life. I am the third child of six, born in the 1950's, raised in Calgary by very hard working, honest parents who instilled these values in me. Even though my parents never attended church, they ensured that we understood that there was something greater and more powerful in the cosmos than our political system, our country and certainly ourselves. I was taught to stand up for what I believed, to help others and when I made a mistake, to own and learn from that experience. I am certain that is where my sense of identity and integrity has grown from.

⁵ John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Sonoma: Polebridge Press, 1988), 100.

Tom Harpur in his book, *Living Waters*, says “To follow a spiritual path is to try, with your utmost despite setbacks, to be obedient to the Divine within and above yourself.”⁶ I love the line, “to try, with your utmost despite setbacks....” This is definitely how my life has unfolded and one of my favourite sayings is: “God never said that life would be easy, but promises that the journey will be worth it.” Parker Palmer shares that our identity and integrity have as much to do with our shadows and limits, our wounds and fears, as our own strengths and potentials.⁷ I feel that both of these authors know the ancient medieval dance called the Tripudium, where one takes three steps forward and one step back, a reality of our faith journey with God.⁸ This is certainly my story too; as I ponder on scriptures I can see that much of these narratives are metaphor, myth, with a little history tossed in. As I reflect on the Bible stories, I try to understand the context of the ancient peoples, my “theo – logic” head and heart struggles with this dualist God who demonstrates both love and wrath. A clergy friend of mine once shared that the devil is the shadow side of God. We all have shadow sides and if God dwells in us, as I believe, it would make sense that God has a shadow side too. These are just a few of the things that I have pondered to this point in my life. This dance of total belief like a child and my sceptical logic definitely challenges my belief system. I will speak more about this later.

In 2000, I moved to Nanton, a small community of 2,100 people just south of Calgary, where my husband and I built a bed and breakfast. Hospitality is another one of

⁶ Tom Harpur, *Living Waters: Selected Writings on Spirituality* (Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2006), 5.

⁷ Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Books, 1998), 13.

⁸ Celeste Snowbar, *Embodied Prayer: Towards Wholeness of Body, Mind, Soul* (Kelowna: Wood Lake Books, 2004), 97.

my values. I enjoy offering a quiet, clean space for people traveling or who just want to get away for a few days. We designed our home with a 'lectio divina' room, a sacred space for me and our guests to read, reflect and pray. During this time I was busy with our local United church, offering Evensong services, leading women's retreats and providing pastoral care when our minister was away. Yet, despite what sounds like a very fulfilling life, I felt that I was not being challenged academically and I could feel my spirituality fading, like an old quilt where the colour has faded. I recall looking for a doctorate of ministry program throughout Canada. My search ended almost before it began when I went to the St. Stephen's website. This Doctor of Ministry program was about looking at self, and mixed the practical and theoretical and had a good theological framework. When it comes to quilt making, if your frame is not sturdy and straight the finished product will be off-centre and may not fit the bed properly. I also needed a frame that can stand for periods of time as I wanted to do this program part time. As a nurse I need the hands-on practical learning and the opportunity to reflect on how the theoretical and the practical unite. So I began this program in the fall of 2006. I soon realised however that something was lacking. The quilt frame was set before me but I was standing, not sitting. I needed to be at this frame with a ministry context, I needed a good solid chair to sit at as I quilted throughout my program. In the winter of 2007, I noticed a small ad in our local paper advertising a hospital chaplain position for the High River Hospital. This was exactly what I needed to do as I moved through my Doctor of Ministry program. I needed to work and use what I was learning in a practical way. I now had a good strong frame and a solid chair to begin my work.

In summary, I am a quilter, nurse and a strong woman of faith. I began my Doctor of Ministry studies wanting to learn more about myself and God. I wanted to be challenged in ways of knowing. I value hard work, honesty, learning, hospitality and caring for others. This is what I brought as I began to build my quilt. This is the block of fabric which I placed at the centre of my around the world quilt pattern. With me at the centre I will now build my quilt of learning and share how my sense of spirit has deepened with my Doctor of Ministry studies.

THE LEADERSHIP STYLE AND THE UNDIVIDED SELF

Parker Palmer notes that integrity requires discernment of what is integral to selfhood; it's not about being perfect, it's about being real and true to yourself.⁹ Due to my upbringing which endorsed hard work, honesty and truth, I have always felt it essential to stay connected with who I am and what I believe; to be real, regardless of my role. Palmer calls this the "undivided self," an integral state of being whole, which is the essential strand of one's identity.¹⁰ As I continue to grow as a woman and in God's way, I feel more whole each day when I hold to my heart the truths I live and value. I claim to live an undivided life. Likely some days are more successful than others, but as Tom Harpur suggests, the trying is integral for me to be the best person that I can be for me, God and the people of God.¹¹ In regards to my identity and integrity, I often use the phrase, "being authentic," which to me means striving to live an undivided life leading to inner wholeness.

⁹ Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Books, 1998), 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹¹ Tom Harpur, *Living Waters: Selected Writings on Spirituality* (Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2006), 5.

Parker Palmer also speaks of the journey into authentic selfhood, as a journey towards respecting others.¹² For several years in my nursing career I was a nursing instructor in long term care facilities. Innately, I felt it was better to teach by example. As nursing draws in many individuals from all age brackets, many students were the same age as me. The students had years of life skills under their belts, which I greatly valued. On many occasions I found myself learning right along with the remainder of the class. Our respect for one another became mutual; there was trust and respect in our learning. Further, Palmer speaks about the various models of learning and encourages the reader to focus on the subject-centred model. Palmer says that the passion for the subject propels the subject, not the teacher, into the centre of the learning circle. Whether this circle is physical or an imagined one, creating a safe environment for both the learner and the teacher to explore the subject together creates what Palmer describes as “the community of truth.”¹³

During the Leadership and Change course at St. Stephen’s College, we were asked to find a metaphor for our leadership style. It took me a few moments as I pondered the task, but finally and quite suddenly I knew that my leadership style metaphorically was that of a circle. Catherine M. Harmer in her article from *Human Development*, says that in a circular model, energy flows from one member to another. Leadership is a function of the team and is carried out through co-responsibility and gift sharing. Dominance of one or more members is eliminated as co-responsibility is based

¹² Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Books, 1998), 161.

¹³ Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teachers Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Books, 1998), 116, 137.

on the honouring of all members of the group.¹⁴ Another article, *Leading Change in the Church: Reflections on Women's Leadership*, Juliet Huntly and Deborah McKellar, et al., comment on Margaret Wheatley's expertise who shares that circle members value participation and encourage individual initiatives. According to Wheatley, leadership is all about starting and sustaining conversations.¹⁵ At each retreat I lead, or if possible when I address a large group of women, I encourage the formation of the circle. Perhaps even more important, I share why this circle construct is a model I value.

Palmer says that we teach who we are and that good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher; and how we connect to the learners.¹⁶ Many times groups look to the leader for answers. Perhaps because of my upbringing and life experience of honouring honesty and being open, I never felt that I had to be an expert. In fact I was taught to say, "I don't know." It's a statement which is an honest equalizer within a group. Usually my, "I don't know" turns into, "What do you think and let's find out together." Respecting the gathered wisdom of a circle promotes independent thinking and learning. The circle is a natural learning and teaching construct for me. Perhaps from my youth of sitting around camp fires singing songs in rounds, or hand sewing on quilts with my mother and aging women relatives, I feel connected and one of the group when in a circle.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus frequently gathers his disciples. In my mind I consider that they gathered in a circle around their teacher to listen to his wisdom. Jesus

¹⁴ Catherine M. Harmer, "Government in Religious Congregations," *Human Development*, Vol 16, no 1, (Spring, 1995): 25-28.

¹⁵ Juliet Huntly, Deborah McKellar et al., "Leading Change in the Church: Reflections on Women's Leadership." *Making Waves: An Ecumenical Feminist Journal*. Vol 5:2, (Fall 2006): 10-11.

¹⁶ Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Books, 1998), 2, 10-11.

created a new way of thinking about ministry and spiritual leadership. Jesus' use of the term servant (*diakonos*) clearly communicated to his disciples that this word emphasised the service given on behalf of others.¹⁷ Jesus turned common assumptions and values of leadership upside down through a revolutionary teaching. Scripture shares: After arriving at Capernaum, He questioned them: "What were you arguing about on the road?" He then sat down and called the Twelve to Him. He spoke with intentionality: "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."¹⁸ In time, the disciples would recognise that servant leadership was not about climbing the ladder but serving at the bottom.

Servant leadership involves humbling yourself and doing the tasks that no one else wants to do. In Jesus' time, the act of washing feet was to be assigned to the lowest of servants. However at the last supper, Jesus humbled Himself and washed the disciples' feet. Afterwards he declared, "Do you understand what I have done for you? ...You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is the messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."¹⁹

Servant leadership insists on humility. Humility is the attitude of being modest and respectful. It is a virtue in many religions and philosophical traditions. Humility enables you to serve others wholeheartedly and thereby set an example that others will

¹⁷ David S. Young, *Servant Leadership for Church Renewal* (Scottsdale, Pa.:Herald Press, 1999), 157.

¹⁸ Mark 9.33-35, NRSV.

¹⁹ John 13.12-17, NRSV.

follow. Being humble however, does not mean being weak or allowing others to take advantage of you. Servant leadership requires integrity. People do not want to follow a person they do not respect.²⁰ Speaking to servants, Ephesians 6:6-8 reads, “Obey then not only to win their favour when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.”²¹ Finally, servant leadership demands honesty. People are disappointed by people who cannot tell the truth.²² Proverbs 16:13 teaches us, “Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value a man who speaks the truth.”²³

Maundy Thursday has always been a powerful and meaningful day for me. The Latin word *mandatum*, meaning new commandment, comes from this day where Jesus after washing the feet of the disciples, declares that we should love God and our neighbour as ourself.²⁴ This scripture is foundational for me and in particular within my ministry context as hospital chaplain.²⁵ To visit a dying patient, attend a young mother who has just lost her newborn or hold the hand of a frightened woman before surgery is to live out these commandments.

I have been Chaplain for the High River Hospital for the past four years. The hospital staff and patients have come to understand that I respect everyone’s faith/non-faith beliefs. I strive to be a reflection of God’s love and light to others I meet. I do this in a number of ways. First, I use people’s given names. Isaiah says, “But now thus says

²⁰ David S. Young, *Servant Leadership for Church Renewal* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 199), 157.

²¹ Ephesians 6.6-8, NRSV.

²² David S. Young, 158.

²³ Proverbs 16.13, NRSV.

²⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, 4th edition(2003).

²⁵ John 13.34.

the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”²⁶ When you use a someones name, people feel as though they count, that they are important, not just another housekeeping staff wearing a blue uniform. I strive to greet everyone I pass in the hallways. I do this with all sincerity because I do care for others. By simply greeting them with a hello, a smile or a nod of my head, I share a connection between our spirits. I also stop and ask staff how their day is going and ask if there is anything I can do for them. This all occurs long before I begin my visits with patients of our 100 bed hospital.

Building trust can be a slow and difficult process. According to the Webster dictionary, trust is a firm belief or confidence in the honesty, integrity, reliability and justice of another person, thing or faith.²⁷ Educator Parker Palmer describes the purpose of a circle of trust as something that “has no agenda but to help people listen to their souls and discern their own truth.”²⁸ Within hospital ministry trust building is paramount among staff, patients and volunteers. The great work within hospital ministry is to develop these healthy circles of trust as Palmer describes.

Within my ministry context, I spend a great amount of energy trying to help people. As I shared earlier in this paper, I continue to grow as a woman in God’s way when I hold to my heart the truths I live and value. As I sit with those who are heavily burdened, I feel as though we are encased in a sacred bubble. I listen with my whole self, or as St. Benedict would say, “To listen with the ear of your heart.”²⁹ My only agenda is

²⁶ Isaiah 43.1, NRSV.

²⁷ Webster’s New World Dictionary, 2nd College ed. (1984).

²⁸ Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness* (San Francisco, Ca: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 53.

²⁹ Joan Chittister, *The Rule of St. Benedict: Insights for the Ages*. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2000), 20.

to listen with respect to the person before me. Within this sacred, circle space there are three of us; the patient, myself and God; a triologue of care. Over the years, the opportunity of sitting with others and listening has definitely deepened my sense of spirit. I feel their spirit connected to mine like an umbilical cord pulsing energy back and forth between us. I also feel God's presence right there as the patient shares and I listen. When I do speak, I know that God helps to guide my words and phrases. For many times I am amazed by the wisdom that simply comes forth from myself. Each and every time, I give thanks to God for being with me as I strive to help others. What this means to me, and has been a great insight, is that God walks beside me each and every day. I am not alone. I am walking with my companion God who is there to help and guide my journey and the journey of others.

Certainly in my youth, like others trying to find their way, I lived a much more divided life. I would act out the role that others had modelled for me, sometimes with a poor result. I came away feeling like I was a fake. However, sometime in my thirties I eventually found the Linda that I had been searching for; the real and true me. I started living out the undivided life.

In summary, I strive to lead an undivided life, which is honest and helpful to all I meet. I appreciate Jesus' commandment to, "Love God and your neighbour as yourself." Jesus puts God first, the neighbour second and me last, a humbling opportunity for which to strive. Even though a hierarchy is presented for us to follow, I believe all three are interconnected and integral as a single unit. As I sit with a patient, in between the words I honour the silence, bathed in Gods loving presence. I sense a humbling of spirits, both

mine and the patient's. This is an experience that only God, the patient and I can truly understand as the Holy of Holies. A space so sacred, my hearts melts into God's hands.

HEALTHY AND UNHEALTHY THEOLOGY

I recall early in my nursing career caring for a young man (27) who was dying of bone cancer. I had just finished giving him a bed bath and was cleaning up in his bathroom when his minister came in for a visit. The conversation began with the minister asking the man about his health status. I was trying to hurry up and leave them for some private time when suddenly out of the mouth of the minister came these words, "You know why you are dying Tom...it's because you haven't been to church in three years!" I was stunned and shocked by this guilt-filled and accusative statement coming from a minister. The clergyman then went on to say, "It's going to take a lot of praying by *you* to beat this thing, so *you* have got to pray real hard!"

The word theology comes from two Greek words, *theo*, meaning God and *logos* meaning word. Theology is the understanding of God and the relationship of God to humankind.³⁰ Theology is very important because in it we can discover who and what God desires for us.³¹ Jesus did not come to merely teach ethics or help people through

³⁰ *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, 4th ed. (2003).

³¹ 1 Corinthians 1.9, NRSV.

life's problems, but he proclaimed the good news that through him God offers salvation, love and forgiveness, (Eph 2:8 and John 3:16).³²

The story above was my first real exposure to unhealthy theology, a theology that ignores reality. Clark and Olson note that the word health comes from the Anglo-Saxon word, *hal* which means whole. Health is a central concept of nursing, says Clark and Olson and sees health as the opposite of illness and as a condition in which all cultural, biological, relational and spiritual factors that relate to illness are brought into balance. Further, these authors note that in a number of sacred texts, including the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, health is seen as wholeness; a total sense of being. As a word, it is linked with safety, salvation, fullness, completeness and peace. From this point of view, the goal of treating illness is to find meaning, healing and restore health, but not necessarily a cure.³³ From this conjecture it would seem that unhealthy theology claims scientific and medical research as false and simply ignores it as inconsequential. In the case of my young dying patient with bone cancer, the minister needed to fit his observations into his theological system to make sense of them. In other words, this man's cancer had nothing to do with genetics, viruses, health behaviours, environmental pollutants, or chance, but simply that he was being punished by God for not going to church. The minister believed that in order for health to be restored to the young man dying of bone cancer, the patient would have to do all the work. This minister did not offer his support through prayer nor that of his community to the young man. When people are ill and dying, guilt and guilt-giving in my experience is a form of terrorism at

³² Ephesians 2.8 and John 3.16., NRSV.

³³ Margaret Clark and Joanne Olson, *Nursing within a Faith Community: Promoting Health in Times of Transition* (Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications, Inc., 2000),32-33.

the bedside. These patients are vulnerable. I believe by inflicting more pain and suffering on an already burdened person is inhumane. Unhealthy theology seems to leave no room for questions and drives people away from God's loving and forgiving embrace. This judging and condemning theology holds God up as a Divine presence, of whom we should be fearful.

As a Registered Nurse and Chaplain, I believe in balancing the sacred and the science of all life. I appreciate that my orthopaedic surgeon will say a prayer with me before she operates. I trust in her skill and knowledge. I also trust that God will guide her hands, heart and mind throughout the surgical procedure. Healthy theology frames reality in terms of God's ever flowing grace to all of us; church and non church-goer alike. As Chaplain, when I enter a patient's room I have only one agenda on my mind and in my heart. "In God's presence, how can I help this person?" I strive to be a reflection of God's love and light to others. I offer a kind presence and caring support both verbally and nonverbally to help bring peace and comfort to the hospitalized patients and their families. I assure them that they are NOT alone!

Henri Nouwen in his book, *The Wounded Healer* asks the question, "What does it mean to be a minister in our contemporary society?" Nouwen says the ministry of service will not be perceived as authentic unless it comes from a heart wounded by the suffering about which the minister speaks.³⁴ As a chaplain I must be willing to put my own faith and doubt, hope and despair, light and darkness at the feet of patients who want to find a way through their confusion and touch the solid core of life. In chaplaincy the

³⁴ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Doubleday Publishers, 1979) , xvi.

work is to help people recognise the work of God in each person. Nouwen shares, “The chaplain is not one who reveals God to the patient...who gives something to one who has nothing...but one who helps those who are searching to discover reality as the source of their existence.”³⁵ Teaching moments happen all the time, if you’re paying attention. Teaching does not mean telling the same old story over and over again. Instead, teaching can offer other channels, through which patients can discover themselves, clarify their own experiences and find the cracks and crevices where they can hear God speaking to them.

I recall visiting an elderly woman several years ago whose daughter sat at the bedside looking distraught. The daughter questioned me, “Why is God punishing my Mother?” She continued, “My Mother has been a good and kind woman her whole life and now here she is having all this pain and discomfort at the end of her life, it’s not fair!” So, we began our discussion talking about her image of God. Understanding what people believe helps me to know where they are coming from. This woman believed that God was a condemning, unforgiving and punishing Deity, certainly not the God of love and support. The inner conflict of this woman appeared to stem from having an unhealthy theology. Her image of God was like a great sky wizard that circles above the Earth causing pain and suffering to some, but not others. This God was unjust, took sides and didn’t play fair. Her image of God did not offer her any hope or peace for the present or the future. I left the bedside with hope that our discussion may have opened up another way of understanding of who God is for this woman and her dying mother.

³⁵ Ibid., 39.

Living with a healthy theology has been a great source of comfort to me over the years. I personally believe that God does not fail us, it is our image of God that does. My image of God lifts up a healthy, healing and wholesome theology and philosophy. I know and trust that God loves and supports me when times are filled with joy and also walks with me in times of sorrow and pain. I am never alone for God is with me. I believe that God does not cause pain or suffering, nor does God stop it either. We have free will and choices in our lives. However, saying this, there is also great risk in living life. Accidents, cancer, heart disease, strokes, just to name a few, are part of life as is living well into your nineties. All of us exist knowing there is finality to our life, even if we do not want to admit it. Some people still want to believe the fairy tale that life is like a rose garden, with no pain or suffering or times of trial, but that is not life. I feel my experiences of nursing throughout my life have taught me that life may have its times of rose garden beauty but that the garden also harbours biting insects and thorns along with the fragrant rose.

In summary, I believe in a loving God filled with grace for all humankind. This bottom line theology offers me trust, security and hope for the future. I read the scriptures as stories for me to glean insights from for my life, not as literal truths or historical facts. The Bible and other sacred readings create a lens through which I gaze to come to know God. I feel that the presentation of a dualist God only confuses people and when times get tough, as they always do, people then believe that they are not good enough and turn away from God. I turn only to the light, the grace, the hope of salvation and wholeness with God. I have developed this healthy theological view throughout my Doctor of Ministry studies. This healthy theology has strengthened my belief in God and

deepened my sense of spirit to God. I have come away certain in my belief that God is here with me as my constant helper.

HOW DOES HEALTHY THEOLOGY SUPPORT THE FABRIC OF MY LIFE?

As I consider the colours of my quilt, I have been drawn to the various shades of the colour green. I have read and studied the life of the mystic Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) throughout all of my graduate work at St. Stephen's and in my personal time over the years. Hildegard was an extraordinary woman who lived in a misogynist world, yet she proclaimed enlightened views of gender, ecology, ecumenism, music, art, and holistic health.³⁶ Hildegard developed her theology from organic concepts of life and used the term *veriditas* to mean inner and outer greenness, freshness, vitality, fecundity, fruitfulness and the growing energy of God, both physical and spiritual.³⁷ I wait each spring for the *veriditas* to begin both in our world and deep within my own heart. This greening time fulfills a promise from God that the Earth will continue, the seasons will come and go and that life will go on. The colour green gives me hope.

From scripture, "In Christ all things are created in heaven and earth, everything visible and everything invisible."³⁸ One aspect of mystical Christian thought which lies in the simple truth of Hildegard's theology is that God is everywhere, in all things and all things in God. The term panentheism is a constructed word composed of the English equivalents of the Greek term *pan*, meaning all and *theism*, meaning God.³⁹ Panentheism

³⁶ Barbara Newman, ed. *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 55- 56.

³⁷ Barbara Newman, ed. *Voice of the Living Light: Hildegard of Bingen and Her World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 58-59.

³⁸ Colossians 1.15-17, NRSV.

³⁹ Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Etymology, 4th ed., (2003).

understands God and the world to be inter-related with the world being in God and God being in the world. Panentheism seeks to avoid both isolating God from the world as traditional theism often does and stresses God's active presence in the world. This view presents God as completely transcendent and yet immanent throughout creation.

Sallie McFague states that we all share a common origin and we are interconnected to all living things.⁴⁰ McFague asks us to turn away from the anthropocentric view that claims that we are masters of the Earth. This she notes is initiated from the book of Genesis, which tells humankind to subdue and dominate all other life forms.⁴¹ Rather, says McFague, our shift needs to now focus on living justly and sustainably with every living thing.⁴² This eco-theological view really touched my soul after reading McFague's book. I consider God as both transcendent and an immanent being. However, McFague invited me to ponder, "If God is always incarnate, if God is always in us and we in God, then Christians should attend to the model of the world as God's body."⁴³ Further, God did not become human on a whim; rather, it is God's nature to be embodied. McFague continues that Jesus Christ is the lens, the model, through which Christians interpret God, the world and themselves. McFague asserts this model of the world as God's body and is appropriate for our time, (as well as being in continuity with the Christian incarnation tradition) because it encourages us to focus on the earth as our neighbourhood.⁴⁴ McFague makes a point that I strongly support; that religion is not primarily about belief in the existence of God, but rather that religion is

⁴⁰ Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology, God, the World and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 44.

⁴¹ Genesis 1.26, NRSV.

⁴² Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: The World and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 49.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 73

about doing, enacting love in the world.⁴⁵ The activities of religious people are gratitude toward God and compassion toward others. In the model of the world as God's body, McFague grounds Christian praise and doing, helping others and our world suggests that there is one world, one reality and it is all Divine.⁴⁶ To imagine as being in and of God dismisses the dualism and lifts up panentheism.

Jackson, my husband of 37 years, was diagnosed with throat cancer in February 2010. Jackson was always fit, never smoked and watched his diet throughout his 64 years of life. We, like so many families journeying with cancer asked the question, "Why, why Jack?" Some families blame our social and political systems or our medical system. Many people blame God, citing that God punishes others for not being good enough, not being perfect. Again, here is the great misunderstanding of who God is for the world and who God is for me. When Jackson's cancer could not be healed, I was naturally sad but not angry. I continued to hold to the truth that what I believed about God was true, that God was also sad that Jack had cancer. I continued to feel supported by God and feel my faith deepen throughout our 14 months of battling cancer. During this time I prayed and spoke to God often, sometimes in the middle of the night, other times while helping to tube feed or shower my husband. We both felt God's presence right beside us, each and every day. Jack always loved nature and found great peace in creation. We both took time throughout our married life to stop and smell the roses and ponder upon God's beautiful canvas and be thankful. It is hard to articulate just how close we both felt to this Divine presence. Perhaps closer than our very breath, perhaps

⁴⁵ Ibid., 102.

⁴⁶ Ibid.,105.

God as our breath; we were enveloped by love. Holding this view of God in all things and all things in God was inclusive, healthy, healing and offered great comfort to us both.

Early in his cancer journey, Jackson received a lap quilt from Victoria Quilts, the Canadian organization that has local chapters of women making quilts for people with cancer. As Jack loved wild animals, his quilt was covered with red foxes and deep earthy green edges around its perimeter. Having Jack covered and comforted with this quilt was a powerful balm of God's greening energy of love. We could not change the outcome of cancer's final grip on this dear man, however the *veriditas*, the greening energy of God, gave us both hope for Jack's resurrection not just to God, but also his resurrection into those who loved him. We prayed that Jackson's spirit would be resurrected into me and our children and that Jack would continue to live in us. Holding on to this healthy view of how God can be there for us has carried me throughout this very difficult time in my life. Jack died in April 2011 and I remain steadfast in my love for God who touched me when I was vulnerable and raw. A God who continues to wrap me with the green fabric of peace as I gently walk through these days of profound loss.

