THE USE OF SPIRITUALITY IN FOSTERING RESILENCE AMONG YOUNG ADULTS AT
HARDING UNIVERSITY

A Research Project

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By

Darryl C. Jason Darden

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STEP 1: DEFINITION

STEP 2: EXPLORATION AND ANALYSIS

Case Study Analysis & Description of Issue
State of Generation Z Mental Health & Institutional Setting(s)
Integration of Mental Health and Spirituality
Social Analysis & Case Study Analysis
Theological Concerns

STEP 3: CONSTRUCTIVE INTERPRETATION AND REFLECTION

Spirituality and Suffering & Case Study Analysis
Theological Perspectives on Trauma, Suffering, and Stress
Spirituality Through Religious Practice
Spirituality and Religious Struggle

STEP 4: STRATEGIC SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICE

Theology of Ministry
Strategic Suggestions for Harding University
The Appointment of a University Chaplain and the Organization of a Pastoral Care Team
The Development of a Center for Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy

STEP 1: DEFINITION

As a pastor, university professor, and Army reserve chaplain, I find myself heartbroken by the sharp increase in mental health diagnoses among young adults today. This sadness is born from my love for young people; I want the best for them. I am passionate about helping emerging adults flourish mentally, emotionally, relationally, and, most importantly, spiritually. In this project, I will explore the use of spirituality in fostering resilience among young adult populations. Specifically, what is resilience, and why do some young adults seem more resilient than others? How does a child's upbringing impact their ability to adapt and overcome challenges? What is spirituality, and what role does it play in fostering resilience among young adults? What are some best practices to increase resilience among Generation Z students in a university setting?

The American Psychological Association defines resilience as "The process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands."[1] In 2024, the term "trauma" has various meanings. To one person, a traumatic experience may mean the loss of a loved one. To another, a traumatic experience may mean the loss of internet connectivity. As a 42-year-old African American male, my definition of "trauma" may significantly differ from the 18-year-old Caucasian American female. However, most Americans would agree that the COVID-19 pandemic was challenging for young and older adults alike. John Eldredge, in his book titled *Resilient: Restoring Your Weary Soul in These Turbulent Times,* states, "What began in 2020 was a shared experience of global trauma, and trauma takes a toll. The long experience of losses great and small, all the high-volume tension

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[1] American Psychological Association. "Resilience." Accessed March 24, 2024.
https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience

around masks, quarantines, vaccines, school closures, and on and on the list goes."[2] Since the

pandemic, conversations surrounding mental health and wellness have increased dramatically.

Young adults are no longer afraid to publicly state, "I am struggling mentally." I find this to be a

form of resilience that was almost viewed as "unacceptable" when I was younger. So, rather

than attempting to define what a "traumatic experience" is, I find it essential to forgo our

individual definitions and focus on the process of adapting to and overcoming any plethora of

challenges. We should take pride in the fact that young people today are willing to seek mental

health care. Thankfully, a host of material is available on fostering resilience in young adults. I

find the resilience framework based on the work of Angie Hart at the University of Brighton

efficient and relevant. Hart believes in five specific approaches to fostering resilience in young

people. Young people need their basic needs met, a sense of belonging, a learning community,

coping skills, and a positive view of their core self.

Resilience Framework (Children & Young People) Oct 2012 – adapted from Hart & Blincow with Thomas 2007

SPECIFIC APPROACHES	BASICS	BELONGING	LEARNING	COPING	CORE SELF
	Good enough housing	Find somewhere for the child/YP to belong	Make school/college life work as well as possible	Understanding boundaries and keeping within them	Instil a sense of hope
		Help child/YP understand their place in the world		Being brave	Support the child/YP to understand other people's feelings
	Enough money to live	Tap into good influences	Engage mentors for children/YP	Solving problems	
	Being safe	Keep relationships going		Putting on rose-tinted glasses	Help the child/YP to know her/himself
	Access & transport	The more healthy relationships the better	Map out career or life plan		
	Healthy diet	Take what you can from relationships where there is some hope		Fostering their interests	Help the child/YP take responsibility for her/himself
	Exercise and fresh air	Get together people the child/YP can count on	Help the child/YP to organise her/himself	Calming down & self-soothing	
	Enough sleep	Responsibilities & obligations		Remember tomorrow is another day	Foster their talents
	Play & leisure	Focus on good times and places	Highlight achievements		
		Make sense of where child/YP has come from		Lean on others when necessary	There are tried and tested treatments for specific problems, use them
	Being free from prejudice & discrimination	Predict a good experience of someone or something new	Develop life skills		
		Make friends and mix with other children/YPs		Have a laugh	

NOBLE TRUTHS			
ACCEPTING	CONSERVING	COMMITMENT	ENLISTING

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[2] John Eldredge, *Resilient: Restoring Your Weary Soul in These Turbulent Times* (Nashville, Tennessee: Nelson Books, an imprint of Thomas Nelson, 2022), 15.
[3] Angie Hart. "What is the Resilience Framework." Accessed March 24, 2024.
https://www.boingboing.org.uk/resilience/resilient-therapy-resilience-framework

I believe Hart's five approaches to fostering resilience in young adults can be achieved through participation in spiritual practices and engagement with a religious community. Spirituality is a tool that can provide young people with answers to their most profound existential questions. Religion is typically practiced in community and often prevents isolation. Community is important because it lets young people know they are not alone; we need each other.

I have the unique privilege of serving as a New Testament professor at Harding University and chaplain in the United States Army Reserve (USAR). My full-time work as a professor allows me to express my theology without restraint. My work in the USAR limits this freedom as I minister to Soldiers with a host of different religious beliefs. I share Scriptures in the university setting to remind young people that God will meet their basic needs. Scriptures like Matthew 6, which states:

> So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or What shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.[4]

At Harding University, I strive to remind my students about the importance of trusting God during seasons of struggle and the significance of community. The Bible describes the church as a family where people can find a sense of belonging and oneness. Ephesians 2:19 states, "Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."[5] When functioning at its best, I believe the Christian faith can provide the solutions to Hart's five specific needs in the resilience framework.

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[4] Matthew 6:31-34 (NIV)
[5] Ephesians 2:19 (NIV)

However, in my role as USAR chaplain, I am careful not to push my Christian spirituality and religious convictions onto my young Soldiers. This is where I believe evidence-based therapies are incredibly beneficial to chaplains. I have gravitated toward problem-solving therapy and motivational interviewing while providing care to non-religious Soldiers. Studies show that young Soldiers often struggle with emotional dysregulation due to the stressful military environments they find themselves in. In Arthur M. Nezu's book titled *Problem-Solving Therapy: A Treatment Manual,* he states, "As such, the second Problem-Solving Toolkit focuses on helping individuals to better modulate their emotional reactions to stressful stimuli to prevent one's immediate negative emotional responses from becoming more intense as well as long-lasting. In essence, we describe this to clients as helping them to prevent the "train from leaving the station at an accelerating speed."[6] There is a host of non-religious material that teaches young adults how to regulate their emotions and flourish in the face of challenges. Additionally, the Army uses a resiliency training program to provide service members with tools for emotional regulation. My job as an Army chaplain is to serve religious and non-religious Soldiers with every tool I have at my disposal. Suppose spirituality and religion are not the places where a Soldier finds wholeness. Hopefully, the chaplain can point that Soldier or young person in the right direction by using evidence-based psychotherapies to provide care.

STEP 2: EXPLORATION AND ANALYSIS

Case Study Analysis & Description of Problem

In the Fall of 2021, D was a first-semester freshman in my New Testament survey course. Although it was nearly one hundred degrees in Central Arkansas, D wore long pants and an oversized jacket to class daily. She sat in the very back row and did not speak to her classmates

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[6] Arthur M. Nezu, Christine M. Nezu, and Thomas J. D'Zurilla, *Problem-Solving Therapy: A Treatment Manual* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2013), 151-152.

before or after afterward. She seemed disconnected, unhappy, and lacking confidence. During a

lecture, I briefly mentioned how spirituality can be used as a tool to help us thrive mentally.

Later that afternoon, I was surprised to receive an email from D stating that she was dealing with

anxiety and needed some support. I agreed to meet with D the next day; I had no idea this

meeting would change my ministry completely. As I visited with D, she made me aware of her

mental health diagnosis. She had generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder,

depression, an eating disorder, suicidal ideation, and social anxiety. My heart broke for this

young student, so that day, I committed to offering spiritual care to her whenever she needed it.

The meeting with D was timely because I had just begun my first semester at Vanderbilt in the

integrative chaplaincy program. During the first three semesters of study, I learned how to

integrate psychotherapies like ACT, MI, and PST within my role as a spiritual care provider. So,

I announced to the three hundred or so first-year students I teach, "If anyone needs spiritual

support or counseling this semester, I would be happy to meet with you." I did not anticipate the

response. There were so many requests that I needed to set up an online appointment schedule to

keep up with the number of students looking for spiritual care.

  This experience caused me to ask the question, "Why are so many young adults

struggling with their mental health today?" Immediately, I began to think about my own two

children. My 19-year-old daughter, a Generation Zer, experienced her own set of mental and

emotional challenges over the past year. The second question I asked myself was, "As a father,

professor, pastor, and Army chaplain to young adults, what can I do to help these young people

flourish spiritually and mentally?" I have always believed spirituality was vital to enhancing

mental and emotional wellness.

State of Generation Z Mental Health

In his 2016 book, *Generation Z Goes to College,* Corey Seemiller states, "As these students entered kindergarten, they saw newscasts of September 11, 2001. They witnessed the economy crash and saw the unemployment rate skyrocket. They have known only two US presidents and have lived in a world at war for the majority of their lives [SIC]."[7] Sadly, by nearly every metric, student mental health is worsening. During the 2020–2021 school year, more than 60% of college students met the criteria for at least one mental health problem, according to the Healthy Minds Study, which collects data from 373 campuses nationwide.[8] In another national survey, almost three-quarters of students reported moderate or severe psychological distress (National College Health Assessment, American College Health Association, 2021). Nearly every professor I know has witnessed a sharp increase in the number of students requesting academic accommodations for mental health-related issues.

