

**A Formula for The Application of Trauma-Informed Care
In The African American Church**

by

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A Summative Capstone Submitted to

the faculty of the

Department of Practical Theology

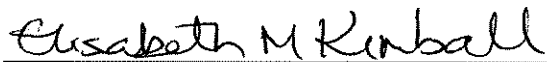
of the Protestant Episcopal Theological Seminary in Virginia

in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

Alexandria, Virginia

May 5, 2022



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am profoundly humbled and grateful to God for giving me the knowledge, strength, and endurance to undertake such an incredible task and complete it successfully. But nevertheless, I recognize that without Him, I can do nothing.

I want to thank my mentor and Advisor, Dr. Lisa Kimball, for her insight, wisdom, guidance, patience, and kind spirit that contributed to the completion of this work. I am also thankful to Dr. Elizabeth DeGaynor and Dr. Sharon Heaney for the care you have given me as you served in the professor, reader, and cheerleader positions. Without your tutelage, this task would have been much harder.

To Dr. Kathleen Staudt, mere words could never convey how grateful I am that God aligned the stars and graciously chose you as my writing coach. Thank you for every suggestion, correction, and word of praise.

A very special thanks to Vincent Williams and James Fitch, staff of our devoted Bishop Payne Library.

My friend, Linda Meadows, thank you for consistently demonstrating enthusiasm about this work. Furthermore, to your soulmate, Father Richard Meadows, you have been my constant spiritual guide. Thank you for keeping me on God's mind.

I recognize that this work would be meaningless or absent if it were not for my best friend. Tonier Cain, my dear friend, it is your real-life story that inspired this capstone. I thank you for always acknowledging that God will fulfill His promises. You are my daily reminder of His love.

To my friends, family, children, grandsons, sister, brother, and especially my beautiful mother, thank you all for serving as the inspiration for me to continue the task even when it all seemed impossible.

Last but certainly not least, to my husband James, I thank God daily for your love, support, kindness, and encouragement. I pray that God will bless you in ways that will blow your mind because of all you poured into me during our thirty-two years of marriage, and especially during my years as a student at Virginia Theological Seminary. I love you!

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Introduction

Holy Communion
I loved Jesus so much
I once rescued communion wafers from the trash
And sprinkled them onto the earth.
The cardinal feasted on them through winter.
Years later, holy men put me in the trash.
No one came to my rescue
So
I went back to the dirt.

—Marie Thearose

The epigraph used at the beginning of this chapter is taken from the poet Marie Thearose whose work, including the mentioned piece, often concerns the trauma she has faced in religious settings that snowballed to her loss of faith. In a blog post, Thearose speaks of the validity of her loss of faith, saying "the painful or abusive actions of others wound and cause people not to want to be part of a group, and while that doesn't disprove the claims of the religion itself, it does cast a dim light on it. If the actions of others did not influence our ability to find or lose faith, then there would be no point in our faith communities."¹ I've included Marie Thearose's "Holy Communion" to communicate how vital compassion and safety in faith communities are to an individual's spiritual/religious journey.

Several years ago, I was selected to serve as a Steward in one of the historic African Methodist Episcopal Churches. The position of Steward is a sought-after position that carries with it some level of prestige in the AME Church. The attraction for me to the position was the service to the sick and needy, which is one of the role's primary duties. As a Steward, I could now walk in my calling at this church. For most of my adult life, my concern has been helping those who could not help themselves. In this position within the church, I believe my sense of the needs of the people sharpened and I became more aware of the treatment of our most vulnerable church and

¹ Thearose, Marie, <https://www.mariethearose.com/post/losing-faith-when-others-hurt-you>, accessed March 7, 2022

community members, in ways I had not before. I had access to the inner leadership of the church, those who would make the decisions on how the church would respond to the congregation's needs and community members. I was now enabled and empowered to let the other leaders and the pastor know when there were needs of members that the church could either address directly or refer to outside resources. This ability to respond and manage how the church approached and dealt with the needs of the congregation manifested itself in many ways and offered new opportunities for me to intervene in a substantive fashion.

One Sunday morning during service, I went to locate some information in the copy room which is located next to the reception area. As I passed through, I noticed a notebook sitting next to a sign that reads *Sign Up for Let's talk addiction*. This ministry is a Substance Abuse Program meant to serve the community and church members. Not one person from that ministry, including the therapist who facilitates the meetings, recognized that the public placement of this notebook could be traumatizing for people interested in the program and as such discourage their participation. I questioned the thought process which would allow the need for such a book and its placement of it at that location exposing such a personal moment in people's lives revealed for all the world to see. Why was it that this sign-up opportunity was not thought clearly through, and why was it that I recognized it, and, immediately it bothered my spirit? It was clear to me that I understood the problematic nature of the placement of this registration form because of my knowledge of Trauma-Informed Care. At that moment, I also became astutely aware that there was a need for this knowledge in the church. I was able to recognize the impact of Trauma-Informed Care practices, the critical component of awareness of trauma, where and when it could exist, and the triggers and creation of trauma by environmental factors because of my friend Tonier Cain and her work around trauma-informed care. Tonier's story is a story of God's undying love for us and

a story of hope. However, it took almost thirty years before someone finally asked Tonier not what was wrong with her but what happened to her.

For the last nine years, I have had the opportunity to work with Tonier and observe what this expert and trauma survivor says about the treatment of others who have suffered under the weight that comes with being traumatized. Toniers' life began to spin out of control at the early age of nine after she was molested by a male friend of her alcoholic and drug-addicted mother. She started drinking from the partially empty cups of liquor that remained on the coffee tables after her mother's house parties. She noticed numbness to the abuse brought on by the liquor and began to self-medicate so that the experiences, the smells, and the trauma of the abuse would stop replaying in her young brain.

The results of trauma are intergenerational. *Intergenerational trauma* is a concept developed to explain generational challenges within families.² At the age of nine, Tonier began to shape her life in the same way her mother had been shaped due to her unaddressed trauma. The intergenerational trauma had not only taken a front-row seat in Tonier's life, but the trauma handed down to her was now occupying the driver's seat, and there was no positive end in sight. The only way it seemed that this traumatic ride would end was by crashing the car. By seventeen, Tonier was a crack addict, an alcoholic, a teen bride, and a mother. By the age of twenty-five, she had lost one child to his abusive father, now her ex-husband, and four children, three conceived from prostitution or rape, had been taken from her and eventually placed for adoption.

Crack Cocaine introduced Tonier to the prison system incredibly early into her addiction journey. Eighty-three arrests and sixty-six convictions, homeless, and now pregnant with baby

² Fabian Franco, "Understanding Intergenerational Trauma." (blog), Good Therapy, January 8, 2021, [https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/Understanding_Intergenerational_Trauma#:~:text=Intergenerational%20trauma%20\(sometimes%20referred%20to,an%20incident%20to%20subsequent%20generations.](https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/Understanding_Intergenerational_Trauma#:~:text=Intergenerational%20trauma%20(sometimes%20referred%20to,an%20incident%20to%20subsequent%20generations.)

number five, she again found herself in prison. Tonier had tried so many times to get sober. There was a program introduced to the women in the prison that would address your trauma and allow you to keep your baby. Not certain what addressing the trauma was about, Tonier heard the part about being able to keep her baby. She asked the Warden if she could be transferred into the Tamar's Children Program. She soon found out that she was not eligible for this program because she was in prison for violation of parole. To be a candidate for this trauma program, you had to be eligible for parole. This time, out of sheer desperation, she attempted something new. She cried out to God, hoping that he would answer her prayer to be accepted into a program that would address her trauma, and hopefully, her healing would come this time. God answered the prayer of an imprisoned parole violator to go into a program that did not accept parole violators. Because of the trauma-informed care program she transferred into, Tonier found God, she found her healing, and she found purpose. Eighteen years sober, she advocates for systems to become trauma-informed so that there is more intentional thought about how we offer and give help.

I have titled myself The Hope Dealer because I know what it means to believe in the power of hope and its ability to stimulate lives that appear irreparable from the outside. Many ministries strive to console those who are suffering, help those unfortunate, and ease the pain where they can. However, in doing these things, they have not even thought about those quietly enduring pain in their churches and communities because of troubles stemming from past traumatic events?

How can the church minister in a more effective way to individuals who have suffered some form of trauma? One of the solutions is to become trauma-informed. This Capstone will offer a deeper understanding of the impact of childhood trauma, and discuss the impact of trauma and the need for ministries to become trauma-informed. Included at the end of this paper is the

PowerPoint for the introductory training I would conduct for churches that would welcome the opportunity to begin the process of becoming a trauma-informed congregation.

When institutions of faith can encourage the lives of trauma survivors, old and young, and do it in a way that brings dignity to those we serve, we certainly will be able to see ‘where there’s breath, there’s hope.’³

³ Cain, Tonier. *Healing Neen: One Woman’s Path to Salvation from Trauma and Addiction.*(Florida: Health Communications, Inc. 2014), 214

Chapter 1: What is Childhood Trauma

The word trauma is Greek and means things that can wound, hurt, or defeat a person. Ponder a moment about those things that can cause harm to a person, a congregation, or a community. What you may have thought of might contain things that have either harmed you or people you know. Your inventory may include accidents, fires, death (including murder and suicide), pandemics, or more specifically COVID-19. Regardless, whether the traumatizing situation affects you personally, the community, or as we have seen since 2020, the entire world, the results can be deep and wide.