I have always felt God's positive presence in my life. I feel comforted knowing that God loves and supports me. I do not believe that we were made perfect in God's image. Perhaps made in God's image yes, but we are not God, we are flawed, and we are not perfect. This is a healthy theology for me, knowing that I am loved regardless of my faults. I do not believe that God is a great sky wizard who floats above the world granting favours to some and not to others. When people die God does not take them from our life; dying is part of life and there is great risk in simply living this life. However, I believe that God does receive us into God's loving arms of grace. This credo

is what I hold close to my heart. It comforts me, especially after losing Jack. Presently, I feel embraced by God's love, grace and peace. The loss of my life partner has been the most life shattering experience of my life so far. Yet, I'm not broken; I just feel a little lost. However, I continue to feel God's presence beside me and hear God's words of comfort in my ear, "I'm here, you are not alone, Jack is with you and me, we are love." As I sit on my back deck under an umbrella listening to the birds and the leaves as the gentle breeze sifts between them, I feel my sense of spirit deepen. I am one with God and the world. I sense now that each prayer, each word or thought that I offer God is communion; one with God. I know that God wants to be in communion with me, waits to hear from me. As I wade through these early days of grief, I can feel the dark waters receding when I open myself up to listen for God's healing presence. Some days I forget to listen for God, but when I do open myself to God my load is lighter and the greening spirit of hope returns. This opening and deepening to God grounds me and this is healthy theology.

As a chaplain I have witnessed great diversity in people's ability to cope with life threatening illness. Resiliency implies an ability not only to cope with traumatic events but also to respond with flexibility under the pressures of everyday life. Ramsay and Blieszner note that people who are resilient have the ability to move beyond being survivors to being people who thrive.⁴⁷ As I consider this statement I question what has helped me with my spiritual resilience? Metaphorically, as I begin this journey of surviving I place in my back pack several skill sets and tools that I will carry with me during these next months and years of my life. First, I am blessed to have two adult

⁴⁷ Janet L. Ramsay and Rosemary Blieszner, *Spiritual Resiliency in Older Women: Models of Strength for Challenges Through the Life Span* (Thousand Oaks, Ca: Sage Publishing Inc., 1999), 6.

children who live with me as they complete their education. I have the support of family, extended family, friends and several church congregations.

Second and perhaps most important is my faith, as I believe and trust in a loving and supporting God. This cancer journey over the past year and a half, as difficult as it has been, has deepened my faith. My husband, despite his inability to eat and difficulty with breathing, was at peace throughout his cancer experience. Even the palliative doctor was surprised that he was so calm about his impending death. Jack said that he was comforted by God. Knowing this and to be with Jack as he suffered moved my spirit to a new place. I can only describe it as looking into the eyes of someone you love and never wanting to change your gaze. In this connecting of spirit I am so filled with love that I become, in Hildegard's words, the living light!

Finally, I have worked in vocations (nursing and chaplaincy) that offer the experience of suffering. I feel that I am well equipped to walk down this path. I know there will be many bumps on the road as I travel on this journey of surviving but that I will eventually be thriving; I will be ok because I do not travel this road alone. God is with me!

In summary, my quilt top has all the various shades of the colour green. The quilt blocks form a pattern of the around the world pattern. These green squares go around and around the quilt encircling me at its centre. Like so many others who are journeying with cancer, I too asked the question, "Why?" As I consider all the various shades of green squares encircling me, the why question has now changed to, "What?" What have I learned over these past 14 months as I watched Jack die? What has healthy theology

done for me, and my belief? What are all the things that I am thankful for? In what ways have I grown to be the woman I am now because of these experiences as chaplain, wife and student? The question “Why” leaves me only with an unanswerable ache. However, focusing on the question “What” offers me time to reflect, to be thankful and appreciate the great gifts that God has given me.

FEMINIST THEOLOGY SUPPORTS HEALTHY THEOLOGY

It was during a nursing theory course for my Bachelor of Nursing degree that I was introduced to a humanist theory called the science of caring. Nursing theorist, Dr. Jean Watson believed that caring is more healthogenic than is curing and that the science of caring is complementary to the science of curing.⁴⁸ The structure for the science of caring is built upon several curative factors; the first being the foundation of Watson’s theory. These are: The formation of a humanistic-altruistic system of values, the instillation of hope-faith and the cultivation of sensitivity to one’s self and others.⁴⁹ I have striven to carry these concepts throughout my nursing career and believe they have made me a better nurse, chaplain, woman and human being.

It was the work of Dr. Watson and her theory of caring that continued to jump out at me as I read books and articles on feminist theology. Feminist theology is more than a movement of increasing the role of women in the church and reinterpreting male dominated imagery and language about God. Feminism also includes the empathetic virtues of caring and intuitive insights of knowing.⁵⁰ I have been fascinated that there is

⁴⁸ Jean Watson, <http://currentnursing.com/nursingtheory/Watson.html> Accessed July 4th, 2011.

⁴⁹ Jean Watson, Accessed July 4th, 2011.

⁵⁰ Joy Ann McDougall, *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 43.

such symmetry between feminist theology and Watson's theory of caring. Caring is very important to me not only as a Chaplain but as a nurse and human being.

According to Rita Nakashima Brock, et al., feminism remains one of the most misunderstood social movements of our time and any attempt to define feminism for all women who call themselves feminists would leave out a great deal.⁵¹ In the public mind and media stereotypical feminists are labeled as man-hating, angry women who believe all women are victims. For most of my life I have called myself a feminist and I am certainly not against the male half of the planet, nor am I anti-family. It would seem that Nakashima's comment above holds true; that there is a long continuum of what feminism means to different people and cultures around the world.

Rosemary Radford Ruether says that liberal feminism has its roots in the liberal traditions of equal rights, rooted in the doctrine of a common human nature in all persons.⁵² However, the core issue with radical feminism says Ruether, "Is women's control over their own persons, their own bodies as vehicles of autonomous experience."⁵³ When it comes to the question, "Who is in charge of a person's health," there seems to be a large disparity in how this question is answered. People who research information on a regular basis are the baby boomer and younger generations. By using the internet these knowledge seekers search out medical information in order to be informed regarding a health concern. These individuals become their own advocates and

⁵¹ Rita Nakashima Brock et al, *Setting the Table: Women in Theological Conversation* (St. Louis, MI: Chalice Press, 1995.), 5-6.

⁵² Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1983), 216.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 228.

feel more confident when talking with medical providers. I would consider these people to be “in charge” of their health, therefore lifting up the values of radical feminism.

In my experience as nurse and chaplain, I have on occasion asked the question of who is in charge of your health to patients over the age of 60. Their immediate response is to list off the names of the doctors who are caring for them. Whether it’s in a health crisis or management of chronic health concerns, seniors often rely on their family members to be their advocates for discussing their health concerns with the health care providers. Along this same line of thinking, the question, “Who is in charge of your spiritual well-being?” could be asked as well. Again, the answer would depend on one’s maturity of faith, age and feminist philosophy. When I have asked this question to seniors most would give me the name of their current minister. Ruether’s simple definitions of feminism, supports a healthy theological view. It lifts up the premise that patients need to be informed about their health issues (body, mind and spirit) and make informed choices for themselves. A healthy, theological view, claims that the patient is not alone on his or her journey and that God is present, offering love, forgiveness and support, perhaps most important, that God is listening and hears their concerns.

Feminism and feminist theology lift up equality and the personal autonomy of individuals. Regardless of a person’s health status, patients require respect and should be considered competent to make decisions regarding their health based on informed decisions (unless deemed incompetent by trained specialists). Patients have a right to receive quality care and a right to refuse care if they wish. I recall ministering to a 93 year old woman of faith who was having a slow gastric bleed. She refused to be investigated further for this life threatening concern. Her family wanted me to find out

what was behind her decision. The family hoped that I could convince her to have this problem investigated. When I sat with her at the bedside, I gave her plenty of time to tell me her thoughts about her decision. She shared that she had had a good and full life; she was tired and wanted to join her deceased husband in heaven. She was a woman of faith and believed that God would receive her when her time came and she hoped that it would be soon. I did not try to change her mind from her decision as I hold these feminist/humanist values of respect for human dignity and told her that I thought she was making a very good decision for herself. I later shared this with her family and physician. This woman wanted to die on her own terms. The family agreed to her decision and they, along with me, visited her daily for the next two weeks until she died very peacefully in her sleep.

This story is an example of how this woman, although not named a feminist, lived her life being in charge of her physical, emotional and spiritual health. This experience is a story of healthy theology and how feminist theology supports this premise.

In summary, the shift from active nursing into hospital chaplaincy has been an easy transition, because at my very core, I am a caregiver. Due to my own physical limitations chaplaincy allows me to use my nursing experience to be the best I can be for the patients I visit. What supports me in my role has been a loving caring God. As a nurse and a chaplain I believe that I am a reflection of God's love and light to all those I meet. I strive to reflect God's caring ways and caring is at the heart of feminist theology. Coming to understand how feminist theology supports healthy theology has been a real insight to my understanding of who God is for me. The quilt top's outer edge is the largest piece that circles the entire quilt. This particular colour of green represents God's

caring ways. I can only image my life and belief where God cares, truly cares for me as I am in a space and place where I am surrounded by a God who wishes and wants only the best for me. With this in my mind and in my heart, I want to be connected to God at every opportunity. Caring is what God is all about and healthy theology and feminist ways support this caring premise.

WOMEN: THE BATTING FOR MY QUILT

As I said during my introduction to quilt making, the batting is what gives the quilt bulk, warmth and support. The batting is placed between the top and bottom pieces of fabric. It is then sewn into the quilt with thousands of stitches. As I consider what has given me warmth and support throughout my life, especially over the past number of years studying at St. Stephen's, the answer could only be women!

As I begin my discussion of women, I'm drawn once again toward the women mystics. These women had found a way to live by their visions and figured out how to remain connected with the church while claiming their own visionary and creative space within. I have frequently sought the words of Hildegard of Bingen as a way to be in the company of a woman who had been fierce in finding her own way to God. For me, Hildegard offers words which open my heart to God. Hildegard's one word in particular which pulls me to God is "*veriditas*." This means the inner and outer greenening energy of God. As I say or think of the word *veriditas*, I feel held and wrapped in God's heavenly quilt. Like the medieval mystic women, I too feel joined with the Divine.

However groundbreaking and visionary Hildegard was she was also embedded in a medieval psychology and culture of her time. Hildegard held a largely traditional

perspective of the role of women.⁵⁴ Certainly, as I read about Hildegard's life, I might wish I could change aspects of her story. I would want her to be the Joan of Arc for women and their struggles. I would hope that she could help dispel the misogynist myths and lift up the causes of women. However, Hildegard is a product of her time and knowing this, what Hildegard's story has always done for me is to help me turn my attention toward my own story of seeking God. From my experience, I have always received great therapeutic value from friendship with women. Women have been a huge part of my seeking God. I know that my sense of spirit has grown immensely because of the women in my life.

I have belonged to a Christian Women's Fellowship group for thirty years. We all started out with the same church (Campbell-Stone United, in Calgary) and then as women have moved away, we have become a much more ecumenical group. We meet each month where I frequently offer a 45 minute study on a variety of topics: biblical/spiritual/theological etc. Our group of around 15 women supports women's groups in the Calgary community as well as around the world. We sing, we pray and most importantly, we support one another by listening and sharing our stories.

Sue Monk Kidd, the author of *The Secret Life of Bees*, says in an online video, when asked about the value of women's friendships; "Women friends are one of the true joys in the spiritual experience we call life. I think it is hard for a woman to become her best, deepest and truest self without other women; for they do this best in the presence of other women. This is a place in that web of female friends where women tell their

⁵⁴ Matthew Fox, ed. *Hildegard of Bingen's Book of Divine Works with Letters and Songs* (Santa Fe: Bear & Co., 1987), 186-194.

stories, but also have their stories heard, received and validated. Women listen one another into being whole. There is a great sanctuary-making that happens when women come together. Women know how to have fun, play, cry and that's important. They create a refuge to be who they are so that transformation happens together. In that kind of community amazing, extraordinary transformation happens. There is *meaning making* when women come together.”⁵⁵

Sue Monk Kidd's words say exactly what women friends mean to me. My women friends do challenge me to be my deepest, truest self. When I share with them something about my life, they give me honest feedback and isn't that why I told them about an issue in the first place? My friends listen to my ideas, my plans and share my deepest thoughts. When Christian Women's Fellowship gathers, we offer a time of “caring and sharing.” The women speak about what is going on in their lives, ask for prayers for themselves, others and our world. We listen to one another's story and become what the Celtic Christians named as having an “*anam cara*”, a soul friend. In his book, *Anam Cara*, John O'Donohue writes, “In the early church, *anam cara* was a person who acted as a teacher, companion or spiritual guide; someone you could share your inner most self, your mind and heart with.”⁵⁶ Such friendship between souls is a form of hospitality. In this kind of friendship that I share with my sisters in faith, we welcome and make room for one another in our lives. Soul friendship recognises and honours the place within us that can only truly know itself in the company of another. In this sacred

⁵⁵ Sue Monk Kidd, <http://www.beliefnet.com/Video/Preachers-and-Teachers/Holistic-Spirituality/Sue-Monk>. Accessed, July 4th, 2011.

⁵⁶ John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 13-14.

space we both give and receive sanctuary. Together we share life, its ups and downs, all the while listening for God's still voice.

When my husband was ill and dying, my sisters in faith called, emailed, sent cards, visited and prayed for us both. I did not feel alone being lifted and supported by all their comforting ways. Perhaps this is how the biblical character Naomi felt when Ruth, her daughter-in-law refused to leave her. In the first chapter of the book of Ruth it says, "Do not urge me to leave you, or to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my god. Where you die, I will die and be buried." Naomi had been through a great deal having lost her husband and both sons, but Ruth stayed and supported her on the journey back to Naomi's homeland, Bethlehem. The book of Ruth is an example of faith, patience, industry, kindness, friendship and trust.⁵⁷ These are all qualities of true friendship.

St. Stephen's has taught me not to put boundaries such as gender around God. God is so much more than a male or female image. Yet as I consider the value of my female friends and the qualities that they possess, I do consider God with some female qualities. Proverbs 17:17 shares, "A friend loves at all times."⁵⁸ This is how I see God. When I consider the poem "Footprints in the Sand" by Mary Stevenson, God not only leaves her footprints in the sand, but also in my heart.⁵⁹ Friendship with God means being so intimately in touch with God, that there is never a time when I do not feel God's

⁵⁷ Ruth 1-4, NRSV.

⁵⁸ Proverbs 17.17, NRSV.

⁵⁹ Mary Stephenson, *Footprints in the Sand*, <http://www.footprints-in-the-sand.com/> Accessed January 2010.

presence. Like a true friend who knows you, God knows what we need before we ask.⁶⁰ God knows me better than I know myself. However, I am learning with God's help to be the best I can be for God, the people of God and myself. God and I have scheduled friendship times every day, where I stop what I am doing and connect to my dearest friend. My friendship with God has deepened my spiritual life in that it has brought me closer to God's divine presence. As friends we both want to spend time together, to be in communion with one another. I remember one particular day when everything that could go wrong, did, and I began my prayer with, "So God, how is your day going?" Friendship with God means loving God and everyone and everything else, including myself.

In summary, I think that I will always hunger to listen to the lives of women across time that have something to tell me about God. In my desire to know God better and for the healing of the world, it is crucial that women continue to listen to one another. We need to acknowledge that all women have both similarities and differences in the details of our lives, but we can pray and hear one another's prayers. The women mystics have offered me a sanctuary in my own journey. My current women friends are who I reach for each day and as I reach for them, they are reaching out to me. Together we create a sacred circle of friendship that is Holy. Women of history and my friends today create a batting of warmth and support that fills my quilt with love and strength.

THE QUILT BACKING: MY SENSE OF SPIRIT

⁶⁰ Matthew 6.8, NRSV.

The back of a quilt is usually a solid piece of fabric. It can be any colour or pattern. Over the years my Mother and I have bought queen size flat sheets and used them for the backs of our quilts. The sheet is usually made of cotton, other times a light flannel sheet is chosen if the quilt is especially made for warmth. The inner batting rests between the top and the bottom of the quilt. The backing gives the quilt form and it is what supports the entire creation. The back of the quilt is what touches and wraps around me. As I consider this important component of quilt making, this piece of fabric is thin, yet holds a spiritual dimension offering me such peace. In Celtic spirituality, thin places are where the veil between this world and the divine---between ourselves and God---are the sheerest or thinnest. Such thin places enable the two worlds, material and spiritual to come into contact.

The quilt back I have chosen for my quilt is a solid white piece of fabric. As a pattern (although not necessary) I decided to have multiple rainbows of various sizes going in all directions covering this piece of fabric. The rainbow has been described throughout popular culture as a symbol of peace, hope and love. From scripture, Genesis shares that after the flood, God promised Noah that God would never again destroy the earth with water, God would not unmake creation. As a sign of this promise, God placed a rainbow in the sky.⁶¹ William Wordsworth's 1802 poem, *My Heart Leaps Up*, begins with, "My hearts leaps up when I behold a rainbow in the sky... ." ⁶² And who could forget the musical, *The Wizard of Oz*, with Judy Garland singing, *Somewhere over the Rainbow*.⁶³ This song continues to be recorded by a variety of artists from around the

⁶¹ Genesis 9.13-17.

⁶² Stephen Gill. ed. *William Wordsworth Major Works*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984),246

⁶³ E.Y. Harburg, *Over the Rainbow*, CBS Songs, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer,1938.

world. The rainbow also became the symbol for gay pride. In the United Church of Canada, the rainbow-coloured flag is a symbol of affirming congregations who welcome and support people of all sexual orientations. With all this in mind, for me the rainbow stands for God's acceptance and love for everyone. It stands for diversity in all its forms; it says we are different but united on this planet as one; the people of God. The rainbow also represents all the colours of this earth, flora and fauna. As I consider this quilt wrapped around me, the thought of being held with all this beauty that God made is without a doubt a spiritual moment.

Prior to my studies, I would use the words spirit and soul interchangeably. I realise now that they are different. I view spirit as that part of me that connects to God and soul to be my unique self; what I've added over the years to know what I now know. Using the quilt as a metaphor, I would say that the top of my quilt, with its pieces and patterns of my life, represents my soul and the back or bottom of my quilt depicts my spirit. Throughout my nursing career and advanced studies I have enriched my soul, becoming the person that I believe God wants me to be. Taking my MTS degree and studying in the Doctor of Ministry program the focus has been on my spiritual development; deepening my relationship with God.

As a nurse I certainly have helped many people. However, as a chaplain I have had the opportunity to help people grow into the persons that God wants them to be. I am more mature and can now take the time with the patient that I could not afford as a nurse. I have always been a bedside nurse and now I am a bedside chaplain. There is nothing I love more than to pull up a chair and sit next to a person who needs comfort. From sitting in silence, praying, singing or talking about last night's hockey game I simply

offer support and strive to be a reflection of God's love. In the midst of this sacred time, I often begin to feel the warmth of my heart. It slowly heats up like the fireplace on a cold wintery night. This warmth I can only describe as God's embrace to let me know that God is there with me. I have come to believe in the "sacrament of the moment," where I know that God is with me and that this time right now is what is important. Not the past nor the future, but right now, with God, presently.

Over the years I have had some very tough cases like the death of an infant, a patient charged with murder or ministering to dying patients and their families. Never once have I not felt the warmth in my heart. Early on in my chaplaincy it came on slowly, but was always there. Now, four years later it begins as I think about the patient I am about to visit and remains until I pray with this person and give them to God's care after I leave. When the heat subsides I go on to visit my next patient.

I pay much closer attention to God's presence in my life and the life of others than I used to. God always gives me a sign, often subtle but a sign that I am not alone. Those moments are again sacrament moments where the connection to God is closer than my very breath, it is my very breath. The mystics knew these feelings well. Whether they are called "showings," as Julian of Norwich called them or Hildegard's "fiery light", they are God's way of communicating with me.⁶⁴

In summary, I do follow the basic doctrines of the United Church of Canada and attend my local United Church. It is important that I join with my church community where we can share our common beliefs. The United Church is a church that invites me

⁶⁴ *Julian of Norwich: Revelations of Divine Love*, translated by Elizabeth Spearing England, (UK: Penguin Books, 1998) 5-7.

to ask questions, to ponder and discuss much like the old rabbinic tradition from the times of Jesus. This church does not tell me what and how to think about theology. I applaud any church that encourages critical thinking skills, as this church does.

Spirituality for me is my relationship and *the knowing* of God's presence in my life. This is a fundamental fact in my life, God is with me! My sense of spirit harbours the presence of the Holy within.

SEWING THE QUILT: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Quilting thread is a heavy cotton thread that is used to sew a quilt together. Quilting needles are short and very sharp needles used to pull the thread through all the layers of the quilt. The goal of hand quilting is to do a running stitch with as small stitches as possible. My grandmother would have said that you should try and sew 8-10 stitches per inch. "If your stitches are too big," she would say, "You'll catch your big toe on one." Hand sewing a quilt takes time. It is not something you can rush. Most women will sew two to three hours a day but if there is a quilting bee with many women sewing, you can sew a quilt in several days. My Mother and I usually put a quilt on every January after all the Christmas decorations are put away. A queen size quilt will take us 4-6 weeks to complete. I drive into Calgary a couple of days a week and help with the sewing. Quilting alongside my 85-year-old Mother is sacred time. As we quilt we chat away or sit in silence sewing for hours at a time. Hand quilting is a great time for thinking, pondering and reflecting. This year in particular I have much to think about. I'm fifty-eight, a new widow, a business owner of a bed and breakfast, a chaplain, mother

of two adult children who are also students who live with me and I'm a student as well. Killen and de Beer state that "Life experience invites us to reflect and the choices we make have significant consequences for our future."⁶⁵ Theological reflection offers personal maturity and integrity to those who wish to explore the inner life. This has been my task throughout the first part of this dissertation. Killen and de Beer share that "As explorers, we enter our experience not knowing the hidden thoughts we will discover, the feelings that will rise, the images we will encounter, the questions we will endure or the insights that will guide our actions."⁶⁶ Throughout this section of writing I wish to continue to engage the question, "How has my sense of spirit deepened/changed since beginning my Doctor of Ministry studies at St. Stephen's." What theological reflection adds to this discussion is a deliberate way of dividing my experience into aspects, bridging my Christian tradition, my work and personal context that comprise my experience.

Consider the act of quilting for just a moment. The needle pulling the thread is pushed through the bottom layer of fabric which I have identified as my spirituality, up through the batting (my experiences with women) and up through the top of the quilt, my soul work. A few stitches are made and then the needle pulls the thread down again through the layers. This process is repeated over and over again. Through this cyclic rhythm of sewing my life together I will work through the process of theological reflection.

⁶⁵ Patricia O'Connell Killen and John de Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York, NY: Crossroads Pub., 2004), 2-3.

⁶⁶ Patricia O'Connell and John de Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York, NY: Crossroads Publishing, 2004), 18.

My experiences are unique to me. Killen and de Beer comment that our experience with its inner and outer dimension is a constant dynamic flow.⁶⁷ I have been on a leave of absence from the hospital where I work for the past six months. During this time I have spent a great deal of time reflecting on my life as a wife, nurse, chaplain and student. I have re-entered these experiences openly welcoming them into my present day. I have taken additional time to revisit my diary, sharing stories with both of my adult children. As I reflect back on my life, it has been one of blessing. My husband strongly believed in lifelong learning and supported all of my educational adventures. Being an RN for over 30 years I accomplished much in this career from bedside nursing to home care, from nursing education to long term care. I loved it all! However, the role of chaplain throughout my fifth decade of life has brought me the most meaningful experiences to date. I have had the chance to walk with people through the most difficult times of their lives. Many of these people were palliative and I have always felt it was a privilege to be invited in to journey alongside. The stillness of sitting beside a woman at 3:00am, praying together, or quietly singing her favourite hymn has opened my heart to God.

Throughout my chaplaincy experience I have been studying at St. Stephen's. The books, courses, and most importantly, writing integrative papers have given me rich resources to become hard-wired to God. Each experience affirms for me the truth of God's presence in my life and the lives of others. Those sacramental moments of eyes meeting, touching, being with or sitting in silence holds for me a mystical, holy union with God. My experiences have been deep and wide and I am thankful and grateful.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 21.

As I continue to sew my quilt, I consider these experiences and I am saturated with feelings. For me the feelings of my experiences out shadow the actual events of the situations. As an example, consider Christmas Day. I can never recall what I have received as gifts from one year to the next but I can easily recall the feelings of that day. I recall the laughter and singing, the meal and being together with gratitude for our lives. Killen and de Beer share that our feelings exemplify the human drive for meaning, a drive that the Christian tradition understands as the desire to know God intimately and ultimately.⁶⁸ Feelings capture the inner dimension of my experiences, my own internal response to what is happening to me. My feelings contain an energy that I believe is connected to my inner spirit. If I try to ignore these feelings I believe this can lead to the unease of body, mind and spiritual well being. As a professional, it is important to control my emotions yet give them a space when and where it is safe to do so. Prior to my studies at St. Stephen's I was a person who was always in control of my emotions and never showed them to others or myself for that matter. However, after learning and practicing the process of theological reflection, I now take time to honour my feelings rather than tucking them away inside. Especially when dealing with sorrowful situations, I now give myself space and time to let these feelings surface, share them with others, cry if I need to and give these burdens to God. Feelings are a rich resource in my journey to discover meaning. When I am open to my feelings, I am opening myself to my inner spirit and God's indwelling energy.

As I work through my feelings images arise. These images cast light on every experience. Killen and de Beer say that images can be visual, tactile, olfactory, aural,

⁶⁸ Patrica O'Connell Killen and John de Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York, NY: Crossroads Pub., 2004), 34.

savoury or a combination of these. These images allow a different angle of vision on a situation and create a climate for insight.⁶⁹ I love to use imagery. I learned to do this in my early twenties when I was first diagnosed with ankylosing spondylitis (rheumatoid arthritis of the spine and weight bearing joints). Visual imagery has helped me deal with chronic pain over the years. An image that captures an experience acts like a metaphor, which can both broaden and enrich one's awareness and understanding. As you the reader, have worked your way through this paper, you must now be aware that I love to use metaphor! Metaphors help me express what I am feeling from an experience. Killen and de Beer suggest that as images arise it is important not to resist, control, suppress or predict their full meaning, or you may miss the Divine message in this new experience.⁷⁰

American-Israeli journalist, Yossi Klein Halevi uses four words to describe how the essential human story is played out with particular intensity in the present day Holy Land.⁷¹ Not only do these four words express what life is all about, but these words are powerful images for me to use as I reflect upon the experiences of my life. These four words are: thick realities, thin places.

