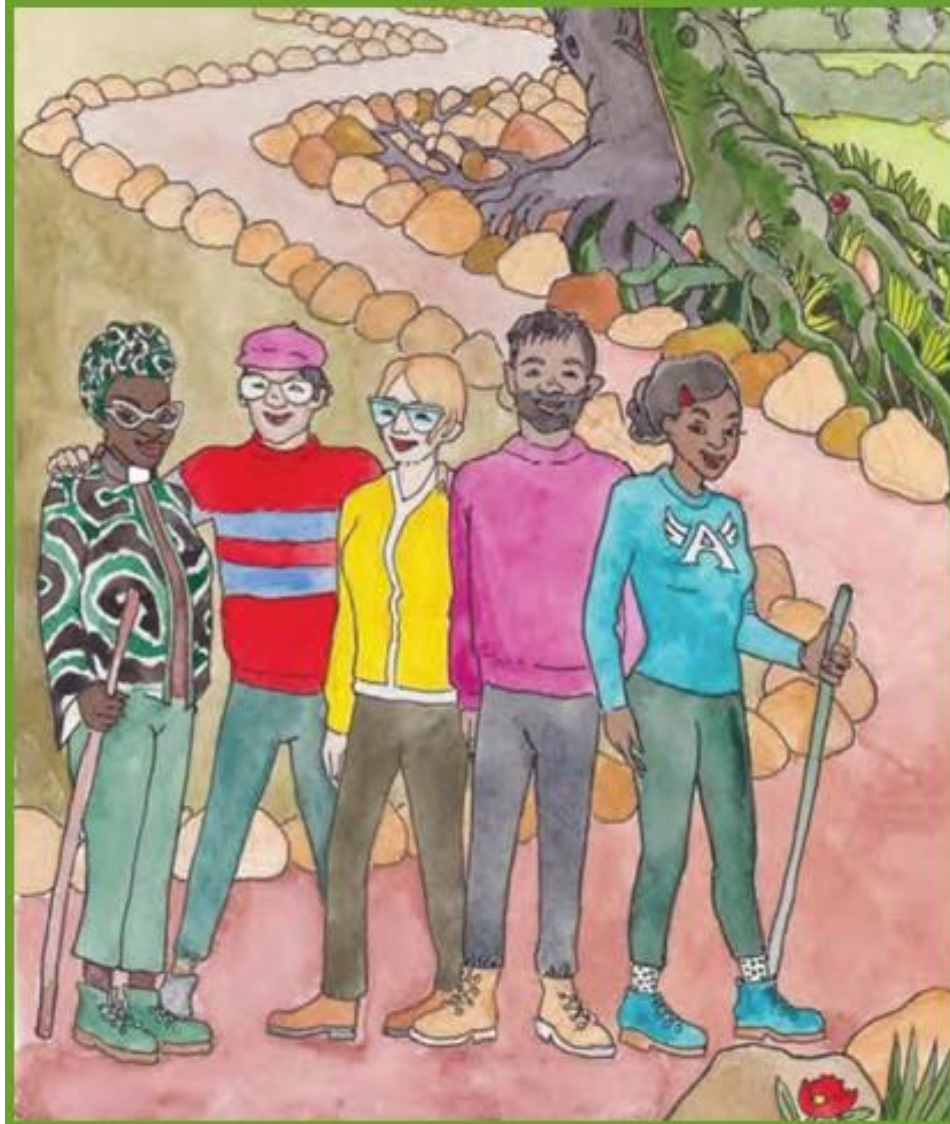


The Companion



Companion Discussion Guide

Healing Congregations: Nurturing Love, Life, and Hope in a Hurting World

Why a Companion?

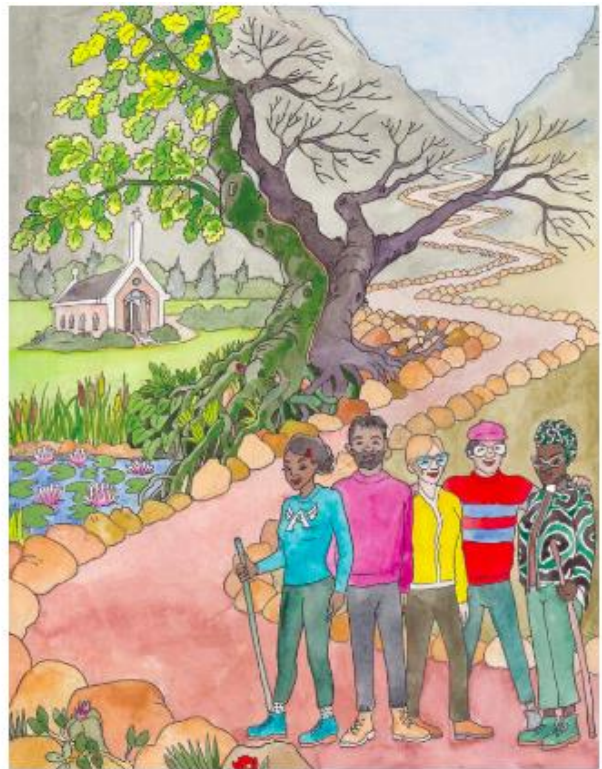
The Barefoot Guide 12 - Healing Congregations: Nurturing Love, Life, and Hope in a Hurting World offers a wealth of human stories, stories about how traumatic and loving experiences shape us all. It also includes different healing lenses from which to approach those stories. We hope this guide becomes a practical resource for theology and practice in congregations, theological schools, and spaces where communities of spirit are seeking God's spirit of love and healing in the world.