Our culture views childhood as sweet-smelling babies, chubby hands dragging teddies, science projects, ballet lessons, prom dresses, and graduation ceremonies. Sadly, the list would be more accurate if it included broken bones, chipped teeth, molestation, and severe beatings.⁴ When an experience happens in a person's life, and that event is difficult to manage, it results in psychological trauma. It is easy to understand that children should be cared for by their loving family and that no harm or danger should come into their lives. Unfortunately, child abuse continues to be quite common. In the United States, in 2020, there were 618,399 reported cases of child abuse, and 1,713 young lives were lost due to the abuse.⁵

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, childhood trauma is a child's experience of an event that is emotionally painful or distressful. Traumatic events can often result in lasting mental and physical problems. Trauma can happen because of adverse events such as

⁴ Everett, Dr. Barbara, and Dr. Ruth Gallop. *The Link Between Childhood Trauma and Mental Illness: Effective Interventions for Mental Health Professionals*. (SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2000) 3

⁵ <https://www.statista.com/topics/5910/child-abuse-in-the-united-states/#dossierKeyfigures>. accessed March 1, 2022.

abuse, neglect, loss of someone significant to that child, violence, natural disasters, and accidents. Noted psychiatrist and researcher of the post-traumatic syndrome Bessel van der Kolk, offers another working definition of trauma. He describes trauma as an event that overwhelms the central nervous system. Trauma is a whole-body physiological response. It affects the brain by altering memory, emotion, and cognition. It changes the way that people process and recall memories. Trauma, van der Kolk states, “is the current imprint of pain, horror, and fear living inside of people.”⁶ Austrian neurologist and founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud observed that World War I veterans did not just remember the violence they had experienced during the war, but were recalling it in the present day. In 1983, the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was placed in the psychiatric diagnostic manual.

In the *Journal of Religion and Health*, researchers state that adults who have suffered some form of childhood trauma experience their traumas manifesting into an extreme fear of intimacy. In addition to this fear of intimacy, childhood trauma can manifest into a fear of God. Before the traumatized individual forms, the ability to modify their self-image and alter their perception of God and the divine, much therapeutic work is required. When one is triggered by the memories of their childhood. The anxiety and fear of loss of control or subordination can conjure up. Researchers further theorize that this trigger may cause the individual to turn to any extreme form of occultism in the individual’s efforts to seek an escape for survival. I found in the reading that it also theorizes that the individual could alternatively turn to a healthier form of religion cling to God as one who saves and cleanses the memory of long-standing trauma.⁷

⁶ Bessel, van der Kolk and Alexandre McFarlane, “The Black Hole of Trauma” in *Traumatic Stress*, (New York: Guilford Press 1996)

⁷ Gostečnik, Christian, Tanja Repič Slavič, Saša Poljak Lukek, and Robert Cvetek. “Trauma and Religiousness.” *Journal of Religion and Health* 53, no. 3 (2014): 690–701. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24485184>.

Trauma most times is classified in three ways: Acute, Chronic and Complex. Acute trauma is a traumatic event that occurred once. Its lasting effect is short-term, and recovery is probable. An example of an acute traumatic event is a child falling on black ice, but no broken bones, just a few bruises, and recovery is expected. Chronic trauma is depicted as multiple traumatic events that may vary in situations. An example of Chronic trauma is that same child falling on black ice, then suffering from a concussion related to hitting her head on the ice, and being involved in a car accident several days later. Chronic trauma can have a snowballing effect. Complex trauma usually starts early in life and could affect a child's development. Incidents that cause complex trauma are acute and, most times, interpersonal and invasive. An example of complex trauma is re-occurring abuse. In young children, quite often, the primary perpetrators of the abuse are parents or close relatives. Psychiatrists note that complex trauma is relational and happens when a parent or primary caregiver causes abuse, neglect, and traumatic stress in a child's early formative years. Babies and young children depend on caregivers to meet their physical and emotional needs. When this does not happen, the attachment bonds are unhealthy, and a child's brain development begins to change. The changes may adversely affect coping skills and the child's development quite often into adulthood. A person's ability to form new relationships later in life becomes problematic. The observed patterns of individuals who have been exposed to trauma are mental health disruptions (including depression, anxiety, mood swings, and insomnia), self-destructive behavior, promiscuity, withdrawal, and isolation.

If there has been a traumatic experience and the child witnessed the event, this may cause life-long problems. When abuse, violence, disasters, or accidents were happening, a child's level of anxiety may have heightened, causing hormones associated with fear and stress to be released. When this type of hormonal release happens, it can interrupt the development of the brain. As a

result, trauma, especially ongoing trauma, can significantly affect a child's long-term emotional development, mental health, physical health, and behavior. The sense of fear and helplessness may persist into adulthood. It leaves the person at a significantly higher risk of the effects of future trauma.⁸

Conversations surrounding trauma and its effects have slowly been rising to prominence in our cultural zeitgeist. A popular television series that is an example of this is the HBO drama series "Euphoria" created by Sam Levinson. The main character and prime narrator of the show, Rue Bennet, faced chronic trauma as a child by watching her father slowly deteriorate to terminal cancer. While actively undergoing this trauma Rue starts abusing her father's pain medication to temporarily escape the reality of the situation instead of addressing the reality of her trauma. When Rue's father passes away and her mental health weakens, her dependency on drugs grows further and further leading to her eventual overdose. From this effect of trauma, we also see one of the other effects of trauma manifest in Rue's character, which is the inability to form healthy attachments with others (primarily parents and caregivers). Throughout the series, Rue enters herself into a cycle where she finds an unhealthy attachment and dependency on her girlfriend Jules, who is also undergoing the effects of unaddressed trauma. When things in their relationship go awry, as they inevitably do in teenage relationships, Rue drowns deep into her dependency on drugs to cope instead of seeking help from her mother or NA sponsor. When there is chronic exposure to trauma in the formative development years in a child's life, there can be a significant effect on their mental and neurological development.

Trauma can have major effects on the development of a traumatized child's speech, thought process, and personality. Traumatic events have a deep sensory impact on children. Their

⁸ Bessel van der Kolk , The Black Hole. 5

feeling of being in a safe place may be ruined by what they see and hear. Loud sudden noises may stir up memories of things that have happened to them. These memories may show up in the shape of nightmares or events that recreate the incident. After a traumatic event, all people experience intense emotional distress and frequent memory intrusions of the trauma as they struggle emotionally and cognitively to adjust their sense of reality. For some individuals, being preoccupied with traumatic events gradually allows them to integrate it into their life story and to view it as a painful past experience.⁹

Our capacity to use our cognitive, emotional, and physical coping skills where there have been traumatic experiences in our lives can be overwhelming. There is a psychological change that happens when there is a traumatic event in a person's life. Previous research has shown that trauma affects our feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. It lodges itself in our bodies with long-lasting physiological effects, and new studies show that these changes may be transmitted genetically to subsequent generations.¹⁰ 1980 was the year that PTSD became an official psychiatric diagnosis in the world. Since that time, much research has been conducted on the influence of the diverse types of traumas on individuals, families, communities, and society. To date, studies continue to confirm that the reason some people recover and others do not is complicated and unpredictable.

In the mid-1990's the Center for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente conducted a study regarding how traumatic childhood events negatively affected adult health. The study was conducted with 17,000 insured, mostly white, people in California. It was revealed that of the ten items asked that related to traumatic events, two thirds of the people who answered had at least

⁹ Bessel van der Kolk , *The Black Hole of Trauma*. 5

¹⁰ McClintock, Karen A. *When Trauma Wounds: Pathways to Healing and Hope*. (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2019), 14

one outcome, and 80% of those had at least one other experience. The study revealed that traumatic experiences as a child impacted the health of adults later in life.¹¹

Trauma induces many disruptions in one's body, and for the believer, traumatic events, and the effects thereof, can be extremely disruptive spiritually. Karen McClintock presupposes that trauma brings into question God's presence or absence during our toughest life experiences, and what happens to us after we die.¹² In her book, *When Trauma Wounds*, McClintock reaches out to Naomi, a young woman from her church who had been admitted to the psychiatric ward of their hospital, after discovering the body of her boyfriend who had committed suicide. The traumatic event caused Naomi so much grief that she had to be sedated and taken to the hospital. Once McClintock reached her room, it was evident that Naomi's tears were not drying up. The experienced psychologist, parish pastor, and chaplain sat with this young church member and prayed that God would eventually release her from her suffering. Dr. Karen McClintock addressed what she felt should be our response to how we care for one another. She penned the words, "I did not need a tool bag. I needed compassion—which means quite literally the ability to suffer with her."¹³ This is a beautiful example of a trauma-informed approach followed by trauma-informed care practices.

Through their research, Joseph E. DeLuna and David C. Wang have shown that after a traumatic experience, or the exposure to a trigger that brings one back to a previous traumatic experience, a child may feel dysregulated and their physiology may be adversely aroused (e.g., difficulty breathing; racing heart).¹⁴ At this moment, a child feels unsafe and scared, and the world

¹¹ National Human Trafficking Training and Technical Assistance Center
https://nhhtac.acf.hhs.gov/soar/eguide/stop/adverse_childhood_experiences. Accessed February 2, 2022

¹² McClintock, Karen A. *When trauma wounds* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2019) 14

¹³ McClintock, Karen. *When trauma wounds*. 33.