To begin, some of the thick realities of my life as chaplain are patients struggling to make meaning of their dying or people who are heavily burdened with debt or trying to get through the loss of their teenage son from suicide. Most recently, a 51 year old staff nurse has just been told that her breast cancer has returned. All of these and so many more are the thick realities of life. They are like a heavy fog we cannot see past as we

⁶⁹ Ibid., 36-38.

⁷⁰ Patricia O'Connell Killen and John de Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York, NY: Crossroads Publishers, 2004),38.

⁷¹ Yossi Klien Halevi <http://being.publicradio.org/programs/2011/thi> Krista Tippett podcast May 12, 2011

travel down the road of life each day. A thick reality for me this year has been the loss of my husband. I still feel out of sorts, like there is something wrong. I have a sense of unease each day, a sense of “*weltschmerz*,” a German word which means a psychological pain caused by sadness that occurs when realising that your situation is caused by circumstances outside of your control.⁷² From a world perspective, thick realities would be the current economy, earthquakes and tsunamis, climate change or pollution. Thick realities are heavy and burdensome in a person’s life. I have used the term thick when I go into a patient’s room where the family is sitting at the bedside filled with sorrow for their loved one who is dying. I can just feel the room is thick with sorrow.

Thin places, on the other hand can be special places like Stonehenge in England or the Isle of Iona in Scotland. In Celtic spirituality, a thin place is a place where the veil between this world and the divine...between ourselves and God, is the sheerest or thinnest. Such places enable the two worlds, material and spiritual, temporal and eternal to come into contact.⁷³ A thin place is where we encounter God. Certainly when I have sat in a 14th century church in Europe, I can feel the veil thinning as I pray in a place where thousands of people have sat and prayed for hundreds of years before me. Other thin places are physical landscapes like seacoasts, mountains and forests where we sense that God’s spirit dwells there. Yet, our tradition tells us that God insists on dwelling everywhere. Certainly the greatest mystery of thin places occurs when we realise that the veil is not always external to us; it is within. Throughout Jesus’ ministry, Jesus made ordinary places extraordinary; he made thick places thin, as he carried God with him and

⁷² Webster’s New World Dictionary, 2nd ed. (1984).

⁷³ Jan L. Richardson, *In the Sanctuary of Women: A Companion for Reflection & Prayer*. (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2010) ,78-88.

made God available to the people to whom he ministered⁷⁴ Like Jesus, there are also the thin places that I carry within myself. Stuck in traffic in Calgary, I can go to my thin place within and listen as my spirit makes its presence known. Wherever I am, God meets me in my thin place.

The image of a thin place is what keeps me connected to God when I am in the thick realities of the everyday. Thin places remind me that I also travel in the presence of the communion of saints and in the company of God who, in the person of Jesus, opened time wide. As I take time out to pray, as I take bread and wine, time can collapse...past, present and future merge and I find myself sharing at the table with Jesus, dear friends who have died, Hildegard of Bingen and all the saints who went before me. I can even share communion once again with my husband. In these thin places if I am still and open I can hear God's voice. So thin places to me are also thin listening places, places where I sit at the feet of God and listen.

From my experiences of thick realities and thin places of listening to God, I have had some significant insights. Theological reflection has clearly helped me see where I have been and how far I have come with all my insights over the past years studying towards my Doctor of Ministry degree. Insights are new understandings leading to wisdom.⁷⁵

Since beginning my Doctor of Ministry journey I have become a better listener. The root of the word *obedient* means "to listen to."⁷⁶ In the creative process of quilt making, being obedient to the action of quilting, to the lessons of life and the joy of being

⁷⁴ Mark 1.29-39, NRSV.

⁷⁵ Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Etymology, 4th ed. (2003).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

intentional to God, is listening. People sometimes ask just what is it I do as a chaplain? My response years ago would have been to share all the various tasks that I do. My answer today would be, “I listen.” I listen to others, myself and mostly to God in those thin places.

Another change is that I have embraced hospitality as a spiritual practice. I run a bed and breakfast, so naturally one would think I am just innately friendly, but hospitality is much more than just being friendly. Practicing hospitality expresses my belief in the inherent worth and dignity of another person. Through my actions of hospitality I move towards creating a world in which we are all treated with justice, equality and compassion. The journey of hospitality is simultaneously outward and inward; we are always meeting ourselves in other people. I believe that as a spiritual practice, hospitality becomes an act of mutual beneficence undertaken in a spirit of self discovery. If I approach welcoming as an expression of who I am, I realise that as I greet you, I also greet myself. I am grateful to meet someone for giving me the opportunity to move deeper into my life, to align my actions with my deepest core values. The traditional relationship of guest/host dissolves into something more egalitarian and the “duty” becomes an opportunity.

My prayer life has deepened over these past years. Prayer has always been important to me as I would take time out each day to pray. However, now I feel so connected to God, it almost feels as though I am in a constant state of prayer. God’s spirit, like the mist off a lake on a cool, fall morning, invades all my sensory portals. Like the moist air, God’s spirit is a healing balm both in and on my body. Prayer has become such a large part of my life, I feel like a prayer some days: God’s indwelling

spirit flows through my veins, moves through my lungs and guides my thoughts to love my neighbour as myself.

I have come to appreciate even more the ministry of teaching and facilitating. In the Rabbinic tradition, the Rabbi would gather people around and discuss the scriptures. The Rabbi would guide the learners through the process of critical thinking. I have come to realise that Jesus was a “table teacher;” he would teach around a common meal with his disciples.⁷⁷ This grass roots movement of teaching is much more powerful than a lecture. The interaction with the learners equalizes the roles of student and teacher. Our spirits meet and we recognise the light of God in one another. As a table teacher, Jesus encouraged others through the power of story. I have come to appreciate that sharing the stories of my experiences ministering to others is a powerful learning tool to others and myself. The “Spirit in me meets the Spirit in You...Alleluia!”⁷⁸ This old paradigm of Jesus is the new paradigm and will be the life giving future of the church.

For years the Christian symbol of the cross was never a strong symbol for me, yet as chaplain I wore one to identify myself to staff and patients. I felt the cross was a reminder of our sins, not our joys, or love for life. So I decided to spend some time reflecting on the cross and came away with two other theological premises. First, radiating out from the centre of the cross, if one were to take the four pieces, each piece could stand for a holistic health element. I believe God wants us to care for our physical, emotional, social and spiritual selves. If we believe that God’s spirit dwells within us as

⁷⁷ John 13, NRSV.

⁷⁸ Jim Strathdee, *The Spirit in Me Meets the Spirit in You*. Ridgecrest, CA: Desert Flower Music, 1972.

1 Cor 3:16 suggests, then we should want to take care of ourselves as God cares for us.⁷⁹ Having God at my centre, symbolised by God at the centre of the cross, each piece now represents God loving us into wholeness. I have personally been encouraged to take better care of myself physically by daily exercise and making time for my friends. When I am feeling down I share my concerns with others and spend time praying to God. The cross has now become a powerful symbol of God's love for me, not something that I feel guilty about. The cross is a symbol that has a spiritual connection, a reminder of how God's spirit indwells and urges me to be the best I can be for me, God and the people of God.

The second theological theme is from the scripture in John 13 where Jesus shares the new commandment: "To love God and your neighbour as yourself."⁸⁰ The vertical portion of the cross represents God in and through me reaching up to the cosmos and a reminder to stay grounded, humble and rooted in reality. The horizontal section represents reaching out to help our neighbour. Jesus both divine and human sits at the centre of the cross encouraging us to live out these commandments.

In summary, theological reflection gives me the time and space to ponder this special relationship between me and God. The physical act of sitting quietly and pulling the thread in and out through the layers of quilt has been a rich experience. I now know that I am blessed by this opportunity to be still and listen for God's whispering voice deep in my heart.

⁷⁹ 1 Corinthians 3.16, NRSV

⁸⁰ John 13.34, NRSV.

As I write the conclusion to this chapter, I recall sitting on my back deck surrounded by my flowers and the green foliage of summer. On this small patch of earth I have reflected upon my life over these past years. Like the garden that began in the late spring, there has been much growth and greening of my spirit. Gardens and the vineyards appear throughout the Bible not only as real places but also as ones that have entered into the mythic memory of the people of God. The image of the garden of Eden to the garden tomb where Jesus meets Mary Magdalene and from the story of Noah's planting of a vineyard to Jesus' vineyard parables, these settings symbolise places where right relationship becomes possible. My inner garden has been fruitful being connected to the Divine. This relationship is whole and Holy! I cannot imagine a life without God. The gardens and vineyards to which the Bible invites us offer basic metaphors of fertility and fruitfulness. They are profoundly feminine images. My relationship with my women friends have been my source of strength, comfort and creativity throughout my life. I am pulled to the creative process of becoming a better person than I am today. I know that I can continue to do this with God's help!

Throughout this chapter I have been stitching together some of my stories where my sense of spirit has deepened. I have been quilting the spiritual fabric of my life as nurse and chaplain. I believe that creativity is God's first language. At the beginning of Genesis, God as Creator labours with artful passion. God calls creation good, but does not proclaim it finished until the sixth day.⁸¹ Putting this quilt together piece by piece has been a new creation, and God continues to do this with me. The creation of the quilt in this paper, representing my life story of change and growth, has provided a space

⁸¹ Genesis 1.24, NRSV.

between and beneath and beyond the words, a thin place where I meet God each and every moment.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to address the current material in the realm of spirituality and sense of spirit development associated with spiritual care volunteers in practice in rural settings. This chapter reviews pertinent literature on the differences between spirituality and religion, mysticism, differences between spirit and soul and spiritual formation.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGION

Margaret Clark and Joanne Olson describe spirituality as “an experience of being in relationship with...”⁸² As an example, I may be in relationship with my sister in Australia, but I have an experience of being in that relationship when I Skype and talk to her. In a similar way I may be in relationship with God and not even be aware of it until there is some form of awakening or enlightened experience.

⁸² Margaret B. Clark and Joanne Olson, *Nursing within a Faith Community: Promoting Health in Times of Transition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, 2000), 21-22.

Lorraine Wright describes spirituality as “Whatever or whoever gives ultimate meaning and purpose in one’s life that invites particular ways of being in the world in relation to others, oneself and the universe.”⁸³ The Bible and other sacred texts are the measures used to guide Christians’ ways of being in the world.

Religion connotes an established system and institution whereas spirituality implies personal involvement, says Holt.⁸⁴ Spirituality is a trans-religious word. From a Christian perspective, spirituality calls us to recognise the importance of its root term, *spirit*, an important biblical word. The Hebrew word *ruach* and the Greek word *pneuma*, are used interchangeably for breath, wind and spirit.⁸⁵

B. Dossey believes that spirituality has three defining characteristics. The first characteristic, *unfolding mystery*, refers to one’s experiences of life’s meaning and purpose. The second, *inner strengths*, refers to self, consciousness, transcendence and both inner and sacred resources. The third characteristic, *harmonious interconnectedness*, refers to interconnections with self, others, a higher power, God and the environment.⁸⁶

Spirit, as wind, breath, life is the most basic and most inclusive way to express centred embodiment. Spirit is a wide-ranging multi-dimensional term with many meanings built upon its physical base as the breath of life.⁸⁷

⁸³ Lorraine M. Wright, *Spirituality, Suffering and Illness: Ideas for Healing* (Philadelphia, PA: F.A. Davis Co., 2005), 4.

⁸⁴ Bradley Holt, *Thirsty for God: A Brief History of Christian Spirituality* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 1993), 5.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-7.

⁸⁶ B.M. Dossey, et al. *Holistic Nursing: A Handbook for Practice, 2nd ed.* (Gailhersbury, MD: Aspen Publishers, 1995), 22.

⁸⁷ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis, 1993), 143.

Puchalski notes that spirituality can be defined as whomever or whatever gives one a transcendent meaning in life. This is often expressed as religion or relationship with God but it can also refer to other things such as nature, energy force, belief in the good of all, belief in the importance of family and community.⁸⁸ One's beliefs and values can profoundly affect how a person copes with illness and with treatment of illness. Therefore, spirituality is important during all phases of one's health and illness.

From the Latin, *religare*, meaning to bind together, religion is a more structured belief system that addresses more universal questions. It provides a framework for making sense of meaning of existence.⁸⁹ Most religions expect general adherence to a particular body of beliefs (doctrines) regarding one's relationship with God. Religion differs from spirituality and can be perceived as more restrictive by some traditions. Religion is often associated with people coming together to share common beliefs, observances, diet, clothing, symbols and rituals.⁹⁰ The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology says that religion is a state of life bound by vows and rules. The root of the English word "religion" was originally used to mean reverence for God or Gods.⁹¹ The word religion is sometimes used interchangeably with faith or belief system, but religion differs from the private belief usually associated with spirituality.

Spirituality remains a word which 21st century people still find new and confusing. This remains so because religion and spirituality are not the same but overlapping concepts. Some people who see themselves as spiritual do not formally

⁸⁸ Christina M. Puchalski, *Spiritual Assessment Tool: Innovations in end-of-life care*. <http://www2.edc.org/lastacts/archives/archivesNov99/assesstool.asp> Accessed January 4th, 2012.

⁸⁹ Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Etymology, 4th ed. (2003).

⁹⁰ Margaret Clark and Joanne Olson, *Nursing Within a Faith Community: Promoting Health in Times of Transition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers, Inc., 2000), 25.

⁹¹ Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Etymology, 4th ed. (2003).

endorse a religion and others who are religious are not spiritual. However, from an experiential understanding both religion and spirituality involve the search for meaning.

Thomas Moore defines religion as a body of beliefs and spirituality as a higher consciousness; 'he further adds' that there is a kind of romance with the spirit as one discerns this relationship. This romantic life is deeply interior. It is thick with images, dreams and words that invite reflection towards an intimacy. Further, Moore states it is love, not intellect that is the way of the spirit. Romanticism is in tune with the process of deepening one's sense of spirit because it places value on the emotional complexity and intensity of a relationship.⁹²

MYSTICISM AND THE DEEPENING OF SPIRIT

For Christians to understand mysticism from its beginning, one starts first with the teachings of Jesus from the New Testament, secondly, with the great body of spiritual writings such as those of St. John of the Cross, Meister Eckhart, Theresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich and many others from whom came a plethora of spiritual material. Finally, the last two centuries have produced many contemporary mystics whose writings continue to stir our spiritual souls. These writings passed down from the early Christian mystics are guide posts as we make similar connections to God. Mystics were in pursuit of communion with God through direct experience, intuition, instinct or insights. This experience was esoterically focused towards enlightenment.⁹³

⁹² Thomas Moore, *The Soul's Religion: Cultivating a Profoundly Spiritual Way of Life* (HarperCollins Publishers: New York, 2003), 162-163.

⁹³ Marcus Braybrooke, *The Explorer's Guide to Christianity* (Hodder & Stoughton: London, UK, 1998), 139-140, 157.

Mysticism is the spiritual conviction found in all religions that everyone is related to everything and everyone else. It suggests that we are all sisters and brothers to one another despite differing races, religions and nationalities. Mysticism also teaches that we are all related to the animals who share this Earth.⁹⁴ Many of the mystics wrote about their experiences of God, believing that it was through their dreams, visions and ill health where God communicated with them. Spirituality was unique to each one. Hildegard of Bingen believed that God spoke to her through her visions. These visions motivated her devotional life which became an embodiment of her spirituality. As an example, in medieval times, the singing of plainchant was a central spiritual exercise. Hildegard encouraged her nuns to internalize the meaning of each word, digest and then release the word through their voices. The more focused and attentive the singers were to the words, the more powerfully was the inner meaning of the text revealed to the listeners and the singers themselves.⁹⁵ The mystics were for the most part tolerated within the context of the religion of the day.

The Christian mystic is a person not concerned with knowing the letter of the Word or religious dogma, but with knowing the Spirit of the Word. The word “disciple” occurs 269 times in the New Testament whereas the word “Christian” is only found three times.⁹⁶ The New Testament is a book about disciples and for disciples of Jesus Christ.⁹⁷ Borg writes that the Bible is like a lens through which we see God and as a lens it is not the object of belief but a means whereby we see. Further Borg states, “I do not think

⁹⁴ Maria Harris, *Dance of the Spirit: The Seven Steps of Women's Spirituality* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1989), 42-44.

⁹⁵ Gloria Durka, *Praying with Hildegard of Bingen: Companions for the Journey* (Winona, Minnesota: Saint Mary's Press, Christian Brother's Pub., 1991), 90

⁹⁶ Strong's Concordance of the Bible, (1990).

⁹⁷ Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith. eds. *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups* (Harper: San Francisco, 1989), 13.

being a Christian is primarily about believing. It is not about believing in the lens, but about entering a deepening relationship to that which we see through the lens.”⁹⁸ Borg continues to assert that it is not even about believing in the Bible, the gospels or other teachings about Jesus, but about a relationship with the One whom we see through this lens. Our preoccupation has been with intellectual assent and not about developing relationships. The Bible is not just about God, but about the Divine-human relationship and through that lens we also see our life with God.⁹⁹

One cannot leave discussion of the medieval mystics without considering two individuals who exemplify the sense of a deepened spirituality. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) was a Dominican nun who at age 21 decided to spend the remainder of her life helping the poor and served as a nurse in homes and hospitals. In her writings she explains her sense of spirituality using the metaphor of a bridge to describe the work of Christ and the way to heaven. For Catherine of Siena, the gate on the bridge represents Christ through whom one must worship in order to have a deep spiritual satisfaction throughout life. Catherine of Siena represents many mystics’ theology of the day, where enlightenment and connection to God must come through Jesus Christ first.¹⁰⁰

Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) began his life in comfort and wealth and delighted with all the trappings of life. However, after becoming injured in battle and throughout his recovery, Ignatius read many books on theology and especially loved the stories of St. Francis. From these readings he had a conversion experience and focused the remainder

⁹⁸ Marcus Borg and N.T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (HarperCollins Publishers: San Francisco, 2000) 239-240.

⁹⁹ Marcus Borg and N.T. Wright, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions*. (HarperCollins Publishers: San Francisco, 2000), 240.

¹⁰⁰ Richard J. Foster and James B. Smith, eds. *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups* (Harper: San Francisco, 1993) 264-270.

of his life developing the Jesuit tradition. Ignatius wrote simple yet profound exercises on how to have a spiritual connection to God. Ignatius believed these exercises could help individuals grow in intimacy with God. This gift from God, Ignatius believed, was a method to seek God and find God in all things. This way of praying allowed Ignatius to discover the voice of God within his own heart and to experience a growth in familiarity with God's Will. Jesuits call this prayer method their "daily examen of consciousness." Through this method of praying it is believed one can grow in a sense of self and the Source of self; you can become more sensitive to your own spirit with its longings. The steps are: to recall that you are in the presence of God, spend a moment reviewing your day with gratitude, ask God to send you the Holy Spirit to help you look at your actions, attitudes and motives with honesty and patience, review your day and finally to have a heart-to-heart talk with Jesus. It is suggested that you finish your prayer with saying the Lord's Prayer.¹⁰¹

The mystics were people who followed church doctrines and spent personal time connecting with God in the most intimate of ways. Through visions, dreams and insights obtained through prayer they helped to shape spirituality as we understand it today. Their goal was to be as close as possible to God with the desire of deepening God within themselves.

I have included some of the mystics from the twentieth century that I believe will add further understanding towards our discussion on the topic of a growing sense of spirit. I begin with Thomas Merton.

¹⁰¹ Richard J. Foster and James B. Smith, eds. *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups* (Harper: San Francisco, 1993) 193-199.

Thomas Merton (1915-1968) was a Trappist monk who wrote over 70 books, mostly on spirituality, social justice and quiet pacifism. As a progressive Catholic, Merton was a proponent of interfaith dialogue and studied eastern religions. Thomas Merton's spiritual concept of "Holy Now" moments is grounded in pure experience and addressed throughout his poetry. Attention to the "Now" is at the heart of the contemplative's life. A note from Merton's journal reveals his thoughts on this notion; "For many years I've entertained a private suspicion that if I were more attentive to the *NOW*, I'd be granted a tremor of bliss, a wink of heaven, a whisper. It's a notion I still believe in after all these years."¹⁰² Today one may hear the words, "living in the moment" which mirrors Merton's concept of the "Holy Now." This simple philosophical and theological concept can prove to be a helpful stimulus for leading a spirit filled life.

Henri Nouwen (1932-1996) was a Dutch-born Catholic priest who wrote 40 books on spirituality. Nouwen offered up a concept called, "A Spirituality of Waiting." Waiting is not a popular practice especially in today's busy world, and was often viewed as wasting time. Waiting has not been listed in the classical spiritual disciplines yet to Nouwen it was essential. Nouwen acknowledged the constant demand for instant gratification in the modern world. Waiting, for Nouwen, meant hoping in God in an open-ended way that did not try to control the future or God's manner of working in the situation. Waiting is not a passive activity, but an active one, in Nouwen's view. Active

¹⁰² Robert Waldron, *Thomas Merton: Discovering His Poetry, Essays and Journals* (Paulist Press: New Jersey, 2002) 32-33.

waiting meant staying alert to God's activity. Nouwen argued that relationships require trust and a relinquishment of the need to control a situation.¹⁰³

Carl Jung (1875-1961) was a Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychology. Jung was considered the first modern psychiatrist to view the human psyche as "by nature religious" and made it the focus of exploration. Jung believed that God was one of the soul's deepest and closest intimacies. He felt that we need to feel related to something larger than ourselves if we are to find meaning and value in life. Jung believed wholeness lay in developing a dialogue and personal relationship with God.¹⁰⁴ Jung encouraged us in his writings to not only recover the individual experience of the voice of God and to allow some room for it in our lives, but to incorporate it in our theology and teaching. Jung felt that the Holy Spirit is the symbol through which Christians express their personal experience of God. Further he believed that the rebirth and transformative experiences represented in the dogma and liturgy of the Christian community must become a matter of individual psychic experiences.¹⁰⁵ From what Jung has shared, the presence of the Holy Spirit means that we have the benefit of support from beyond our own conscious willing and striving. We can become a dwelling place for God.

Evelyn Underhill (1875-1941) was a poet, novelist, pacifist and mystic. She published over thirty books. Few women in the twentieth century have done more to further our understanding of the devotional life than Evelyn Underhill. Underhill says,

¹⁰³ Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life* (Ave Maria Press: Notre Dame, IN, 2004), 46-59.

¹⁰⁴ Wallace B. Clift, *Jung and Christianity: The Challenge of Reconciliation* (Crossroads Publishers: New York, 1997), 105-106.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

“When it comes to prayer, it is that part of our conscious life which is deliberately orientated towards and exclusively responds to spiritual reality. God is that spiritual reality that we believe is indwelling in all things. Prayer is a going up and out from our ordinary circle of earthly interests. Prayer stretches out the tentacles of our consciousness to the Eternal Truth, the Eternal Love, God himself.”¹⁰⁶ Underhill reflects on the line from scripture as her standard when it comes to prayer, Acts 17:28 “In him we live and move and have our being.”¹⁰⁷ Underhill uses a three part movement of prayer and encourages us to begin with prayer in our mind, making space for God by reflecting on spiritual truths. This is an intellectual exercise, where one deliberately surrenders the mind. Prayer then moves to emotions by concentrating on our desire for God by holding yourself in God’s presence. As feelings begin to rise we must commune with God above all else. Underhill says, “We are urged by the passionate heart which climbs the slope to God in prayer.” God urges us to share what is on our minds. The third movement of prayer that Underhill talks about is that of the will. We become determined to hold ourselves in God’s presence by a deliberate act of will.¹⁰⁸

To foster a genuine prayer life, Underhill insists that prayer is simply a conversation with God. This includes speaking, listening, thinking and sometimes just resting in communion with God. This she believes to be a privilege, to honour and talk with God. In prayer not only do we talk to God but with God. This says Underhill is a horizontal exercise. Underhill says we pray to experience God’s presence and have

¹⁰⁶ Richard Foster and James B. Smith, eds. *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups* (Harper: San Francisco, 1989),94-100.

¹⁰⁷ Acts 17.28, NRSV.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Foster and James b. Smith, eds. *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups* (Harper: San Francisco, 1989), 94-100.

fellowship, to learn God's will for our lives, to receive strength and receive answers for our petitions. Finally we pray to express our thanks and praise for God's goodness and mercy in our lives.¹⁰⁹

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SPIRIT AND SOUL

The Hebrew word for soul is *nephesh*, which literally means *life*.¹¹⁰ Soul is just what this word implies, all that comprises who a person is. The soul is how you relate to others and yourself. It is your uniqueness and what stands you apart from others. Soul is your makeup, everything from your DNA, to how and where we were raised, to the things you value in life.¹¹¹ Soul holds the qualities found in layers of the self, deeper than one's personality. Plotkin claims that our soul embraces our core values, our core abilities and our core knowledge.¹¹² I would suggest another value that is embraced would be our core fears. All of these values I would metaphorically place in a bowl, a soul bowl that sits at the centre of our being. If I should be untrue to all that is inherent within me, I would tip out from my soul bowl some of the most true parts of myself. For example if I value honesty and then I'm not honest, I remove what is at the centre of who I am. My stomach hurts, because I have dumped out some of my core values from my soul bowl. I would call this soul pain. As a woman of faith, I need to walk my talk. If I

¹⁰⁹ Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People* (Eagle Guildford: Surrey, UK, 1991), 19- 29, 32-35.

¹¹⁰ Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Etymology, 4th ed. (2003).

¹¹¹ Bill Plotkin, *Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche* (Novato, CA:New World Library, 2003) ,24-30

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 25.

value caring, supporting, helping others, hospitality, kindness, sharing etc., then I need to act on these values in order for me to be whole and healthy. Being true to my soul, is being true to who I am.