Because the Healing Congregations Guide offers so much, we wanted to create a brief Companion like a compass to orient you toward starting points for the journey and to guide you along the way. Ultimately, we trust that each group that works with the Healing Congregations Guide will engage in ways that make the most meaning for them. This Companion offers a few possibilities for the initial steps. Our greatest hope is that those who engage the Healing Congregations Guide will find healing pathways to reflect and share their own stories of hope and healing and remind people of faith the ways congregations nurture life and have nurtured it for centuries, in the midst of hurt.

As you read through the Healing Congregations Guide, you may be curious to note that several of these stories happen outside the traditional congregation space. This reminds us that the work of the church is not contained to the four walls of a building. Wherever we show up with a spirit of love and hope it is a way of nurturing life in our broken and beautiful world.

Join Us on the Journey

This Companion to the Healing Congregations Guide recognizes that from early childhood to adulthood, the human experience includes stories and experiences of love, suffering, and trauma. Trauma may be inflicted through abuse of power, cruelty, neglect, abandonment, or violent systemic and structural oppression. Thanks be to the Creator



for the presence of loving personal, family, systemic, and structural relationships in our human experience. These experiences can help us heal and thrive and ensure trauma is not the whole story.

The writers and storytellers of this Companion and the Healing Congregations Guide know and are witnesses to the fact that our congregations and faith practices sometimes provide a path to healing harm. We also recognize that for some, being the loving congregations we are called to be is a work in progress. Our hope is that the Healing Congregations Guide and Companion help congregations do the work of being a source of healing.

This Companion intends to inspire and encourage. This is not an instruction manual on what to do with suffering and healing work. We invite you and your communities to tell your own stories, offer one another the gift of deep listening, and wrestle with the complexities of the human experience. Bring your own questions on this collective journey and pay close attention to signs along the way that God is listening and speaking. This is a quest rather than an arrival at an easy answer.

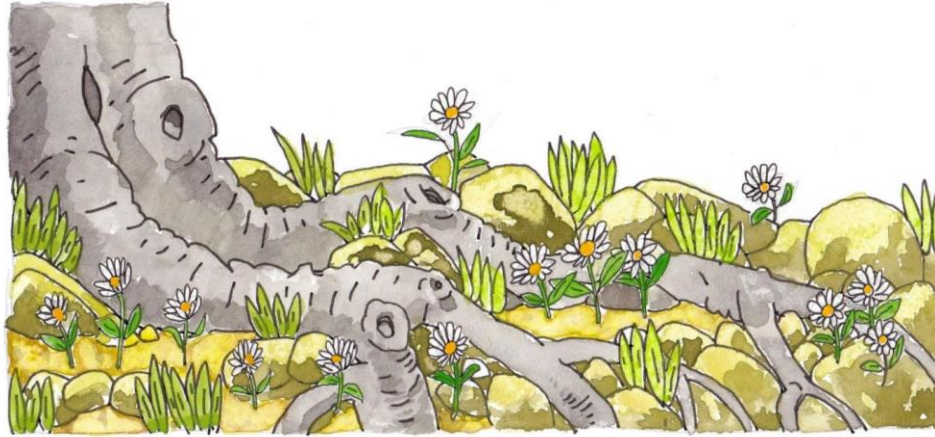
While this Companion is meant to offer some orientation; of course, you do not need it. You are welcome to jump right in and map your own way. Ultimately, we hope you find ways to identify and tell your own stories of nurturing love, life, and hope because, as people of faith, we know that God is still speaking and the Spirit is still working.

Ready to Jump Right In?

Engaging the Healing Congregations Guide in a small group can be as simple as agreeing on a timeline for reading it together and using the following potential questions for deeper conversations.

- What were the sources of hurt, and what facilitated healing?
- How is God showing up and speaking through these stories? Are there scriptures that speak to these stories for you?
- What stories (individual, family, congregational, societal) from your own life come to mind when reading these stories? What nurtured your healing? What were the sources of hurt?
- What spiritual practices nurtured you, your family, or your community?
- What other questions would you like to explore with your community?

The Discussion Tools under the [Roadmap for Small Group Facilitators](#) may be useful.



Healing Congregations Guide Companion Map Legend

We offer the following list of terms, symbols, and instructions as a reference to help you make the most of this Companion and the Healing Congregations Guide. We hope you can use it like a map legend or key.