¹⁴ Peterson, Sarah About Child Trauma. The National Child Traumatic Stress network. 22 January, 2018.
<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/about-child-trauma>. Accessed March 2, 2022

may appear dangerous. At this moment, it is important for the child's spiritual wellbeing and resilience to also engage their view of God as a source of comfort and security. If their behaviors are regulated (and their view of God as comforting and loving), children have the capacity for deeper connections and relationships with others (and God). DeLuna and Wang go further to say that if this does not happen the child may feel abandoned and unloved, even by God.¹⁵

August 23, 2005, a tropical cyclone, better known as Hurricane Katrina, terrorized areas from the Bahamas to Mississippi. Her one hundred fifteen-hour winds were instrumental in Katrina being named one of the most dangerous hurricanes to hit land. New Orleans dodged Katrina's bullet and the initial thought was that the city was spared, until the levees broke, causing a breach and New Orleans quickly became a flood zone. Of the thousands of residents who did not evacuate or could not evacuate the day before, 1,800 lost their lives.

July 2007, two years after the devastation of lost lives, property, business and so much of what made New Orleans a tourist destination, I visited the city as one chaperone on a college tour arranged for fifty middle and high school students who were from marginalized communities in Central Florida. When we arrived at the hotel, I was the first to exit the chartered vehicle and was met by two young children, a boy ten years old and his sister who was eight. They asked if they could help me with my luggage. Of course, I said yes, who was I to turn down such charmers? When we got on the elevator to get to my room, I asked them if they were guests in the hotel, they said no, they lived there and had been living there since Katrina. Shocked by the idea that 2 years had passed and this family was still displaced, I wanted to hear the reasons why but knew I needed to become friends with them first. I asked the children if they would join us that evening for a

¹⁵ Peterson, Sarah About Child Trauma

pizza party. Not only did they come, but they brought their older sister who was fifteen, and their sixteen-year-old cousin.

Curious to hear the stories of Katrina, we asked the children to tell us what happened. The youngest child, one of the girls, started the story. She said on the day of the hurricane, her family, consisting of her brother, sister, mom, and dad, evacuated their familiar surroundings and came to the hotel. This is what they always did because their mom worked for the hotel which provided shelter for employees and family members. Early in the day, the hotel lost electricity and they were now in the dark. Most of the staff had left the hotel, including the cook. I listened intently to her story and her urgency to tell it. Her face began to change and a look of concern came over her. Imagine a ten-story hotel with no lights, no air conditioning, and no food. The family made their way to the kitchen to find food, but all that was there were some cans of vegetables. The cans were opened and shared with the children, but it was all cold. When she said the cans of food were so cold, this little child just started crying, uncontrollably. But what happened for the next ten minutes was my introduction to childhood trauma. It was like a well-rehearsed episode from a television drama series. The little boy picked the story up just from where his baby sister left it. This is what I remember him saying: “The waters just kept coming and coming and we had to leave the hotel. Our father drove all night to the next town because we felt we would be able to escape the floodwaters that were taking over our city. Daddy pulled up to a gas station to find food. When we got out of the car all that was left in the station was some cans of spaghetti. The spaghetti was so cold.” When this little innocent child said cold, he started to cry joining in with his sister who was still crying. Something quite peculiar happened and just like that their fifteen-year-old sister took over the story. She said several months later they made their way back to New Orleans and found their home destroyed; they had lost everything and two years later, a contractor ran off with the

money they received to repair their home, and here they were; sitting in the midst of unaddressed trauma. Suddenly her story stopped and she began to cry right along with her young brother and sister. At this point, I was perplexed, unable to understand fully what was going on, so I did what every adult and every child in the room did that night. I stood and stared in disbelief as to what was going on. The cousin, who was the oldest of the four, began telling her story. She said it had been two long years. Her family evacuated and went to Houston leaving behind her aunt, uncle, and beloved cousins. Her parents had been trying for two years to find them. They finally found each other just two days before we landed in New Orleans. She turned to her cousins when she said that line and all of the children just cried. I cried, the other chaperons cried and every child in that building cried. Then something amazing happened that has stuck with me since 2007. I saw the humanity and the love of God flow from the hearts of children who knew what it was like to have experiences that were tucked so deep down in your soul. That was the very first time that I saw how unaddressed childhood trauma could affect our most vulnerable and innocent community members. For two years, no one had ever asked the children what happened to them, until they met up with us.

Not every child who experiences a traumatic event will develop stressors relating to the trauma. Many times, the stressors depend on the severity of the trauma. For some children, trauma symptoms might include intrusive thoughts or re-experiencing an event or situation. The impact of these symptoms is pervasive and impairs a child's thoughts, feelings, behavior, and physiology.¹⁶ The level of impact on the child is often dependent on several risks, and protective factors, including the severity of the event, the proximity of the event, caregiver reactions, prior

¹⁶ Peterson, Sarah. 2018. About Child Trauma.

history of trauma, and available resources to the child/family.¹⁷ Famed African American author, Toni Morrison, penned the novel, *Beloved*, and discussed the unaddressed trauma of chattel slavery in the character of a dead child whose ghost came back to speak the truth about the past. *Beloved* explores a part of African-American history through the representation of individual and collective trauma. At the center of the novel lies the question of how to remember and place the individual past into the collective past and vice versa. Embedded in this framework, the story focuses on the recovery of an isolated, traumatized individual, Sethe, and her reintegration into a community that is itself a victim of trauma. The novel explores the characters' problematic relationship to their past, which is inevitably bound up with the brutal history of slavery, and examines their attempts and failures to avoid or confront their history of suffering.¹⁸

¹⁷ Peterson, Sarah. 2018. About Child Trauma.

¹⁸ https://buijhs.journals.ekb.eg/article_88572_cb51c6e1bdb88275f8f12e701245b9de.pdf Accessed March 12, 2022

Chapter 2: Faith in Response to Trauma

“Faith is not a belief. Faith is what is left when your beliefs have all been blown to hell.” Ram Dass

What is Trauma-Sensitive Theology

Jennifer Baldwin names four primary commitments of such a theology: the priority of bodily experience, full acceptance of trauma narratives, natural givenness of human psychological multiplicity, and faith in the robust resiliency of trauma survivors.¹⁹

The first recognition of trauma-sensitive theology is the identification of trauma as a fundamental body experience. Certain traumatic experiences affect the body in noticeable ways, such as injuries, but all traumatic experiences such as hormonal changes, affect the body although they may not be as obvious. Christian theology has been guilty of downplaying the reality of the body in preference for spirit and soul.²⁰ We cannot continue to ignore the body within Christian theology. As we begin to understand the healing of trauma, it should be reiterated that” your flesh is constitutive of human life-we are dependent and interdependent because we walk around in flesh and blood. The Flesh is the site of traumatic violence and wounding, and it cannot be ignored in any theology that seeks.²¹

Bessel van der Kolk, highlights and insists that the body retains the somatic memory of traumatic experiences either directly in tissue cells or indirectly through the body’s natural changes in hormones that accompany fight or flight or dissociative escape responses. The body’s response in processing traumatic experiences must be a component in building resiliency and promoting

¹⁹ Baldwin, Jennifer, *Trauma-Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma*. (Cascade Books, Eugene, OR 2018). 2

²⁰ Baldwin *Trauma-Sensitive Theology*, 7.

²¹ Travis, Sarah. *Unspeakable Preaching and Trauma-Informed Theology*. (Cascade Books, Eugene, OR 2021) 35

wellbeing. Traumatic experiences cannot be processed solely by means of intellect or faith. Strategies for resolving the consequences of trauma must include the body.²²

The second primary commitment of a trauma-sensitive theology is the acceptance of trauma narratives. Many trauma survivors fight to tell their stories, fearing that their intended audience will not believe the stories, or that they will be asked too many questions about their experience. Theology, according to Baldwin, must make space for the narratives of trauma that may contradict narratives of grace and healing.²³

The third primary commitment is to accept the multiplicity of human psychology. Human beings are often pulled in multiple directions, creating a kind of ambivalence characterized by experiencing more than one emotion or perception at once. For example, a trauma survivor may feel anger or shame but also realize that there is more to the human person than these emotions.²⁴ Someone experiencing trauma may feel that there is hope and then moments later be unable to imagine what their life will look like in the future. This awareness of multiplicity leads to a realization that there is room for both brokenness and resiliency. Pastoral caregivers are subject to the same types of multiplicity – they may be both horrified in the face of traumatic disclosure and calm and able to respond in a quiet and approachable manner.²⁵

The fourth primary commitment named by Baldwin is the robust resiliency of trauma survivors. She contradicts those theorists who claim that there is no healing from trauma.²⁶ Trauma-sensitive theology and praxis hold resolutely and fiercely, prescriptively, and descriptively to the capacity for the provision of trauma processing, intervention, recovery, and

²² Baldwin, *Trauma Sensitive Theology*, 7

²³ Baldwin, *Trauma-Sensitive Theology*, 8-9

²⁴ Baldwin, *Trauma-Sensitive Theology*, 9

²⁵ Travis, *Sarah Unspeakable Preaching*, 36

²⁶ Travis, *Sarah, Unspeakable Preaching*, 36

resiliency when a person and/or community is provided the support and guidance required for negotiating post-traumatic response and processing.²⁷ In other words, healing is possible for many trauma survivors and theology plays a key role in healing and recovery.