Generation Z, born between 1995 and 2010, comprises today's college students. These young people experienced a surge in mental health-related issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, the American Psychological Association reported sharp increases in stress levels amongst Generation Z. The stressors listed were the number of mass shootings in America, the rise in suicide rates, climate change and global warming, separation and deportation of immigrant and migrant families, and widespread sexual harassment and assaults.[9] While the pandemic raged on, these young Americans struggled to cope with the

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[7] Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace, *Generation Z Goes to College* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 31.
[8] Zara Abrams, "Student Mental Health Is in Crisis Campuses Are Rethinking Their Approach.," *American Psychological Association*, Monitor on Psychology, 53, no. 7 (October 12, 2022), https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/10/mental-health-campus-care.
[9] Arthur C. Evans, "Stress in America: Generation Z. Stress in America Survey.," *American Psychological Association*, 2018, 9. https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2018/stress-gen-z.pdf

isolation and depression that ensued. In a recent survey by NORC at the University of Chicago,

researchers concluded:

> The pandemic has impacted many aspects of their lives (Gen Zers) beyond education and careers. More than half report that the pandemic has made it harder to have fun, and nearly half feel the same about being happy and maintaining their mental health. Many also report that it has been detrimental to their relationships with their friends, physical health, dating lives, the pursuit of hobbies, and other important aspects of being a young person.[10]

During an essential time of mental and physical development, Generation Z was forced to live in

isolation, complete education online, and live with uncertainty about the future. They witnessed

arguments over vaccinations, racial protests, and the political divide in America. They even saw

religious institutions like churches, synagogues, and mosques close their doors. I recently asked

several students to share how the pandemic impacted their lives. A few stated the pandemic was

good for them because they explored the great outdoors more. Others said, "I lost hope for a

while; I was not motivated to complete school online, and I missed hanging out with my

friends." Eventually, these young people were told, "The pandemic is now over; it's time to get

back to business as usual." So, should we be surprised that our young people today have

difficulty adjusting to "normal life?" What does "normal life" look like for Generation Z?

Uncertainty seems to be the norm for these young people.

Generation Z, also known as the Net Generation or iGeneration, grew up playing with

computers, tablets, and iPhones from birth. Several national studies report that Generation Z

uses social media four or more hours daily, double that of all U.S. adults. There are a host of

studies which discuss the relationship between screen time and poor mental health outcomes. In

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[10] AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, "Gen Z and the Toll of the Pandemic," accessed March 24, 2024, https://apnorc.org/projects/gen-z-and-the-toll-of-the-pandemic/.

a survey by Alexa Deyo, Josh Wallace, and Katherine Kidwell titled, *Screen Time and Mental Health in College Students* the authors conclude:

> Screen time significantly predicted higher anxiety, depression, and stress. Spending time outdoors ("green time") significantly predicted lower stress and depression but not lower anxiety. Green time moderated the relationship, such that college students who spent less time outside (1SD below mean) had consistent rates of mental health symptoms across hours of screentime, but individuals who spent average/above average (mean, 1SD above mean) time outside had fewer mental health symptoms at lower levels of screentime.[11]

As a Generation X/Y father of two teenagers, I did not fully understand how technology would impact the mental health and wellness of my children. While in middle school, my wife and I bought our children basic cell phones to call us for after-school pickup. As the years progressed, my wife and I passed our old smartphones to our children, not realizing screen time would become a significant issue. Instead of playing outdoors with their peers, our children would spend hours speaking with their friends over social media and watching videos. Sadly, my wife and I did not stay informed about the various social media apps popping up almost every week. We have good kids; we were not concerned about their online consumption. However, during a recent conversation with my oldest daughter, a 19-year-old freshman in college, I learned of her mental health-related issues resulting from her technology use as a child. She stated, "I would compare myself to others often and think I was not good enough or pretty enough. I learned about bulimia and self-harm through Instagram and Snapchat. Honestly, Dad, I think I had depression in high school." Sadly, our story is similar to that of most Generation Z parents in America. As these children enter college, they carry with them a host of mental health issues that will eventually surface during their transition into adulthood.

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[11] Alexa Deyo, Josh Wallace, and Katherine M. Kidwell, "Screen Time and Mental Health in College Students: Time in Nature as a Protective Factor," *Journal of American College Health: J of ACH*, February 16, 2023, 1–8, https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2022.2151843.

The American Psychological Association defines mental health as a state of mind characterized by emotional well-being, good behavioral adjustment, relative freedom from anxiety and disabling symptoms, and a capacity to establish constructive relationships and cope with the ordinary demands and stresses of life.[12] Recently, I spoke with a licensed professional counselor who stated that most Generation Z patients are likely to be diagnosed with anxiety and depression during their time in college.[13] Studies show that nine in ten Generation Z adults diagnosed with mental health issues say they struggle specifically with anxiety.[14] Every person will experience worry, stress, and anxiety at some point in their lives; the key to resilience is learning good coping skills.

I think a challenge for this generation is their lack of resilience and psychological flexibility. Before my research, I was more inclined to think that resiliency was mental strength, a never-quit attitude, or having grit. The Army's definition of resilience that I learned was the ability to withstand, adapt, recover, and grow in the face of challenges and demands. As a young Soldier, I would often hear statements like, "Embrace the suck," "suck it up and drive on," or "Tough times do not last; tough people do" to foster resilience during challenging times while in uniform. I was also a college athlete; on the football field, we would say things like, "Rub some dirt on it" or "Are you hurt or injured?" to foster a resilient mindset. Sadly, I brought these statements and ways of thinking about resilience to my institutional settings. I had a very basic understanding of what resilience was. Thus, becoming aware of my embedded biases about resilience is crucial to this project. Now, I know resilience is more than toughness; it is learning

[12] American Psychological Association, "Dictionary of Psychology," Accessed April 14, 2023, https://dictionary.apa.org/mental-health
[13] Abraham Chambers, interviewed by Jason Darden, Searcy, Arkansas, January 17, 2023.
[14] "State of Gen Z Mental Health 2022," Accessed April 14, 2023, https://www.harmonyhit.com/state-of-gen-z-mental-health/

to become psychologically flexible. In the words of famous martial artist and actor Bruce Lee, we must all "be like water." Water is both robust and amazingly adaptable. I believe this to be an excellent and practical illustration of what it means to be resilient.

Institutional Setting(s)

The institutional settings where I conduct ministry are threefold. Firstly, I serve as pastor of the Searcy Church of Christ in Searcy, Arkansas. The Searcy church is a small congregation averaging about 250 attendees on a Sunday morning. Our congregation mainly consists of faculty, staff, and students from Harding University. Most of the attendees are students from my New Testament survey courses. Secondly, I serve as the deputy division chaplain for the 91st training division in Camp Parks, California. As a division chaplain, I typically work with Army senior leaders to provide pastoral care to troops and their families. Sadly, I have very little face time with young Soldiers and spend most of my time planning religious support operations. Lastly, my full-time job is serving as an assistant professor of New Testament at Harding University. I typically teach about 300 students per semester.

I would like to narrow the focus to my work at Harding University for this project. Harding University is a 4-year private Christian institution in the small town of Searcy, Arkansas. Harding opened its doors in 1924 and is affiliated with the churches of Christ. The university comprises ten academic colleges providing undergraduate and graduate student education. The student population is approximately 4,800, with 314 full-time faculty and staff. Harding is one of several church of Christ-affiliated universities in the nation, along with Pepperdine University, Abilene Christian University, Oklahoma Christian University, Lipscomb University, and Freed-Hardmen University, just to name a few. Most of our universities have incredibly close ties with our denominational heritage.

The churches of Christ began during the *Protestant Restoration Movement* during the *Second Great Awakening*. The movement started with a large revival meeting in Cane Ridge, Kentucky 1801. During this meeting, several Christians agreed to drop their denominational ties and traditions in favor of being called "just Christians." These Christians rejected denominational creeds, adopting the Bible as their sole source of divine authority. One of the early founders of this movement, Thomas Campbell, famously stated, "We speak where the Bible speaks; where the Bible is silent, we are silent." The Protestant Restoration began as a unity movement but would eventually fracture into three distinct denominations: the Christian church, Disciples of Christ, and the churches of Christ. During the early 20th century, the churches of Christ began establishing Christian universities nationwide. At these universities, students were required to attend daily chapel services and enroll in eight semesters of theological study. Nearly the entire student body grew up attending local churches of Christ. Several of the New Testament professors were also well-known scholars and preachers. The professors taught their students at Harding University and doubled down as their spiritual care providers. There was no need for a university chaplain during these days.

Fast forward to 2024; Harding University is rapidly changing. Today, only about 60% of the student body is affiliated with the churches of Christ. The once all-white, Southern, conservative university has changed over the past 100 years. Generation Z students are leaving the churches of Christ at an alarming rate. Bobby Ross from the Christian Chronicle states:

> Since today's college freshmen were infants, roughly 1,200 churches of Christ in the United States have closed, and the number of men, women, and children in the pews nationally has shrunk by 200,000. In the same 18-year period, universities associated with the fellowship from Abilene Christian University in Texas to York College in Nebraska, have seen a 51 percent decline in students who identify with churches of Christ. Just 2,177 freshmen who enrolled at 14 such universities in fall 2017 gave their

religious affiliation as "church of Christ" down from 4,411 in fall 2000, a national survey found.[15]

With this change in mind, Harding is now in a season where nearly half of the student body disagrees with its doctrinal expressions. Many students no longer view religious faculty as their pastors or chaplains. Yet, most students at Harding still attend worship services on Sunday mornings and gather for small group devotionals during the week.

<u>Integration of Mental Health and Spirituality</u>

I believe many of these Generation Z students lack personal connections with mature spiritual leaders and mentors. These students need mentors willing to journey with them through the murky waters of existential crisis and spiritual exploration. With mental health-related issues on the rise at Harding, our students quickly turn to therapy and fail to see the connection between mental wellness and spirituality. Many tend to separate mental health and spirituality into two distinct categories. Religion and spirituality (R/S) occur in chapel, New Testament survey courses, and during Sunday morning services. Mental health care takes place in the university counseling center during the week. At Harding University, we are missing the bridge that connects these two categories; we are missing a team of integrative chaplains. Harding University needs a team of chaplains who collaborate with the university counseling center, student health center, and student life department to care for students experiencing mental health challenges and religious struggles.