In contrast to soul, the concept of spirit points to what all people, all things have in common, our shared membership in the cosmos. Spirit both transcends all things and is immanent in all things. Spirit refers to the immaterial part of humankind; it is how we relate to God. I recall a sermon from a visiting minister who shared that our spirit is the organ which God has given us to embrace, discern, and manifest the *pneumatic* or windy movements of the Holy Spirit. Our human spirit is the organ that is home to God's Holy Spirit and is able to discern God's voice. This is why we are unable to discern God with our souls alone. Plotkin notes that, "The movement toward spirit is a journey of ascent, a journey of transcendence, while the movement toward soul is a journey of descent, or a journey that deepens you."¹¹³ A holistic approach to spirituality interweaves the ascent and the descent, rendering a balanced whole and healthy person.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Spiritual formation as defined by Richard Foster is the growth and development of the whole person by an intentional focus on one's spiritual and interior life, interactions with others in ordinary life and engaging in spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation.¹¹⁴ Spiritual practices listed in the 215th General Assembly (2003) of the Presbyterian Church (USA) are: devotional reading, praying, resting and Sabbath keeping, contemplation and discernment, nurturing spaces for silence, cultivating the art

¹¹³ Bill Plotkin, *Soulcraft: Crossing into the Mysteries of Nature and Psyche* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2003), 25.

¹¹⁴ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (Harper: San Francisco, 1982) v.

of hospitality and generosity, spiritual guidance and friendships, engaging in works of compassion and justice, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, managing resources for God's service and other forms of piety that have proven effective through history of the ecumenical church.¹¹⁵

“In Christian spiritual formation the focus is on Jesus. It is a life-long process as a believer desires to become a disciple of Jesus and become more like him. This becomes possible because of the grace of the Gospels and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit,” writes Dallas Willard.¹¹⁶ The Spirit guides and empowers us to seek God, to welcome God into our hearts and to discover God in others. By listening for the Spirit's voice and being open to the Spirit's transforming power, we are permanently changed by this indwelling presence.¹¹⁷

There is a Divine call to pursue maturity in scripture with perseverance being associated with attaining maturity.¹¹⁸ The ultimate expression of Christian maturity and its ongoing developmental process is related to becoming the image of Christ.¹¹⁹ Spiritual formation is the beginning of the journey towards being spiritually mature. Spiritual maturity as defined by Majerus and Sandage represents a capacity to connect with God and relational God images. When there are periods of disconnection, there is a longing to reconnect with God...a God attachment.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Spiritual Practices listed from the 215th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, USA <http://gamc.pusa.org/ogarereresources.journal2003.pd> Accessed January 2012.

¹¹⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (Harper & Row: New York, 1988) xi

¹¹⁷ Ibid.,

¹¹⁸ Hebrews 6.1 and James 1.4, NRSV.

¹¹⁹ Romans 8.29, NRSV.

¹²⁰ Brian D. Majerus and Steven J. Sandage “Differentiation of Self and Christian Spiritual Maturity: Social Science and Theological Integration” *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 2010, Vol.38, No 1, 41-51.

Spiritual formation involves a transformative learning experience. The Commission of Christian Formation for the Episcopal Church describes it as learning, transforming and changing.¹²¹ Deep learning is an experiential process and we live our faith through practices that engage and excite us. Formation begins first with the individual who must *encounter* God in a personal relationship. Here one learns who God is and how God is calling us to serve. Second, spiritual maturity is enhanced as the individual hones and refines understanding of God's call by *experiencing* the living God in the community of faith. Finally, when a solid foundation has been established, believers validate, express and augment their growth by *extending* Christ's love into the world.¹²²

There is no one universal formula for encouraging spiritual development in individuals as everyone is at different places in their faith journey. People come to know and love God through a variety of venues both intellectual and practical.

The life and teachings of Benedict of Nursia offers one of the most inspirational models of spiritual Christian community. Benedict lived for three years as a hermit before determining that it is healthier for monks to live in community rather than isolation. However, it was during his time alone that Benedict developed a strong appreciation for both solitary and communal practices. This is where he honed the contemplative practice of *lectio divina*, a meditative approach to scripture that encourages us to listen for and to hear the quiet voice of God.¹²³ *Lectio divina* is an ancient method

¹²¹ Michele F. Junkin, "An Active Approach to Spiritual Formation: Encountering, Experiencing and Extending God," *Common Ground Journal* v7nl (Fall): 85-96.

¹²² Michele F. Junkin, "An Active Approach to Spiritual Formation: Encountering, Experiencing and Extending God." *Common Ground Journal* v7nl (Fall):85-96.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

for praying the Bible, being open to hearing the words of scripture offering a personal and transforming word from God. Readers begin by slowly reading a short passage of text and let their awareness rest upon each word, savouring it. Next the reader meditates on this word or phrase, allowing it to engage the reader fully. As the reader holds this word in mind and heart, he or she ponders if this word connects to some aspect of his or her own experience. The reader pays attention for images or memories that arise. Finally, the reader gives thanks for this opportunity of connecting with God and may take action because of this inspired time of instruction.¹²⁴

Little has been written about the spiritual formation of older persons. Linda Vogel is an exception. She states, “As persons enter the last third of the life cycle, the study on spiritual development shows great potential for growth.” The body may be declining because of wear and tear and the mental processes may be slowing, but as long as there is life the possibility exists for spiritual shaping. This process involves learning and adapting in ways that challenge individuals to become all that they are capable of becoming.¹²⁵

Lindell Anderson notes that Christians are called to use their talents as long as they live. There is no retirement from the service of God. Older adults need to be encouraged to express their faith in words and deeds. Inviting older adults to participate in spiritual care addresses their need for a sense of significance and usefulness. This also affirms the God-given value of older adults by society as a whole. Older adults have

¹²⁴ Joan Chittister, *The Rule of St. Benedict: Insights for the Ages* (Crossroads Publishers: New York, 1992), 15-30.

¹²⁵ Linda Vogel, *Aging, Spirituality and Religion: A Handbook* (Fortress Press: MN, 1995), 38-47.

spiritual yearnings; most want to serve and to leave a legacy of faith and hope and love for those who follow.¹²⁶

Exploring the topic of “deepening one’s sense of spirit” is vast. As a researcher I have strived to provide the reader with a variety of articles and books from various authors about this expansive area of study. It is hope that you the reader have come away with some understanding that the journey of coming to know God is a personal experience. People come to know God through many different ways, such as attending church, listening for God’s inner voice, music, walking in nature, sacred readings like the Bible or helping others in need. This is a unique experience for each person and one that I believe is encouraged by God. God wants and waits for us to connect and be in communion with this Divine presence.

¹²⁶ Lindell Anderson, “Pastoral Care and the Spiritual Formation of Older Persons” *Journal of Religion, Spirituality and Aging*, 21:104 -118, 2009.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHOD

The previous chapters provided the background and significance of this study. The review of literature contained material pertinent to understanding this field of study. This chapter will explain the purpose and method of the research.

This inquiry began broadly without theoretical preconception and focused on discovering the basic social, psychological and spiritual processes associated with understanding if a spiritual care volunteer's sense of spirit had deepened or changed when providing spiritual care to patients in hospital or hospice, to residents in long term care facilities. I explored how one's sense of spirit could be deepened or changed; I employed a research method known as Organic Inquiry, a type of qualitative research.

The aim of any qualitative research is to understand, describe and explain what is happening as viewed by the participants. In other words, to obtain a complete, detailed description of phenomena. Qualitative researchers attempt to describe and interpret some of the human phenomenon often in the words of the selected individuals (participants).

Qualitative analysis allows for fine distinctions between all the data. Qualitative researchers view the world as socially constructed through individual perception. Researchers become immersed in the situation they are studying.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Corrine Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An introduction*. (New, York, NY: Pearson Education, Inc. 2006,) 1-20.

WHAT IS ORGANIC INQUIRY?

The Organic Inquiry approach to human sciences research based on the work of Jennifer Clements et al., is exploratory and discovery orientated.¹²⁸ This qualitative method of study acknowledges that every research study has inherent and expanding natures, which may be realised through subjective and intuitive methods. It seeks to use such experiences of the sacred as a way of knowing. Organic Inquiry views the researcher's own experience and story as the instrument of the study. The experience of the participating in the study and the results may lead to transformation for the investigator, research participants and reader audiences. Organic Inquiry emphasis the use, value and power of stories, along with the Holy Spirit as catalyst for transformation. Each story can change not only the person telling the story, but the listeners as well. The premise behind Organic Inquiry is that people learn and grow from hearing the stories of others.

Helping to understand transformative change in the human experience is not new. Jack Mezirow's theory of transformative learning also focuses on the learners' experiences.¹²⁹ Mezirow postulates that these learning experiences shape the learner and produce a significant impact or paradigm shift which then affects subsequent experiences.

Clements notes that throughout the Organic Inquiry research process the investigator listens to the participants who share their stories during which time open-

¹²⁸ Jennifer Clements, "Organic Inquiry: Toward Research in Partnership with Spirit." *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2004), 26 – 49.

<http://www.itp.edu/resources/divinefeminine/research-organic.php>

¹²⁹ Jack Mezirow, "Transformative Learning Theory," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, Vol 1, Issue 74 (Summer 1997), 5-12.

ended questions are asked by the investigator. These questions, guided by the Organic Inquiry method, focus on bodily and emotional sensations, sense of time, feelings and the meaning of the experience for the participant.¹³⁰ Further, when it comes to meaning, the researcher's questions are used to explore how the experience has changed the participants' self, spirit or service.¹³¹

Organic Inquiry is based on feminist principles (caring, equality, listening) and is a research method rooted in respect for the feminine, the earth and the involvement of those taking part in the study.¹³² It takes into account the notion that human beings doing research strive for objectivity, and because of our human traits, it is futile. It therefore includes the researcher's story as an essential part of the research itself, along with the stories of the participants. It also invites Spirit in as part of the study which is considered to be partially responsible for the transformation. The researcher, the participants and the readers of the study are all part of the transformative change that this research approach hopes to bring.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THE SIX PRINCIPLES

Organic Inquiry holds six characteristic principles that describe both explicit and implicit ways of knowing our lived experience. These principles help the learner to understand the meaning of what they have learned or experienced. These principles are named as: The Sacred, Personal, Chthonic, Numinous, Relational and Transformative.

¹³⁰ Jennifer Clements, "Organic Inquiry: Toward Research in Partnership with Spirit." *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2004), 26-49.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 28.

Organic Inquiry holds these characteristic principles as foundational in all ways of knowing.¹³³

The questions developed for the interviews were based on the six principles of Organic Inquiry. Understanding each principle has led the researcher to question the nature of spiritual development.

The Sacred is an attitude or atmosphere of awareness where one is respectful and aware of a creative or energy life force which is embodied. The principle of the sacred is positioned as the first aspect of the Organic Inquiry model, establishing its outright difference from other qualitative methodologies. As such, Organic Inquiry claims its roots in the participatory paradigm.¹³⁴ Several questions were developed from this principle for the research. These are: “What participation does the Holy Spirit offer as you visit a patient?” “Do you always sense the Holy Spirit with each visit?” Explain.

The Personal refers to that which belongs or has meaning to a specific person. The subjective experience of the participant becomes the core of the investigation and the filter for the other stories that the researcher will gather. The researcher’s personal story or passionate interest serves as the seed for the study. This topic emphasises the hope that the participants will engage with their own stories and re-enliven their own experiences.¹³⁵

The question developed from this principle is: “Do you feel a connection between your story as (participant) and the story of the patient?” Explain.

¹³³ Deah Curry and Steven Wells, *An Organic Inquiry Primer for the Novice Researcher* (West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing, 2006), 11-17.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 12.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 12-13.

The Chthonic is a term often used in Jungian psychology to describe the spirit of nature within. These are negative unconscious thoughts and impulses of the self. These are one's inner voices that tell us we are not good or smart enough. This is a place of tests and challenges when the roots of the research can grow in unexpected directions and ways.¹³⁶ The research question formulated from this principle is: "What fears do you have as you provide spiritual care to another?"

The Numinous is the opposite of chthonic and refers to the direct knowing and inspiration from a higher power or source. This confidence of knowing has positive effects for the individual. It is a flash of clear, direct knowing that is at once experienced as authentic and true. The numinous realm offers inter-subjective guidance to the participant.¹³⁷ The inquiry developed from this principle is: "Describe an experience where the numinous of the divine has helped you deal with a difficult situation?"

The Relational is where the knowing arises from relationships with the participants and their stories. The relational connects aspects of context between separate or different data in the study such as old and new theory, paradigms, cultures and world views. A depth of understanding is developed between individuals.¹³⁸ The question developed from this principle is: "How do you think differently now about some aspect in your own life?" Explain.

The Transformative is a quality of difference that occurs in a shift from one set of assumptions or way of being to another. The essential condition or character of a person

¹³⁶ Deah Curry and Steven Wells, *An Organic Inquiry Primer for the Novice Researcher: A sacred Approach to Disciplined Knowing* (West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing, 2006), 13.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

is changed in a profound way. The story offers transformation to both the teller and the listener.¹³⁹ The research question developed from this principle is: “How have you been changed or transformed by listening to the patient’s story?” “How has your sense of spirit deepened by providing spiritual care and how has it changed?”

WHY ORGANIC INQUIRY FOR THIS STUDY?

Life experience invites one to reflect. Seeking God’s presence involves theological reflection, which is the artful discipline of putting our experience into conversation with our culture, contemporary faith community and our heritage of the Christian tradition.¹⁴⁰ I have spent a great deal of time reflecting if my sense of spirit over these many years has deepened or changed and I ponder what role the Holy Spirit has played in this transformation. As I work with spiritual care volunteers in the hospital setting, I also query their growth potential as they provide spiritual care visits. I believe that Organic Inquiry is best suited for this research because of its novel aspect having a strong emphasis on transformation as well as information. This approach draws upon multiple ways of knowing and invites the researcher to participate in partnership with sources beyond the ego. The organic orientation includes the assumption that the Holy Spirit is also part of this knowing. As a woman of faith journeying in a Christian feminist context, and an educator, I believe that the Organic Inquiry method of research is the absolute choice for this research.

¹³⁹ Patrica Killen and John De Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York, NY: Crossroad Pub., 1994),17.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,18.

SETTING AND SAMPLE

Potential research candidates included 150 men and women who had taken the Spiritual Care Training course from the researcher over a period of two years. Further, these people must be registered spiritual care volunteers in rural hospitals, nursing homes or hospices in southern Alberta. Research candidates also must have been volunteering in spiritual care for a minimum of 12 weeks visiting patients or residents in long term care or hospice. Some of the volunteers had a great deal of experience, others were new to the role of spiritual care. Regardless of their experience, all the spiritual care volunteers had to have taken the Spiritual Care Training Course. This course is a 15 hour training program, developed by myself as the researcher focusing on the role of spiritual care volunteers.

A letter asking for research candidates was sent out to all spiritual care volunteers via the volunteer coordinators of the various facilities. The selection of participants was based on those who wished to participate and with enough experience volunteering in spiritual care to draw quality data for the research. Eight participants were eventually invited to participate in the study. All of the participants had a Christian background and were between the ages of 49 to 72. One participant was male and the remainder were female. This study was limited to participants who profess a Christian heritage. It is not designed for non-Christians, simply because the volunteers who are participating in this study are Christian and bring what they know and believe into spiritual care practice. The patients or residents who the research participants visited also had Christian heritage but they were not necessarily church attendees. The researcher professes to be of the Christian faith, thus the Christian tradition became common ground for this study. This

study was open to all Christian traditions; participants reflected a variety of theological views which were of great interest when addressing one's sense of spirit.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Ethical Review Committee of St. Stephen's College approved this study as non-injurious to the subjects. In accordance with ethical guidelines all participants were given adequate information to make an informed decision about whether or not to participate in the study. A copy of the consent form is found in the Appendix.

A written consent was obtained from each participant at the beginning of the interview session. The consent form clearly stated that the research candidate's participation was voluntary and participants would be free to withdraw from the study without prejudice or fear of reprisal at any time throughout the study. The cost to the volunteer was a total of two to three hours for the interview and to be available for telephone questions if the need should arise from the researcher. The benefit to the participants was that through discussion with the researcher the participants might reflect further on their experiences of providing spiritual care to patients and residents. The participant's might leave the interview process changed by the opportunity to have had further discussion with the researcher. This is the hope of Organic Inquiry research.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Interviews took place over a three month period in 2011. The researcher contacted each participant by telephone to arrange a convenient place and time for the interview. The majority of the interviews took place in the morning at the researcher's

home. Interviews were digitally recorded for data collection purposes. Field notes were included to record any emotions or facial expressions of the participants. After the interviews were completed, speech recognition software was used to assist the researcher to transfer all the data onto the computer to create a hard copy. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym and then each interview was printed off on different coloured paper for easy identification. Reviewing the transcripts took many weeks for significant themes to emerge.

As part of the Organic Inquiry process, the researcher after reading the data, traveled within her mind into the liminal domain of consciousness. Once there, the researcher gathered wisdom and insights and returned to integrate what had been learned. Liminal means in-between and implies the place/time that exists at the edges of conscious reality.¹⁴¹ Numerous insights were revealed through this process. The researcher used her “lectio divina” room, which is a meditation room in her home, for this process. This is a sound proof room that is private, where music and candle lighting created a spiritual atmosphere. Prior to the reading of each transcript a prayer was offered inviting the Holy Spirit to be part of the process of revealing relevant themes from the data. Taking the time to follow this process was definitely a transformative and learning experience as a researcher. Reviewing the data using this Organic Inquiry approach was considered a sacred endeavour in partnership with Spirit.

As themes became clear, a cut-and-pasting of the research participants’ comments were placed under each theme. The coloured paper assigned to each participant assisted

¹⁴¹ Deah Curry and Steven Wells, *An Organic Inquiry Primer for the Novice Researcher* (West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing, 2006), 130.

the researcher to identify particular participants' contributions. Where ever possible direct quotes from the participants were used. Anonymous and confidential reporting of the data storage was protected. Data was stored in the researcher's locked office and was destroyed at the end of the project.

The confidentiality of the participants' names was protected and the participants' names do not appear in this document. Throughout the report when examples are given to support the data, the use of pseudonyms was used. At the completion and publication of this study, participants may borrow the research document from the Volunteer Coordinator at the High River Hospital.

VALIDITY

Qualitative Inquiry examines the validity of a study based on its textual authority rather than its numerical accuracy.¹⁴² It also strives for consensus and coherence.¹⁴³ The organic approach suggests and encourages transformative change for the individual participant. Every participant is on a unique path so the valid transformation outcome for one reader will necessarily be distinct from that of another. This type of validity is personal and measured by asking the question, "Is it useful to me?" The study has transformative validity when it succeeds in affecting the individual participant through identification with and change in their story.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Donna M. Mertens, *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers, 2005), 420 – 427.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Jennifer Clements, "Organic Inquiry: Toward Research in Partnership with Spirit." *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 2004, Vol.36, No 1, 43.

Accurate and detailed reporting of actual situations on all four levels of experience--thinking, feeling, sensation and intuition--is essential to organic validity. Detailed self-examination and reporting is required as well as a high level of self awareness by the researcher. The researcher needs to discern the value of her own subjective experience, the influence of Spirit and the intent of the original data.¹⁴⁵ Analyzing the data from a variety of perspectives offers a balance that invites validity. To accomplish this, the researcher assessed her own story, the participants' stories and the transformative change in both. The researcher examined changes to both heart and mind, trying to avoid a one-sided assessment of their meaning.¹⁴⁶

ASSUMPTIONS

One of the crucial assumptions when considering Organic Inquiry is that it uses a more expanded cognitive approach. By way of the six principles model of sacred, personal, chthonic, numinous, relational and transformative as well as the three part process model of engagement with the liminal, Organic Inquiry draws on a concept of the self that is wholistic. By wholistic, this means that Organic Inquiry opens the doors to the many subjectivities, using them as appropriate to the topic being studied. Therefore, the rational-analytic mode of generative knowledge is not privileged over the intuitive, somatic, affective, experiential, social and the cultural ways of knowing. This wholistic concept is one wherein the self recognised as not necessarily being contained by our physical bodies and our personal thoughts and ideas. As a methodology, Organic Inquiry clears the way for researchers to use every part of who they and the participants are as

¹⁴⁵ Jennifer Clements, "Organic Inquiry: Toward Research in Partnership with Spirit." *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 2004, Vol.36, No 1, 43.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

tools to understand the topic under investigation. Organic Inquiry assumes its role is to elicit change in the researcher and participants.¹⁴⁷

LIMITATIONS

Organic Inquiry is a young, emerging approach to research and one that is inherently inexact due to the processes that involve working subjectively and in partnership with Spirit. Limits of this approach arise from an ontology that sees all things as connected. Everything appears to be not only related, but relevant and essential; therefore it can be difficult to distinguish what is meaningful.¹⁴⁸ The researcher is at risk of both losing focus and simultaneously being uncertain where to set boundaries or make arbitrary selections, thereby including more information than generative knowledge. The source of inspiration may vary from one researcher to the next, making this type of research difficult or perhaps even inherently impossible to duplicate, since the setting is unavoidably subjective. Since the researcher is the instrument of the study, distortions, whether intentional or unintentional are possible. The researcher, hopeful for results that satisfy expectations, may edit or interpret the data in distorted ways. The researcher must be sufficiently self-aware to be able to acknowledge limitations and assumptions so that they may become informative filters rather than unseen confounding factors.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Deah Curry and Steven J. Wells, *An Organic Inquiry Primer for the Novice Researcher: A Sacred Approach to Disciplined Knowing*. (West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing, 2006), 21-22.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

BIAS

A bias is a consistent alignment with one point of view. Qualitative researchers try to acknowledge and take into account their own biases as a method of dealing with them. They attempt to seek out their own subjective states and their effects on the data but never are completely successful. Using a qualitative research method, the data must be filtered through the researcher's mind before it is put on paper, therefore all research in qualitative analysis are affected by researcher bias.

Interview questions reflect the interests of those who construct them. It is important for researchers to try and transcend some of their own bias with the aid of methods they use in the process. The data must bear the weight of any interpretation. For this the researcher must constantly confront his or her own opinions and prejudice with the data. Using Organic Inquiry as the method for this research, the data collected provided a much more detailed rendering of events than even the most creatively prejudiced researcher might have imagined.¹⁵⁰

During the interviews, several of the questions asked by the researcher might have introduced potential bias because they may have unintentionally lead the participant to an expected response. Upon answering the questions, the participant was unaided by the researcher. The researcher only encouraged the participant to go deeper with his or her response.

¹⁵⁰ Robert Bogan, C. and Sarik Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*. (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1982), 58-61.

The researcher believes that the participants will have a transformative experience through the act of providing spiritual care to patients or residents. This premise stems from the researcher's own experiences of spiritual and personal growth as a hospital chaplain. Perhaps more importantly, these changes are intended to be a positive experience influenced by Spirit. The researcher, who is the instrument of the study, must be sufficiently self-aware to be able to acknowledge biases and assumptions so that they become informative filters. Ongoing vigilance and honesty are required for this research approach. The use of Organic Inquiry as a method of choice for this research, begs for change to occur. The researcher will honour whatever the data reveals.

The purpose of this research is to find out if there has been a change in spirit for spiritual care volunteers from their visits with hospitalized patients, hospice or residents in long term care facilities. This chapter has included a discussion of the Organic Inquiry method of research, including the setting and sample, ethical considerations, data collection and analysis as well as validity, assumptions, bias and limitations of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHO ARE THE SPIRITUAL CARE VOLUNTEERS?

BIBLICAL ROOTS OF VOLUNTEERISM

The long tradition of volunteerism first appears in the Old Testament when Noah received the call from God to build a boat. This message, repeated many times and in many ways in the Bible, is that those who follow God must volunteer to help meet the needs of others. Noah not only helped his family, but he attempted to reach out to everyone in his community.¹⁵¹

Leviticus 25 tells of the year of the Jubilee, where once every 50 years all debts are cancelled.¹⁵² Volunteers may share in the Jubilee by paying some of their indebtedness to society and perhaps even help compensate for wrongs they have committed by making restitution through service. Volunteerism may help people cancel their spiritual, physical and their emotional debts to others through their helpful actions and words.¹⁵³

In the New Testament Jesus voluntarily becomes a servant to provide us with an example of hope. The passage in Philippians describes the Son of God offering himself, so that he could become the servant of humankind.¹⁵⁴ Jesus had compassion for others,

¹⁵¹ Genesis 6.9, NRSV.

¹⁵² Leviticus 25.8-9, NRSV.

¹⁵³ Donald Ratcliff and Blake J. Neff, *The Complete Guide to Religious Education Volunteers*. (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1993),16.

¹⁵⁴ Philippians 2.7-8, NRSV.

which moved him to teach, to heal and to deliver others from their problems.¹⁵⁵ Christ quoted the prophet Isaiah in describing his ministry, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release of the captives and recovering of sight to the blind; to set those free who are oppressed.”¹⁵⁶ This scripture details many of the activities modern volunteers follow, to help others.

Not only was Jesus a volunteer, he also called volunteers. Jesus’ disciples were volunteers who responded without compulsion or payment. They were trained by Jesus and imitated his methods. Later on they volunteered to take on the task of leading the church. Jesus’ disciples, and later on the seventy, (Luke 9 & 10) being volunteers were sent out on two tasks: to preach the good news and to heal the sick.¹⁵⁷

The parable of the Good Samaritan shows volunteerism in its ideal form.¹⁵⁸ It also indicates that good, well-meaning people of faith can, like the Levite and priest, ignore the genuine needs of those around them while concentrating on the prescribed tasks. The Samaritan in contrast, took the time to evaluate the actual need, brought his resources to bear on that need and then recruited outside assistance as it was needed to meet the need. The parable of the Good Samaritan provides a captivating picture of volunteerism and volunteer leadership.