The primary aim of Trauma-Sensitive Theology as stated by Baldwin is to offer a way of thinking through the many loci of our theological systems that honor the experience of traumatic wounding. This method takes care to reduce the potential for further wounding through abuses of theological, religious, or spiritual power, and offers theological language for the fostering of resiliency. As such this is a theology for the ecclesia of survivors and those who offer care. Trauma-Sensitive Theology seeks to offer a theological balm for the wounds of trauma and illuminate a path towards resiliency, healing, and restoration of connection and balance.²⁸

Theologians engaging in conversations of trauma

Dr. Thema Bryant, a theologian of African descent ordained in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, describes herself as a Womanist Psychologist. She quite often says that our sanctuary is a space for the marginalized. If this is not the case, then it is not God's place. She has helped us understand that sometimes, our places of worship that should be spaces of sanctuary or healing can also be places of harm. Dr. Bryant is a trauma survivor of sexual assault, a survivor of a civil war in Liberia, a survivor of trauma brought on by the violence in Baltimore City, and a survivor of trauma relating to racism and sexism. She states that quite often, the "church folk" see the wounds of trauma survivors, and their usual response is "What is wrong with you?" instead of "What happened to you?" "This question is followed up with," "Why are you like that?" By contrast, a Trauma-informed person would ask, "What happened to you?" "When we are culturally aware and trauma-informed, it changes the questions that we ask and how we see people.

²⁷ Baldwin, Trauma-Sensitive Theology, 10.

²⁸ Baldwin, Trauma-Sensitive Theology, 155

Trauma can be described as an acute form of suffering. The issue of suffering is at the very heart of Christianity. We are first introduced to trauma exceedingly early in the Bible. Trauma in its earliest form is written about in the third chapter of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. In chapter two, God instructs Adam of a specific command to guide his walk in the garden. First, he told Adam that he could eat from any tree except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Second, God tells Adam that he would surely die the day he eats from the tree of good and evil. The Scripture is unclear when Eve is told of the specific rule regarding Adam having not experienced death and may not have understood the implications. Regardless, we must acknowledge that God was specific about the command, and He was specific about the punishment. In chapter three of Genesis, Eve is speaking with the serpent when he tells her that she and Adam will not die if they eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but that they will be like God, knowing all good and evil. When Eve eats the fruit and then passes it on to Adam to consume, the two realize they are naked. During this period, the shame of what they had done consumed them. Adam hid because he saw his nakedness, not God. God MADE THEM NAKED! He was cool with it until their nakedness became contextualized in the perception of lack. Because Adam and Eve hid it demonstrates that they were traumatized by the serpent's lie.²⁹

On January 10, 1958, a year after the famous Montgomery Bus Boycott, Karolyn L. Trimble wrote a letter to the young Martin Luther King, Jr. With a pressing concern. She asked, “Rev. King...Why is it that God has let Negroes suffer so?”³⁰ I too have asked myself that same question from time to time and according to Mika Edmondson, author of *The Power of Unearned Suffering*, this powerful question has always stood at the heart of the black experience in America. I decided to engage this question in deep conversation with my friend Linda, another African

²⁹ <https://medium.com/interfaith-now/consciousness-and-the-garden-of-eden-the-first-trauma-6f311a83cc7d>

³⁰ Edmondson Mika. *The Powers of Unearned Suffering*. (Lexington Books. Lanham, Maryland 2017) xi

American woman who describes herself as Christian and who happens to be the wife of an Episcopal Priest. Almost unable to hold back tears, her answer sounded more like a lament than it was like a deep conversational question between close friends. She began by saying that she did not know if there was an answer to that specific question about human suffering, especially in the city in which we both live, Charm City, Baltimore, Maryland. Realizing where she was emotional, I immediately began typing as she spoke. I took her words and now they are interpreted into this lament about the suffering of Black Americans:

Are you a father who longs for the suffering of His children?
Your silence feels like betrayal
We have endured so much on this earth
Would it all have been so simple if Adam and Eve obeyed you?
And stayed in the garden, eating jubilee each day
in the presence of your goodness and grace

Are we a barren land?
Cursed like the fig tree that bears no fruit
Left to wither in the heat of the sun
Abandoned
Gutted
Demolished

Why won't you strike them down when they hurt us?
With their knees on our necks
God, our God, we cry out
your beloved needs you NOW
Your presence feels distant
Our bodies abused as you watch from up high
Carest thou not that we perish?

Will you swoop down as you did in Egypt?
Bring us to you and free us from the hands of our enemies
Perfect us
Open the eyes of our oppressors
Make them bend at their knees

Great is your affection for us
Your love is limitless
As our suffering is yours

Your comfort is ours
Make us steadfast in the waiting
Bless, bless, bless

Theologians have always debated the issue of where God is in suffering, and the heightened interest in trauma studies as of late have impacted that debate and the work of rethinking suffering as it relates to trauma. We are now beginning to hear about this subject as it is informed by feminist, womanist theologies. Dr. Bryant speaks of regaining the voice back after it has been taken away due to traumatic events. Dr. Bryant claims that “healing does not end with the cessation of all symptoms but instead results in thriving which is the empowerment of the survivor to regain his or her voice, body, power, sense of self.”³¹ She acknowledges that most times people of religious backgrounds and ethnic minorities will more often seek help from religious leaders as opposed to psychologists.

Serene Jones, the author of *Trauma and Grace*, gives her account of trauma, redemption, and resurrection by saying that trauma is not something you ever get over, but only bear. An account of trauma cannot ever be reduced to a happy narrative of redemption because it leaves you hanging. She goes on to further say that in our daily living, it is Pollyannaish to think trauma can always be conquered, yet there is that continuing resistance to letting it be the final word. For so many, the lived experience of it in the resurrection is never going to be the case.³² At this point once again, we ask, where is God in suffering, and how does the Church fit into this space with her people who are suffering? More specifically, has the Black Church failed trauma survivors?

Has the Black Church failed trauma survivors?

³¹ Sim, Christy Gunter. *Survivor Care: what religious professionals need to know about healing trauma*. (Foundery Books, Nashville, Tennessee 2019) 86

³² Theology Today “Theologians engaging The Author(s) 2011, 227
https://mayrarivera.com/files/mayrarivera/files/10_theologians_engaging_trauma.pdf

As employed here, the African American Church, applies to Protestant denominational churches originating in North America after 1592, designated for or directed toward individuals of African origin or their progeny. The powerful history of the African American Church and her denominations is a significant part of the history of this country. Such denominations as African Methodist Episcopal, Baptist, and Pentecostal were founded in the nineteenth century and these houses of worship became the stabilizing forces needed for African Americans living in a country that still did not recognize them as equal. It is in the Black Church where much of the support needed by its members and the community at large can be found. The Black Church has been an important foundational piece within the community. Historically it has been the center of the community for the spiritual, educational, social, and cultural needs of Black Americans.

Any discussion of the African American Church must begin with an acknowledgment of the rich and vibrant tradition of African spiritualism, including Christianity, scholarship, and philosophy, that transcends the Atlantic Slave Trade and the African diaspora in the Western Hemisphere. Enslaved individuals were neither brought to the Americas as empty vessels nor in the absence of history, independence, or intellectual capacity. On the contrary, their individualism and intellectual capacity have contributed, impacted, and molded every aspect of modern society and western culture, including the modern church.

Christianity, praise, and worship in the African American community have often rested upon two foundational pillars from the Old Testament. They are the Exodus story and the scriptures from the book of Psalms. Traditional worship, discipleship, preaching, and teaching in the African American community are linked to these Old Testament teachings in many ways. Still, to better understand the worship experience in the African American Church and its role and function in the community, one must understand the unique attractiveness of these scriptures and their

applicability to the community's historical and current experiences. Many of the scriptures in Psalms are laments that originate from periods of great suffering and strife. They are unapologetic cries for help, deliverance, and liberation. Even though we find that there may be laments within the Psalms, we must remember that most of them end with a glimmer of hope and in a place of praise.

More than any other book of the Bible, The Psalms illustrate God's promise, a promise that is transactional but powerful. The faithful will be rewarded in exchange for worship, devotion, and obedience. The Psalms also functioned as therapeutic and cathartic salves to the broken bodies and spirits of the southern enslaved people. They provided hope that their lives were ruled not by the human masters but by the Lord, who would rescue them from their bondage and pain. The hope and transformative power of the Psalms provided a means of voicing and working through their suffering, thereby restoring their inner health.³³

Faithfulness is future-oriented. God ensures that the people of God will not forsake God, no matter the current trial. For example, the 37th Psalm is one of the scriptures often recited in the Black Church. The psalmist, who may have been David, writes that the evil people always had all that they desired and treated the poor with such degradation, but we must remember that there is no reason to be angry because one day God would make it all right. Psalm 13 is often considered the cry of Black Americans. The 13th Psalm asks God how long before we will be delivered; even though we are trying not to complain and murmur in these times, we are still waiting for our day of deliverance, and we want to know how much longer we must wait.