Over the years, scientists and theologians have begun exploring the vital connection between spirituality and mental health. In her book titled *The Awakened Brain: The New Science of Spirituality and Our Quest for an Inspired Life,* Dr. Lisa Miller states, "Each of us is

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[15] Bobby Ross, "Christian Universities Feeling the Pinch" (Christian Chronicle, December 26, 2017), https://christianchronicle.org/christian-universities-feeling-the-pinch-as-churches-of-christ-shrink.

endowed with a natural capacity to perceive a greater reality and consciously connect to the life

force that moves in, though, and around us. Whether or not we participate in a spiritual practice

or adhere to a faith tradition, whether we identify as religious or spiritual, our brain has a natural

inclination toward and docking station for spiritual awareness."[16] During adolescence, between

late childhood and early adulthood, the brain's plasticity permits environmental influences that

make intellectual and emotional development possible. Maladaptive thinking and poor

environmental influences may lead to an inability to cope with daily stressors. Poor coping skills

will inevitably lead to many physical and emotional risk factors. According to the American

Psychological Association, maladaptive thinking is defined as "A condition in which biological

traits or behavior patterns are detrimental, counterproductive, or otherwise interfere with optimal

functioning in various domains, such as successful interaction with the environment and

effectual coping with the challenges and stresses of daily life."[17] The use of spirituality as a

coping mechanism can be a healthy alternative to maladaptive coping. *The Oxford Textbook of*

Spirituality in Healthcare states,

> When we turn to the literature on spirituality, the first impression is that it is similarly
> beneficial for health and well-being. Spirituality is perceived as a subjective experience
> that exists both within and outside traditional religious systems. It relates to the way in
> which people understand and live their lives in view of their sense of ultimate meaning
> and value. Spirituality, in this sense, includes the need to find satisfactory answers to
> ultimate questions about the meaning of life, illness, and death. It can be seen as
> comprising elements of meaning, purpose, value, hope, relationships, love, and, for some
> people, a connection to a higher power or something greater than self.[18]

Spirituality is a tool that can help us discover answers to life's existential questions. It can

provide us with hope and peace amid our challenges. Spirituality is essential to the lives of

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[16] Lisa Miller, *The Awakened Brain: The Psychology of Spirituality and Our Search for Meaning* (London: Allen
Lane, 2021), 15.
[17] American Psychological Association, "Dictionary of Psychology," Accessed April 14, 2023,
https://dictionary.apa.org/mental-health
[18] Mark Cobb, Christina M. Puchalski, and Bruce D. Rumbold, eds., *Oxford Textbook of Spirituality in Healthcare*,
Oxford Textbooks in Public Health (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 113-118.

young adults who are still developing ideas about the world and their place in it. Not only is spirituality a critical component of mental wellness, but R/S can also play a huge role in producing resilience in young adults.

In a 1997 article from the *American Journal of Public Health*, researchers explored the link between religious service attendance and mortality over twenty-eight years.[19] The results showed frequent attendees had lower mortality rates and were more likely to stop smoking, increase exercise, increase social contacts, and stay married. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that R/S can help prevent maladaptive thinking and behavior.

In a religious community, emerging adults can engage in intergenerational dialogue. Most young adults lack lived experience and need mature adults to help them navigate challenging life situations. Mentorship is an essential principle in most religious communities. According to Christian Scripture, the apostle Paul had a spiritual mentoring relationship with the young evangelist Timothy. Paul states in 2 Timothy 2:1-2, "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."[20] Clearly, Paul recognized the importance of mentoring younger generations. In another text, Paul tells Timothy to "flee youthful lusts" which in my opinion speaks to the connection between spirituality and healthy decision making. The term lust, here, is used to describe internal desires that draw us away from a relationship with the divine. Spiritually speaking, if a person loses their connection with the sacred, they risk exposing themselves to maladaptive thoughts and behaviors.

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[19] W. J. Strawbridge et al., "Frequent Attendance at Religious Services and Mortality over 28 Years," *American Journal of Public Health* 87, no. 6 (June 1997): 957–61, https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.87.6.957.
[20] 2 Timothy 2:1-2 (NIV)

Fortunately, Harding University has several resources available to help students flourish. The biopsychosocial needs of students are addressed within these university organizations. First, Harding has a student health center where my spouse is the primary care provider. Second, the university has a counseling center where therapists provide free counseling services to students. Third, the athletic department has a free program that encourages students to embrace a healthy lifestyle through proper nutrition and exercise. Finally, many local churches are near the university, and we have a small campus ministry presence. While Harding does not employ campus ministers, they serve as free resources for our students. Two years ago, Harding organized the "Living Well" committee, which consists of the organizations listed above, to meet the biopsychosocial needs of our students. Yet, to my knowledge, this committee has no campus ministry or chaplain representation. Sadly, I believe Harding is overlooking the spiritual needs of our most vulnerable students. The general assumption is that students receive spiritual care from their professors and at local church gatherings.

Social Analysis

As Harding University recruits prospective students, we typically target Christian high schools and larger churches of Christ. As membership in the churches of Christ continues to decline, we must broaden our recruiting efforts to include non-church of Christ-affiliated students. Most of our student-athletes are not affiliated with our denomination. We also have several students who identify as agnostic or atheists attending Harding. Additionally, we have an underground LGBTQ+ community that continues to grow every semester. Yet, in a 2023 study by the Barna Group, researchers concluded:

> Though religious affiliation and church attendance continue to decline, spiritual openness and curiosity are on the rise. Across every generation, we see an unprecedented desire to grow spiritually, a belief in a spiritual/supernatural dimension, and a belief in God or a higher power.

> The challenge facing the church and parachurch ministries is whether they are ready and able to meet the spiritually open—where they are, as they are. Our data shows the church has real work to do to bridge the trust gap for people who are spiritual but not religious.[21]

With this study in mind, it is essential to remember not every student at Harding University is religious. 40% of the student population did not grow up attending a church of Christ denomination. Sadly, the overwhelming lack of diversity has remained constant at Harding University. The university is in Searcy, Arkansas, with a population of 23,000. According to the most recent survey, the racial/ethnic composition of Searcy was:

White: 83.01%, Black or African American: 9.67%, two or more races: 3.2%, other races: 2.12%, Asian: 1.72%, Native American: 0.28%, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander: 0%[22]
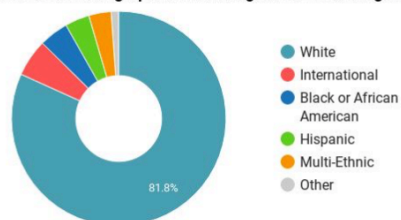

Harding Male/Female Ratio

- Women
- Men

45.1% 54.9%
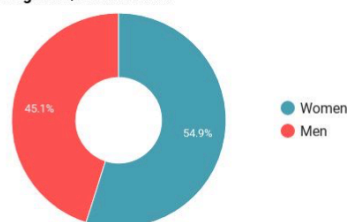
For the gender breakdown for all students, go here.

Harding Racial/Ethnic Breakdown of Undergraduates

Racial-Ethnic Demographics of Harding Full-Time Undergradua…

- White
- International
- Black or African American
- Hispanic
- Multi-Ethnic
- Other

81.8%

[23]

Harding's ethnic demographics are like that of Searcy, Arkansas. 81% of the student population is White, 5% African American, 3% Hispanic or Latino, 3% Multiethnic, 2% Asian American, 1% Native American, 1% Pacific Islander. Most of the students are from the states of Arkansas, Texas, Tennessee, Oklahoma and Alabama. The male to female ratio at Harding is 54% female and 45% male.

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[21] David Kinnaman, "Rising Spiritual Openness in America," *Barna Group*, January 18, 2023, https://www.barna.com/research/rising-spiritual-openness/.

[22] "Searcy, Arkansas Population 2023," Accessed April 14, 2023, https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/searcy-ar-population

[23] "Harding Demographics and Diversity Report," Accessed April 14, 2023, https://www.collegefactual.com/colleges/harding-university/student-life/diversity/

95% of the faculty at Harding University are White. I serve as the only African American New Testament professor at the university. Nationwide, there are only about five tenured African American religion professors in church of Christ-affiliated universities. The overwhelming lack of diversity at Harding is problematic for several reasons. First, it causes students who are not a part of the majority to assimilate into Southern, White, conservative church of Christ culture. Secondly, students in the majority are presented with limited opportunities to develop cultural competency while at Harding University. Thirdly, the lack of diversity creates a narrow worldview. This narrow worldview does not see the value in diverse theological positions and non-White ethnic representation.

The students visiting my office for spiritual support are single females aged 18 to 21. Half of the female students are White; the other half are African American or Multiethnic. Often, these female students struggle with depression, anxiety, eating disorders, self-harm, sexual trauma, LGBTQ+-related concerns, and religious struggle. The men who visit my office are usually White, single, agnostic, and struggle with suicidal ideation, ranging in age from 19 to 22 years old. I have noticed that African American, Latino-American, and Asian American males do not typically reach out to me for spiritual support. I see this as a tremendous opportunity. There is a recurring theme among the students I care for: they do not fit into the dominant culture at Harding University. During my counseling sessions with students, we often discuss race, theodicy, and religious or spiritual growth questions.

Case Study

For example, V is a 21-year-old African American female student. She is currently single and dealing with sexual identity issues. V has struggled with depression in the past and currently visits the university counseling center once a month for a "checkup." She is a reticent

student, always wearing headphones while walking around campus. Recently, she has felt

conflicted about her faith and her sexuality. She is attracted to the same sex but believes the

Bible prohibits these types of relationships. She wants her same-sex attraction to disappear; she

wants to marry a male and have a family in the future. Sadly, she was sexually abused by a male

church member at the age of ten. Therefore, she often questions why God would allow this to

happen to her. During college, she began to view pornography and frequently dreamed about

being in a relationship with a woman. Additionally, she stated she feels more male than female

at times. Yet, she is conflicted because her theology does not allow her to have a relationship

with a female. V is a classic example of the type of student who visits my office for spiritual

support. These students require mentorship from seasoned adults who understand the

importance of integrating spirituality and mental health concerns. These students need a safe

place to explore their spirituality and mental health.