<p>Key Terms show up in blue. Hover your cursor over the text for links to more resources on that topic.</p> <p>Trauma =</p> <p>Toxic Stress =</p>	<p>Learn More sections offer more information to go deeper into a stream or framework. Media, books, and resources are provided to engage groups in learning and practice with the materials.</p>	<p>Roadmaps provide guidance for specific audiences.</p> <p>Healing Congregations Guide Materials correspond to the stories and practices to engage with in each roadmap.</p>
<p>Streams are frameworks for thinking about trauma and healing.</p> <p>TIC = Trauma-Informed Care</p> <p>HCE = Healing-Centered Engagement</p> <p>LCL = Leading Causes of Life</p> <p>Wading Deeper Into A Stream provides detailed information and suggestions for applying the framework to a particular context.</p>	<p>An Appendix is provided with printable handouts, worksheets, and informational material.</p>	<p>Resources sections include links to printable handouts, books, articles, and information</p>

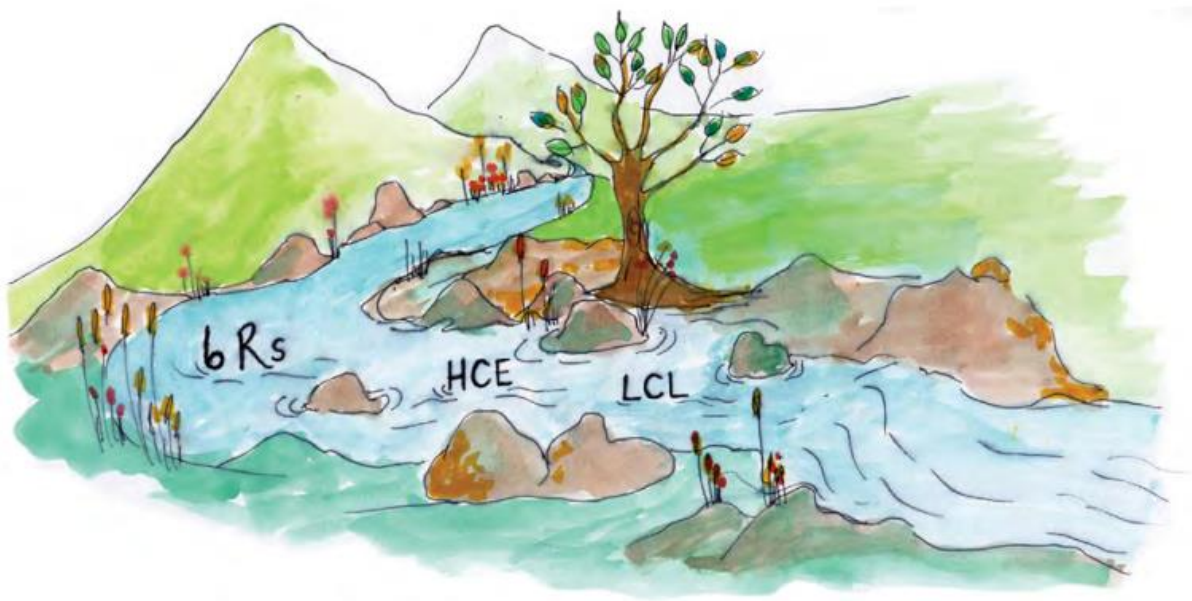
What Are the Streams That Guide Us?

We are communities of hope, and it turns out that our spiritual practices are exactly what science tells us is needed for protecting, healing, and transforming the impact of trauma on our bodies, minds, spirits, and communities. Many frameworks can help us practice even more intentionally. We have chosen three thought streams that we found particularly useful in helping us be proactive agents of healing in our communities. But these are not the only streams of thought or frameworks that work, so keep exploring and learning to see what works for you.

The three streams of thought we have chosen to feature in this work are:

- 6 R's and 6 Principles of Trauma-informed Care (TIC) that we refer to as "6x6",
- Healing-Centered Engagement (HCE)
- Leading Causes of Life (LCL).

We think of these streams of thought as all flowing into one river, going in the same direction toward hope, healing, and life.



6 x 6: The 6 Rs and 6 Principles of Trauma-Informed Care

Trauma-Informed Care or TIC invites empathy and understanding of how past experiences shape one's current gifts and struggles. This approach can be part of the practice of any organization. It means that as an organization, you are aware of how trauma impacts people and you focus especially on safety and avoidance of re-traumatization. The 6Rs describe how congregations can demonstrate being trauma-informed. The 6 Principles are the core values at the heart of Trauma-Informed Care.

More information on Trauma-Informed Care and the 6 Rs can be found in the Healing Congregations Guide on page 55.

Healing-Centered Engagement

Healing-Centered Engagement or HCE overlaps with trauma-informed practices but also has vital distinctions. Its approach to addressing trauma moves beyond the question of “What happened to you?” to “What is right with you?” It offers a way for people who are not clinicians providing therapy to nurture healing in their communities through cultural and spiritual roots, finding agency and meaning, and engaging the social and political dimensions of traumatic experiences. It uplifts the role of aspirational dreaming to ignite hope and centers the health and well-being of those providing care. More information on the Healing-Centered Engagement can be found in the Healing Congregations Guide on page 81.