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<https://christianscholars.com/my-god-is-a-rock-in-a-weary-land-a-comparison-of-the-cries-and-hopes-of-the-psalms-and-african-american-slave-spirituals/#easy-footnote-bottom-19-6106>. Accessed March 14, 2022

The Exodus story is an illustration of God's promise fulfilled. This story represents the execution of the Lord's promise, the deliverance of the same favor that was alluded to in the book of Psalms and applied to God's chosen people, the Israelites. Exodus is Psalms put into practice! The great sin of chattel slavery as practiced in America was that the enslaved population was treated not as individuals but as fungible labor units. To de-individualize a human being, one must subject them to the trauma of dehumanization. The enslaved must be dehumanized not only in their eyes but also in the eyes of the enslaver. The enslaved and the enslaver are locked in a mutually destructive, albeit unequal, embrace of dehumanization, denial, violence, cynicism, and fear, which requires an ever-escalating imposition of trauma by the enslaved upon the enslaver. From this crucible of trauma, the African American Church formed.

Emphasizing to the enslaved that God rewards those that are servile, obedient, docile, and patient, is attractive to the enslaver as a means of psychological control over the enslaved, while also serving as a balm to the injury caused to the enslavers' psyche by the brutality inherent in the act of enslaving others. The Old Testament Bible is replete with illustrations of trauma imposed upon the disobedient and ultimate reward granted to the faithful. From the enslaver's vantage, the condition of chattel slavery was ordained by God, or it would not exist; a manifestation of some fault or flaw of the enslaved that had offended the Lord, which led the enslaved to be subject to their condition; A condition that was non-permanent, as resurrection awaits the true believer.

The enslaved population was not a blank slate and was more than capable of taking the teachings of the Psalms and combining them to suit the realities of their existence; they were giving meaning to Psalms that we enjoy today. This meaning is that of specific promise between God and the faithful. That God promises a better day not only in heaven but while on this earth.

Examples of the liberation from intolerable servitude are within the Exodus story. The condition of enslavement need not be permanent and the enslaved, rather than the enslavers who were currently reaping the reward of their labor and toil, were indeed God's chosen people. The African American Church was founded upon the pillars of hope and liberation. For these reasons, the Psalms and the Exodus story have been, and remain, foundational to the Church's orthodoxy.

The Black Church has been the place where the community members knew that in addition to their souls being fed with the Gospel on Sunday morning, it was also a place of refuge in the times when their needs for food, shelter, and financial support were great. The Pastor of these congregations, many times, became the Social Worker and Mental Health Professional. Most often they had little to no training but used what they had to help, sometimes entire communities, and those who were not members of the congregation. When these Black Churches are in communities today that are marginalized, the work can be stressful, and if the leader is not equipped to help effectively, especially those who are trauma survivors, the outcome can be personally, professionally, and communally disastrous. As the leader of the church, which is often the only "glue" holding a community together, they take on multiple leadership roles for which they may not have been prepared and which are not often recognized by their denominations. Stress to "be there for others," often at the expense of the pastors themselves and their families, to excel at being a pastor, and to exhibit integrity at all times despite exceedingly difficult circumstances.³⁴

There are some Black Christians who are still not embracing the idea of telling their truth when it comes to their mental health and trauma as well as that of family members. Some denominations are still relying on the one and only belief that had been handed down through

³⁴ Streets, Frederick, "Social Work and a Trauma-Informed Ministry and Pastoral Care: A Collaborative Agenda," *Journal of the North American Association of Christians in Social Work* Vol. 42, No. 4 2015) 47

generations, which is that Jesus could fix it, all you need to do is to pray. Certain leaders are afraid or ill-equipped to deal with mental health or truly complex issues within the community.

The Black Church has historically been an escape from the day-to-day pressures, burdens, and humiliations of the micro-aggressions that dominate every facet of African American life in this nation. So, it really is no surprise that many churches are unprepared to deal with the reality of trauma. Trauma and microaggression are constant, daily realities faced by African Americans in this society. Being Black in the United States today is fundamentally a contributing factor to individuals' feelings of being traumatized. In some Black churches, there is beginning to be more conversation around trauma and mental health causes and treatment. The times are changing, and pastors such as Anthony L. Bennett, lead pastor at historic Mount Aery Baptist Church in Bridgeport Connecticut, conducts trauma-informed worship services and will ask parishioners after the service, whether the sermon triggered anything for them and then invites the members to speak or ask for prayer. Dr. Thema in her position as the newly elected President of the American Psychological Association is excited and hopeful that she will be able to encourage the Black Church to understand that faith and our mental health not only can go hand in hand but need to go hand in hand in order for us to be whole.³⁵

Thankfully, some congregations have decided not only to tell people where they can get help to address trauma but also to shape their ministries so that members can become the best version of themselves and truly flourish. Reshaping ministry in this way keeps well-meaning churches from being guilty of re-traumatization. We can never know all that a person has or will go through, we do not have the ability to visualize the hurt and harm that people may have suffered before they embraced our ministry, but we can be intentional about how we will treat them with

³⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmQo1aGN2iI>

kindness, safety, welcoming, acceptance and all those adjectives that will allow them to see Jesus in us.

In the introduction to *Survivor Care* by theologian Christy Gunter Sim, social media trauma survivors were asked what one thing they would tell their spiritual leader about their journey. Amazed by the number who responded, she received answers such as, “Stop with the useless words like everything happens for a reason or “when you are preaching about forgiveness, you should really remember us, put an exception in what you're saying, always remember the woman who is being abused at home. I really wish you wouldn't challenge me to forgive.”³⁶ The comments she received reminded her of the space between how we believe we are loving and caring for the members and how we are loving and caring for trauma survivors who are also members of our church.

Asking why traumatic things happen, theologian and psychologist Karen McClintock states that when people are wounded by trauma, asking "why me" is both a quest for understanding and a call for justice. Trauma survivors need more than simplistic theological language or packaging. They need openness and someone to go on the journey of healing with them. This is what the faith community can and should offer.³⁷

Seeking God after childhood trauma

Trauma can lead to a variety of attitudes toward God and religious ideas. Many people who are trauma survivors understand the feeling of a broken spirit. This feeling comes when there is a loss of faith that happens when the belief system is destroyed. A traumatic event such as abuse tears apart the wholeness of a person. As such, abuse depersonalizes not simply because it steals, but because it tears out what is intimately connected to the larger fullness of being, dismantling

³⁶ Sim, Christy Gunter. *Survivor Care*: 1-2

³⁷ McClintock, Karen A. *When trauma wounds*, 134

the symphony of human parts. In situations of terror, people spontaneously seek their first source of comfort and protection. Wounded soldiers and raped women cry for their mothers, or for God. When this cry is not answered, the sense of basic trust is shattered. Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life.³⁸ Looted, the victim is abandoned to process the experience in further isolation. This violation deadens life along a spectrum of security and terror, façade and reality, wholeness, and brokenness.³⁹ Trying to manage pain in progressive proportions, anger wells up and the trauma survivor's personality can fragment; the pieces of the symphony no longer play in harmony.⁴⁰

There is a great deal of research showing that spirituality is an effective and empowering treatment resource for trauma survivors. Spirituality might be defined as “an inner belief system providing an individual with meaning and purpose in life, a sense of the sacredness of life, and a vision for the betterment of the world.”⁴¹ Spirituality has been connected to coping, and quick recovery from depression and anxiety, and there is a decrease in the rates of suicide and substance abuse.

Adults who have suffered some form of childhood trauma experience their traumas manifesting into an extreme fear of intimacy. In addition to this fear of intimacy, childhood trauma can manifest into a fear of God. Before the traumatized individual forms, the ability to modify their self-image and alter their perception of God and the divine, much therapeutic work is required. When one is triggered by the memories of one's childhood anxiety and fear of loss of control or subordination can be conjured up. Researchers further theorize that this trigger may

³⁸ https://huffpost.com/entry/trauma-restoring-faith_b_8959580. Accessed February 25, 2022

³⁹ Bruggermann, W. *Death in Reverberations of Faith. A theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes.* (Westminster John Knox, Louisville, KY, 2002), 48

⁴⁰ Beste, Jennifer E. *God and the Victim: traumatic intrusions on grace and freedom.* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York 2007) 53

⁴¹ *Spirituality and Trauma: Professionals Working Together – PTSD: National Center for PTSD: Accessed February 18, 2022.*

cause the individual to turn to any extreme form of occultism in the individual's efforts to seek an escape for survival. I found in the reading that it also theorizes that the individual could alternatively turn to a healthier form of religion clinging to God as one who saves and cleanses the memory of long-standing trauma.⁴² The remarks that follow tell us that more research and clarification are needed to understand why certain individuals who endured childhood trauma turn to a wide range of religious practices while others reject God. A highly ambivalent relationship with God and all religiosity as extremely conflictual, can be the experience of a victim of traumatic events. An individual can blame God for abandoning them or not protecting them, or be prompted to turn to God and religion in search of help.

The impact of childhood trauma on adult faith

According to Dr. Bryant, there are different ways people will respond when they see our wounds. Sometime when the church sees our wounds, the question is asked why are you talking like that or why are you acting like that? When the church is culturally aware and trauma-informed they ask the question, what happened to you and your people. When we are aware of the culture we may also ask, how has your faith been shaped by your trauma, and how has your trauma shaped your faith?⁴³ Dr. Bryant, points out that we are carrying wounds that are generations in the making. She teaches about intergenerational trauma or ancestral trauma, and how it can show up genetically in terms of our body responding to trauma that is passed down.

She shares that in the tradition of the Black church there is a song people may hear that speaks to the singer's confidence in God's abiding presence to receive what we need to bring:

This morning when I rose, yeah (I didn't have no doubt)
This morning when I rose, yeah (I didn't have no doubt)
I know the Lord (will take care of me)

⁴² Gostečnik, Christian, Tanja Repič Slavič, Saša Poljak Lukek, and Robert Cvetek. "Trauma and Religiousness." *Journal of Religion and Health* 53, no. 3 (2014): 700. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24485184>.