Theological concerns

In the *Oxford Textbook of Spirituality in Healthcare*, Abu-Raiya and Pargament explore

the links between religion and health, which they state:

> In a study of religious college students, Bergin et al. [36-37] found a positive correlation
> between intrinsic religiousness and sociability, sense of wellbeing and tolerance, and a
> negative correlation between extrinsic religiousness and the same criteria. Similarly,
> Ryan et al. [26] found that higher levels of identification were associated with higher
> self-esteem, less depression, anxiety, and social functioning, while higher levels of
> introjection were negatively associated with these variables.[24]

In his chapter on *Healthcare Spirituality: A Question of Knowledge,* Swinton states*,* "Religion is

perceived as a formal system of beliefs held by groups of people who share certain perspectives

on the nature of the world. These perspectives are communicated through shared narratives,

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[24] Abu-Raiya, H. & Pargament, K.I. (2012). On the links between religion and health: What has empirical research
taught us? In M. Cobb, C.M. Puchalski, and B. Rumbold (Eds.), *Oxford Textbook of Spirituality in Healthcare* (333-
339). New York: Oxford University Press.

practices, beliefs, and rituals that, taken together, create particular worldviews."[25] The evidence

suggests that participation in R/S is helpful for college students. Yet, research also suggests

Generation Z is far less religious than previous generations. However, their level of spiritual

curiosity is still relatively high. Swinton further states:

> Spirituality is perceived as a subjective experience that exists both within and outside
> traditional religious systems. It relates to how people understand and live their lives in
> view of their sense of ultimate meaning and value. Spirituality, in this sense, includes the
> need to find satisfactory answers to ultimate questions about the meaning of life, illness,
> and death. It can be seen as comprising elements of meaning, purpose, value, hope,
> relationships, love, and, for some people, a connection to a higher power or something
> greater than self.[26]

Many of the students who visit my office for spiritual support are anxious, depressed, have low

self-esteem and suicidal ideation, and tend to isolate themselves socially. I believe engaging in

religious practice would be beneficial for these students. Yet, many students resist religious

practice while at Harding because of the requirement to attend daily chapel and enroll in eight

semesters of theological study. Additionally, every faculty member at Harding University must

be a member of the church of Christ denomination. Professors lead prayers and share scriptures

during lectures in nearly every class meeting. So, Harding students are inundated with daily

religious practice when they step on campus. Sadly, it feels as if we are "force-feeding" religion

to the student body, and many are resistant.

Our former president, Dr. Bruce McLarty, wrote his doctoral dissertation on how faith-

based schools tend almost inevitably to walk away from their faith, given enough time, and,

ironically, often become enemies of the faith that founded them. Unfortunately, President

McLarty transitioned from Harding University in 2020 amid declining enrollment and racial

tension. There is a general feeling amongst the faculty and staff that Harding University is

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[25] John, Swinton. Healthcare spirituality: A question of knowledge. In M. Cobb, C.M. Puchalski, and B. Rumbold
(Eds.), *Oxford Textbook of Spirituality in Healthcare* (99-104). New York: Oxford University Press.
[26] Cobb, Puchalski, and Rumbold, *Oxford Textbook of Spirituality in Healthcare,* 99-104.

losing its religious distinctiveness. However, I do not see it that way. Rather than functioning

from a paradigm of fear, I view this as a season of opportunity. We have the opportunity to

journey with spiritually curious students to help them discover meaning, purpose, value, hope,

and love. I believe this is what Jesus Christ accomplished during his three-year ministry on

earth. He shared love with people struggling mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Jesus states in John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."[27] There

are many ways to offer "life" to spiritually curious students without leaning too heavily into our

religious practices, causing them to turn away.

  In Acts 17, the Apostle Paul visits Athens and is disturbed by a city full of idols. Rather

than offering his critique of the idolatrous culture, he worked to contextualize his message. Paul

states, "People of Athens! I see that in every way, you are very religious. For as I walked

around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this

inscription: to an unknown god."[28] The apostle Paul could have quoted several Old Testament

commandments about the sin of idolatry. Instead, he values the Athenian's devotion to their

various deities. Through this connection, Paul offers his perspective on creation and

existentialism. Paul was gentle and non-judgmental in his address to the spiritual curious. As

spiritual care providers, we must embody this approach as we care for spiritually curious young

adults.

  I believe spiritual care providers must work to contextualize a message of hope for

Generation Z. A generation struggling with addiction to technology, mental health-related

issues, and a lack of religiosity but with tons of spiritual curiosity. It is important to note that the

word religion is only used about five times in our modern English translations of the New

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[27] John 10:10 (NIV)
[28] Acts 17:22-23 (NIV)

Testament. The koine Greek word *pneuma,* which means spirit, is used over 350 times in the

New Testament. The Scripture heavily emphasizes spirituality and resilience in the face of

hardship (*i.e., The Beatitudes*). So, could it be that resistance to religion and openness to

spirituality align more with the message of Christ? The Generation Z students at Harding

University may be on the right track. Jesus was a spiritual care provider who did not offer

religion to his followers. Instead, he provided faith, hope, and love amid their suffering. As

spiritual care providers, we believe leaning into spirituality can help people overcome their

mental, physical, and emotional challenges. We believe spirituality helps human beings flourish.

We believe spirituality fosters resilience in the face of suffering.

According to the American Psychological Association, resilience is "The process and

outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through

mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands."[29]

I believe Generation Z needs support navigating difficult life experiences during the school year.

Research suggests the human brain does not fully develop until about 25 years old. Without the

proper education, young people may turn to maladaptive coping mechanisms to find relief from

their mental and emotional challenges. In a recent article from *Psychology Today,* Elizabeth

Mancuso states, "Resilience is fundamentally linked to coping, which involves the many ways

people respond to adversity in their efforts to rebound. Having many coping options within one's

coping toolkit is particularly helpful for resilience. Spiritual coping methods can expand a

person's coping repertoire beyond their nonspiritual forms of coping."[30] The challenge that

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[29] American Psychological Association, "Dictionary of Psychology," Accessed April 14, 2023, https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience
[30] Elizabeth Krumrei Mancuso, "Is Spiritual Coping in Your Toolkit?" last modified January 19, 2019, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hope-resilience/201902/is-spiritual-coping-in-your-toolkit

exists at Harding University is the lack of bridge builders. On one side, there is the conservative church of Christ religion. On the other side, there is ambivalence and spiritual curiosity. Employing university chaplains may be a great solution to help bridge this gap at Harding. Rather than forcing these young students to assimilate into the church of Christ religious culture, maybe we should encourage them as they explore their spirituality with seasoned mentors.

STEP 3: CONSTRUCTIVE INTERPRETATION AND REFLECTION

Spirituality and Suffering & Case Study Analysis

In her 2020 article, *Gen Z: A Generation of Trauma and Compassion*, Ashley Laderer suggests that terrorist attacks, increased suicide rates, divisive politics, the COVID-19 pandemic, Black Lives Matter protests, and the rise of White supremacy have caused Generation Z to be known as a generation of trauma.[31] As I work with this generation, I often wonder about how they understand their experiences of "trauma." Is it trauma, or perhaps better described as suffering or stress? This is an important question to consider whenever we experience challenges.

Recently, I met with an 18-year-old Harding University student who wanted to discuss her mental health challenges. As we spoke, she used the word trauma several times to describe what she had experienced. For example, one Sunday morning, she visited a small church in rural Arkansas with her family and listened to a sermon on the dangers of sexual promiscuity. In the sermon, the pastor stated, "If you engage in sexual immorality, you will end up in hell!" The student said she felt extremely uncomfortable and now struggles with Christianity because of the sermon. She stated, "No one wants to go to a church where you listen to a pastor guilt everyone

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[31] Ashley Laderer, "Gen Z's Mental Health Crisis and Collective Trauma," *Charlie Health*, March 1, 2023, https://www.charliehealth.com/post/gen-zs-mental-health-crisis-collective-trauma.

in the congregation." She believed this was an example of religious trauma. While listening to her story, I began to realize that my definition of trauma and her definition were utterly different.

As the conversation concluded, the student suggested Generation Z was a very resilient generation because of all the trauma they experienced and overcame. However, I have seen a pattern in my students where the use of spirituality in fostering resilience does not sit well with them. Most of my students believe they are resilient and fail to see how spirituality can help keep their brains healthy and happy. Yet, there was one point we agreed on during our discussion; human beings experience suffering. We must discover how to navigate suffering so it does not get the best of us. It is important to remember that we all have different definitions of trauma and suffering. How we allow those seasons of trauma and suffering to shape us is where resilience comes into play. Additionally, trauma is different than common everyday stress; all human beings experience stress. Yet, a significant difference between stress and trauma is the length of stay in our brains and bodies. Stress can be acute, come on suddenly, and last briefly or only a few days. Trauma, on the other hand, stays with us and may prevent us from flourishing if left untreated.

While every generation can be affected by trauma, studies show that young adults are more vulnerable to mental health challenges compared to older populations. Since the frontal cortex does not fully develop until the mid to late 20's, younger populations work overtime to make sense of everything happening in the world. Sadly, these young people turn to harmful coping mechanisms while attempting to process the plethora of information they receive using technology. Older generations, however, had vastly different childhood experiences. The internet was either nonexistent or just emerging. Technology was slow; the devices were bulky and used in public spaces, not in isolation. Older generations spent more time outdoors and

socialized with friends face to face. Active shooter drills were not part of their educational

upbringing. Religious participation was a thread that connected communities. Older generations

began working earlier than Generation Z. A 2017 study on resilience concluded that older adults

were more resilient due to family socialization, religious faith during childhood, and a well-

grounded working life.[32] Generation Z is growing up in a time of information overload, and

many lack the coping skills and social support needed to foster resilience or navigate their

suffering.