¹⁵⁵ Matthew 9.36, NRSV.

¹⁵⁶ Luke 4.18-19, NRSV.

¹⁵⁷ Luke 9 and 10, NRSV.

¹⁵⁸ Luke 10.25-37, NRSV.

In Ephesians, Paul states that gifts are given to each person and that serving is central to the task of spiritual growth.¹⁵⁹ Throughout the New Testament the early Christians described themselves as “servants”, those who served God and the people of God. Voluntarily serving is the result of Christian love and a key indication that one has become a Christian.¹⁶⁰ Indeed Christ noted that caring for the needs of others was involved in eternal destiny.¹⁶¹ Jesus preached that volunteer ministry, even to the least important person, was credited as service for God and the volunteer would receive glory as a result.

RURAL VOLUNTEERISM...A UNIQUE CONTEXT

The word *rural* comes from the Latin word *ruralis*, meaning country.¹⁶² Ranches and large farms encompass most of southern Alberta. One historical aspect of rural communities is that many farms and ranches are now celebrating a century of rural life with three generations or more. These people of the land understand the importance of heritage, the lineage of living where their forebears pioneered, broke land and herded cattle up from the United States. These people today choose to live near the historical roots of their grandparents and great-grandparents. They appreciate the hard times and what their forbears had to accomplish in order for them, the current land owners to have a life that they now enjoy.

¹⁵⁹ Ephesians 4.12, NRSV.

¹⁶⁰ Galatians 5.13, John 15.12 and John 4, NRSV.

¹⁶¹ Matthew 16.17, 25.31-46, NRSV.

¹⁶² *Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*, 4th ed. (2003)

From the Greek, the word *xeno* means strangers, aliens or potential danger.¹⁶³ Xenophobia refers to the fear of strangers. This fear within the rural context, stems from some urban people not understanding or respecting people of the land and their way of life. When I moved from Calgary to Nanton over ten years ago, I had a great deal to learn about rural communities. I found out just how important it was to know my neighbours, in case they needed some help and for them to know me for the same reason. In the city this might be seen as being nosy but, in the country, it means you care. It also means that you are united with each other and the community. This is a kind of protectionist mentality that speaks to an unspoken trust of rural people and their way of life which is to be honoured and respected by all.

Some rural people support every aspect of community, especially our local hospital and long term care unit. Grace Ledoux, Volunteer Coordinator for the High River Hospital, says that there are over 150 registered volunteers offering their time at the hospital.¹⁶⁴ Everyone who volunteers in the 100 bed hospital at High River is considered part of the community if you live in the rural area.

As Chaplain for the High River Hospital, understanding the unique rural context of how people are connected to the land and the lives of others is imperative. Ledoux says the High River Hospital is flooded with requests from rural people wanting to volunteer. They volunteer, says Ledoux, because rural people want to help one another. They may not know the patient but they know his or her family and helping out means they are respecting what the family did for this community in the past, present and in the

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Grace Ledoux, interview by author, digital recording, Nanton, Alberta., 16th August 2011.

future.¹⁶⁵ Many rural volunteers do their tasks efficiently but more importantly, they spend time listening, talking and sharing the common threads of their lives with one another. There is a more relaxed and friendly approach to volunteerism in rural community says Ledoux, because taking time to be with people is just as valuable as taking a medication or having a treatment.¹⁶⁶ These unique rural relationships are of great value and speak to those inner values of love, respect, acceptance and equality that people of faith hold to be true.

WHY DO PEOPLE VOLUNTEER IN SPIRITUAL CARE?

Volunteerism, as noted above, has a strong biblical basis. This is one of the contributing factors as to why people volunteer in spiritual care. High River Hospital Volunteer Coordinator Grace Ledoux comments that people volunteer in spiritual care because they yearn to walk the talk of God. They want to help others as Jesus did.¹⁶⁷ Ledoux says that the average age of spiritual care volunteers at the High River Hospital is age 68.¹⁶⁸

Some people volunteer in spiritual care because they have witnessed a relative or friend who has gone through a health crisis and therefore they want to help another person that experiences a similar situation. This issue may be personal to the volunteer because of the impact it had on them.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ (Ledoux 2011).

¹⁶⁶ Grace Ledoux, interviewed by author, digital recording, Nanton, Alberta, August 16th, 2011).

¹⁶⁷ (Ledoux, 2011).

¹⁶⁸ (Ledoux 2011).

¹⁶⁹ Donald Ratcliff and Blake J. Neff, *The Complete Guide to Religious Education Volunteers*. (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1993), 9 -13.

People volunteer because they want to give back to society, perform an act of stewardship, or give of self to others with no expectation of return. Spiritual care volunteering can be seen as gift giving. Perhaps someone once helped you and when you have the time and opportunity you want to return the favour and help another person.¹⁷⁰ Spiritual care volunteers want to learn a new skill and enjoy personal growth while at the same time offering their time and talent to assist those in need. Professional chaplains offer regular workshops and training to assist spiritual care volunteers who learn in an ecumenical setting.¹⁷¹

People want to volunteer in spiritual care because they want to make a difference. They can see the impact they have on others, whether through prayer at the bedside or by singing old familiar hymns in a small group setting. Unselfish giving to another person offers potent feelings of satisfaction...it's addictive.¹⁷² Volunteers possess a deep desire to bless others and in doing so receive the added benefit of being blessed. Many spiritual care volunteers report that in giving, they receive much more in return than they have given out to others.¹⁷³

Spiritual care volunteers often develop lasting friendships because they have similar world and religious views. Many of these volunteers have left the workplace, so

¹⁷⁰ Jacelyn I. Poetker, "Tapping the Power of Boomers as Senior Volunteers" (paper presented to the Kerby Centre), 18. Calgary, Ab., June 22, 2009.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 19.

¹⁷² Grace Ledoux, interview by author, digital recording, Nanton, Alberta, 16 August 2011.

¹⁷³ Donald Ratcliff and Blake J. Neff, *The Complete Guide to Religious Education Volunteers* (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1993), 11.

an added bonus of volunteering is meeting new people, both other volunteers and long term care residents.¹⁷⁴

There are a many reasons why spiritual care volunteers, offer their time and talent in the hospital and long term care settings. This is an example of a unique, vast resource of people caring for others in rural communities. One final comment from Ledoux about why people volunteer in spiritual care: “They want to model for their children and grandchildren the importance of caring for one another.”¹⁷⁵ Spiritual care volunteers often strive to live out the Great Commission, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you.”¹⁷⁶ Grace Ledoux believes that spiritual care volunteers live out this commandment to all they meet.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*,12.

¹⁷⁵ Grace Ledoux, interviewed by author, digital recording, Nanton, Alberta, 16 August, 2011.

¹⁷⁶ Matthew 28.18-20 and John 13.34, NRSV.

¹⁷⁷ Grace Ledoux, interviewed by author, digital recording, Nanton, Alberta, 16 August, 2011.

CHAPTER SIX

PARTICIPANT NARRATIVES OF PROVIDING SPIRITUAL CARE

THE VALUE OF ANECDOTAL NARRATIVE

The word narrative simply means story.¹⁷⁸ The form of story has become a valuable method of presenting aspects of human research. Anecdotes are a special kind of fragment of an entire story. Anecdotes are defined as secret, private and unpublished details of a story.¹⁷⁹ Anecdotes can teach us. The use of anecdotal material in phenomenological writing is not merely literary embellishment. The stories themselves are examples or topics of practical theorising. Anecdotal narratives are important for pedagogy in that they function as experiential case material on which human science research is made possible. An important feature of anecdotal narrative includes that they prompt the teller of the story to reflect, to transform and make meaning of one's life.¹⁸⁰

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher with eight study participants. Questions were developed from the Organic Inquiry method of research and were extremely helpful throughout the interview process because they triggered responses from the participants.

¹⁷⁸ Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Post Modern Approach* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 67.

¹⁷⁹ Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (London, Ont: The Althouse Press, 1997), 115 – 121.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

MARGARET'S STORY

RESEARCHER'S NOTES

Margaret is in her late fifties and has recently retired from a position in laboratory services. She began volunteering as a palliative care volunteer after taking the palliative care course offered by the local health region. Palliative care volunteers sit at the bedside of the dying when family members are unable to be present. Margaret is an active member of the United Church and was interested in providing spiritual care to long term care residents. Margaret participated in a pilot study for spiritual care volunteers provided by the researcher in 2009. Since that time Margaret has volunteered in the long term care unit of a small rural hospital providing spiritual and palliative care to senior residents. The interview for this study took place in the home of the researcher in August 2011. When Margaret arrived, she is excited to talk about her experiences and what she had learned from providing spiritual care to long term care residents.

NARRATIVE ANECDOTE

I come from such a strong Catholic background where religion is very different from spirit. I always realised that I had my spirituality but it wasn't until I left the Catholic Church that I realised where my spirit was at and what I could do with it. I wanted to share myself with others. Religion is so hard and in most cases has little to do with spirituality. Spirit, everyone has spirit; we are spirit people. It has been so growthful to talk with others, like spiritual care volunteers and residents about their knowing of spirit. We don't have to say one thing about religion or what's happening in a church. We can say what is happening in your soul and heart though! I know now that

soul is that part of each of us that is unique, whereas spirit is that ethereal part of us that is the same in everyone. Spiritual care is done from the heart with total love, unconditional total love to another human being. Understanding the difference between spirituality and religion has allowed me freedom of expression. I think ministers need to do a better job at helping us understand the meaning of these words. The clergy are our spiritual guides, so it would help all of us if we could speak the same language. Spiritual care training has helped me to articulate what I mean. I've also learned from sitting with a group of like-minded people and hearing someone else say exactly what I have been trying to put into words for hours, sometimes a lifetime!

The residents are so happy when I show up and simply spend a few precious minutes with them. There is real value spending time with another human being, for everyone involved. Spiritual care volunteers light up the lives of those in long term care and for me too. I see a smile on their face when I come and I show them that I care. Visiting these people makes my soul sing! I never leave feeling poor, because for me it is always a privilege to spend time with them. Many times during a visit as they share their life story with me, I hear pieces of my story tucked in theirs. That's when I have those "aha moments" of realisation that all spirit is connected as one.

One thing I've learned from practicing spiritual care is to use your time wisely. Time is precious so don't waste it. Family members and some of my friends are beginning to talk more openly about spirituality. Certainly when a member of your family dies or as we grow older, people start to treat each other differently. They now see that life is precious and when they realise this, they start treating it that way.

Spending time with long term care residents really helps me be grateful for each breath I take and what a wonderful gift God has given, allowing me to share my time on this earth with others. I thank God for leading me down this path.

I always begin my visit by sitting in silence, often in the car before I come into the facility. The more I visit residents, the more I realise the importance to centre myself with silence. As I sit in silence, I realise that when I visit others I am representing Jesus, I am his light and love and so I'd better be in a good space when I do it. So before I begin to spend time with a senior I must get closer to God first. Spending time with God is not a selfish act; it is an opportunity for me to learn self love. God says I am worthy of love, therefore, I must love myself first before I love others. I believe that the Holy Spirit works through my intuition, so I must be still and silent so that I may feel the presence of God's guidance flow into me.

After I have centred myself in silence with God, I then go and visit the residents. The first thing I usually do is get quite close to them. I touch their hand or shoulder and look them right in the eye. Yesterday when I was visiting a woman it was our tears that spoke to one another. I never said one word to her nor she too me. It was so powerful it felt like we were one. When I first started visiting residents it was hard to be quiet, but now I can just sit there in the silence and listen for God's peace. I have realised that "presence is enough." In this particular visit I did read to this woman who loves the poetry of Helen Steiner Rice. A calm washed over her as I read. The fifteen minutes went by so fast. When I leave the residents I always tell them that I love them. So many seniors never hear those words anymore. I offer to say a prayer if they are open to it. If they refuse, I will say a silent prayer for them before I leave the room. After leaving the

resident I always go to the chapel. The time spent in the chapel is very important to me. When I first started in spiritual care, after visiting several people, I would just leave the long term care unit and head home. But, something nudged me to go into the chapel one day. I'm certain it was God. As I volunteer in spiritual care I need to keep the residents' "stuff" in the facility and then I can deal with my own "stuff" and not theirs during my family time at home. In the chapel I pray to God and ask him to take care of the people I visited that day so that I can walk out knowing that God will watch over them until I return another day. They have a little book in the chapel where the spiritual care volunteers are encouraged to write if they want. Last week I wrote: "To love with our love, for our love, we shall rise above." God brings these words to me and I am so thankful.

On my spiritual care visits I definitely sense the Holy Spirit in the room with me...one hundred percent. The Holy Spirit helps me say what is needed especially in difficult situations. I was sitting with a woman last Tuesday who was dying. When I went into the room she was struggling for breath. She was restless and alone, yet I felt we were not alone. Perhaps there were angels present, I'm not sure, but I felt a presence. I started reading her some favourite poetry and scriptures and she calmed down within minutes and became very peaceful. I know that there was a higher power...Spirit or angels present overseeing this event. The resident was comforted, but so was I. I felt so supported that I did not even have to ponder as to what was coming next, it was so easy. I never thought about her dying, because it didn't matter at that moment. This woman and I were surrounded by some Divine presence. What's so interesting is that I could not believe it when I went to pay the parking as to how long I had spent with her. When I

first arrived, the lady in the next bed had her TV blaring and I felt the outside world really coming at me hard. But, shortly after, when I began to read to her, I focused on just this woman and it was like an energy field around the bed had tuned out the noise. It pushed the world a little farther away. It was though time did not exist. Time is not important anymore because you are so engaged into the experience and time disappears. The parking guy wanted over six dollars and I was surprised that I had stayed there for over two hours and I didn't even realise it. So what I now tell my husband when I go to visit some of these people is that I can't give him a time when I'll be back. Sometimes we trip ourselves up and become slaves to the clock. I don't like putting time boundaries on any of my visits when I'm doing this kind of work. You can't short change the visits. Besides, God will guide me when it is time to go, but you have to make the space.

Every once in awhile, I must be honest, I do not feel the presence of the Holy Spirit when I do a spiritual care visit. It often depends on the person I visit. One lady I visit cries most of the time but she does stop when I am with her, but when I leave she starts up again. I am hopeful that God is there but sometimes I just can't feel any heavenly presence. There are also times when the visit is not going well like with too many interruptions...staff, family, fire alarms or it's me...I'm too focused on my "stuff." Sometimes you can only give what you can and some days, that's just not enough. This is the reality of residents living in care facilities.

Over these past two years of visiting residents, my spirit has become very strong. Before my spirit would waver, I'd question and have doubt and now when I see people, I have faith... I have a deep hope...I have courage to say what I need to say because I know that God is in me and guides me. I also know that I will not be judged. Judging has

always been a big thing with me. Providing spiritual care has taken away some of my judgement towards others and what I am trying to do is just live, to be who I really am, deep at my core...the soul Margaret...the earth Margaret. What I mean by this is that I first must do all my daily tasks in the reality of my life. I must live my truth, honour myself, spend time with my husband and family and then I can offer myself to help others. So many people forget to ground themselves and do their earthly work, yes it's great that they help others, but then their lives become broken. They don't understand they need to honour themselves first, be whole first and then help others.

Spiritual care has enriched my life beyond belief. It's all about living who I really am. I am at peace with myself. That is what I have felt more of since I began visiting residents than anything else...I have peace with myself! I have spent many years searching, you can guarantee that! I never knew that doing service would bring me so close to God. It is through service that I have grown into being who I have meant to be all along. When I was younger, I often wondered what my purpose in life was. Now I have found my purpose with the help of God. What I realise now is that service comes right from my heart with nothing but true love in it.

After spending time offering spiritual care to others, I come away feeling like I am doing God's work and it makes me feel good. God's work is compassion. I have always been passionate about life but now I show more compassion to those who are different than me. I no longer judge. I firmly believe the best thing you can do is live by example. My kids and husband have told me that I have changed into a more compassionate person. I now get to model how I really want to be before God and my family. If my light and love is shining brightly and I am in right relationship with God

people will gravitate towards me. I don't have to look for people to provide spiritual care to, God sends these people to me. I don't have to search...they are sent by God. It's a natural process. It's all such a growthful experience. I feel alive now in all facets of my life... with myself, friends and family. I am also a much better listener. After all, everyone wants to tell their story and have someone, anyone listen. I now give people I meet a listening ear. It makes them feel valued in a world where few listen.

I realise that I am never alone, that God, the Holy Spirit and His angels are always guiding me and leading me to where I need to go. I am living out who God wants me to be. This whole journey of learning about spiritual care and then providing it to others in long term care has been so rich for me. I am the new Margaret and I thank God!

MARY'S STORY

RESEARCHER'S NOTES

Mary is in her mid sixties and is a member of the United Church in a small community near the foothills of southern Alberta. Mary, like Margaret, was part of the pilot project for the Spiritual Care Training in 2009. Since that time Mary has volunteered in spiritual care for the long term care unit at the local hospital. Mary leads a Qigong group at her local church and provides a program called Spiritual Moments for the long term care residents. She has dealt with facial cancer and has had several surgeries in the past two years. Mary is also a palliative care volunteer at the local hospital. Mary is married with adult children. Mary arrived at the researcher's home on

a sunny day in August for her interview. Mary said she was looking forward to sharing some of her story as a spiritual care volunteer.

NARRATIVE ANECDOTE

When I think about the dark night of the soul, that's sort of what's been happening with me these last few years. I've had a lot of things going on in my life. I was spending a lot of time in prayer a few years back, I guess I felt I should since I was having some health problems. Then I decided to go back to church...oh how I do love that little church. It's not the building or the minister so much but the community where the energy is almost tangible. You can feel it when you go inside, where people have gone for generations. I do think outside of the box sometimes and people really don't like that, especially people at church. There are times when religion and religious people kind of get on my nerves because of all those rules. But I have come to understand that I have God's spirit deep within me, deep within my heart. No matter where I go I am the Spirit of God in me. I try to help everyone around me and make things work out, like for my kids. I realise now that I can't fix others, I can only work on me fixing me. I do feel the Holy Spirit with me each day, at home, walking, gardening and in my volunteer work.

You see I was going through this angst, I was questioning and always looking. I guess you would say I'm a seeker. Then one day I saw the ad in our local paper for Spiritual Care Training. After the training I became a spiritual care volunteer for our local hospital. The experiences of volunteering have taught me to live every moment and in the moment, especially living with my facial cancer. I do feel the Holy Spirit is with me at all times.

When I first starting visiting residents on long term care, I felt I wasn't doing it right. I guess somehow I still felt you needed to know the Bible verses from front to back, even though that was not stressed in the training. After a few visits I realised I don't care if I'm doing it right because I'm doing it with God! At first I learned a few tough lessons because there were a few ladies that would have had you there for 24 hours if they could. I learned that I needed to set boundaries with some people. So as I began my visit I would tell them that I had half an hour to spend with them. This really helped, but with some residents I had softer edges and would stay a few minutes longer. I learned to just go with my heart open but being aware not to get too deep. I believe that you have angels all around you to help keep a clear boundary. Providing spiritual care can do harm to yourself if you open your heart too much. You do not want to take on others' pain to the point of harming yourself.

As soon as I walk into a room I can feel a strong energy and if they don't want me there I will only stay for a few moments. Certainly for shorter visits I can be "there" for them too. I usually open myself to the energy of the Spirit. I am aware of my own stuff for a few minutes and then I tuck this away so I can be there for them. This time is always about the resident and I want to be present with them as openly and honestly as I can. When I am providing a spiritual care visit to those who are dying they let you know what they want from you. I like their honesty. What a gift for me, a stranger, to journey with them. In those few moments you develop some trust. I tell them I am here to listen and when you set this up it invites them to be honestly who they are; no roles, just sharing the bare truth of their life, their hopes and wishes. The resident will only have to say just one or two things for me to pick up on what they want to talk

about. Many times I just sit and never say a word and let them do all the talking. That's what dying people and people who are lonely really need, just a listening ear. I love the silence when I'm sitting with residents because that is when I feel so close to God.

I bring all that I am to these people from that soul part of me; the part of me that makes me who I am. My soul is filled with my knowledge and understanding from all those books I've read, courses I've taken and my fears too. Every single person that I have met is different, everyone! Even our resident that does all the crying; when I sit with her she stops crying so I know that I have touched her soul too. Sometimes she doesn't stop crying so I just sit there anyway and include her in the family of human beings. For my own well being I usually have to look outside and focus on the tree, the sky, or a bird. It helps take me away from this situation for just a moment and then I come back and offer the best I can for her. That's all I've got, I'm human and so is she.

I like saying prayers from my heart to the residents. They're random, but so am I most of the time. Sometimes I come away and ask myself if I did any good today; did I connect with them? As I think about it I believe that there is always a connection, even with my crying lady. I have taken some of me and shared it with another at no cost to them. No payment or transfer of funds. I have fully given myself for whatever time I spend with them. Prayers help me focus and let God know my thoughts, even though God knows these before I even ask. Yet, I feel better when I spend time with God through prayer. I pray more now than I used to. I pray for the people in long term care and their families. I've learned not to think too much through prayer and just let it come from the heart. God will guide the words when I simply trust.

I also know that God and angels are with me when I visit residents. I sense that there is someone...something in the room with me. This helps me know that everything will be ok. I can now walk anywhere on long term care and feel this spiritual energy. I didn't feel it at first yet I believed that it was there. I think that I let my fear of "not doing spiritual care right" stop me from receiving this energy. I have decided that the humanness in my head can get in the way of my heart. I often over think things and that's why I have these fears. I am learning to lead with my heart more than my head.

When I'm sitting with people I sort of drop into their space. I can feel it physically. Time does not mean anything in this space. I know that my energy is starting to go if I catch myself looking at my watch. I can feel myself start to lift out of this space and the connection is broken. Sometimes it's because of interruptions from other people or outside noise too, but usually it means that both the resident and I are finished with our time together. Sometimes the resident shares things with you that they have never told anyone before. This can be a burden and exhausting. These are things that I lift to God in prayer. Once the connection is broken I sometimes just sit there in silence and hold their hand if they wish. This has been so powerful to learn. Just sit and be still with another human being. No talking, no discussion...just human being time.

I sat with a man one day and he told me all about his ranch that he loved so much. Now I'm not a rancher, so I first thought how can I connect to him. But as he continued to share his story, I soon realised his love for nature is the thing that I love too, like my garden. Our stories were bridged through the love of land and leaf.

One of the biggest things that I have learned by providing spiritual care to others is this sense of living in the moment. I can sit and watch a flower for an hour and I'm not aware of time at all; time simply disappears. In this timeless state I see colours I don't usually notice. I feel a light coming over me and the sense of being washed by star dust. It's a "no time," time. When I come out of it I have to look around again and touch the ground, get physical again. Now I can see all the colours not just one colour that took all my attention before. I also sit with candles and the same thing happens. It is so peaceful. When I'm in this place of peace I know that I'm touching the edge of heaven. I have worked hard all my life and I never knew, until I started spending time in spiritual care, that I could enjoy such peace from such simple things.

This growing up is so much fun! I spent a lot of years with anger energy and now it has disappeared into love energy. I think because of this I do cry a lot more. I used to be in such control and crying for me meant that I was out of control. I do more weeping now, little tears which are healing and they are a type of prayer too. Tears are very cleansing, I call them pearls of love. I am less judgemental about other people who are crying because of this. Providing spiritual care to others is such special work. Other people often ask me why and how can I do this kind of work? My response is that I get to spend time touching the edge of heaven with other human beings. I never volunteer expecting that each and every time I will come away getting anything back. Yet, I have learned so much about who I am and I think I'm getting pretty good at being a person with strong faith and having the strong action of faith. I am preparing for my future ahead...it is such an honour.

The experience of being a volunteer in spiritual care has made me a much better listener in my personal life too. The other day my son called to share that he is getting another divorce. Normally I would have started at him with all kinds of questions and comments, but instead I just listened. Eventually, I told him that he had all the skills to work this out whatever the outcome and that God was with him on this journey. Just trust the process I said. After the phone conversation I realised just how much I have changed for the better.

My faith and trust in God has deepened by spending time with others less fortunate than me. I have a loving husband and good friends who listen when I need someone to talk to. I have learned that things usually work out. When you arrive at the bedside with good and God in your heart even the smallest smile makes every one's day. I walk a different walk now knowing how present God is for me and those I love. My belief in God has gotten so much stronger and I am thankful and grateful that it has blossomed from spending time with others in need.

ROY'S STORY

RESEARCHER'S NOTES

Roy is a gentleman in his seventies who took the Spiritual Care training in 2010. He had heard about the training through a friend at his church. Since taking the training, Roy has volunteered as a spiritual care volunteer in a 75 bed long term care facility. Roy spends time with the male residents on the unit. Roy attends the Baptist church and shares his passion for God with his wife of 57 years. Roy spent most of his career working in the area of safety in the work place. Roy has experience volunteering in a

rehab centre in Saskatchewan. Roy arrived at the researcher's home eager to share his experiences about spiritual care visiting.

NARRATIVE ANECDOTE

One thing I've learned since I started volunteering in spiritual care is that women are more caring than men...there is no question about it. As I listen to the female spiritual care volunteers I've learned patience. Maybe because they are the bearers of children...I think that has a lot to do with it. I find women more caring than men and maybe that's why men don't volunteer as much. I really love being with people and that's why I volunteer. It's good for me to spend time with people especially the men on the long term care unit. I usually visit eight fellows and other people who are sitting by themselves. I just sit down and chat with them. I always come away feeling better about myself and not complain so much with a few of my aches and pains.