⁴³ Fuller Theological Seminary, Thema Bryant-Davis

I know the Lord (will provide for me)
I know the Lord (will lead and guide me all the way)⁴⁴

When you are a trauma survivor, says Bryant, you might have some doubt, you might have some issues, and you might have some things to take up with the throne room.⁴⁵

In an Old Testament class taught at Virginia Theological Seminary, Dr. Judy Fentress-Williams, gave an assignment in which students were instructed to tell the story of Abraham, (Genesis 16) from one of the character's perspectives and not the perspective of the narrator. I chose to examine Hagar's story. As someone trained in trauma-informed care, it was evident to me that Hagar was in fact a trauma survivor. I thought back to every sermon, bible study, and women's retreat I had attended in which Hagar was the center of discussion. No one ever identified the trauma or considered the role it played in the decisions she made after becoming pregnant with Abraham's son. It had not occurred to storytellers, bible teachers or even Seminary trained preachers that the story surrounding Hagar was one of those bible stories that could re-traumatize an already hurting rape victim. If churches are trauma-informed, leadership would be able to view bible stories, scriptures, and songs in a different light.

In telling the story of Hagar, we must remember that she is not the only one who has suffered some form of trauma. Hagar's young son, Ishmael, has been a victim as well. In Genesis 21:14-16 we read the story of an abused and abandoned mother who has gone into the wilderness with her son. She and Ishmael are homeless, hungry, and alone. Hagar places her son under a bush where she is unable to view him. She weeps because of the fear that her baby won't survive. God shows up just as Hagar was giving up, and He yells for her to get her son. It is at this moment Hagar realizes that the Lord had not forgotten about her and he had not forgotten Ishmael. The

⁴⁴ Smith, Jerry Calvin. (2004)

⁴⁵ Fuller Theological Seminary, Thema Bryant

dysfunction of everyone in Ishmael's life was almost lethal. How would all these traumatic events affect his adult life?

For some, the catastrophic events are lived, managed, and transported into the past, but for children who have been traumatized, these events get “stuck” and quite often produce a post-traumatic response. When a trauma survivor is attempting to recover from childhood trauma, the very experiences that they have tried so hard to drive out of their memory are the things that must be owned. The process is painful and embracing the reality of what happened needed most of the time is what hinders the healing process. When we can be truthful about the painfulness of traumatic events, it is then that we will begin to embrace the idea of liberation and completeness.

Juanita Ryan, a survivor of childhood trauma and a therapist, wrote about the process of recovery from childhood trauma. She tells about a model for understanding the process involved in recovery. The three internal states or senses of ourselves are the wounded self, a judgmental self, and an observing compassionate self. The Wounded Self is the part of us that carries most of the shame, fear, and despair generated at the time(s) of the trauma we experienced.⁴⁶ Children, according to Ryan, view adverse events as their fault. When someone experiences trauma early in life, they view their wounded adult selves as child self. Judgmental Self is critical, and rejection of us is rejecting our wounded self. The judgmental self within us sees the wounded child as overwhelmed with pain.⁴⁷ This dimension of our being is in charge and quite often we are astonished to know that the judgmental self is in control. This internal state blames the wounded child for the awful incidents that have happened causing the child to become overcome with grief. The observing, compassionate self is the third internal self. Ryan states that this is where the kind, wise, loving part of us may be found. The observing role this part of us plays is that of being able

⁴⁶ <https://www.nacr.org/abusecenter/recovery-from-childhood-trauma-2> Accessed February 18, 2022

⁴⁷ <https://www.nacr.org/abusecenter/recovery-from-childhood-trauma-2>. Accessed February 18, 2022.

to notice and pay attention to what is happening with the wounded child and the judgmental self without adding more judgment or reactivity.⁴⁸

It is difficult to view the world as safe and caring, the self, and God as reliable and trustworthy when abuse and exploitation are embedded in one's personal biography.

⁴⁸ <https://www.nacr.org/abusecenter/recovery-from-childhood-trauma-s>. Accessed February 18, 2022

Chapter 3: Forming Faith After Trauma

“Come celebrate with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me and has failed.” Lucille Clifton

What is trauma informed care ministry

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the following are the six key principles of a trauma-informed approach to service. If training to the church community was being conducted this is how the principles would be described: (1) Safety – the church will ensure that its members and the community it serves feel safe both physically and psychologically. Understanding safety as defined by those served is a high priority. (2) Trustworthiness and Transparency –the churches’ operations and decisions are conducted with transparency with the goal of building and maintaining trust with the members and community members, their family members, among staff, volunteers, ministry heads, and others involved in the church (3) Peer Support – Peer support and mutual self-help are key vehicles for establishing safety and hope, building trust, enhancing collaboration, and utilizing their stories and lived experience to promote recovery and healing. The term “Peers” refers to individuals with lived experiences of trauma, or in the case of children, this may be family members of children who have experienced traumatic events and are key caregivers in their recovery. Peers are also referred to as “trauma survivors.” (4) Collaboration and mutuality –Importance is placed on partnering and leveling of power differences between church staff from the volunteers, sextons and clerical to the minister(s) and all ministry heads, demonstrating that healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making. The church recognizes that everyone has a role to play in a trauma-informed approach. “One does not have to be a

therapist to be therapeutic.”⁴⁹ (5) Empowerment, voice, and choice - Throughout the church and among the members and the community being served, individuals’ strengths and experiences are recognized and built upon. The church fosters a belief in the primacy of the people served, in resilience, The church understands that the experience of trauma may be a unifying aspect in the lives of those who are the decision-makers, those who provide services, and who come to worship or receive assistance and support. The church understands the importance of power and differentials and ways in which members and the community being served have been diminished in voice and choice and are often recipients of coercive treatment. They are supported in cultivating self-advocacy skills. The church is a facilitator of trauma survivors' recovery rather than controller of recovery. The church is empowered to do its work as well as possible by adequate organizational support. This is a parallel process as staff need to feel safe, as much as people receiving services. and in the ability of individuals, organizations, and communities to heal and promote recovery from trauma., (6) Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues. The church actively moves past cultural stereotypes and biases (e.g. based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, religion, gender identity, geography, class, etc.); They further say that it is one thing to recognize when someone in your church or ministry setting has deep woundedness. It is something entirely different to equip yourself and your ministry team to be able to bring healing and hope to that individual or family system.⁵⁰

How do we describe a trauma-informed ministry?

⁴⁹ Ford, J. and Wilson, C. (2012). SAMHSA’s Trauma and Trauma-Informed Care Experts Meeting.

⁵⁰ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014

- A trauma-informed ministry is one by which religious care providers have a basic understanding of the nature of trauma and how it may impact the overall quality of life of the person or person.
- A trauma-informed ministry also means that the religious care provider is aware of the impact of trauma upon persons depending upon where they are along the life-cycle, as well as their age, gender, social and marital status, and sexual orientation.
- A trauma-informed ministry seeks to collaborate with other community members who can provide additional resources and to whom the religious helper can refer those needing assistance in coping with their traumatic experiences.
- A trauma-informed ministry aims to increase the skills of coping with or reducing the stress that can otherwise lead the sufferer to feel that they can no longer manage or prevent their traumatic and post traumatic experience from destroying them.⁵¹

When we talk about a trauma-informed ministry, we are signifying the shift in how churches are responding to the needs of their community members who may have suffered some form of trauma. On Sunday morning in churches across this country, there are trauma survivors sitting in church service. Many of the people we sit next to each other in the church have experienced some form of abuse and neglect resulting in the relieving of their traumatic events leaving them carrying traumatic wounds. Given that reality, some trauma experts now suggest that every parish needs clergy and church staff who are trained to recognize trauma in the people they serve, to acknowledge their wounds, and to support them in getting help.⁵²

⁵¹ Streets, Frederick, "Social Work and a Trauma-Informed Ministry and Pastoral Care: A Collaborative Agenda," *Journal of the North American Association of Christians in Social Work* Vol. 42, No. 4 (2015), 471

⁵² <http://awakemilwaukee.org/2020/08/25/6-ways-clergy-and-church-leaders-can-build-trauma-sensitive-parishes/>. Accessed March 3, 2022

Becoming trauma-informed provides an opportunity for faith-based communities to take the lead in addressing trauma and restoring and fostering resilience. The purpose for learning and using the language is so that as you begin working with other entities who are also trauma-informed, you will be on the same page as those resources and this will ensure that the possibilities of further harm coming to an individual will be lessened. SAMSHA has designated the following to help congregations understand their place in becoming trauma-informed.

A church that is trauma-informed **realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; **recognizes** the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the church; **responds** by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist **re-traumatization**.⁵³ A fifth **word, repent**, was added because we are a faith-based community, we will acknowledge the way in which our faith communities have been sources of trauma through abuse, judgment, rejection, and abasement. We will **repent** of our participation in causing harm and in our participation in denying trauma or retraumatizing people and systems.⁵⁴

How can the impact of childhood trauma be addressed through faith-based outreach?

As Spiritual First Responders, the Church needs to respond to people in crisis with humility. We know that Jesus is our Lord, so thus, we should be on the frontline responding with love for those who are hurting in the community and those suffering in our church.