Angie Hart's resilience framework speaks of five approaches to fostering resilience in

young people. Young people need their basic needs met, a sense of belonging, a learning

community, coping skills, and a positive view of their core self.[33]   In the case study mentioned

above, fortunately, the university student had a strong family life (needs met & belonging). The

student's parents spoke with her often about her mental health challenges (learning community).

Secondly, they encouraged her to participate in religious practice, which ultimately led to greater

resistance to organized religion (learning community). Lastly, the student found purpose in

working part-time and attending Harding University full-time (coping skills & positive view of

core self). She was able to navigate her mental health challenges and foster resilience through

learning new skills. Resilience is the glue that keeps our lives from falling apart during

suffering, trauma, and stress.

Theological Perspectives on Suffering, Trauma & Stress

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[32] Parkhide Hassani et al., "A Phenomenological Study on Resilience of the Elderly Suffering from Chronic Disease: A Qualitative Study," *Psychology Research and Behavior Management* 10 (2017): 59–67, https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S121336.

[33] Angie Hart, "Resilience Framework," accessed March 24, 2024, https://www.boingboing.org.uk/resilience/resilient-therapy-resilience-framework/.

Why do human beings suffer? From the Christian perspective, many believe human suffering results from the fall. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden when a serpent appeared. The serpent approached Eve and asked, "Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?"[34] Eve answers the serpent's question with the directive she and Adam received from God. The serpent responds, "You will not certainly die, for God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."[35] Surprisingly, the serpent is somewhat correct because Adam and Eve did not die when they partook of the fruit that day.

Yet, the consequence of their disobedience would have lasting effects. Theologian Walter Brueggemann suggests the fall in Genesis is not a narrative of how death came into the world but rather a story of the anxious-ridden life that would plague Adam, Eve, and their descendants.[36] Consequently, Adam and Eve's self-reliance led to anxiety, stress, suffering, and trauma. Painful labor, long, hard days of work, and ultimately, death became a part of our reality. Both the religious and non-religious seek to discover the origin of human suffering or at least attempt to understand it. Regardless of our hypotheses, one thing is apparent: every human will experience some form of suffering. Suffering is undergoing pain, distress, or hardship. Yet, our threshold for pain is on a case-by-case basis. Suffering for one is not suffering for another. When a person describes a traumatic experience, typically, they describe a season of intense suffering. Trauma and suffering are related; in many ways, they are close cousins. Shelly Rambo describes trauma as "The suffering that doesn't go away. In most cases, when we experience suffering, those experiences become integrated into who we are in time."[37]

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[34] Genesis 3:1 (NIV)
[35] Genesis 3:4-5 (NIV)
[36] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 1. ed (Louisville, Ky.: Westminister John Knox Press, 2010), 18.
[37] Shelly Rambo, Video 6.1: A theological rethinking of trauma and suffering (Vanderbilt Divinity School Lecture)

Theologian James Cone once stated, "The best place to begin an examination of the problem of suffering is with the Bible."[38] Traumatic experiences appear throughout both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. For example, in 2 Samuel chapters 13-15, King David experiences family trauma resulting from his adultery with Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of her husband Uriah. In 2 Samuel 13, David's son Amnon rapes his half-sister, Tamar. David learns of Amnon's indiscretion and is utterly heartbroken and depressed. To add further insult to injury, Tamar's brother, Absalom, kills his half-brother and Amnon and flees the country. In a matter of three years, David's daughter was raped through incest, his son was murdered, and Absalom was on the run. Eventually, Absalom returns home to a father whose household and kingdom were in ruin. King David dealt with severe depression and failed to govern his people properly, so the responsibility of governing fell upon his son Absalom. In 2 Samuel 15, Absalom steals the hearts of the Jewish people and conspires with a band of young soldiers to kill his father. King David experienced seasons of intense suffering due to the traumatic events within his family life. The story of King David is an excellent biblical example of suffering and resilience amid unspeakable traumas.

Throughout Psalms, David presents several questions to God amidst his suffering. Questions like, how long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? Who praises you from the grave? These questions reflect the nature of his relationship with the divine. David shared an intimate relationship with God but sometimes felt abandoned, afraid, alone, and without hope. Finally, in 2 Samuel 17, Absalom dies in battle when his hair gets

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[38] James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Rev. ed (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997), 31-32.

caught in an oak tree, and three javelins are plunged into his heart. The traumas of adultery,

murder, incest, war, and losing a child were all issues David experienced in his lifetime.

How did King David endure the difficulties he faced while fleeing from his son

Absalom? The answer to that question is resilience. Psalm 3 communicates that David found a

sense of resilience through his relationship with the divine. In his book, *The Life of King David,*

Chaplain J.S. Park states, "David allowed the emptiness of his heart to take a full course until the

bottom gives out so that he has no other choice but to find refuge in a bottomless God. The

resolve of every Psalm could only come by scraping along the walls of a downward spiral until

there was a landing. It's in our full-on grief that we find the fullness of grace."[39] There is

something about grief and suffering that causes most human beings to reach for a source of

divine assistance or inner strength.

In Psalm 3, David's enemies were numerous; many believed God could not deliver him

from Absalom. Yet, in verse three, David states, "But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my

glory, the One who lifts my head high."[40] In his relationship with God, there was protection

from the bandits who were attempting to take his life. God had become his glory, or a being of

most importance to him. David was discouraged and defeated and did not possess the will to

continue. Yet, his relationship with God gave him the power to keep pressing on. In verses 4-7,

God gave David a listening ear when he prayed, motivation to wake up in the morning, courage

in the face of fear, and hope that he would be delivered from the enemies seeking his life.

Whether we believe the stories of King David or think they are fictitious, David found resilience

through his relationship with God. In Psalm 3, spirituality played an essential role in enduring

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[39] J.S. Park, *The Life of King David: How God Works Through Ordinary Outcasts and Extraordinary Sinners* (Way Everlasting Ministry, 2015), 25.
[40] Psalm 3:3 (NIV)

the traumatic events he faced. David found meaning, purpose, value, love, life, and hope when

he needed it the most. Spirituality can be a coping mechanism where people find wholeness

amidst suffering, even for a moment. David's resilience gave him the strength to keep living and

keep fighting. In her book titled *David in Distress: His Portrait through the Historical Psalms*,

Professor Vivian Johnson states, "A close reading of the narrative of Psalm 3 brings out a

heightened sense of danger for David at the time of Absalom's rebellion and suggests that he

escapes his predicament with divine succor."[41] This divine assistance was offered to David

through his use of spirituality. The Holy Spirit provided David with the inner strength to carry

on.

David's resilience through spirituality was a process he learned over time. Before David

became king, he worked as a shepherd caring for his father's sheep. After his appointment to the

kingship by the prophet Samuel, the first challenge he faced was a warrior named Goliath. Yet,

David learned resilience in the face of danger through his time as a shepherd. In 1 Samuel 17,

David states:

> I have been taking care of my father's sheep and goats. When a lion or a bear comes to
> steal a lamb from the flock, I go after it with a club and rescue the lamb from its mouth.
> If the animal turns on me, I catch it by the jaw and club it to death. I have done this to
> both lions and bears, and I'll do it to this pagan Philistine, too, for he has defied the
> armies of the living God! The Lord who rescued me from the claws of the lion and the
> bear will rescue me from this Philistine![42]

Resilience is adapting to difficult life experiences through mental, emotional, and

behavioral flexibility. David used psychological flexibility throughout his life to deal with

anxiety, depression, anger, grief, shame, and guilt. Undoubtedly, David's primary coping

mechanism was the intimate relationship he shared with his God. Secondly, he wrote several

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[41] Vivian Johnson, *David in Distress: His Portrait through the Historical Psalms* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2020), 52.
[42] 1 Samuel 17:33-34 (NIV)

songs and prayers throughout the Psalms and played instruments as forms of externalization to alleviate his cognitive fusion. Psychological flexibility, positive coping, and externalization are principles in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Problem-Solving Therapy (PST), and Motivational Interviewing (MI).

Kanako Taku, associate professor of psychology at Oakland University, states, "Resiliency is the personal attribute or ability to bounce back; post-traumatic growth, on the other hand, refers to what can happen when someone who has difficulty bouncing back experiences a traumatic event that challenges their core beliefs, endures psychological struggle and then ultimately finds a sense of personal growth." "It's a process that "takes a lot of time, energy, and struggle."[43] 1 Kings, the final scene of David's life, begins with the king as an older man near the end of his life. He is feeble, frail, and unable to keep warm, regardless of how many blankets were placed on him. David is depicted as a warrior whose youth and vigor are no more. Although he experienced unbearable suffering, his intimate relationship with God remains. Throughout his life, David experienced seasons of suffering, stress, and trauma, yet he never seemed to lose faith in the providence of his God. Even during his last days, David is surrounded by a community who care for his wellbeing. David's suffering concludes when he accepts his pending death and places his hope in the promise that one of his descendants will sit on his throne for eternity. The evidence-based practice of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) teaches that cultivating a stance of acceptance decreases unnecessary suffering, allowing us to make choices in life based on meaning and values rather than fighting with what the day brings.[44] This is precisely what King David does during the final chapter of his life.

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[43] Lorna Collier, "Growth after Trauma," *American Psychological Association* 47, no. 10 (November 2016): 48.
[44] Jason A. Nieuwsma, Robyn D. Walser, and Steven C. Hayes, eds., *ACT for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors: Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to Bridge Psychological and Spiritual Care* (Oakland, CA: Context Press, 2016).

Spirituality Through Religious Practice

Spirituality is a term that can be somewhat difficult to define. Theologian Jurgen Moltmann believes the "spirit" is the love of life that delights us, and the energies of the spirit are the living energies that this love of life awakens in us. The Spirit of God is called the Holy Spirit because it makes our life here something living.[45] For Christians, spirituality is just one of three elements that make us human. The apostle Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."[46] Paul presents three elements Christ's followers must care for in this text. The body, our physical being, the soul, our inner being, and the spirit, the invisible force we allow into our being. The Hebrew word for spirit is *Ruah,* which means wind or an impersonal natural force. It is often extended to mean breath or spirit of life. The first time the word *Ruah* is used in the Hebrew Bible is found in Genesis 1:2, "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God *(Ruah)* was hovering over the waters."[47] The spirit in this text was God's divine presence in a space of darkness and emptiness. During seasons of suffering, people often describe themselves as empty, dim, and hopeless. Yet, the spirit offers us life amid our dark and hopeless state.