You know spiritual care has helped my life in a big way. We've been married for 57 years and over that time we have always wanted to sit down and do a morning devotional or Bible study. Now I'm a morning person and I like to get up early and do my exercises. In the summer I go out to my garden and work. My wife is a late sleeper and does not get up until around 9:00am; so by the time she would get up I was already doing my thing for the day. That was our routine since I retired a few years back. After I started volunteering I really began to appreciate women and what they do for others. So I decided to start a new practice of preparing my wife's breakfast for her each morning. I set the table with her bran muffin, half a banana and get a cappuccino ready. She is to call me when she wakes up and over her breakfast, that's when we have our devotional

and Bible reading. We visit and talk for awhile and then we both go our separate ways for the remainder of the day. Seriously, we never did this before I started volunteering. I did realise that something was missing but it was through visiting other people that I have come to realise this. You see when I visit these seniors on long term care I have so much to be thankful for. I really look forward to this morning time with God and my wife. This practice has brought us much closer together and I'm certain that it has helped our marriage. We have had a good marriage but realise now that I have taken my wife for granted. So last night before we went to sleep I told her that I am thankful that she is my wife. I appreciate her and my family so much. After working with seniors who are here one day and gone the next, I thought gosh, that could happen to us. I have grown both spiritually and personally by the practice of spiritual care with others.

Since volunteering in spiritual care I have done an evaluation of my own spiritual walk. I have asked myself three questions: Where am I now on my spiritual journey? Where do I want to go on my spiritual journey? Finally, what do I hope to achieve by going there? I realise that we dwell too much on ourselves and not enough on others. We often place our own needs before others. Spiritual care has changed me to be more caring and loving, more sensitive towards others. I know that I have become a better listener. I'm much more conscious to listen to others. This is especially true when I'm dealing with the residents I visit; you really need to hear what they are saying. Sometimes it's what they are not saying that is really the message. There is often something deeper going on.

Many times as I listen to the residents tell their story I think that perhaps one day I will be sitting in a wheelchair too and hope that I will be treated like I treat them; with

respect and kindness. When I ask the residents if their families come to visit them, many say no and that they feel abandoned. I tell them that the spiritual care volunteers, the nurses, chaplain...we are your family too!

The question came to me, “How do we measure success at being a spiritual care volunteer?” I have wondered about this for some time. So I have watched and I see the smile or gleam in the eye of a resident when the volunteer spends time with them. The other day at the chapel service I observed one resident and a volunteer singing an old hymn together and both of their faces were bright and filled with joy. I figured out this is how we measure success.

I’ve noticed that many residents are not as touchy or sensitive and seem to get along better with other residents after the volunteers have spent some time with them. I think it has helped them feel more connected to community. I try and have deeper conversations too. I’m sure I would get tired of staff asking me how I am and talking about the weather. Residents, no matter how ill still want to share their opinions, their beliefs and what they are passionate about with others. I now realise that even the people with dementia can still receive spiritual care, perhaps not by having a conversation, but by just sitting with them. My mirror presence of volunteering supports them in feeling like they are part of a community and that they belong; we are all in this life together.

My prayer life has improved considerably over this past year. I pray for the people in long term care and I pray for the staff. I keep a list on my fridge and beside my bed of people that need my prayers. I pray more often now than I did before I started as a spiritual care volunteer. I am thankful for my prayer life, for it is very important to me. I

have always desired a closer relationship with God and have become totally reliant on the leading of the Holy Spirit in my life. Prayer can heal the sharpest and most agonising wounds and can move mountains if you believe in the power of prayer. I trust that God will use me in his plans for the greater good... for God is the potter and I am the clay. I pray each day that God will use me in this way. I try and treat each day as a new experience which will draw me closer to God so that I will become more spiritually mature.

Spirituality is all about relationship whether you talk or sit with someone in silence. Silence really is golden you know! However, when I do speak to residents I speak from the heart, I pray from the heart. Mostly I share scriptures that I know and relate them to what is going on with this person sitting beside me. I'll stay and visit residents as long as they want me to be there. Sometimes when a person has been in long term care for a while they forget that they did have a pretty good life. We have to remind them of their life and that they were worthwhile, their life counted and that they were a good friend and neighbour. Each person I visit, I view this time as sacred time. I usually begin my visit by asking the Lord to help me and to say what this person needs to hear from me today. Some days I do not sense the Holy Spirit but when I come back another day and try again, sure enough... the Lord is there! Many times it's the situation that blocks me from sensing the Holy Spirit. It's true that sometimes I worry that I will say the wrong thing when dealing with others' pain and suffering, but the Holy Spirit always comes through for me.

When I listen to people's stories and talk about their problems, it gives me food for prayer. Their stories also make me thankful for my life. How easy it is to make a

choice that takes you down the wrong road. I am thankful for my choices and I'm certain that God has had a direct hand in my life. After visiting with the resident, sometimes they tell me that "it has been a good visit," that usually means that I have been a good listener. I do sincerely care about others and I guess it shows. Well, that makes me smile even more. People just want to be heard and continue to be part of society even if they are in long term care. I try to talk about the good things and shy away from the negative. I always try to be respectful and caring and give them my biggest smile. I also learned not to judge others, just simply love them. I could also have made a choice that negatively impacted my life. That could be me sitting in that wheelchair instead of him. We are all worthy of God's love, regardless of our life.

Spiritual care has been a life changing experience for me. I feel so much more complete with my personal life thanks to volunteering in spiritual care. I try, with God's help, to be a lit candle shining in the darkness.

JENNY'S STORY

RESEARCHER'S NOTES

Jenny is a woman in her late forties who was one of the volunteers from the pilot study for spiritual care training. Jenny has no church affiliation yet identifies herself as a seeker. She wants to experience God and find what others have found through prayer and community. Jenny's young adult children have recently left home and she believes her care giving skills could be of use with seniors. Jenny is originally from the United States

and has no older adults in her life here in Canada. She is a casual unit clerk but has not worked for some time due to raising her children. Jenny has volunteered as a spiritual care volunteer in a 75 bed long term care facility since taking her spiritual care training in 2009. Jenny is an energetic woman who is easy to like. She arrived at the home of the researcher ready for her interview.

NARRATIVE ANECDOTE

I think religion is about the rules of how we are supposed to understand God, which is where I always have a problem. I seem to break those rules quite regularly! Rules are not what I feel about God in my heart, whereas spirituality is what I experience with God. Spirituality is what drives me and gives me that inner spark of life. It is the experience of being in relationship with God, family, friends and me too! I really feel close to God when I'm in the natural world; like in the mountains where I got married.

I heard about the spiritual care training from the volunteer coordinator at the hospital and I thought, why not! It's rather funny because at first I thought that I was going to help others, but in helping others, I have been helped. I have grown so much over these past two years; I'm not even the same person I was back then. I've wanted to volunteer for a long time. The kids had just all left home and I felt that the time was right to be a caregiver in a different capacity. A friend of mine had died from breast cancer ten years ago and I was still fearful of being with people in pain, so I knew that I didn't want to volunteer in palliative care. I wasn't ready, but I thought I could start with spiritual care, even though I really didn't know exactly what that meant. It's funny how we get to

places that we didn't know we were going to. I guess that's where God comes into the picture!

When I walk into a resident's room and look them in the eyes, I can see this person slowly brighten up. The one woman I visit with a fair bit, well... her eyes get so big when she sees me come into her room. She knows me and is always happy to see me. She often talks about the stars, we pray together and I offer her a blessing before I leave. I feel like I have actually done something for another human being when I visit her. I think it's good for both of us. Even when she is sleeping I stand near her and offer a prayer. I sense that somehow she knows I'm there.

When I spend time with this woman, our time together seems to go so fast. One time I even forgot to take her to the chapel service because we were having such a special time together. When I sit with her I don't think about anything else, time seems to slow down and yet it also speeds up when I realise how much time has passed at the end of my visit. When I spend time with her or any other resident, I seem to have no concept of time or a time line for that matter. I get very focused on the person I am visiting and I seem to be able to block out any other noises. However, even though I am centred on the resident I definitely sense another's presence with us that is comforting; it's like I'm sitting with the Divine. I think God must be there to give me the words of comfort to say to the resident. I'm still not that comfortable praying out loud with all the residents, but with a few of them I seem very comfortable to do that. I am certain however, that God is helping me say the words from my heart. I feel that these words are coming through me from God. I do feel much more confident and grown up with being a reflection of God's love and light to others. For sure, I do ask for God's help to go with me when I visit a

resident and I feel good and safe that I am not alone. I would name this presence the Holy Spirit...the energy of God. Kind of like an action figure to help me be the best volunteer that I can be. I also feel that the Holy Spirit is giving me reminders to be more positive.

I sense that God draws me to other people, it's a push and pull kind of thing. Paying attention to what and who God wants to be in my life is important. Anytime the chaplain is giving a presentation or workshop, I want to be there because I always learn so much. I also feel that she is so authentic and real about her faith and I want some of that to rub off on me just a little. I keep watching for opportunities to learn and grow in God's way.

When I first started volunteering, if anyone had told me that I would be comfortable in spiritual care on a long term care unit I would have said "not a chance." At first I thought that I should volunteer on the medical unit where the patients come and go and I would not have to get too close to others. Whereas, on the long term care unit, you have to develop relationships with the seniors and that kind of scared me. Having that relationship now does not frighten me because I know that God has something to do with what I am doing. Now I can truly say I am a spiritual person because I am in relationship with God and all the people I meet on long term care and in my community. Before I began in spiritual care, I really did not know who I was and I seemed to have several personalities, many of which I didn't like very much. I felt I was not good enough for me or anyone else. Sitting with people in need made me take stock of my life and made me grateful for my life. Yes, I am not perfect but I am trying to be a better person thanks to spiritual care. I used to want to be a blessing to others, but I have found

that the residents in long term care are a blessing to me and because of this, I feel that I can give God's love and light back to them. I know one thing for sure is that my faith has deepened. I feel closer to God and more willing to let God's spirit guide me to do whatever he has planned for me. I have felt pulled to do things before but never actually took the steps to follow through. I didn't live up to my responsibility in my relationship with God. I'm supposed to be intentional about connecting, and I didn't do that before. Now, I purposefully set aside some time to connect with God through prayer and meditation.

I know that I do make a difference many days for residents, but I do have days that I am rather flat and really shouldn't be there. One day I was helping people get to the chapel service. Usually I stay and help them turn the pages of the hymnal. Instead I went into the volunteer office and did some paper work because I knew that I would not be any good for anyone that day. If my pot is empty I can't fill anyone else's pot. All my life I have said "yes" whether I wanted to do something or not, but now I am starting to say "no" when it is the right thing to do.

For me spiritual care is not about fixing someone else, it's about journeying alongside the resident where they are at this moment. Spiritual care is also letting the resident know that I am there for them. Whether we talk or not doesn't matter, because it's not about me, it's about supporting them. I think it would be terrible to sit in the same place each day and feel like no one cares. I like to listen to the stories about their lives. They have lots of stories to share. Many times I am amazed at how they managed through such difficult situations. As I hear their stories I realise how fortunate my life has been. Some days I feel sorry for myself, but not after listening to the residents' life

stories. I ask myself how can I make a difference for this person today and the best thing that I can do is simply sit and offer my time to listen.

I know that I am a better listener and all around person because of this. I am more patient in my life as a whole, not just here but at home too. Seniors are a rich resource and they have a great deal to teach me if I am still and listen. I am very aware of this now when I spend time with residents. I purposefully spend time just with God. I sit near my flowers in the garden and patiently wait for God to speak to me.

My life now has meaning, which it didn't before. A metaphor that I can use to explain the change in me is that in the Spring I planted bedding plants in my garden. In May they were very small with few green leaves and flowers. I kept watering and weeding them, praying for them to grow. After six weeks they still looked about the same. Then in early July the sun finally warmed the earth enough for them to start to grow. They spread out and touched the other plants bringing all the colours into focus. My garden over the summer was bright and cheery and filled with joy. I love nature and this is the best way for me to explain how I have grown and changed for the past two years. The fertilizer was the initial spiritual care training, but it was the experience of spending time with the residents that really nurtured my inner garden. The sun I see as the Holy Spirit bringing hope into every situation.

My family have seen a huge difference in me. Going through this experience of providing spiritual care to others and learning about me has probably saved my marriage. This new inner confidence and helping me look at life through another person's eyes has broadened my relationship with God too. The old me didn't trust people. Now I trust

because of God's help. Before I began in spiritual care, I thought about death and dying and wondered who would be at my bedside when I died. I realised that no one would be there. That was a dark time in my life. Thanks to spiritual care I no longer concern myself with these thoughts, because I now know that God will send people to be with me. People just like me who give of their time to be there for another person in need. In spiritual care you have to be "real" with the people you're visiting...you can't fake anything. The residents can see right through you. If you're not happy they will ask you why. I learned very fast to get real and be honest about my life with others and myself.

I also learned that I did not have to recite the entire Bible from memory to be a spiritual care volunteer. My role is to show what I know. To honestly act out what I hold to be true. I just need to carry those stories within me and be who I am. Some days broken, some days filled with joy; but always being a person who truly cares for another human being. Being a spiritual care volunteer has helped me grow up to be a winner in life. I believe that God has given me the strength to overcome my fears and help me understand to live out who I am at my core...a care giver, now strong and confident.

NANCY'S STORY

RESEARCHER'S NOTES

Nancy is a woman in her late sixties who is the ultimate care giver for everyone. Nancy and her husband were not able to have children of their own and so Nancy has made a career of caring for other people of all ages. Nancy lives in the country and volunteers at the local hospice along with her many other volunteer roles in the community. She claims the United Church tradition as foundational for her life of faith.

Nancy was a participant in the pilot project of the Spiritual Care Training program.

Nancy took care of her Mother when she was dying and feels compelled to continue to volunteer in this important role. She has also taken the palliative care course offered by the local health region. Nancy was eager to come to the researcher's home and tell her story of volunteering in hospice.

NARRATIVE ANECDOTE

I don't think people who volunteer with the dying really know how they affect the patient, their family and friends. I get very teary and emotional when I think about it. The kindness, caring and grace that falls around people who are caring for others is profound. They awaken things in others that they did not even know were there. I remember that you asked me one day to tell you about my faith and I said that "I didn't know how deep my faith was until I took the opportunity to reflect on it." My response still "wows" me! I have learned a lot from sitting with the dying. I learned that forgiveness is one of the most powerful themes we hear from the dying. The patient tells you so many stories about their life and how they didn't forgive people and now they wish they had. I think the final task as we near death is to forgive.

I watched a video with all the other spiritual care volunteers last month on "soul pain" and I think it really affected me. I realise that more people have soul pain because of their childhood. Soul pains are those areas in our life where there are old hurts and these hurts have never been mended. They just continue to plague and irritate the person until they get resolved; sometimes they never get resolved. Soul pain comes from your values that have not been honoured. For example, if you love people and value family

yet have a disenfranchised relationship with your sibling, this gives you soul pain. Your soul is poisoned. My eyes have been opened by volunteering at the hospice. I did not realise there are so many tangled web relationships. When I hear each story I think about my own life and give thanks to God that I had such a wise Mother. I am also thankful that God continues to let me hear what I need to hear so that when I come to the end of my life, perhaps I will not have too much “baggage.” I’m a rather shy person but I watch and I listen and I have learned so much from other mistakes.

Even as a kid I was the person that all the other kids came to when they had problems. I wasn’t as calm then as I am now. Perhaps the calmness comes from knowing and trusting in God. I make better choices now too and have tighter boundaries about whom I can help and who I have to encourage to move on to get more professional help. I have a friend who is always in a state of “drama” and that pulls me in the wrong direction away from God, away from the quiet. I need the quiet, the calm and more serenity in my life.

I am more capable than I thought I was, thanks to spiritual care. I also realise that this is why God never blessed me with children so that I could look after so many other people. When you first meet people it scares them when you say you don’t have any children. It’s like an elephant in the room and they feel like they have nothing in common with you. Yet we are all human. I think about these people and try to put myself in their shoes and realise it’s my job to put them at ease. I use these skills as I visit the dying. I’m not as judgmental as I once was because I think I am more empathetic about their situation. I realise I am here to support people, not judge them. I

have had a belief in God all my life but as I have matured, I have more compassion and less judging in my heart.

As a spiritual care volunteer I don't carry a Bible into a room, nor do I know it front to back. I sometimes think patients are a little scared when ministers walk into their room with a Bible tucked under their arm. I've often thought who are they carrying it for, the patient or themselves? Bibles can be intimidating to people because the patient may think the clergy has some knowledge they don't and they are coming in to fix them. People always want to be in control and sometimes I've seen the clergy "lord over" patients who are helpless. Most people are afraid of dying and that includes clergy. At first I thought I could not be a spiritual care volunteer because I did not know my Bible well enough. Then I realised that it was about me just being myself and simply offering my listening time to another human being. I liked that I could meet the patient on equal terms if I don't carry a Bible.

Spirit is that part of me that connects to God whereas soul is that part of me that says, "I'm still mad at my sister." Soul is all those human traits like personality. My spirituality is my connection to all things in this world, some things I cannot explain, like all the great mysteries of life. I think it is important to go to Sunday school when you are young as it gives you a strong foundation. Sunday school helps you become a better person. Sin is an interesting word. I think it means to fall short. I often wonder why people have to be born again. Can God guarantee that if I am born again I will not say or do anything sinful again? I believe that God would say no. I have always had a strong foundation of right and wrong and I realise most of this came from my Mother. People

take the Bible too literally; really it's just a guide to encourage us to do the right thing for others.

Experiences really lay the bricks for the next road you take. We always have choices in life; even people who are poor have choices. Many times people don't take advantages of opportunities and have regrets later. Perhaps they are afraid of learning from others. I know people who don't go to funerals because they are fearful or don't want to face their mortality. My brother died when I was in my twenties and my very wise Mother helped me to explore my feelings which I think is one of the reasons why I like spending time with people who are dying. I encourage them to talk and share what they are feeling. Sometimes they tell you things that they have never told another soul. I consider both my Mother and grandmother as my mentors and heroes. They taught me how to really live through life, not just on the surface like so many other people but through the thick and deep stuff of life. I think spirituality is the experience of life, listening to your mentors and challenging your feelings. Life is a spiritual journey. Spirituality skips by all the hierarchy so that you can go directly to the source, which I believe is God. This does threaten organized religion, but I am much more comfortable with clergy who are spiritual verses being religious. I gravitate to kind, gentle people who are compassionate; a person who I can have a conversation with. Three of the people I love to quote are Emerson, the Dalai Lama and the Sufi poet Rumi. I love poetry and I read it sometimes to patients. You can just see that their thoughts are drifting away to another time and place as I read the words from these three wise men. As I meet people at the reception desk in the hospice, even then I feel I'm doing spiritual care just being who I am. If I can provide hospitality to families who visit I feel that is

spiritual care too. I always go to the memorial services and teas where I help read or light candles for those who have died. I feel bad if a patient died when I was away and missed saying goodbye.

As I sit with people I receive gifts of story from others and my heart grows. As a spiritual care volunteer I strive to meet people where they are at on their journey whether they go to church or not, have children or not...it's not about me, it's about them. My job is to give out love and support. Not to judge others. I feel anytime that I spend with a patient is a sacred time. I often ask myself, "What if I wasn't at the hospice today, who would have taken my place to give comfort to that patient who was crying?" Thankfully I do feel the presence of the Holy Spirit surrounding me and all those I visit. God is part of me and when I spend time with others God is there too. I wear my prayer bead bracelet all the time and it gives me comfort and I feel safe. My bracelet is like a talisman; it wards off evil spirits, keeps me safe and provides me with peace and serenity. It's like God on my wrist. I always make sure I wear it to the hospice and patients comment on it. This gives me an opportunity to talk about all the beads and what they represent like, the love beads, gratitude bead and the forgiveness bead.

When I spend time with patients I don't want the time to end. The time goes so fast anyway it often seems like I've just arrived and the patient lets me know it's time for me to leave. Patients are always in charge...what they say...goes. Mostly I spend fifteen to twenty minutes at the bedside. These people are tired and need their rest for when their families come to visit. I'm there to fill the gap, offer a hand and a listening ear if they want to talk about something on their mind. When people are dying they do not

have much time and yet they have all the time in the world as they sit and wait for someone to visit. Many do not want to be alone.

I am much more patient and mindful of saying good and kind things to others since volunteering in spiritual care. It is such a gift to journey with others and share just a little pocket of time with them. I always come away smiling; I know I get the better part of the deal. My words are gifts that I share with the patients and these words simply come into my head from God. I know that I treat people better and I'm a better person because I'm doing what God wants me to do and for the right reasons. I am an old soul that draws people towards me but now because of spiritual care in hospice work, nothing has ever felt this right! I now have the words which help me share what I believe. I have more confidence and can name the wisdom which comes from God. Providing spiritual care to hospice patients have been a real spark that turns on the light bulb deep inside me so that I can see the real Nancy. I am enriched by the other volunteers as I watch them spend time with the patients. It's so sacred to watch people interact and share with one another. Volunteering in spiritual care has been just the greatest thing that ever happened to me.

PEGGY'S STORY

RESEARCHER'S NOTES

Peggy is a woman in her early sixties who volunteers at the local hospice. Peggy is a life time member of the Anglican Church and has always provided pastoral visiting to congregation members who were in hospital. Peggy's husband fought cancer for nearly three years and eventually ended up living at the hospice for a month before he died.

Peggy grew to love the staff and volunteers at the hospice and felt pulled to offer her time in volunteer services. The chaplain encouraged her to take at least six months before she came back to the hospice. In that time Peggy took the Spiritual Care training program. Peggy was a social worker in her professional life and volunteers two afternoons per week. She lives in the south part of Calgary but enjoys the 30 minute commute to the hospice just outside of the city. The hospice was built in the country with beautiful vista views of the foothills and mountains. Peggy looks forward to sharing her experiences of volunteering at the hospice and was very pleased to invite the researcher into her home one morning in August 2010.

NARRATIVE ANECDOTE

My husband and I were married for forty-one years. We made sure that once each day we told one another that we loved the other. I think it made our marriage and life together a good one. All three of our kids live in Edmonton, along with the grandchildren. I retired from social work when Bob got sick and took care of him right up until he died. I just knew that God wanted me to volunteer in spiritual care at the hospice. It was a real push-pull kind of thing. The chaplain was right to encourage me to wait though until I had worked through some of my grief. I wasn't ready either; lots of paper work to do and I needed some "me" time. I think God has had a plan for me though because a friend of mine saw the ad in the local paper about the spiritual care training. Normally she never gets the paper but the one day she bought it, her eyes went right to the little ad and she thought of me. After the training I contacted the chaplain at the hospice and told her I was ready to volunteer in spiritual care.

I remember the first day I went into the hospice to volunteer. I felt nervous and a little scared. I'm not sure why I felt that way, as I was always comfortable talking with people. I think it was because it was the first time I was back at the hospice since Bob died. However, after a few times of volunteering, my feelings of fear disappeared. Well...except for that one time when I was sitting with a man with the same cancer as my husband had and he was around the same age too. I remember thinking I shouldn't be here; I'll probably start to cry. You know it's funny, just then I felt a presence surround me. It was like being in the deep end of the swimming pool. I was surrounded and touched by all the water. I believed this presence was the Holy Spirit come to support me and this man. I remember that we talked about his work and life on the farm for nearly an hour. My husband loved to talk about his work too. I felt myself get right into the rhythm of conversation, back and forth, like ocean waves. After that visit, I just knew that God was with me each and every time I would visit a hospice patient.

Another thing that has helped me is that on my drive to the hospice I pray for all the people I might visit today. I ask God to be with the patient before I even pull my car into the parking lot. This way I know that I am not alone when I go in to visit. I trust that God is already at work helping to comfort the patient before I arrive in the room. I go into the patient's room full of confidence that the God is with me, I am not alone. Some days I still wake up filled with grief or I hear a piece of music on the radio that reminds me of Bob. On those days my visits seem not to go as well. I think that a veil of grief is covering my body and prevents me from perceiving the Holy Spirit's presence. I do trust that God is there but I am not able to feel his presence supporting me and the

patient. On those days, I try not to stay too long at the hospice. I need to rekindle my soul on those days at home.

I am always amazed hearing the stories of patients' lives. Certainly as a social worker I have heard some pretty sad stories. However, here at the hospice it is so different because now I have time to just sit and listen. Often the stories of people's lives mesh with my journey of death and dying. I was fortunate that my husband and I always talked and so we said all the things that we wanted to say before he died. This was a great comfort to me especially after died. As I hear the patient's story sometimes they share things with me that they have not told their spouse or children. One day I had a very meaningful visit with a man in his seventies who was dying. He told me he would like to talk to his wife about his fears of dying but was afraid he would upset her. I suggested to him that perhaps his wife might be thinking the same thing and maybe he should ask her if they could have a frank talk. A week later when I went in to visit the same man, he shared with me that in fact he did talk with his wife. He said she was relieved and he thanked me for helping him take the steps to better communicate with his wife. Thanks to my own experience and God's support, I was able to help this man and his wife. I recall going home after my visit feeling like I had made a real difference for this couple.

I sat with a family in the lounge of the hospice one afternoon. The two women shared that their Mother was in emotional pain from some event in her past. The Mother would not share what this burden was with her daughters. The patient was filled with regret and the fear of how this would affect the promise of eternal life from God. Secrets are terrible burdens for people to carry throughout their life and many secrets carry the

added burden of shame attached to them. As the chaplain spent time with the patient assuring her that God forgives everyone and that perhaps it was time for her to forgive herself, I sat with her daughters. I asked the women if they were open to prayer and they agreed. I was not sure even how to begin my prayer so I just shared with God about the situation and asked for God's guidance and help. What began with anxiety on my part ended with giving over to God and the words of comfort and support flowed out of my mouth and touched all three of us. I have never felt that kind of strength before. I was definitely mouthing God's words. I later spoke with the chaplain who told me that she encouraged the patient to unburden herself to God. In the privacy of the patient's room the woman told God all about the burden she had been carrying for most of her life. None of us, not the chaplain nor the daughters ever found out what the "secret" was, but the patient's anxiety calmed and her death was peaceful. I later received a card from the daughters of the woman who thanked me for helping them through a very difficult time. I know it was not me, but God who really helped these women.