Leading Causes of Life

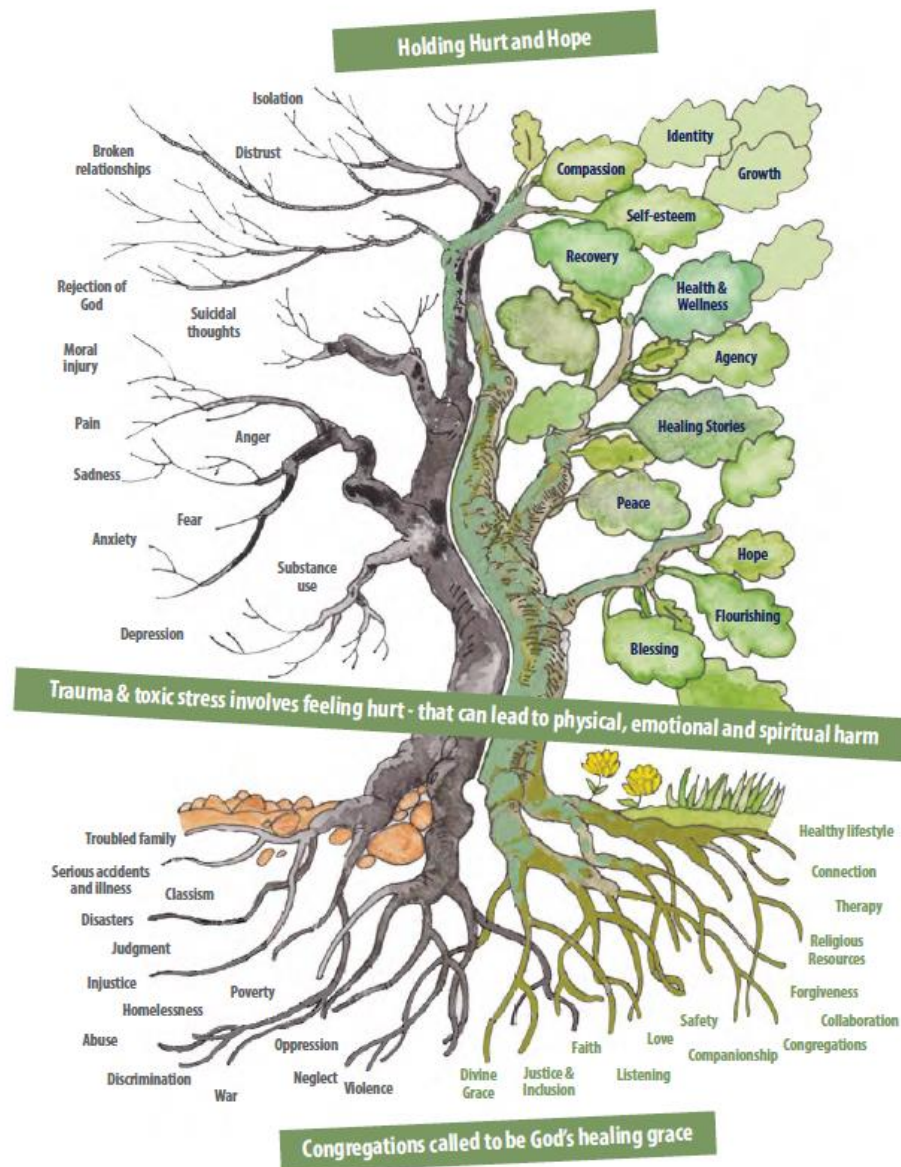
While the medical world often leads us to focus on the leading causes of death, Leading Causes of Life focuses on five themes that drive our well-being, and each one happens in our congregational life. When we talk with each other, we are all yearning for hope, wholeness, and well-being. We want to be rooted in these deeper ways of living that make us feel connected to each other with more significant meaning and purpose. Gary Gunderson calls these ways of being Leading Causes of Life. He says, “*We live in **connections**; we thrive in webs of meaning that make reality **coherent**; we flourish in **our capacities to work together** on things that matter; we bloom in our experience of giving and receiving **blessings** across generations; and we prosper as we are drawn towards **hope**.*”

As this guide seeks to be generative, we know that what we pay attention to grows, so we are leaning into those things that cause life: connection, hope, agency as our capacity to act and work together, blessing, and coherence. There is more to explore on the Leading Causes of Life in the Healing Congregations Guide on page 108.

Holding Hurt and Hope

The paradox of both hurt and healing existing side by side is explained in more detail in the Healing Congregations Guide on pages 9 and 10. We find the Tree of Community a helpful illustration to communicate this complexity.

The Tree of Community: Trauma and Life



(Adapted from the National Council for Behavioral Health. Developed as part of the trauma-informed Primary Care Initiative. Supported by Kaiser Permanente National Community Benefit Fund at the East Bay Community Foundation)

Considerations for Those Leading the Way

We hope this Companion to the Healing Congregations Guide will be versatile for several leaders and roles. We also recognize that your role will shape your hopes and aspirations for how the Companion might be used.

We offer orientation to the Companion in five roles:

- [Small Group Facilitators](#)
- [Clergy and Faith Leaders](#)
- [Theological and Spiritual Educators](#)
- [Children and Youth Ministers](#)

We call these sections Roadmaps. Within each Roadmap, you will discover some framing, highlighted stories, and discussion tools for reflection. You will also be directed back to specific pages within the Healing Congregations Guide that we feel are relevant to your role and potential context.

These Roadmaps are merely a starting point. While we highlight certain stories in different places, each may be explored through multiple lenses for deeper learning. Ultimately, we hope your orientation to the Healing Congregations Guide will draw you and those you lead deeper into this sacred work of story-sharing and learning.

Wading Deeper Into A Particular Stream

There may be a framework that speaks to your context more than another. Maybe a framework appears more accessible to your community than the others. Maybe you have been on the journey for some time and are ready to wade deeper into a particular framework on trauma and healing. What follows are deeper dives into each of the streams of thought we found helpful. We have provided additional material on each stream, such as key ideas, stories from the Healing Congregations Guide featuring the framework, resources to explore, and learning materials.