In the New Testament, the scripture uses the Greek word *Pneuma* to describe the spirit. The Holy Spirit first appears in the Gospel of Matthew in verse 1:18, which states, "This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit."[48]

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[45] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 42.
[46] 1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NIV)
[47] Genesis 1:2 (NIV)
[48] Matthew 1:18 (NIV)

In the text, the Holy Spirit possessed the power to create human life in the womb of a young woman. The epistle of James conveys the necessity of the human body being filled with the Spirit. James, the brother of Jesus, states, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."[49] The person who does not live with or by the Spirit can be best described as hopeless. In other words, a hopeless person lacks meaning and purpose; they are dead on the inside. Spirituality is an invisible force that produces life within our inner being; it gives us a reason to live. As Jesus began his public ministry, he traveled to his hometown of Nazareth to share what the *Ruah* or *Pneuma* of God commissioned him to do. In Luke 4:18-19 he states, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."[50] It is the Spirit that gave Jesus meaning and purpose for his existence. Throughout his life, Jesus leaned heavily into spiritual practice to foster resilience in the face of horrific challenges. From his youth, Jesus observed the Jewish festivals at the temple in Jerusalem. He attended worship services in local synagogues. Christ prayed, studied the Hebrew Bible, and fasted often. When the crowds became overbearing, he searched for solitude, and after feeling refreshed, he rejoined his community of disciples. Jesus practiced generosity by serving people experiencing poverty and providing pastoral care to those who were marginalized.

Jesus understood that religious practice was a tool to foster greater spirituality. Jesus and his disciples were practicing Jews who experienced their fair share of religious struggle. It was the religious who condemned Jesus to death on the cross. While waiting to be arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus began to sweat drops of blood and stated, "My soul is

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[49] James 2:26 (NIV)
[50] Luke 4:18-19 (NIV)

overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."[51] Under

extreme stress and anxiety, Jesus turns to the religious practice of prayer to find relief from his

suffering. He also pleads with his disciples to remain by his side because he understood the

value of community during seasons of suffering. Like King David, Jesus clings to his

relationship with God to foster the resilience needed to endure the suffering he experienced.

Spirituality through religious practice gave Jesus the will to carry on.

Through religion, many human beings find life, meaning, and purpose. At Harding

University, our core value is the integration of faith, learning, and living. This means developing

the whole person through a commitment to Christ and the Bible as the Word of God, an

emphasis on lifelong intellectual growth, and the encouragement of Christian service and world

missions through a servant-leadership lifestyle.[52] As a university, Harding enforces religious

practice through daily convocation and mandatory Bible courses over eight semesters of study.

Much of the student body welcomes these practices because religion is where they find meaning

and purpose, or in other words, life. Today, the religious practices of Harding University are not

as important to Generation Z as they were to previous generations. Professor James Hudnut-

Beumler speaks of the declining significance of religion in his lecture on *21st Century Religion in

America*. He claims that 22% of 18–29-year-olds do not believe much or act on their supposed

faith. Hudnut-Beunler also states, "The challenge to Christianity in the U.S. does not come from

other religions but rather from a rejection of all forms of organized religion."[53] In a recent study

on religion and depression among US college students, researchers concluded that students who

profess a religious faith had fewer symptoms of depression than those with no religious

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[51] Matthew 26:38 (NIV)
[52] https://www.harding.edu/about/mission
[53] James Hudnut-Beumler, *Religion in 21st-Century America* (Vanderbilt Divinity School Lecture)

affiliation.[54] The study also claimed that religion is a social network that helps students cope during stressful seasons. So, as the rise of religious "nones" continues across college campuses, is there room for spirituality apart from religion? If one assumes spirituality is a life-giving force and not merely the practice of religion, then the answer to that question is yes. It is essential to note the distinction between spirituality and religious practice when providing care to young adults. Participation in religious practice is good, but daily connection with the Spirit is even better.

Spirituality and Religious Struggle

Atheist philosopher Sam Harris believes spirituality must be distinguished from religion because people of every faith and of no faith have had the same spiritual experiences. In his book titled *Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion,* Harris states, "There is nothing a Christian, Muslim, or Hindu can experience (self-transcending love, ecstasy, bliss, and inner light) that constitutes evidence in support of their traditional beliefs because their beliefs are logically incompatible with one another. A deeper principle must be at work."[55] He believes the deeper principle is the illusion of self. The illusion of self is a subjective experience generated by the brain that is not real in nature.[56] The illusion of self is quite similar to self-as-content, which is a principle found in acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). Self-as-content simply means, "I am what I say about myself." Harris defines spirituality as deepening the understanding of science, philosophy, and psychology and cutting through the illusion of self. I disagree with Harris' definition of spirituality and believe that self-transcendence is fundamental

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[54] Rick Philips, and Andrea Henderson. "Religion and Depression Among U.S. College Students." International Social Science Review 81, no. 3/4 (2006): 166–72. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41887283.

[55] Sam Harris, *Waking up: A Guide to Spirituality without Religion*, First Simon&Schuster (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 34-35.

[56] Sam Harris, "The Illusion of the Self," accessed March 27, 2024, https://www.samharris.org/blog/the-illusion-of-the-self2.

to spirituality. In a general sense, spirituality itself promotes self-as-context. Spirituality

assumes the numinous, that something or someone is bigger than me. This in itself promotes the

possibility of noticing oneself from a distance.[57] Rather than discarding the illusion of self, I

believe spirituality aids human beings in becoming aware that there is more to life than the sum

of our thoughts.

In 2024, today's university classrooms are filled with Generation Z students. As they

arrive on campus for the first time, they bring baggage with them. Their bags are filled with

clothes, toiletries, and trinkets from home, but also baggage filled with anxiety, stress, and fear.

Developmental specialists consider ages 18-24 as late adolescence, a time fraught with issues.

Issues such as autonomy from parents, leaving home, sexuality, career choice, and religious

identity. As these students wrestle with their newfound independence, stressors can turn into

increased anxiety, depression, sleeplessness, headaches, colds, eating disorders, and even

suicidal ideation.[58] Harding University has an undergraduate student population of

approximately 5,000, and every one of those students needs spiritual, mental, and emotional care.

On any given week, the university counseling center cares for over 300 students. With

only 12 therapists in the counseling center, many students cannot receive professional mental

health care. Many of these students turn to their professors for mentorship, counseling, and

support during seasons of distress. As a Christian university, we encourage our students

struggling mentally to engage in religious practice. To strengthen themselves through prayer,

scripture study, and attending worship. Yet, for many students, their theodicy is still emerging as

they struggle to make sense of their recent challenges. In a 2003 survey of 3,860 first-year

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[57] Nieuwsma, Walser, and Hayes, *ACT for Clergy and Pastoral Counselors*.
[58] Timothy Baghurst, and Betty C. Kelley. "An Examination of Stress in College Students Over the Course of a Semester." Health Promotion Practice 15, no. 3 (2014): 438–47. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26740524.

college students, researchers concluded students were less likely to attend religious services, pray, or meditate while in college. In this same study, college seniors reported becoming less religious since starting college.[59] However, at religiously affiliated universities, students reported a strengthening of their religious convictions at the time of graduation.

The American Psychological Association defines religious struggle as tensions, strains, and conflicts about what people hold sacred. Exline, Pargament, Grubbs, and Yali (2014) identified six types of religious/spiritual struggles: divine, demonic, doubt-related, moral, struggles of meaning, and interpersonal struggles.[60] Research shows that attending a religiously affiliated university generally leads to greater gains in religious commitment. Yet, Small and Bowman (2011) state, "The overall findings for religious struggle are also largely unexpected. The same groups of students and institutions that have greater religious growth also have greater gains in religious struggle."[61] There are several reasons college students experience religious struggle. Firstly, students at religious institutions are often exposed to new theology that challenges their preexisting ideas. Secondly, exposure to racial/ethnic diversity in the university setting can lead to internal struggle and questioning of a student's worldview. Thirdly, non-religious students and those who are marginally religious may struggle with religion's meaning and nuances while attending a religiously affiliated university. Therefore, exploring the separation of spirituality and religion may serve as a healthy conversation starter for students struggling religiously.

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[59] Jenny L. Small, and Nicholas A. Bowman. "Religious Commitment, Skepticism, and Struggle Among U.S. College Students: The Impact of Majority/Minority Religious Affiliation and Institutional Type." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50, no. 1 (2011): 154–74. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41307055.
[60] Kenneth Pargament, Juile Exline, "Religious and Spiritual Struggles," November 1, 2020, https://www.apa.org/topics/belief-systems-religion/spiritual-struggles#:~:text=Religious%2Fspiritual%20struggles%20are%20defined,%2C%20and%20Ano%2C%202005).
[61] Jenny L. Small, and Nicholas A. Bowman. "Religious Commitment, Skepticism, and Struggle Among U.S. College Students: The Impact of Majority/Minority Religious Affiliation and Institutional Type." Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 50, no. 1 (2011): 154–74. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41307055.

If spirituality is more than just religious practice, how do students explore their spirituality amid their religious struggles? Spiritual assessments are excellent tools to use with Generation Z students. In George Fitchett's 7X7 model, he first seeks to understand the relationship that exists between the person and God. Secondly, the model discusses values, activities, and beliefs that bring purpose to a person's life. Lastly, the model assesses whether the person's values and beliefs can help rewrite their life story.[62] Utilizing Fitchett's assessment model provides a better picture of a person's level of spirituality. Fitchett's model considers that some people are spiritual but not religious and opens the door to conversations on meaning, value, and purpose. Fitchett's 7X7 model is an excellent tool to use when providing care to emerging adults.