Churches must assess their formation programs and honestly determine if they are incorporating the traumatized into their ministry praxis. Formation programs may, at times, confuse overcoming sin with ignoring the complex somatic effects of violence. If “the old is gone [and], the new has

⁵³ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma

⁵⁴ Different Drummers: Trauma-Informed Congregations” YouTube Video, 16:51, May 30, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOHgi55HrAw>

come” (2 Cor 5:17), if God no longer remembers our sin (Heb 8:12), and believers are to think on what is praiseworthy (Phil 4:8), then what is the believer’s warrant to discuss traumatic events, much less study them? Does not Paul even declare that one should “forget what is behind” (Phil 3:13b)? Complex traumatic events live on as body memory. For the sexually traumatized, “take two verses and call me in the morning” is both simplistic and unethical.⁵⁵

It cannot be stressed enough that the fundamental task for those who have been traumatized is to discern a new meaning for living as an aspect of transforming and healing from trauma. A trauma-informed ministry not only seeks to help heal the wounds of the survivors of trauma, but also to help entire communities that have been traumatized to flourish and be empowered by God’s love and grace.⁵⁶

Psychologists and other mental health providers are the professionals who provide the counseling needed for trauma survivors. Still, the evidence shows that all the other things required to create resilience are being taught within the faith community regardless of denomination. If the church is a true sanctuary, where safety, healing, and intentional care for trauma survivors are to be practiced, we must carry with us the tools needed to recognize and respond to them with compassion. Becoming a trauma-informed congregation will empower us to become a community of hope, always believing that, in my friend, Tonier's words, "where there's breath, there's hope."

⁵⁵ Vanhoozer, K.J. *Is there a Meaning in This Text? The Bible, The Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1998) 53-54, 58-60, 64, 77

⁵⁶ Jones, Serene. *Trauma+Grace*

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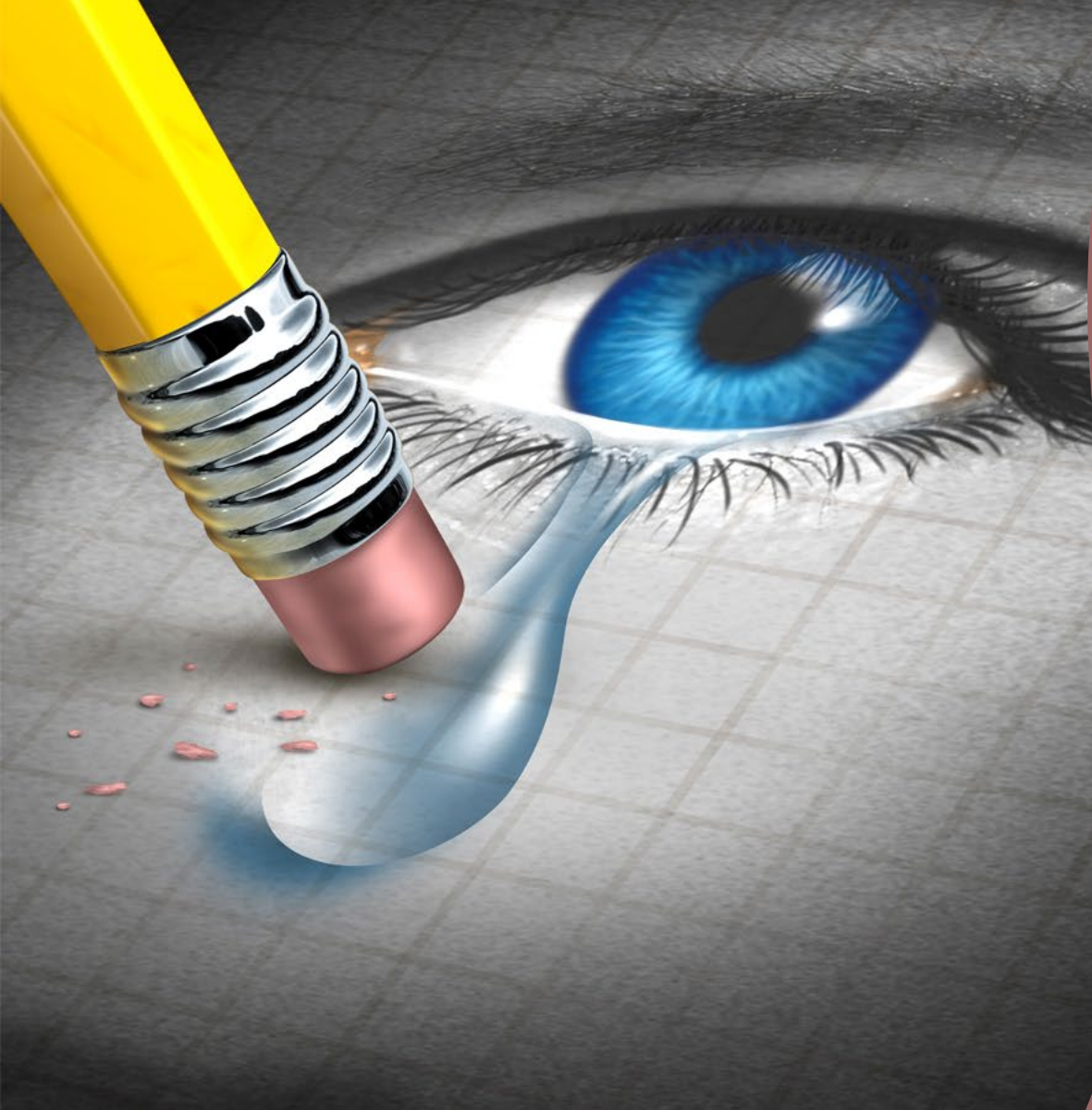
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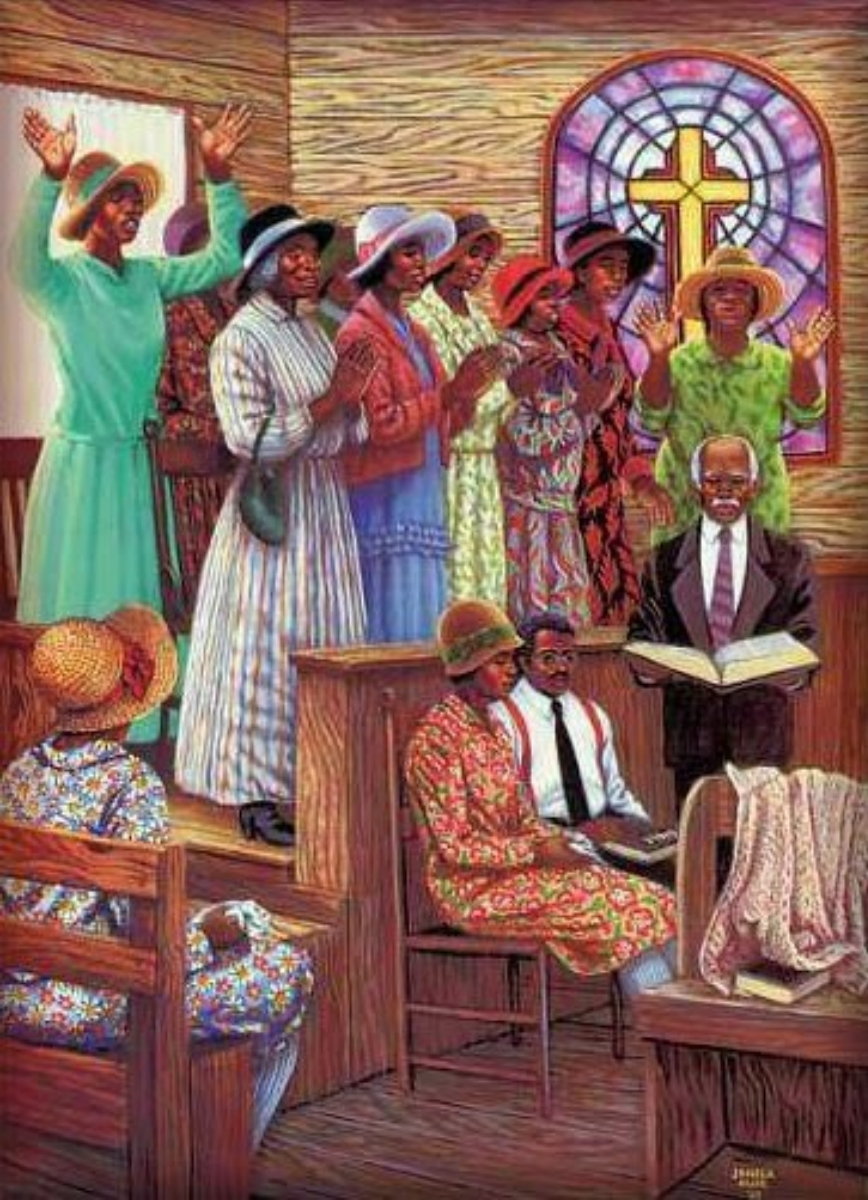
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Appendix