The 6Rs and 6 Principles: A Trauma-Informed Approach

We hear the question a lot: “What do we need to do to be a trauma-informed faith community?” There are no exact, prescribed steps, but there are some practices that the majority of those working in the field of trauma and resilience agree are particularly important.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s framework of a Trauma-Informed Care approach identifies 4 Rs (*Realize, Recognize, Respond, and Resist Retraumatizing*) that make good benchmarks to tell if we are headed in the right direction. They say:

A trauma-informed congregation **realizes** the widespread impact of trauma and understands how trauma can affect individuals, families, communities, and even the congregation; **recognizes** the signs of trauma and the practices of healing and hope; and **responds** by actively practicing what we know brings healing and resilience in all areas of the congregation. People are gentle with each other and actively **resist retraumatization** by applying relational healing modes, especially in moments of conflict or disruption.

The Chicagoland Trauma-Informed Congregations Network added two more Rs (*Repair and Resilience*): A trauma-informed congregation also **repairs** relationships by acknowledging ways in which our faith communities have been sources of trauma through abuse, judgment, rejection, and abasement and actively works to repair relationships. A trauma-informed congregation also trusts the power and wisdom of our scriptures and spiritual practices to cultivate **resilience** and well-being for people of all ages. The Healing Congregations Guide provides more information on the 6 Rs on page 55.

To keep us on our toes (and maybe a little bit confused!), SAMHSA also suggests 6 Principles that should undergird everything that we do in Trauma-Informed Care. This is also in the Healing Congregations Guide on page 48.

- **Safety:** The physical setting is safe, and interpersonal interactions promote a sense of respect, nonjudgment, and safety.
- **Trustworthiness and Transparency:** Those providing services are committed to transparency, actively working to earn the trust of patients, clients, and congregants. In this way, historical and institutional traumas are brought to light, and there is an honest reckoning in an effort to repair relationships. This happens through accountability, well-defined roles and expectations, and clear communication

- **Peer Support:** We are all affected by trauma. When we enter into mutual, supportive relationships, it promotes healing and recovery.
- **Collaboration and Mutuality:** Everyone has a role to play in a trauma-informed approach. Decisions, power, and actions should be shared.
- **Empowerment, Voice, and Choice:** Recognize and build on individuals' strengths and experiences. Trust people's God-given ability to heal and have agency, voicing their needs and choosing their paths to wholeness.
- **Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues:** Intentionally address biases and stereotypes. Leverage the healing value of cultural connections. Recognize and address the effects of historical trauma.

The 6 Rs and the 6 Principles work together to help communities understand and create healing spaces for intergenerational trauma. These practices recognize and protect everyone's dignity and humanity. They remind us that we are all more than the adversities that have shaped us. God calls all of us beloved.

Integrating the 6Rs and 6 Principles in your Healing Congregations book study is a simple exercise in starting to practice being trauma-informed. For example, you can attend to safety by thoughtfully preparing the space to be inviting and calming, either for in-person or virtual gatherings.

- You may play music or include a time for people to center themselves as they arrive.
- Think about how the physical environment is set up and what you can do to ensure participants have enough personal space when meeting in person.
- You can work together as a group to establish ground rules that help everyone feel safe and present.
- You may also share with your participants in advance that some of these stories are highly sensitive and may contain difficult content.
- Encourage people to give themselves grace and to step away when needed.
- One of the Rs is "Resist Re-Traumatization," so please be mindful of those who are living with their own experiences of childhood adversities or ongoing difficult experiences with trauma and chronic stress.

Learn More

SAMHSA: A Practical Guide for Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach

<https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep23-06-05-005.pdf>

Oprah Winfrey and Bruce Perry. "The most important thing for healing is love."

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dF20FaQzYUI>

Healing-Centered Engagement

A healing-centered approach to addressing trauma acknowledges real harm has taken place, and often, it is in the context of human relationships. It does not ask, “What is *wrong* with you?” It recognizes that something happened to you and asks different questions. Healing-Centered Engagement asks, “What’s right with you?”, “What’s strong with you?” and “What do you need to be restored, to heal?” It views those exposed to trauma as whole people first, whole people with agency in creating their well-being rather than broken victims of traumatic events. Healing-Centered Engagement is akin to the South African term “Ubuntu,” meaning that humanness is found through interdependence, collective engagement, and service to others.

Healing-Centered Engagement offers an asset-driven approach to holistically restoring people’s well-being. The healing-centered approach comes from the idea that people are not harmed in a vacuum, and well-being comes from participating in transforming the root causes of the harm within institutions. Healing-Centered Engagement also advances the move to strengths-based care and away from some of the deficit-based mental health models that drive therapeutic interventions. Explore the Healing-Centered Engagement in the Healing Congregations Guide on page 81.

The Healing-Centered Engagement work of youth advocate Dr. Shawn Ginwright offers the CARMA principles as a way to bring these truths to light.

CARMA stands for Culture, Assets, Relationships, and Aspirations.

- The role of **Culture** and spiritual rootedness in restoring identity cannot be ignored and often is a place for much work to be done.
- The two truths above--#1. Healing is possible, and #2. We are not the worst thing that has happened to us--emphasize **Assets and Relationships**.
- **Meaning** is getting in touch with the profound discovery of who we are, why we are, and what purpose we were born to serve. The importance of providing guidance for children and youth to make meaning of their situations and find purpose in their lives is often what children and youth workers can offer in their programs.
- The last A, **Aspirations**, might be the most important of the CARMA principles because it is often the case that trauma destroys children’s and youth’s ability to dream. Practicing aspirational imagination is essential to give children and youth hope that the future is bright and offers so much life to explore.