There are several ways to explore spirituality apart from religious practice. Spirituality offers human beings meaning, purpose, value, hope, relationships, love, and, for some people, a connection to a higher power or something greater than self.[63] (Swinton et al.) Additionally, "Spirituality has been positively associated with quality of life, self-esteem, reduced anxiety, meaning-making, hope, increased ability to cope, and relationality and social support."[64] An exploration of spirituality begins with our values.

Simply put, a value is something worth living for. It is something we deem as important, special, or even priceless. Jesus states in Matthew 6:21, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."[65] In other words, what we value is where our minds and emotions reside. Leaning into our values brings life to our bones and breath to our lungs. Therefore, whatever

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[62] George Fitchett, *Assessing Spiritual Needs: A Guide for Caregivers*, Rev. edition (Lima (Ohio): Academic Renewal Press, 2002).

[63] Cobb, Puchalski, and Rumbold, *Oxford Textbook of Spirituality in Healthcare*.

[64] John, Swinton. 'Healthcare spirituality: a question of knowledge', *Oxford Textbook of Spirituality in Healthcare, Oxford Textbook in Public Health* (Oxford, 2012; Oxford Academic, 1 Aug. 2012), https://doi.org/10.1093/med/9780199571390.003.0015, accessed 11 Nov. 2023.

[65] Matthew 6:21 (NIV)

brings breath or life *(Ruah/Pnuema)* to our minds and bodies can be viewed as spiritual. For many Harding University students, spending time with family and friends gives them life. Other students view exploring nature as a very spiritual experience. Still others engage in service to oppressed and marginalized communities as their expression of spirituality.

STEP 4: STRATEGIC SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICE

I serve at Harding University because I have a deep desire to help young people flourish. This desire was born out of my journey into young adulthood. Growing up as an Army brat, my father's military obligations had our family on the move every four years. My dad was either deployed, mobilized, or "out in the field" often. Thankfully, he would encourage me to spend as much time as I could with my grandfather. My grandfather was a veteran, educator, counselor, and preacher. He grew up in the segregated south of the 40s-50s and would often share stories about the discrimination he faced. However, there was something about "Jesus and the church" that gave him hope in those days. My grandpa believed spirituality helped him navigate the racism, poverty, and incarceration he faced as a young adult. During my teen years, I began to struggle mentally and turned to substance use, theft, and outbursts of anger to cope. Fortunately, my grandfather recognized these symptoms in me and started using Problem Solving Therapy (PST) during our conversations. After a detailed analysis of my problem(s), Grandpa would always say, "Now Jason, you know Jesus could come back tomorrow, so just do the best you can today." Through the mentorship of my grandpa, I was instilled with a rich optimism in the face of challenges and with a theology that taught me God's in control, so just do the best you can. I learned resilience from my grandfather. I discovered spirituality gives people hope. I learned the value of taking one day at a time. I strive to offer pastoral care and mentorship to young adults working through spiritual and mental struggle because Grandpa did it for me. This is my theology

of ministry. It is rooted in my love for neighbor and my passion for mentoring and encouraging others.

Theology of Ministry

William Roozeboom, in his book titled *Neuroplasticity, Performativity, and Clergy Wellness: Neighbor Love As Self-Care,* states, "Neuroscience provides the empirical evidence for why self-care is so vital to effective ministry and spiritual caregiving ― one's capacity for loving one's neighbor begins with learning to love and embrace her or his whole, embodied self."[66] As a younger Christian, I would read the Matthew 23:39 text, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself,"[67] and think, "How can I do better at loving others?" Service to people experiencing poverty, caring for older adults, and encouraging the youth were my simple answers. However, what it truly means to love another is to, bring our best selves to a relationship, in service to the other. As I have healed from my past mental and spiritual struggles, I have a responsibility to share the wisdom I have gained through the mentoring of young adults. The command to love our neighbors is such an important text that many Christian circles call it "The second greatest command." If Christians truly love God (the greatest command), they will do everything in their power to love their neighbor. This embedded theology has shaped my ministry to young adults as well as my parenting of two Generation Z daughters.

Mentorship is another dominant theme that permeates my theology of ministry. I grew up studying the *Pastoral Epistles* of Paul and came to appreciate the theology he presents on mentoring relationships in Titus 2:1-8:

> You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. 2 Teach the older men
> to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love, and in
> endurance. 3 Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to

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[66]William D. Roozeboom, *Neuroplasticity, Performativity, and Clergy Wellness: Neighbor Love as Self-Care*, Emerging Perspectives in Pastoral Theology and Care (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017), 12.
[67] Matthew 23:29 (NIV)

> be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. 4 Then they can urge
> the younger women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled and pure,
> to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will
> malign the word of God. 6 Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. 7
> In everything, set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching, show
> integrity, seriousness eight, and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned so that
> those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.[68]

Here, Paul sets a clear mandate that Christians should teach those who are younger. Moses

mentored Joshua and Caleb, Jesus had mentoring relationships with his twelve disciples, Paul had

a mentoring relationship with Timothy and Titus, Ruth had a mentoring relationship with Naomi,

and the list goes on. Mentorship is vital to creating healthy young adults who become the "salt

and light" of our society.   A 2011 research article on the effects of mentoring in young adults

stated:

> From our vantage point, in assessing the evidence as it bears on the value of mentoring as
> an intervention approach, the consistency of favorable finding across a range of
> populations, settings, modalities, and outcomes stands out as a key strength, whereas the
> relatively modest and still-variable pattern of effectiveness for program is a salient
> limitation. To more fully realize mentoring's potential as a strategy for strengthening our
> nation's youth, not only researchers and practitioners but also policymakers, advocacy
> organizations, and funders will need to become better coordinated in their efforts and
> uniformly committed to an ethic of scientifically informed advancement.[69]

Young people benefit from dedicated mentors and not just the latest youth program. Most youth

programs that I have seen consist of a host of young people and only a few adult mentors. This

theme is seen throughout the country in after-school programs, athletics teams, social clubs, and

in church youth groups. While these youth programs are beneficial and formational, they can

never replace one-on-one time with a dedicated mentor.

Lastly, my theology of ministry has been shaped by a love for encouraging others. I grew

up in a family of encouragers who cheered me on as I stumbled into adulthood. During times of

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[68] Titus 2:1-8 (NIV)

[69] David L. DuBois, Nelson Portillo, Jean E. Rhodes, Naida Silverthorn, and Jeffrey C. Valentine. "How Effective Are Mentoring Programs for Youth? A Systematic Assessment of the Evidence." Psychological Science in the Public Interest 12, no. 2 (2011): 57–91. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23074587.

mental or spiritual struggle, I was encouraged to think optimistically and to take one day at a time.

My family took the verse found in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 literally, "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."[70] Father Thomas Casey (S.J) states, "Words do not just bring physical death or life. They can also kill the soul or make it blossom like a flower,"[71] Human beings flourish in communities where encouragement is a part of the culture. For Christians, the church should be a community of mutual support, love, and encouragement. The church is often referred to as the "household" or "family of God" in scripture. The apostle Paul teaches Christians to view one other as "brothers and sisters" in Christ under the headship of God our Father.[72] The health of our family of origin, community, or church is essential in developing resilience. Our first exposure to community is typically found in our family of origin. Kimberly Benson, a licensed professional counselor who works with families, states:

> If one's family of origin was dysfunctional, faced issues such as abuse, substance abuse, poor health, or poverty; did not provide children with real-world skills, or did not adequately demonstrate love, that person may experience difficulties in these areas later in life, especially if they start a family of their own.[73]

There is an integrative relationship between the church and our families of origin. Typically, healthy families attending healthy churches produce healthy young adults. However, I acknowledge that this is not always the case. Harding University is graced by the presence of over five thousand students representing five thousand different families of origin. Some of the families are healthy and some are not. As stated above, the effects of an unhealthy family of origin impact us into adulthood and beyond. Research on parental neglect shows, "A lack of parental involvement and monitoring has focused on detrimental outcomes with results focusing on

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[70] 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)
[71] Thomas G. Casey, "The Power of Words." The Furrow 67, no. 3 (2016): 154–63. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44738323.
[72] 1 Timothy 5:1-2 (NIV)
[73] Kimberly Benson, "Family of Origin Work," accessed March 28, 2024, https://www.drkimberlybenson.com/family-of-origin-work.

intrapersonal variables such as depression and anxiety."[74] I tend to believe that an encouraging family, church group, teacher, coach, or mentor can make a significant impact on the lives of Generation Z students. Many times, we learn resilience by simply observing resilient people.

Strategic Suggestions for Harding University

I propose two strategic suggestions for promoting the use of spirituality in fostering resilience among young adult populations at Harding University. Firstly, the appointment of a university chaplain and the organization of a pastoral care team. Secondly, the development of a center for pastoral care and Chaplaincy. These strategic suggestions are rooted in my theology of ministry and are designed to enhance spirituality, mental wellness, and resilience in faculty, staff, students, and administrators at Christian colleges and universities. Earlier, I referenced Angie Hart's resilience framework, which suggests that young people need their basic needs met, a sense of belonging, a learning community, coping skills, and a positive view of their core self to foster resilience. I believe the strategic suggestions proposed meet the needs of Hart's framework of increasing resilience in young adults.

The Appointment of a University Chaplain and the Organization of a Pastoral Care Team

Ian Stuart, in his article titled, *Chaplaincy Presence and Activity* states:

Fifty years ago, outside Oxbridge, there were just eight university chaplains in England. Today, chaplaincies of one model or another are established in almost every institution of higher education in the country. Current statistics indicate that there are in excess of 400 chaplains working in higher education. This expansion of the church's involvement in this field has, of course, paralleled the significant expansion of higher education itself.[75]

The use of chaplains on college and university campuses began in the United Kingdom in the 1950s and has expanded to reach a plethora of campuses here in the West. It is almost unheard

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[74] Jonathan P. Schwartz, Sally M. Hage, Imelda Bush, And Lauren Key Burns. "Unhealthy Parenting and Potential Mediators As Contributing Factors To Future Intimate Violence: A Review of the Literature." Trauma, Violence & Abuse 7, no. 3 (2006): 206–21. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26636186.