As I reflect on my experiences of providing spiritual care at the hospice, I realise that my whole life has been getting me ready to do this important work. I must admit that when I was a social worker in hospital I always thought that the volunteers were really there just to fill their day. I never really gave much thought to their role and how they affected the patients' lives. I think differently now. I realise I was judging them for being just who they are; caring and kind individuals. I never thought that one day that volunteer would be me. As I look back upon the young arrogant social worker that I was, I am ashamed of my judgements towards volunteers. God has a funny way of putting us

in our place. Here I am now in this role of spiritual care volunteer and I realise this is where I was meant to be all along.

Since joining the spiritual care team at the hospice my prayer life has vastly increased. I start my day with prayer and end my day in prayer. I pray for all the people at the hospice, the patients, staff and volunteers. Last week I drove to Edmonton to visit my children. As I was driving I began to think about several patients in the hospice. So when I got to Red Deer I pulled over and prayed for these people and their families. I feel like that is part of my job now, to pray for these people who are going through what I did a few years ago. I feel that I am a blessing, but more importantly, I feel I am blessed each time I sit at the bedside of a patient who just wants to talk. I believe that prayer connects us to God in a very intimate way. I want and need this connection for me to be whole with my body, mind and spirit.

I always thought I was a pretty good listener, but my focus after listening in my profession, was go and chart what was going on with the patient. I realise as I listened I was thinking clinically about my response to the situation. Now as I listen to patients share their stories, worries and fears, I'm doing it as a friend. I listen with my heart not my head. When the patient shares something personal with me I feel so privileged. The relationship is different. It's like my spirit meets and mingles with their spirit and in the middle of this, God is there too, in both of us. I think this new listening skill has been one of my biggest insights throughout my spiritual care experience.

When I spend time with the patients in the hospice I notice that my time there goes very quickly. I usually arrive around 1:00pm and the next time I look at my watch

it's 3:30pm. I think that when you are really enjoying what you are doing, time just disappears. I guess if time were to drag along, then perhaps it's time for change.

Now that I'm volunteering in spiritual care I feel like I have purpose once again in my life. It's like a new chapter in my story. Spiritual care has helped me in so many ways. I feel more connected to God by helping others, which is following what the Bible teaches us. The story of the Good Samaritan has always been one of my favourite parables. However, it seems to be more relevant than before. I am the Samaritan in the story helping anyone who is on my path, anyone who needs me to be a listening ear.

My understanding of who God is for me has deepened. I sense God's presence more fully and throughout the day, not just when I am at church. I am much more aware of little insights that come my way, which I believe is God nudging me to do something, like call a friend or read a passage from scripture. I have spent most of my life in the Anglican Church and I have never felt as close to God as I do when I am volunteering in spiritual care. God just sits in my heart and fills me with such contentment and peace.

I am more grateful for my life and thankful that I have a loving family and friends to support me on my journey. Most importantly, I am thankful for a loving God who is with me each and every day. I am not alone with God.

BARB'S STORY

RESEARCHER'S NOTES

Barb is a woman in her early seventies who celebrates her faith in the Christian Reformed Church. Barb is a former Registered Nurse who worked in a variety of positions over her 50 year career. After completing her Master's degree in Nursing she started one of the first palliative care hospice programs in the city of Calgary. Barb retired several years ago and moved to rural southern Alberta. Barb took the Spiritual Care Training in 2010 to help with her pastoral visits for her church. In early 2011, Barb had an opportunity to work as a spiritual care volunteer on the acute care medical unit of the local hospital. The researcher went to Barb's home for her interview. Barb was pleased to tell her story of providing spiritual care to acute medical patients.

NARRATIVE ANECDOTE

I think spirituality is the essence of a true being and their association with a life force. I do not see God as a person but as a life force. I believe there is a spiritual need in each of us to connect to this life force. When a person becomes aware of this Divine presence they have a choice of what to do with it. If the person accepts and acknowledges God an opportunity arrives to embrace this connection. Throughout history, it is this spiritual connection with people and God that has led humanity to where we are today.

When I started up on acute care it certainly brought old memories to the forefront. That was actually quite good in some ways because it warmed me up... so to speak as I

began my visits. One day, after introducing myself to a female patient, she said to me, “This is really wonderful to have all this time to think about things that I never had time to think about before.” She then asked me what is the difference between the power of positive thinking and faith? I literally said, “Wow” I’ll have to think about that! The patient went on to say that this was what she had been thinking about all morning. “What did you come up with,” I asked. The patient continued, “I think the theory of the power of positive thinking that came out with Norman Vincent Peale’s stuff, was that I have everything I need within me and I can pull myself up with my own boot straps. Where faith says that I know there is something bigger than me and together we can do what needs to be done.” She said that one should just put it out to the universe and it will come back multifold. I remember going home and reflecting on what she said. I recall thinking is faith really just that simple? It’s so interesting talking to other people. They often share a perspective that is foreign to me and my Christian tradition. I think it’s good sometimes to shake yourself up a bit and perhaps revisit your own credo.

I was asked to see a patient who was grieving and in a great deal of physical pain. Her chronic condition had intensified over the last few months since her middle aged daughter had died. I explored her feelings with her. She basically just wanted to give up on life and die. She had suffered a really hard life and told me it was not worth living any more. As a spiritual care volunteer or anyone for that matter, it’s not up to me to tell her that she shouldn’t feel that way. If I were in her shoes maybe I would feel the same as her. So I just listened as she told me her story. When she was young she had hopes and dreams just like all of us. Then life...a hard life came her way. I thought about my own choices in life and how my choices seemed to work out, but they might not have...and

there but for the Grace of God go I. It's so important to continue to honour and respect people and listen to their story before they let go of life. It's always about journeying with people. I prayed with her and she really gripped my hand hard. I think she knew I really cared and was listening to her every word so we did have a spiritual connection. I remember praying for her several weeks after she had died hoping her spirit could finally be at peace. That visit did stick with me for some time. The last few years I've been thinking about my own needs of having a sick husband. Visiting patients has allowed me to tap into the wonderful experiences of learning that I've had along the way. It's amazing how many things we know and when a situation comes along just how much wisdom comes out of your mouth. It's kind of scary sometimes. That's when I really feel like an ancient dinosaur! My accumulated knowledge and the Holy Spirit have guided me to say and not say things to help others.

The act of forgiveness is such a big part of having a peaceful death. People who don't forgive tend to go through unhelpful recurrent thought processes like all their regrets and "I wish I would have..." The lady whose daughter died, that I just told you about, unfortunately was a suicide. It was so devastating. The patient kept on questioning her parenting skills. We talked about that too. She told me everything she could remember about the events of her daughter's childhood. I asked her if there were any incidents that jumped out at her. The patient said no, her daughter had a great childhood. I then asked her if she had forgiven her daughter for putting her through all this pain and grief? I recall the patient going very quiet and shaking her head no. I told her that people who take their own life are in terrible pain and do not think clearly. So that became part of our prayer that the patient would begin to forgive her daughter

because certainly she had not intended to hurt her family, only herself. Society has the nasty habit of judging people for one single act in their lives. It's hard for people to move beyond that and see the whole person before the terrible act of suicide. We talked about finding a favourite memory to focus on and to visualize on a positive picture rather than on the negative one of her death. Reframing the situation is a very helpful strategy.

All my visits have been "sacred...time...spent." Certainly the time of personal connection where our spirits touch one another is so special. Nearly always it involved a physical connection, which was not always with prayer but a vertical connection to God. During my visits I always felt connected to God. I do not always know if the patient feels this connection, sometimes they express this and sometimes they do not, but I always know that God is there. I can think of one gentleman who didn't really welcome verbal prayer, but we talked about the good old days and some of the hard times throughout his life. I felt very much the unspoken presence of God. The man would be telling me his story and then he'd say "and here we are", inferring that it was God that got him through those tough times.

I have always been amazed when I sit down to visit with patients and almost always there are very few pleasantries shared by the patient. The patient gets right down to sharing what is on her mind. Maybe because they believe that is why I've come (which it is) and that I am there for the purpose of listening. It's almost like they know God is hanging around with spiritual care volunteers. Listening is everything if we want to meet the needs of the patient. It's such a gift to be a good listener. I'm fortunate being a nurse all these years', it was a skill I learned early in my career.

From this experience of volunteering in spiritual care I am reminded to always be honest with the patient. If you are coming back tomorrow, for goodness sake, come back. When I had my knee replaced this winter the nurse said she would be right back and then went off for her break. I remember feeling that “I’m not important enough for her just to have told me the truth.” It’s a terrible feeling. The underlying message is that the professional or volunteer doesn’t really care about the patient. It’s so important to be honest and just say I don’t know, if you really don’t know. Just be honest. This has been a big reminder for me, after all patients are sick not stupid!

I have always had a very active prayer life but now there are so many more people to pray for. Before I started in spiritual care I would say a general prayer for people in hospital. Now, I name the names and tell the stories to God and ask for his divine intervention of help and healing. I find that if I start my day with prayer my day goes so much better than if I don’t. Prayer keeps me connected; it keeps me in right relationship with God. The big part of prayer for me is the quiet time after I pray. I sit and wait and listen for God’s still and quiet voice to speak to me. I have more time now for prayer since I retired which is good. As I grow older I believe that I need to spend more time with God. Sometimes I light a candle or put on some soft music, but always making a space for God in my home and in my heart. My internal dialogue with God is now more up front and centre because I have reconnected with the people who need God’s help.

It’s such a gift of giving and receiving to be a spiritual care volunteer. It gives me purpose beyond my own problems and health concerns. The Bible teaches us to reach out and help others. I think one of the most important tasks of care giving is just acting upon these two little words...care and giving.

SHIRLEY'S STORY

RESEARCHER'S NOTES

Shirley is a woman in her mid sixties who has recently retired and moved to a small town south of Calgary. She is a member of the United Church and has worked in secretarial positions most of her life. Several years ago Shirley took several courses in Clinical Pastoral Education to meet some of her growing pastoral care needs. Shirley admits that she is still grieving the loss of her church family in Calgary and needs to be needed. Shirley calls herself a lifelong learner and likes a challenge. Shirley took the Spiritual Care Training in 2010. For Shirley's interview, I met her at the local hospital where she volunteers on an acute medical unit. We found a quiet room for the interview to take place without any interruptions. Shirley was happy to share stories of her spiritual care experiences.

NARRATIVE ANECDOTE

I think that spirituality is the process of reaching out to people with no perceived notion of where the patient is at. As a spiritual care volunteer it's about total acceptance of who I am, where I am and being able to minister care to others knowing that. It's always been important to me to find out what spirituality means to the patient so that you can offer prayer or care giving in accordance to what their beliefs are. Spirituality is different than religion. Religion is based on scripture and the structure of the church whereas spirituality is the soul and knowing that there is something beyond. People have such preconceived ideas of what religion and spirituality are. Spiritual care wants to know how your soul is today. When I walk into a patient's room and I tell them that I am

a spiritual care volunteer, if they are people of faith I am welcomed in. However, sometimes if they are not people of faith, they couldn't care less if I came in or not. I had been visiting a patient on the medical unit. His family was not interested that I was there for them or their father. As days went by the patient and I did have some connection. I offered prayer and he accepted it; a touch of my hand on his. I think he did appreciate me spending some time with him. This is not the same though as when I compare it to another visit only a month later where the whole family was around, very spiritual people and very accepting of prayer and care being offered to their loved one. The comfort level for me as I entered the patient's room was warm and welcoming. It's not that I have to always feel appreciated, but it certainly does make you feel like you are doing your job. With this family I really felt that I was ministering to them. I offered scripture, prayers and blessings. This was sacred time for me as I did feel the presence of the Holy Spirit or some force from the universe for both me and the patient. When that happened I remember feeling that I was confirmed, that I was where I was supposed to be, kind of like in the prayer of St. Theresa. I forget exactly how this prayer goes but I know it says, "You are where you are supposed to be right now." I know that I feel more comfort and connection when I visit with people who practice their faith. I think that we are on the same wave length as I am and they truly understand. If the patient has grown up with spirituality in their home and I arrive at their bedside, they get why I'm there. I realise that Jesus ministered to those who did not know God but somehow he did it in such a way that was accepting and embracing. I guess we never really know how we touch other people, perhaps it's just in the showing up at the bedside or a smile that is more powerful than any prayer that I might offer. I never really thought about that before until

just now, when those words just came out of my mouth. I guess, “Wow”...that’s really a good thought. Maybe I do make a difference when I visit with people who are not church going. In many of the parables, Jesus tells a story and then leaves but as the reader, we find out that people made a change in their life. So I guess I’ll never really know how I affect other people’s lives by simply showing up in their room. This is a huge revelation for me...thank you.

When I visit patients I do feel connected to my own spirit, to God and more spiritual. I feel good and uplifted and accomplished with the role that God has given me. My own sense of spirit has deepened by providing spiritual care to others. It has changed the way I pray and the way I look at prayer. Before I became a spiritual care volunteer it seemed like prayer was just about saying the words and not really thinking too much about what I was saying. I find now when I pray that I’m not searching so much for the right words. I no longer worry about the words and pray from my heart; letting the words flow out of my mouth. It’s really about trusting that God is there to guide and support me. I started using the words “thank you” so much more in my prayers. So often we forget to give thanks and I believe that they really help people be more grateful for what they have and have had. Before I go into a room I prepare first by saying a prayer, especially if there is a difficult situation going on. I will often stop at the door and say a little prayer just before I enter. I think more about prayer than I used to and wonder if that sometimes I should ask the patient, after I have offered a prayer, if the prayer helped them. How else would I know if exclusive language offends their sensibilities or that that they prefer to always address God as “Father.” I visited one man dying of cancer and in my prayer I did say that God is waiting with open arms to accept him when he was ready.

The patient's wife and sister were there and they told me what a wonderful prayer that was. It was a bit of a risk saying what I did and sometimes I'm not sure if the patient and his family are ready to hear words like that. I may think that these words are comforting, but if the patient is not ready I could upset them. After I thought about it further, I have decided that after I meet someone for the first time and I offer prayer, I will ask them if that prayer met their expectations. If it didn't, I'll change it next time. I think by simply asking the patient if the prayer comforted them, helps to develop a truthful and perhaps trusting relationship. Even if they didn't like the prayer they will still appreciate that I cared enough for them to ask. It is always about hearing what the patient wants and needs.

I had a patient say to me one day that he did not know why he got cancer; he was questioning why God was punishing him. I remember saying that God does not give diseases to people, that God gives us strength and hope to cope with them. So many people think that when bad things happen to them, that it's God's fault and God's plan. Most people have lived a pretty good life and they try to make sense of the "why me" question, where there are simply no answers. These are always really tough conversations and I talk with the chaplain about them. Yet, I am so thankful that the patient felt comfortable enough with me to open up and talk about what was bothering him. I do not come away from every visit feeling at peace but I know that I have made a difference just by being there. I also know that I was not alone as I was visiting the patient; that God was there too.

A few weeks ago I had a sudden urge to drop into the emergency unit. I rarely stop in there but I literally felt pushed through the glass doors. A lady was sitting beside

an empty stretcher and she was in tears. Her husband was having an x-ray and she was very worried about the result. I sat and we prayed together. I believe that God wanted me to meet this woman or why else would I have felt so compelled to go into the ER just at that moment. I am now paying more attention to listening to the yearning of my heart because I think this is how God is speaking to me. I believe that God wants the best for me and in my role as a spiritual care volunteer to help others.

I honestly can say that as I listen to another person's story I come away feeling so thankful and filled with grace. People's stories are always so powerful. People have great strength to get through such challenges over their lifetime. Their stories touch my heart every time. One man told me that his doctor said there was nothing left to do for him. This man had a young family and so he carried on with chemotherapy not for himself, but his family. It takes great courage and I am humbled to be in his presence. Even in the face of death, some people can still find humour in situations when most of us would just cry. I do have such empathy...sympathy and I can almost get into their shoes. I feel their sadness and impending loss but I can also feel their strength. As I listen to their stories I think about my own life and I'm grateful for a loving husband, children and grandchildren. I'm also thankful to live in this province where yes, life has its challenges, but I've never lived in poverty. I've never had to worry about spiritual poverty either, for I was raised in a Christian home where my parents loved me and told me that God loved me too.

Providing spiritual care to people who are very ill has given me a new direction in my own life. In the past I have felt God calling me but because of my financial situation I had to work to help pay the bills. Now that I am retired perhaps I will go back and

complete my CPE (clinical pastoral training) if that is where God leads me. Certainly with every patient I visit, I feel closer to God. There were times in my life when I thought God abandoned me, but I realise now that it was me that stepped away from God, not the other way around. God is always there for me. I feel God's love each day growing more and more inside me. This is what I have learned that I can share with patients. They may feel abandoned because they are dying, but in fact God is closer to them now than ever before.

My spirituality is now on the rise again where before it had stagnated. My inner spirit has been awakened. I feel more fulfilled as I visit patients and spend time listening to their stories. I listen in a different way than I did before I started volunteering. I listen deeply, with the core of my soul. When I do this I just know that God is with me. As I pray with people I use what I have heard from the patient in my prayer. This gives the patient a great deal of comfort and I feel like I'm doing what I'm supposed to...being a reflection of what God wants and hopes for this patient.

I have also learned that I need to take more time and reflect on what God is trying to tell me. When I pay attention to God's will it seems like the answers and life unfolds in an orderly fashion. I am currently making a quiet prayer corner in my home where I plan to make time each day for quiet reading and reflection time. I know in the early part of my life I was so busy and I regret not having that personal relationship with God. Had I been listening then, like I am now, I might have taken a different vocational path. Through spiritual care though, I am having some of those needs met and I am thankful to God for this opportunity to be a reflection of God's love towards whom all I meet.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THEMES AND ANALYSIS OF LIVED EXPERIENCE

SEEKING MEANING

From all the narrative commentary the researcher unearthed the notion of how the participants have deepened their sense of spirit from their experiences of providing spiritual care to patients and residents of long term care, hospitals and hospice facilities. Any lived experience description is an appropriate source for uncovering thematic aspects of the phenomenon it describes.¹⁸¹ Theme is the results of focus; it is the point. Theme can simplify a concept told in narrative form. It captures the phenomenon it is trying to understand and helps the researcher make sense of it. Theme is the process of insightful and reflective discovery of a notion.¹⁸²

To isolate thematic elements the researcher used a selective and high-lighting approach.¹⁸³ In this selective reading approach the text was read many times. While assessing the data, the researcher also used a three-part process of the Organic Inquiry method, whereby the researcher traveled in her mind to the liminal domain of consciousness. Once there, the researcher gathered wisdom, and returned to integrate what had been revealed. Liminal means in-between and implies the place/time that exists

¹⁸¹ Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (London, Ont: The Althouse Press, 2003), 92.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 87-88.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 93.

at the edges of conscious reality.¹⁸⁴ The researcher used her meditation room in her home for this vital process. As quiet music played and candles were lit, the researcher read the stories of the research participants. A prayer was said prior to reading each participant's story. The researcher then simply sat quietly and let the themes slowly emerge. The researcher believed with the intentional space to lift insights and with the help of the Spirit, the themes would reveal themselves. The researcher then wrote down the themes as they came to her. This process was repeated over a period of several days. Max van Manen describes theme discovery as the stars that make up the universes of meaning we live through and by the light of these themes we can navigate and explore such universes.¹⁸⁵

THEME DISCOVERY

From the research five major themes of spiritual growth and change were revealed to the researcher. These were (1) an increased prayer life, (2) closer connection to God, (3) increased confidence, (4) improved relationships with others, and (5) more gratitude and less judging. A sub-theme of time was also revealed.

INCREASED PRAYER LIFE

Prayer is described as the act or practice of imploring a request, an utterance, praise, thanksgiving or confession to God.¹⁸⁶ According to Evelyn Underhill, prayer is

¹⁸⁴ Deah Curry and Steven J. Wells, *An Organic Inquiry Primer for the Novice Researcher: A Sacred Approach to Disciplined Knowing* (West Conshohocken, PA: Infinity Publishing, 2006), 85-94.

¹⁸⁵ Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (London, Ont: Althouse Press, 2006), 90.

¹⁸⁶ Webster's New World Dictionary, 2nd ed., (1984).

simply a conversation with God.¹⁸⁷ The participants of the study all claimed to have had an increase in their daily prayer activity.

Several comments from the participants included:

“My prayer life has improved since joining spiritual care...I pray more frequently” and “My prayer life has vastly improved. I start and end my day with prayer...I see it as part of my job.”

Prayer develops our relationship with God. Praying or sharing thoughts, concerns and joys with God helps us grow closer and more intimately connected to God.¹⁸⁸

Study participant Barb commented,

“When I pray I feel so close to God and it keeps me in right relationship.” Prayer connects me to God in a very intimate way. I want and need this connection to be whole in body, mind and spirit.

This inward/outward dynamic of prayer is perfectly expressed in the way the sixth-century monk Dorotheus of Gaza imagined our world. He saw it as a circle, with God at the centre and our lives as lines drawn from the circumference toward the centre.¹⁸⁹

Research participant Shirley commented on prayer:

“When I pray now, I am not searching so much for the right words. I think about prayer more each day. Prayer has become such a big part of my life”

¹⁸⁷ Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism* (Eagle Pub: Guildford, UK, 1991), 2-8.

¹⁸⁸ Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism* (Eagle Pub: Guildford, UK, 1991), 2-8.

¹⁸⁹ Kathleen Norris, *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith* (Riverhead Books: New York, 1998), 59-60.

One reason for frequent praying or praying without ceasing, is so that you are always prepared for crisis.¹⁹⁰ Another reason for constant praying is express our thankfulness to God.¹⁹¹ As a species, many have decided to keep praying because we have found that prayer works for most of us.¹⁹²

Margaret shared,

“I pray to God and ask him to take care of the people I visited today.” One of the reasons to spend time in prayer is because Jesus instructed us to pray.¹⁹³

Scriptures are the foundation of a person’s prayer life. In Luke, Jesus tells his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.¹⁹⁴

Underhill says that we pray to experience God’s presence and have fellowship with him.¹⁹⁵ From the study one can conclude that the spiritual care volunteers have increased their prayer life.

CLOSER CONNECTION TO GOD

Daily intimacy with the Divine draws the heart closer to God and imparts a ministering heart towards others.¹⁹⁶ Psalm 63:1-11 says “O God you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and

¹⁹⁰ 1 Thessalonians 5.17, NRSV.

¹⁹¹ Tom Harpur, *Prayer: The Hidden Fire: A Practical and Personal Approach to Awakening a Greater Intimacy with God* (Northstone Pub: Kelowna, BC, 1998), 60.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁹³ Matthew 6.9-13.

¹⁹⁴ Luke 18.1, NRSV.

¹⁹⁵ Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People* (Eagle Guilford: Surrey, UK, 1991), 30-54.

¹⁹⁶ Mother Teresa, *Mother Teresa: In My Own Words* (Gramercy Books: New York, 1996), 1-5, 95-109.

wearry land where there is no water...”¹⁹⁷ The study participants had more comments about this theme than all the others. These words are powerful and personal.

Margaret said the following about feeling closer to God:

I get closer to God as I sit in silence. I must be still and silent so that I may feel the presence of God’s guidance to flow into me. On my spiritual care visits I definitely sense the Holy Spirit in the room with me...one hundred percent! The Holy Spirit gives me the words to say. I know that I am not alone; I feel the presence surround me. Doing service has brought me closer to God.

Ester de Waal says that to listen closely with every fibre of our being, at every moment of the day, is the most difficult of things in the world, yet essential if we mean to find God whom we are seeking.¹⁹⁸

Mary shared the following about her experiences of feeling closer to God:

I have God’s spirit deep within me, deep in my heart. Where ever I go God is with me. I know that God and his angels are all around me when I visit a resident in long term care. This helps me to know that everything will be ok. My belief and trust in God has gotten so much stronger by providing spiritual care.

Psalm 73:23, “I am with you: for you hold me by my right hand.”¹⁹⁹

Roy said the following:

I now do a morning devotional with my wife. This practice has brought us much closer together. I have always desired a closer relationship with God. I have that now and I am totally reliant on the leading of the Holy Spirit. I trust God will use me in his plans for the greater good. I try and treat each day as a new opportunity which will continue to draw me closer to God.

Ephesians 4:13, “We must grow until we attain the measure of the fullness of Christ.”²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Psalm 63.1-11.

¹⁹⁸ Ester de Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict* (The Liturgical Press: Collegeville: Minnesota, 1984), 43.

¹⁹⁹ Psalm 73.23, NRSV.

²⁰⁰ Ephesians 4.13, NRSV.

Jenny shared the following about her feeling of being closer to God:

While visiting a long term care resident I sense another's presence with us that is comforting. It's like sitting with God. I believe God is there helping me say the words from my heart. My faith has deepened. I feel closer to God and more willing to let God's spirit guide me. I trust more now because of God's help. I purposefully set aside some time each day to connect with God through prayer and meditation. During this time I listen and wait for God.

Henry Nouwen shares that, "Waiting is not a passive but an active activity with God."²⁰¹

Nancy said the following:

Thankfully, I do feel the presence of the Holy Spirit surrounding me and all those people I visit. God is part of me and when I spend time with others God is there too. I didn't know how deep my faith was until I had an opportunity to share it with others.

Peggy shared about her feelings of being closer to God:

So many times I feel a presence surround me like swimming in the deep end of a swimming pool and being touched by all the water. I believe this presence is the Holy Spirit come to support me and this man. After this experience, I just knew that God was with me each and every time I would visit a hospice patient. I trust that God is there, whether I can feel him or not. My understanding of who God is for me has deepened. I sense God's presence more fully than before. I am more aware of little insights that come my way, which I believe are messages from God. I feel closest to God when I volunteer in spiritual care. Now, God just sits in my heart and fills me with such contentment and peace.