A healing-centered approach recognizes that healing from trauma begins with restoring one’s identity. Honoring cultural heritage and traditions is essential to affirming one’s identity. It views the importance of agency—the ability to act with purpose and power in one’s best interest—as a necessary process for reestablishing a sense of control over one’s situation. It recognizes the power of consistent, positive, caring relationships to

nurture healing through restoring trust and a sense of belonging and acceptance. Healing-Centered Engagement suggests finding meaning to bring a sense of order during seemingly chaotic circumstances. It turns toward aspirational thinking to keep envisioning the future to help people see that the pain that may be in front of them is not all there is.

Learn More

- Shawn Ginwright Article: <https://ginwright.medium.com/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c>
- Difference between Trauma-Informed Care and Healing Centered Engagement: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJOoCQBE2a8>
- Difference between Equity, Equality, Liberation, and Joy/Love/Happiness/Flourishing: https://youtu.be/TxbRQx_8TUA

Leading Causes of Life

The Leading Causes of Life are the things that drive our well-being, and they are found in our congregational life. The causes of life are always there, but they grow and thrive when there are safe places of love and care. This stream helps us see how life does find a way to grow, and often it surprises us most in the community.

- CONNECTION

As human beings, we find life through complex social relationships and connections to one another, building communities of various kinds that enable us to adapt to changing threats and opportunities.

- COHERENCE

Coherence is how we make sense of life and order an otherwise overwhelming confusion of experience of nature and of ourselves in seeing our life journey as intelligible, neither completely random nor simply victim to forces outside of our control.

- AGENCY

The capacity to act intentionally in the world—our creative freedom—and our moral awareness of how our responsibility for what we do and why we do it marks our human spirit.

- HOPE

Hope, in the deepest sense, is not optimism or wishful thinking: it is about our capacity to imagine a different, healthier future and to find the energy to do something to bring it about.

- INTERGENERATIVITY

When our lives are blessed and nurtured by those who come before and after us, we are encouraged, strengthened, enlivened, and better able to shape our lives and make vital choices. Active blessing means affirming another's sacredness as a person—wishing them well.

Learn More

- Leading Causes of Life [Video](#) with Gary Gunderson & Teresa Cutts
- Gary Gunderson and Larry Pray, Leading Causes of Life: Five Fundamentals to Change the Way You Live Your Life, Abingdon Press, 2008.

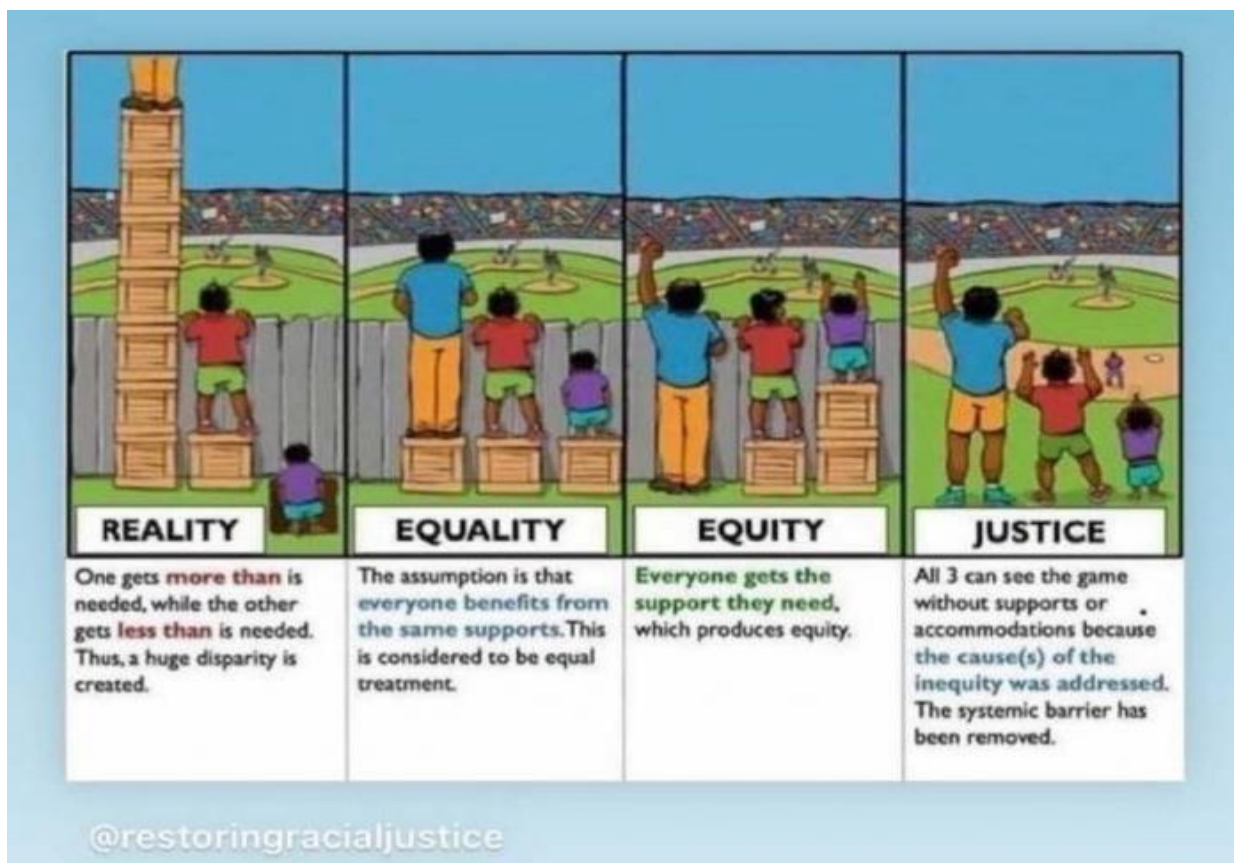
A Discussion of Equality, Equity, and Justice