[75] Ian C. Stuart, "Chaplaincy Presence and Activity." In The Foundation of Hope: Turning Dreams into Reality, edited by R. John Elford, 78–88. Liverpool University Press, 2003. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1gpcbbs.11.

of for a Christian campus not to have a university chaplain or campus ministry presence. Why might a college or university enlist the services of a chaplain? Stuart states, "Chaplaincy is a ministry offered by the church and is an expression of the abundance of God's grace and love. It is concerned with all aspects of the corporate life of the institution, including the pastoral care and spiritual growth of students and staff."[76] I believe colleges and universities should employ chaplains because students are away from their familial ties and need to experience love and support during a crucial developmental time in their young lives. At Harding University, we have a very small campus ministry team consisting of one campus minister and several marginally trained students. Unfortunately, due to limited funding, our campus minister is a part-time staff member who works on campus only one day a week. The main objective of our campus minister is to train a selected group of undergraduate students to provide pastoral care to the 5,000-plus students we have on campus. Sadly, there is very little information about Harding University's campus ministry online or in other university publications. Most students I talk to have no idea that we even have a campus ministry presence at Harding. However, the importance of a university chaplain on a college or university campus cannot go unstated. University chaplains serve as denominational links between the university and the church; they are mentors, counselors, leaders in public liturgy, teachers, participants in policy making, and creators of community. Returning to Hart's work, a chaplain's ministry is designed to meet the needs of people. Every young adult must have their basic needs met, a sense of belonging, a learning community, coping skills, and a positive view of their core self. These needs can all be met through a religious community. For example, Campbell University, a private Christian school in North Carolina, built a campus ministry house that offers a space for students to hang

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[76] Stuart and Elford, *Chaplaincy Presence and Activity*.

out, cook, meet with friends, study for class, or have a Bible study or meeting. This space meets the needs of students by offering a "hub" for community. University chaplain teams spend countless hours with students and can identify if a student's basic needs are not being met. They form rich relationships with students, which foster a greater sense of belonging. Almost all chaplains that I know are gifted in leading communities through religious studies and resilience training. Chaplain led communities offer beneficial coping skills and a positive view of one's self to students through the use of spirituality.

Case Study

I was recently approached by a student in my New Testament course who wanted to discuss her views on religion. G did not grow up in a religious family. She never read the Bible and does not remember the last time she attended a religious service. Somehow, this student ended up attending our conservative Christian university in Searcy, Arkansas. The student's father is a licensed professional counselor, and her mother is a high school teacher. It was G's parents who encouraged her to attend a Christian university after witnessing their child struggle through a season of severe depression and suicidal ideation. After a class lecture, G stated, "I think I am starting to believe in Christianity, and I am thinking about being baptized one day. I feel like religion is making a difference in my life. Can I talk with you about it?" Sadly, G did not know where to turn to on campus for support, so she reached out to me. Shortly after, we scheduled an office visit, and she began to share her story. As I listened to her story, G expressed her motivations for wanting to become a Christian and her desire to be baptized. We planned to meet once a week for the next few weeks to study Scripture and to "flesh out" any questions she had before committing to following Jesus. I was recently granted the honor of baptizing G off-campus at a local church. Based on my experiences with G, I believe several

students at Harding would benefit from the presence of a chaplain as they explore their faith.

University chaplains stress the importance of using spirituality as a positive coping mechanism

in navigating life's problems. Unfortunately, university professors are busy grading papers,

creating lesson plans, lecturing, and meeting with students about course content, so very little

time can be devoted to one-on-one mentorship and counseling their students. I believe a pastoral

team approach is needed on the Harding campus to meet the spiritual needs of our student

population. The appointment of a university chaplain and pastoral care team would be beneficial

not only to students but to faculty and staff as well.

   The chaplain at Harding University should be a person who has met several rigorous

qualifications before being appointed. The chaplain must have a current ecclesiastical

endorsement, completed an M.Div. or MA equivalent program (preferably a doctorate), at least

10-15 years of ministry experience, and familiarity with the use of evidence-based

psychotherapies in pastoral counseling. These requirements are necessary because historically

the churches of Christ do not have denominational standards for ordination to ministry. Every

church and or educational institution is entirely autonomous from one another. The

qualifications listed above provide a level of professionalism that I believe our denomination is

missing.

   Most importantly, the university chaplain should be a person of high character and

competency. They must have a passion for mentoring young adults, a love for ecumenism, and a

thirst for interfaith dialogue. The university chaplain should also have leadership experience in

working with pastoral staff. Does this sound like a lot? It should; this role is vitally important to

the health of our institution. Yet, I heard Vanderbilt professor Melissa Snarr once state, "It's

hard to hire saints."[77] I now realize how true this statement is, especially within the churches of Christ. We have a deficiency of qualified chaplains in our denomination. Simply put, Harding needs a skilled and experienced chaplain who has training in pastoral counseling and a knowledge of evidence-based psychotherapies. We have a population of nearly 5,000 Generation Z students at Harding, each with a host of different spiritual and psychological needs. Harding University desperately needs a team of chaplains to meet the needs of our students.

So, I dream of the day when the chaplain's office is located near student life, across from the deans' suites. At Harding, our deans in the student life department wear several different hats. They function as disciplinarians, mediators, emergency contacts, social event coordinators, and chaplains to students daily. With the chaplain's office near the student life department, the chaplain may have opportunities to provide pastoral care to passing students and to the full-time staff. The chaplain needs a pastoral care team of two to three working in tandem. Preferably, a junior chaplain would work under the senior university chaplain and provide the necessary campus support and ministry coverage. Working under the junior university chaplain should be one male and one female ministry intern. The ministry interns would be seminary students or representatives from our existing campus ministry department. This would provide synergy and collaboration between the campus ministry department and the university chaplain's office. The main difference between campus ministry and the chaplain's office at Harding is their mission focus. Campus ministry is more about Christian discipleship to students, while the chaplain's office focuses on providing spiritual care and pastoral counseling to the entire Harding population. Yet, there is integration that occurs between campus ministry and the office of the chaplain because we typically minister to the same students with the same types of problems.

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[77] Melissa Snarr, interview by Jason Darden, Nashville, Tennessee, February 21, 2024.

The Harding University chaplain's office should maintain regular office hours and have students schedule meetings in advance through an online appointment calendar (i.e., Calendly). Faculty and staff should also schedule meetings in advance, maintaining regular office hours, which provides the pastoral team with the flexibility to meet as needed. The university chaplain's office will hold regularly scheduled meetings with the directors of the student health center, counseling center, and student life department to discuss any student concerns and formulate collaborative plans to care for the needs of students. Additionally, the university senior chaplain will have direct access to the university president and be a part of the president's special counsel. This will provide the chaplain with the opportunity to update the president on the spiritual life and well-being of the university at large. The university chaplain will be protected from sharing confidential communication unless permission is granted by the source.

Since the university chaplain is trained in using evidenced-based psychotherapies, the chaplain's office will develop screening protocols to assess whether a referral to a licensed therapist is needed. The chaplain will become familiar with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), Motivational Interviewing (MI), and Problem-Solving Therapy (PST) and will maintain notes on the session and which therapy was used for treatment. The chaplain will work with the university counseling center to develop protocols for caring for and treating students with anxiety, depression, and spiritual struggles. The university senior chaplain will train the pastoral care team on recognizing the signs of a mental health crisis and on the use of spiritual practice in fostering mental resilience. I envision the chaplain's pastoral care team becoming familiar with using meditative practices, Lectio Divina, Labyrinth walks, silent retreats, etc. Although the university chaplain may be the only member of the pastoral team trained in using

evidenced-based psychotherapies, the junior chaplain and interns can be trained to use spiritual practices while caring for struggling students and use referrals in more complex cases.

The Development of a Center for Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy

The Harding University College of Bible and Ministry (COBAM) consists of several ministry departments. Departments such as theological studies, the center for preaching, global missions, and family ministries combine to form our COBAM team. Surprisingly, we do not have a center for pastoral care training or center for Chaplaincy. I believe this to be the case because we have no formal ordination process for entering into ministry in the churches of Christ. Chaplains must figure out how to become board-certified on their own; we have no approval authority.

Most upper-level theological courses at Harding require some type of field ministry experience. For example, our homiletics students must practice preaching, and majors in Biblical languages must learn Greek and Hebrew. However, we have no clear, direct path for students wanting to enter pastoral counseling or Chaplaincy. Almost all seminaries offer the M.Div., which prepares students to enter the field of pastoral counseling, Chaplaincy, and much more. However, on the undergraduate level at Harding University, we do not have any stand-alone courses designed to prepare students to become Christian counselors or chaplains. Thinking back, when I first entered the ministry, I had no idea that I was going to become the de facto mental health counselor for an entire congregation. I believe more training is needed at the undergraduate level to help better prepare students for entering a master's level seminary. This newly established center will be Harding's premier training department for all things pastoral and chaplain-related. The Center for Pastoral Care and Chaplaincy will work with professors

from the psychology department and counseling center to build courses that meet graduation requirements for psychology and theological studies majors.

I envision creating this new department within (COBAM) that broadens our department's approach to training ministers. For over one hundred years, we have predominately trained men entering the ministry as preachers and missionaries. However, times have changed, and fewer students at Harding are interested in entering full-time ministry. More women have become theological studies majors and are seeking careers in the ministry. Unfortunately, most churches of Christ are complementarian and do not allow women to serve in congregations as ministers or pastors. So, as our denomination continues to atrophy, like most mainline protestant denominations in America, we must learn to broaden our approach to training ministers. One of the best ways to accomplish this at Harding is by encouraging our students to become pastoral counselors and chaplains. In the churches of Christ, both men and women can minister outside of working in a local church. My oldest daughter is a theological studies major at Harding and wants to enter the ministry. Sadly, I told her it would be difficult to secure a job as a minister in the churches of Christ as a woman. Yet, my hope is renewed because there are a host of other ministry options for her in the field of pastoral counseling and chaplaincy. The dream is to build a program that leaves a legacy on the Harding campus and better prepares our students as pastoral care providers entering the ministry. With the Lord's help, I believe this can be accomplished.

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