This is the amazing mystery, not only is God with us, not only is God for us, but God is also in us. Colossians 1:27 says, "...this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."²⁰²

²⁰¹ Henri Nouwen, *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life* (Ave Marie Press: Notre Dame, IN, 2004), 36-47.

²⁰² Colossians 1.27, NRSV.

Barb said the following about her experiences of being closer to God:

During my visits in spiritual care I feel very connected to God. I know that God is there. I feel God's unspoken presence. As I get older I need to make more space and time for God in my home and heart. I'm doing that more now. My internal dialogue with God is now more up and centre because I have reconnected with people who need God's help.

Psalms 40:1 "I waited patiently for the Lord, he turned to me and heard my cry."²⁰³

Shirley's comments about feeling closer to God:

I do feel the presence of the Holy Spirit or some other force from the universe for both me and the patient when I am visiting. This is sacred time together. My own sense of spirit has deepened by providing spiritual care. I feel God's love each day growing more inside of me.

Hildegard of Bingen, a 12th century mystic and polymath, talks about being a feather on the breath of God. Hildegard never ceased to be amazed at how God showered her with so much grace and light. She realised that God, who is the source of novelty and creativity, sustains all life with inexhaustible energy. Hildegard felt close and connected to God and her poetry and writing captures this by the saying "I am a feather on the breath of God."²⁰⁴

The theme of feeling a closer connection to God is demonstrated by the Parable of the Vine and the Branches.²⁰⁵ In the centre of this abiding relationship, the vine being Jesus and the followers being the branches, there is the love of God. God is the ultimate vine grower and without God no branches can bear fruit. The next verses in John:12-17 clearly asks the persons of faith to love one another as God loves each of us. Jesus

²⁰³ Psalm 40.1, NRSV.

²⁰⁴ Gloria Durka, *Praying with Hildegard of Bingen* (St Mary's Press: Winona, Minnesota, 1991), 32-36.

²⁰⁵ John 15.1-11, NRSV.

appoints us to go and bear the fruit. Offer the fruit of love to each person you meet and God will abide in you.

There is a plethora of writings, including poetry, songs, material written by the mystics and scripture that help encapsulate the feelings of being close to God. The participants of this study clearly showed how they feel their sense of connection with God has deepened by providing spiritual care to people in hospice, long term care and the hospital setting. What this implies is that when people of faith get an opportunity to spend quality time with others in need, their own relationship with God grows deeper and stronger. Helping others is a theological theme lifted out of many scriptures as witnessed above.

MORE GRATITUDE AND LESS JUDGING FROM LISTENING TO STORY

Judging or being judgemental is defined as a way of making oneself feel better by finding fault with others.²⁰⁶ It is caused by having a closed mind, fear and having an attitude of superiority over another person, culture or religious group. People who judge feel they have the right to judge others and lack grace.²⁰⁷ People who judge often enjoy the attention of sharing their view with others. Judging is another theme lifted up through sermons and is found as a major theme in the New Testament. The parable of the Good Samaritan is an example of judging another human being.²⁰⁸ In this parable it is the Samaritan who is despised by Jews, yet, it is the Samaritan who rescues the man on the road left for dead. The priest and Levite pass by their neighbour out of fear or some other unknown reason. Parables are contradictions in one's common story and are meant to

²⁰⁶ Webster's New World Dictionary, 2nd ed., (1984).

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Luke 10.25-37, NRSV.

shake us up by offering a new way to understand who we are.²⁰⁹ The reader is invited to ask the question, “Who am I in this story; who do I want to be?”

The world in which we live is a narrative world, created by our stories. The type of stories shared by the Spiritual Care Volunteers says Crossan, would be action narratives, for as they reveal their stories they seek to investigate their world and make meaning.²¹⁰ Listening to another person’s story invites one to connect the story to one’s own personal story and then reflect on how this story helps to make meaning in one’s own life.²¹¹

Gratitude is defined as thankfulness, gratefulness, appreciation or acknowledgement of what one has or will receive.²¹² Gratitude is at the heart of the gospels and is a basic Christian attitude which is a theme for sermons many times throughout the church year. The biblical story of the woman with the least coin clearly lifts up an attitude of gratitude through this poor woman giving two small copper coins, likely all she had, in thanks to God.²¹³ One of the aspects of our character that is integral to our maturity and happiness is developing a heart of gratitude.²¹⁴ Psalm 30:11-12 states, “You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. LORD my God, I will

²⁰⁹ John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Eagle Books: Chicago, 1988), 37-45.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31-45.

²¹² *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, 2nd ed., (1984).

²¹³ Luke 21.1-4, NRSV.

²¹⁴ Matthew Fox, *A Spirituality Named Compassion: Uniting Mystical Awareness with Social Justice* (Inner Traditions: Rochester, Vermont, 1999), 87-91.

praise you forever.”²¹⁵ The biblical stories of finding what has been lost, tells of gratitude experiences by the finders which are celebrated within community.

When you have a heart of gratitude for your own life, upon hearing another’s story, *pathos* can develop. Pathos is a Greek word meaning the quality or power from actual life experience or in literature, music, speech or others forms of expression, evoking feelings of pity or sorrow. In classical Greek rhetoric, pathos was a means of appealing to audiences’ emotions. Pathos is a type of empathy focusing on sadness and suffering from hearing another’s story.²¹⁶

The participants of this study had much to say on the topic of gratitude and judging from listening to their patients’ stories. Here are some of their comments:

Nancy shared the following:

When I hear each person’s story I think about my own life and give thanks to God that I had such a wise Mother. I am so thankful that God continues to let me hear what I need to hear so that when I come to the end of my life, perhaps I will not have so much “baggage.” I’m not as judgemental as I once was because I think I am more empathetic about people’s situations. I realise that as a spiritual care volunteer I am here to support people, not judge them. I am more compassionate and have less judgement in my heart.

Margaret’s words are a powerful testimony of gratitude and non-judgement:

As I listen to another person’s story, I hear pieces of my story tucked in theirs. That’s when I have those “ah-ha” moments of realization that our spirits are connected as one. I realised that my “presence is enough.” I can just sit in silence and listen for God’s peace. Listening to others gives them their value back. I’ve become a better listener because of my role as a spiritual care volunteer. Providing spiritual care to those in such need has taken away some of my judgement and I am thankful! I am grateful for each breath. What a wonderful gift God has given me, spending time with others. God brings the words into my mind and I am so grateful.

²¹⁵ Psalm 30.12, NRSV.

²¹⁶ *Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*, 4th ed.,(2003).

Parker Palmer tells us that for us to understand another person, instead of hearing our own thoughts about the subject, we must listen more deeply without judgement.²¹⁷

Roy shared the following:

Listening to resident's stories makes me thankful for my life. I know that I have become a better listener and am conscious of this skill more than ever. Silence is really golden you know! I've learned not to judge others...just love them as Jesus did. I always come away after visiting a resident feeling better about myself and grateful for only having a few aches and pains. Mostly, I am thankful for having God in my life.

Peggy shared her insights on gratitude and judgement:

The stories that I hear of patient's lives often mesh with my own journey of death and dying. I've become less judgemental and more accepting of myself and others. I no longer judge others because of their roles. I have learned to be more present and grateful in my life. It's easier to be grateful for the big things like health, family, friends and a good job. I now focus more on the little things that make the big things more enjoyable. I take an attitude of gratitude each day. I feel blessed each time I sit at the bedside. I am more grateful for my life and thankful for having a loving God who walks with me each day. I'm not alone with God. I listen with my heart, not my head, as the patient tells me their story. When I truly listen to the patient it's as though our spirits mingle...my spirit, the patient's spirit and God's spirit too.

Mary's words:

The patient and I had so much in common after all. The stories shared at the bedside were bridged through the love of land and leaf. I also love the silence when I am sitting with residents because that is when I feel close to God. In the silence I sit and hold their hand, if they wish. There is no talking, no discussion, just human being time! I'm conscious to let the resident do all the talking. I think because of this I am a better listener in my life with God and in my personal life too. I'm less judgmental about other people crying. I now see crying not as a sign of weakness, but of shedding little prayer tears. I no longer judge them, I can be empathetic and try and pray their pain away. I am grateful that my faith has blossomed from spending time with others in need.

Jenny spoke about gratitude from hearing the resident's story:

I like to listen. This is one of the best gifts I can offer residents. As I sit and listen to them share about their lives I am moved, changed and grateful for my

²¹⁷ Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An undivided Life* (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2008), 240.

life. I realise how fortunate my life has been and I no longer feel sorry for myself. I now spend more time praying to God and giving him my thanks.

Barb provided several comments on gratitude and judgement:

As I listened to the patient tell me her story I thought about my own choices in life and was so thankful I took the path I did. I always come away thankful and filled with more grace. I am not there to judge, I am there to help. Listening is everything if we want to meet the patient's needs.

Finally, Shirley made several comments on gratitude:

I am now so grateful for my husband and family and that I live in Alberta. I am also thankful that I was raised in a Christian home by my parents. When I sit with a patient, I listen differently now...I listen with the core of my soul.

The participants of the study have expressed an increase in gratitude behaviours. They shared that they have had more gratitude for their own story and for having God in their life. They were more thankful to God and less judging towards others. Spending time with God enhances the relationship between a person and the Divine. This leads to more inner peace, grace and love towards the people of God. The art of listening is demonstrated in the Bible in different ways. Not only does humankind attempt to listen to God, God also listens to humankind. Jesus said in Matthew, "He who has ears to hear, let him listen."²¹⁸ The participants of this study shared that they listen and hear not just with their ears but also with their hearts. Truly listening to another person's story offers an opportunity for a change of attitude into gratitude and thankfulness to God for their life.

INCREASED SELF-CONFIDENCE DUE TO GOD'S SUPPORT

"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my

²¹⁸ Matthew 11.15 ,NRSV.

soul knows it very well.²¹⁹ There are many Bible verses on the topic of increased self-confidence from putting your trust and faith in God.

Confidence means a firm belief, trust, reliance or assurance in something like family, friends or God.²²⁰ The participants of the study shared their thoughts on the theme of confidence. Here is what they said:

Margaret said:

My spirit is strong now...I have faith, deep hope and courage to say what I need to say because I know that God is in me and guides what I say to others. Spiritual care has enriched my life beyond belief. It's about living who I really am. I feel so confident and at peace with myself.

Mary said the following:

I feel better when I spend time with God through prayer. I am more confident in my abilities to help others.

Roy shared the following:

The Holy Spirit always comes through for me. I trust and the LORD will be there to help.

Jenny said:

I do feel more confident and grown-up now with being a reflection of God's love and light to others. I ask God to go with me when I see a resident and I know that I am not alone. I feel safe. God has given me the strength to overcome my fears and help me understand to live out who I am at my core...a care giver, now strong and confident.

St. Teresa of Avila said of God, "Seek yourself in me."²²¹

Nancy shared the following:

I didn't know how deep my faith was until I took the opportunity to reflect on it. I am more capable than I thought I was thanks to spiritual care. Words come into my head from God...they are gifts from God just when I need them most. I have

²¹⁹ Psalm 139,13-14, NRSV.

²²⁰ *Webster's Newworld Dictionary*, 2nd edition (1984).

²²¹ *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Vol 3, (ICS Publications: Washington DC, 1985) 357.

more confidence and can name the wisdom which comes from God. I am enriched by watching other spiritual care volunteers spend time with patients.

Peggy said the following about the theme of confidence:

I now go into the patient's room full of confidence because I know that God is with me. I am not alone at the bedside, God is there too. What began with anxiety on my part ended with giving over to God. Now the words of comfort and support flow out of my mouth. I have never felt that kind of strength before. I am definitely mouthing God's words. I also have more confidence in the rest of my life too, because God's strength and wisdom is with me.

According to Webster's Dictionary, self-confidence is generally described as a state of being certain that the course of action is the most effective. Self confidence is having confidence in oneself.²²²

Barb shared the following:

My accumulated knowledge and the Holy Spirit have guided me to say things to help others. I trust that God will always be at my side.

Shirley spoke on the theme of confidence:

When I pay attention to God's will it seems like the answers and life unfold in an orderly fashion. God has given me more confidence to help others.

“So we can confidently say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear...” (Hebrews 13:6).²²³ The participants have clearly identified that their self-confidence had increased by spending time with patients and residents in hospital, hospice and in long term care. They claim that their confidence, to be a successful spiritual care volunteer, has come from God. When a person puts his or her trust in God their burdens are lightened. There is a sense of sharing their load with God. They believe that life can be easier if one trusts

²²² Webster's New World Dictionary, 2nd ed., (1984).

²²³ Hebrews 13.6, NRSV.

that God is there for and with one. There is belief that God wants only the best for you and is willing to go the extra mile just for you. Learning and understanding this, the participant's level of self-confidence rose. The study participants' senses of spirit have deepened and transformed their confidence into a strong bond with God. Philippians: 4-13 shares, "I can do all things through God who strengthens me."²²⁴

IMPROVED RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are described as the way in which two or more concepts, objects or people are connected or in the state of being connected.²²⁵ Our relationships with people may lift our spirits, help us feel connected and encourage us to develop genuine love and grow in wisdom and compassion. Our relationship with nature may teach us humility, respect and courtesy. Positive experiences in both areas enlarge our spirit and provide for us a sense of place in this world and universe.²²⁶

People also have a spiritual need to find meaning and to express ideas and thoughts relating to God. The presence of God is evoked through cultivating internal and practical external ways of coming to know God more intimately. In the Christian tradition, God goes a step further and promotes a relationship where God indwells within the individual promoting incarnational care of the self. Building a good relationship with the indwelling God promotes positive contexts for healing.²²⁷ Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 tells us, "If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no

²²⁴ Philippians 4.13, NRSV.

²²⁵ Webster's New World Dictionary, 2nd ed., (1984).

²²⁶ Junietta Baker McCall, *A Practical Guide to Hospital Ministry: Healing Ways* (The Haworth Pastoral Press: New York, 2002), 166.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 186.

one to help him up!”²²⁸ The participants of this study understood the value of helping those who have fallen down. As spiritual care volunteers they strove to be the companion on the road to pick the man up, both in a practical and metaphorical sense. The participants of the study had much to share on the theme of improved relationships.

Margaret shares her thoughts on relationships:

Spiritual care is done from the heart with total love, unconditional love to another human being. There is real value for everyone in spending time with another person. Visiting these people in long term care makes my heart sing! It's a privilege to spend time with them. It was our tears that spoke to one another...it felt as though we were one. I am doing God's work for others. I am more compassionate and show that to those who are different from me. My family tells me that I have changed into a more compassionate person. I feel I have grown so much from spending time with the residents. I feel whole in body, mind and spirit!

Mary says:

Whatever I'm doing, I'm doing it with God. I believe there is always a connection with others. I have taken some of me and shared space with them.

Roy shares his thoughts on relationships:

I realise that we dwell too much on ourselves and not enough on others. Spiritual care has helped me be more caring, loving and sensitive towards others. I treat others with respect and kindness. I think I am a better husband because of the relationships I have developed with residents in long term care.

Jenny said the following:

Having a relationship with seniors no longer frightens me because I am in relationship with God. The experiences I have had in spiritual care have likely saved my marriage. I communicate and listen better than ever before. I am more patient and caring with my family.

Nancy spoke of improved relationships:

I am much more patient, kind and say supportive and caring things to my family and friends.

²²⁸ Ecclesiastes 4.9-12, NRSV.

Peggy commented:

I finally get to pay back the kindness shown to me and my husband when he was dying. Helping others in hospice care helps me live out the Christian message of caring for others less fortunate. This relationship between God, me and others is a powerful circle of love.

Barb claimed:

As I visited the patient, God was there too. It is such a powerful relationship, one I've wanted for years. I listen more carefully to the yearnings of my heart.

Shirley said:

God is speaking to me with every patient I visit. I love this relationship with God!

From the participants' comments, the relationships formed promoted healing and recovery for all those involved. God wants us to be in relationship with one another and the people of God. "We are wired for God" says Dr. Herbert Benson and through evolution we have become genetically connected to the great power in the universe. We are made to be in this life relating to God, the people of God and our world.²²⁹

SUB-THEME OF TIME

Time is defined as the continued progress of existence and events in the past, present and future regarded as a whole. Time is what the clock measures.²³⁰ Several of the participants commented on the topic of time. This sub-theme emerged from the participants when spending time with the residents. Not all of the participants commented on the topic of time; however enough did to make this subject worth visiting. Here are the participants' comments.

²²⁹ Herbert Bensen, *Timeless Healing: The Power and Biology of Belief* (Read Business Inc: Boston, MA, 1996), 43-60.

²³⁰ Webster's New World Dictionary, 2nd ed. (1984).

Margaret shared:

Time is so precious, and I wish people wouldn't waste it. Time seems to disappear when I sit with a person at the bedside.

Mary had much to say about time:

The experiences of volunteering in spiritual care have taught me to live in the moment. Time does not mean anything. In this timeless state, I feel light coming over me and the sense of being washed by star dust. It's a "no time," time. When I'm in this place of peace I know that I am touching the edge of heaven. Spiritual care has taught me to enjoy simple things, like time well spent.

Thomas Merton's "Holy Now moment" is understood as paying attention to something that holds one's focus and suspends time as one discern its meaning and pleasure.²³¹

Jenny stated:

When I spend time with a resident, time goes by so fast. In some ways time slows down and yet goes so fast. When I suddenly realise that it is time to leave the resident, I can't believe where the time went.

Nancy commented:

The time goes so fast. It seems like I just arrived at the patient's bedside and it's time to go. I wonder if God has something to do with time when you are spending time with someone in need?

Peggy describes her experiences of time:

Time goes by really quickly when you are visiting a patient. When you are really engaged in listening to the patient, time simply stops, it disappears altogether. It's really strange how this happens. It's like God putting us in a bubble and we just float there listening to one another.

The participants of this study, as they visited patients and residents, many found that time shifted out of its normal context, that time somehow changed its dynamic.

²³¹ Robert Waldron, *Walking with Thomas Merton: Discovering His Poetry, Essays and Journals* (Paulist Press, New Jersey, 2002), 32-33.

Time, although not the focus of this study, is an interesting subject that should be researched further.

The research question asked for this study, “How has your sense of spirit deepened by providing spiritual care to residents in long term care or patients in hospital or hospice?” To deepen this question even further one must ask why we want to have our sense of spirit deepen...so what?

Getting the best out of this life with God and the people of God offers everyone the potential for fullness of life. The feelings of being supported by a loving and forgiving God help us through the valley times of life. In thankfulness, people also want to share their mountaintop times of joy throughout their life with God. From sharing joys and sorrows with God a relationship develops, grows and deepens. This relationship fosters feelings that we are not alone as we journey through life. Our society needs people of faith to pray for our weary world and be a reflection of God’s love and light to all. Love is stronger than hate, prejudice, apathy or commercialism. Having a loving God, both transcendent and immanent gives people a purposeful meaning for living life to its fullest. This could create the Kingdom of God right here on earth, today!

The participants of this study are spiritual care volunteers who have experience in their role of helping others. Their responses have clearly demonstrated that by providing spiritual care to patients and residents, they themselves have benefitted greatly. The participants of this study said that their prayer life had increased and that they now feel closer to God. They are less judging and more thankful from hearing the stories of others. The participants of the study said that their self-confidence had increased and

they have improved relationships with family and friends. They are better listeners and believe that providing spiritual care has been one of the most enlightening experiences of their lives. From the evidence presented, the researcher concludes that the experience of providing spiritual care to others has deepened the participants' sense of spirit.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Parker Palmer says, “In an effort to understand another’s experience instead of simply objecting to what the other person says we can listen more deeply instead of giving answers, respond to their commentary with curiosity.”²³²

The purpose of this study was to explore how spiritual care volunteers’ sense of spirit deepened by providing spiritual care to patients and residents in hospital, hospice or long term care facility.

Although we may each understand the word spirit differently, we all treasure a sense of who we are and what it is to be alive with an awareness of an inner experience of connection with something more. The participants of this study have discovered a greater depth in life beyond external pleasures. Embarking on this journey of providing spiritual care to others, they have opened up new passages and self-realizations, new hopes, restored faith and a deeper sense of love for themselves. The participants discovered God’s spirit deep within their hearts and they have come away with a more grounded understanding of life and a greater appreciation of their spiritual purpose. They do not feel alone, for they have discovered this sense of belonging to the kinship of all life.

²³² Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: the Journey Toward An Undivided Life* (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2008), 240.

The participants of this study have deepened their connection to their own true self, to God's spirit, to others and the natural world. Reflecting on their experiences they have come to understand the power of their place in life and know what it means to be at home with God. From this experience of being with others in need, they have drawn wisdom and inspiration from a deeper well.

Five themes emerged from this study. The participants shared that their prayer life had grown, both in frequency and in the depth of prayer. Through prayer and spending time with patients and residents they felt a closer connection to God. They felt God's constant presence, the nearness and support of God. Due to God's closeness the participant's self-confidence had increased. They knew they were not alone and they trusted that God would support them as they visited patients and residents in need. The participants developed more gratitude and less-judging behaviours from hearing others stories. As they opened their minds and hearts to other people, they became less judging of their own families which improved relationships between all family members. They focused on becoming better listeners, which helped with personal relationships. The participants of the study were passionate, loving people of God who developed a deeper and closer sense of spirit by providing spiritual care to others.

Transformation takes place on numerous levels. It has happened consciously and unconsciously for both the researcher and the participants of this study. Like the completed quilt, now providing comfort and warmth to me, the stories from the participants have given me more insights for wisdom to grow deep within. As an organic researcher revealing my own personal story, this was a humbling and enlightening experience. Topics of an intimate and sacred nature can best be explored by methods

which allow us to reflect and discern and which opens us up to transforming experiences. The participants of this study have metaphorically built their own quilts from sharing their inner thoughts of divine love and sense of spirit with the researcher. The stories of their patients and residents have interacted with their own stories, bringing them a change of mind and heart. These synchronous moments which they believe to be guided by the Spirit, validated their connection to all beings. This enterprise of understanding the deepening of one's spirit and quilt creation provides an overwhelming sense of peace and fulfillment. The evidence of this study clearly indicates a deepened sense of spirit for both the participants and researcher from an increased prayer life, a closer connection to God, more gratitude and less-judging behaviours, increased self-confidence and improved relationships with others.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The implications of this study will contribute to the development of knowledge related to spiritual formation. Much of spiritual formation is focused on church life and how best to use your gifts by helping other church members. Working in and for one's own church is an important avenue for spiritual formation. However, stepping outside one's own faith community and meeting people with no faith or no church affiliation, provides opportunities for spiritual growth in profound ways. Like the biblical prophets of old, stepping out of one's comfort zone does have its challenges. Rejection, differing theological beliefs and rituals and being faced with the unknown, make up some the many reasons why people do not go beyond their churches to seek spiritual growth.

This study will also help to discern the difference between healthy and unhealthy theology. The research participants, regardless of their faith traditions, upheld a loving, do no harm, ecumenical and non-evangelising spirit when visiting patients and residents. They were generally very well received by the patients and residents who they visited. The result was that the participants felt they offered supportive, non-judgemental comfort to people in crisis. They believed that they were a reflection of God's love and light to others. More research needs to be done in this area before it can be concluded that unhealthy theology works against the deepening of one's spiritual life.

Another area for further study in the area of deepening of spirit, is to explore how the patient's or resident's sense of spirit deepened by having spiritual care volunteers spend time with them. There are a number of studies addressing the role of the professional chaplain, but none focussing on the patients' viewpoint in the area of a deepened sense of spirit. This study would be of great value in the clinical setting where the ratio of professional chaplains to patients is a challenge. Experienced spiritual care volunteers could add to the spiritual care programs complement and provide much needed spiritual care at the bedside if demonstrated that the patient's sense of spirit changes, leading to better outcomes. It is the hope of this researcher that more people will offer their time to volunteer in the clinical setting thereby providing more opportunities for their own spiritual growth while meeting the needs of patients and residents.

As researcher, I have written my story and shared how my own sense of spirit has grown from studying at St. Stephen's College, my work as chaplain and my personal story of living life as a woman of faith. My spirit deepened further as I interviewed each

participant, read and re-read their stories. Their stories mirrored my own story of a deepened sense of spirit.

The fruits of the spirit as described in Galatians 5:22-23, reflect some of the findings of this study. This study has been about harvesting benefits.²³³ Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness and self-control; all these gifts and more are what the participants of this study have received from their experience of helping others. This study has been an example of the organic inquiry model wherein each story shared touches another and we grow and deepen our connection to God even more. As an organic inquiry researcher, my hope is that you, the reader of this paper, have also had your sense of spirit deepen. The search for knowing with the help of the Spirit, is never finished; like God's love...it goes on forever.

²³³ Galatians 5.22-23, NRSV.

APPENDIX

CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH TITLE: Spiritual Care Volunteers in Rural Hospital Ministry: Experience to Transformation.

RESEARCHER: Linda J. Ormson, PO Box xxx, Nanton, Alberta T0L 1R0

EMAIL: jxxxson@xxxxx.net TOLL FREE PHONE: 1-866-xxx-xxxx

This research in ministry study is to answer questions around your experiences of volunteering in spiritual care in rural hospitals/long term care facilities and hospices. The results will be used for the purpose of research data used in my project dissertation for a Doctor of Ministry degree at St. Stephen's College, Edmonton.

I am satisfied, having had the study explained to me and having had the opportunity to ask questions, that I can participate in this research under the following criteria:

- The information for the study will be obtained from the audio taped personal interviews. The interview will take approximately 2-3 hours.
- All information will be confidential to protect my anonymity and any personal information will be destroyed upon completion of the research.
- My identity will not be revealed and a coded name will be used in the research document.
- My participation is voluntary and I may withdraw at any time without prejudice.

I, _____(Please print your name) agree to participate as a volunteer in the above research study. My phone number is: _____.

Participant signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher signature: _____ Date: _____

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