As a small group facilitator, it is important to create a space where all voices are heard and to attend to the ways power may impact how people show up in vulnerable spaces. We all long for connection and belonging. We also have past experiences of hurt and healing, ways we are socialized to expect to be listened to or to be silent, and unique personality traits. Raising awareness of equality, equity, and justice can be a helpful discussion when setting group norms.

Equity is everyone getting the support they need to thrive, which is not the same as equality. Equality implies equal treatment, or everyone getting the same thing regardless if it is helpful, useful, or meaningful for the individual. As we know, our society privileges some over others, so, to create an environment of equity, some need more resources than those who are privileged. Justice is the removal of systemic barriers that create inequity.

This video is of Dr. Ginwright referring to liberation instead of justice. [Radical Healing with Dr. Shawn Ginwright](#).

[Here](#) is a popular image by @restoringracialjustice that helps to unpack the differences between these terms.



A Discussion of Our Core Self-Capacities

Risking Connection in Faith Communities is a curriculum developed by the Sidran Institute and written by Jackson Day and other faith leaders. One of the core ideas in this learning program is the idea that each of us has core psychological and spiritual needs that they call our “self-capacities.” These three core needs are:

1. Feeling worthy of life
2. Managing our feelings
3. Feeling a sense of connection to others, even when we are apart.

We are born whole. God created us to know our value without question, to be connected to each other, and to feel a range of emotions that help us richly experience the world around us. God imprinted these capacities into our DNA as human beings. Throughout our lives, we are constantly working on building these core parts of our identity and experience as humans.

When we experience traumatic or adverse events as children or even as adults, those core parts of ourselves can be disrupted. Abuse, neglect, and long-term wear-and-tear of discrimination can make us question whether we are worthy of love and care. We can find our feelings overwhelming. We can feel disconnected from other people.

When that happens, we behave in ways that help us feel better or that help us feel worthy and valued, manage our feelings, or feel connected to others. Sometimes, we try to get our needs filled in ways that are unhealthy.

What psychologists have found, and indeed what we know about how God’s imprint of love works in us, is that if we can build up those core parts of our wholeness--feeling worthy of life, managing our feelings, and feeling connected to others—we can handle stress better.

When we see people acting in ways that might be disruptive or problematic in our view, we know that those behaviors are tied to experiences of pain. Trauma-informed care teaches us to ask: “What happened to you?” versus “What’s wrong with you?” Healing-centered engagement teaches us to ask: “What’s right with you?”

We can also ask, “How is this behavior helping this person” to:

1. Feel worthy of life
2. Manage their feelings
3. Carry a sense of connection to others even when they are apart

Our job is not to judge and correct the behavior but to understand that the person is probably trying mightily to get back to that God-imprinted wholeness and to figure out how to support and meet the need that they are trying to work out.

We can do this for ourselves, too! Rather than judging and shaming ourselves when we have trouble coping, we can recognize that there are deep needs that we have as

humans and find ways to build up our strengths in these areas—feeling worthy, recognizing and managing our feelings, and fostering a sense of connection with others.

What we find is that the more we can build up and increase these three core functions, the less likely we are to be flipped into crisis mode when we are faced with stress or adversity.

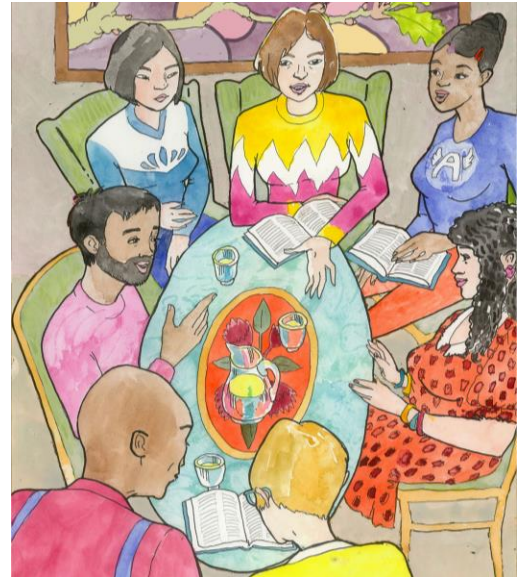
We may need a therapist to help us work on these things, but mostly these self-capacities are built through positive social relationships. We can be healing for each other—we can help each other restore our experience of our God-imprinted wholeness—simply by showing respect, listening, collaborating versus fixing, fostering hope, and reassuring each other that we are there for each other.