Introduction to Trauma-Informed Care

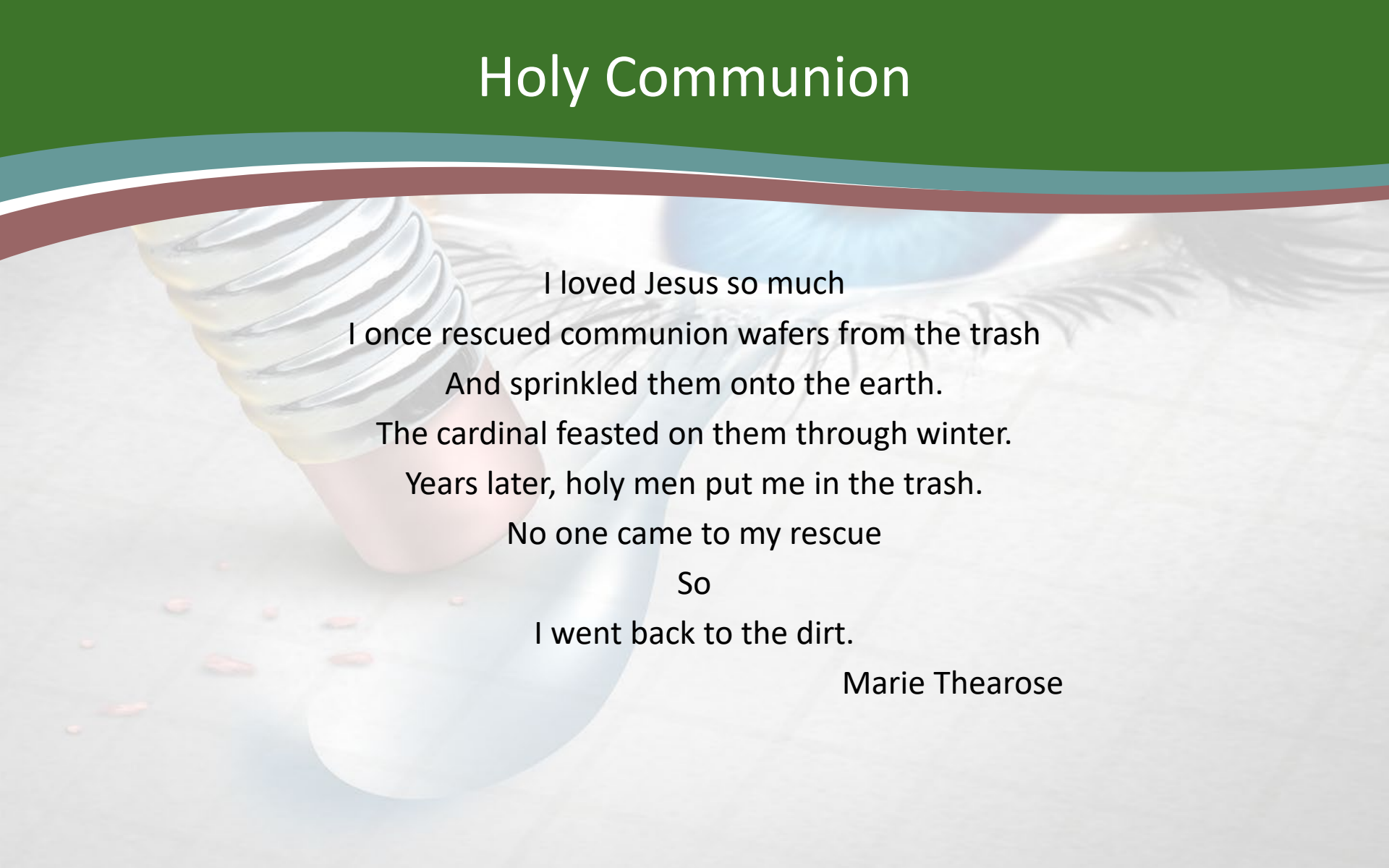
Introductory Training dedicated
to African American Faith-Based
Communities



This is our Prayer

Holy Spirit, We come to you today thanking you for the opportunity to reflect as a congregation on how you would have us minister to others in ways that are loving, kind, and considerate. Please continue to allow us to feel your presence and hear your voice in all we do to be of service to our community.
Amen.

Holy Communion



I loved Jesus so much
I once rescued communion wafers from the trash
And sprinkled them onto the earth.
The cardinal feasted on them through winter.
Years later, holy men put me in the trash.
No one came to my rescue
So
I went back to the dirt.

Marie Thearose

Learning Objectives

As a result of this training, participants will become more aware of trauma, trauma informed care, the terminology of them both as well as develop practical strategies to assist in engaging in a more sensitive way with church and community members who have experienced trauma.



What is Trauma?

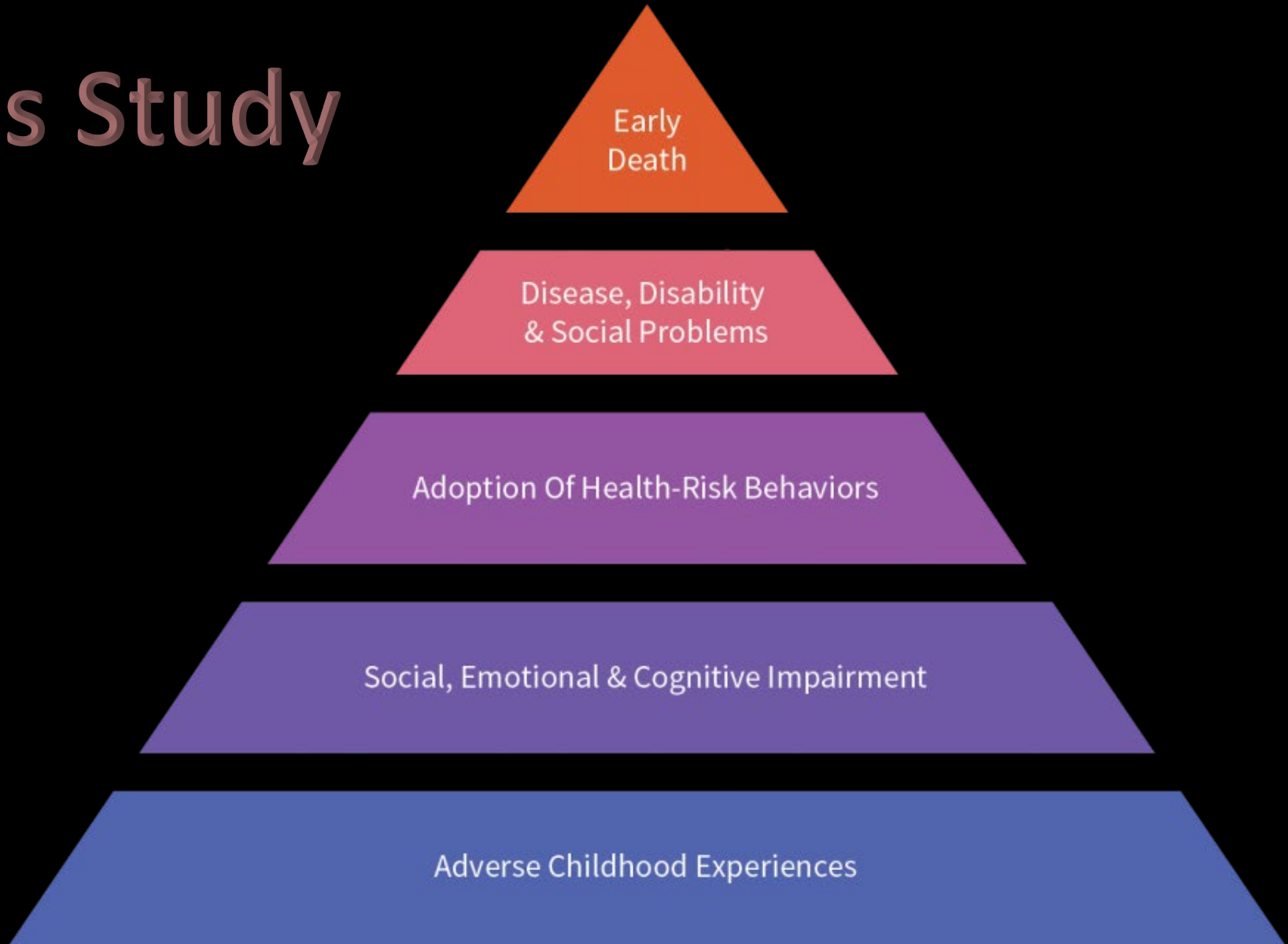
- SAMHSA
- Definition of the word TRAUMA
- Trauma results from experiences that are:



Brain Trauma



ACEs Study



Classification of Trauma

A background image showing a hand holding a white pill bottle with a pink cap. Several white pills are scattered on a light-colored tiled floor. The image is overlaid with a green banner at the top and three geometric shapes: a brown circle, a blue triangle, and a green hexagon.

ACUTE

CHRONIC

COMPLEX

What does a trauma informed faith community look like

- Recognize the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) / trauma among all people
- Recognize that many behaviors and symptoms are the result of traumatic experiences
- Recognize that being treated with respect and kindness – and being empowered with choices – are key in helping people recover from traumatic experiences

The Five R's



- Realizes
- Recognizes
- Responds
- Resists
- Repent

Trauma affects all levels of society.

Themes of Trauma Recovery (Bryant, Thema, 2005, Herman, 1997)

1

Safety

2

Trust

3

Anger

4

Body Image/Sexuality

5

Coping

6

Self Esteem/Thriving

“Christians love to say, “But God is still good!” —a statement that’s filled with truth yet rushes past a needed moment of recognition, one that acknowledges the fact that loss, heartbreak, and pain need to be processed for us to experience the warmth and grace of a loving God.” Abbey Perry



QUESTIONS