(This material comes from the *Risking Connection in Faith Communities* curriculum developed by the Sidran Institute and hosted by the Traumatic Stress Institute.)

Co-regulation is a helpful skill in supporting others experiencing stress. Co-regulation is nurturing connection of another individual that supports their regulation needs through the use of strategies, tools, and calming techniques in order to self-soothe or respond in times of stress. Co-regulation is providing another person, the calm, safety, and connection they cannot access for themselves in the moment. Resmaa Menakem says, “Settled bodies help settle other bodies.”

Preparing for the Journey

This section is for those who may be responsible for leading others in deepening their understanding of trauma and nurturing healing in their communities. We have developed Roadmaps for specific audiences, and each Roadmap includes selected materials from the Healing Congregations Guide for groups to engage in learning together. We have also provided a few foundational understandings that are relevant for all audiences working to understand trauma and promote healing. These are offered here as discussions.



Start with the Yourself

We know that for any kind of healing journey, we need to start with ourselves. Consider what you need to do to prepare yourself as you lead this discussion. Some questions you might ask yourself as you prepare:

- How can I center myself before the discussion starts so that I am grounded and focused on the core message and goal of the program?
- What have I noticed about what activates my feelings?
- What do I know about what helps reconnect me when I feel off-kilter?
- How do I want to cultivate curiosity, kindness, and grace for myself and for others in this conversation?



Roadmap for Small Group Facilitators

Our task in this project is to share the language of our big and loving God, to say the words of hope and healing that will foster safety in a world gone upside down, where trauma and suffering need to be met with the radical truth of God's love and the power of relationships in community or kinship.

Your role as a facilitator is to help your group members bring their understanding about God to the stories--their experience of God, how God acts, and how we should be together as people of faith. And your role is to help people wrestle with the questions that the stories raise about how hurt, love, life, and hope operate in our lives...and what our role as people of faith is in creating a more loving world.

Invite participants to allow themselves to be drawn into their deepest knowledge and wisdom about who God is and how we can live through God's lens of love and tenderness. Some questions you can ask each other:

- What are some key words, phrases, or images that stay with you from the story?
- How does the story connect to your own experiences?
- What are the scriptures or sacred texts that this story reminds you of?
- How does the story support or challenge your own experience or view of God?
- What might the voices of those who have mentored you across your life say about this story?
- What did you learn about how hurt and hope operate in our lives?
- Consider what might be your next most faithful step on the journey to being trauma-informed and healing-centered.

Wrestling with Dominant Views of God

If you want to go a little deeper, you can invite your group members to consider how we are often embedded in dominant views of God that reflect unjust power structures and that this can contribute to causing and perpetuating trauma and suffering.

How can we pay attention when these dominant views come up? Can we pause and take the time to reflect to uncover where the dominant views overshadow our God of love, mercy, forgiveness, equity, and justice.

Invite group members to pause, do some self-reflection, and be aware of how this is operating for them as you dialogue with the story. Here are some questions to help you do that...

- What are the dominant notions of God that I bring to the reading?
- How do those notions shape my thinking and actions?
- Are there dominant notions that need to be disrupted or affirmed?
- In what ways might I need or want to disrupt or affirm these dominant notions?
- Are there themes or truths that could be affirmed, paradoxes lifted up, or lessons to be enhanced or emphasized?

Stories to explore:

- *He Weaved Webs of His History*. Healing Congregations Guide p. 88. Consider engaging the reflection questions at the end of this story on p. 90.
- *Connectivity at a Heart Level*. Healing Congregations Guide p. 93
- *Healer Healed*. Healing Congregations Guide p. 15

Content and practices to highlight:

- Practice the art of listening and experience the gift of being listened to by learning to listen at multiple levels through Deep Listening. Healing Congregations Guide p. 102.
- Prepare to create an environment for courageous and vulnerable sharing by considering the Role of Stories. Healing Congregations Guide p. 3.
- Read and discuss the Reflections on Connectivity and Healing through the Heart. Healing Congregations Guide p. 100

Resources:

See Appendix for 1-page resources you can hand out to your group members
Four Ways of Talking and Listening as a one-pager?
Deep Listening one-pager from resources



Roadmap for Clergy and Faith Leaders: Leading with Strength

Many of the editors and authors of the Healing Congregations Guide are clergy, some of whom also lead congregations. With this guide, we hope to remind leaders that experiences of trauma live in every congregation, whether within the lives of individual members, leaders, and staff or the congregations as a whole. Congregations may have their own histories of communal and [intergenerational trauma](#).

For faith leaders, this guide offers an opportunity to open up the conversation of hurt and hope and the relevance of faith as a pathway towards healing—healing that does not ignore or bypass pain but rather allows the hurt to be witnessed and shared in a loving community. This collective witnessing and sharing of pain often releases the power of healing that is possible when healing is experienced within a loving community.

We are communities of hope. We are communities of life. Religious rituals and experiences were formed precisely to mediate experiences of suffering with the power of God's presence and promise. It turns out that our spiritual practices are exactly what science tells us is needed for protecting, healing, and transforming the impact of trauma on our bodies, minds, spirits, and communities.

The in-between space where hurt and hope meet is the place of our most profound spiritual power. It can be a place of risk for things like [compassion fatigue](#), burnout, and moral injury. The Healing-Centered Engagement lifts up the “Care for the Caregiver” not

as an afterthought but as the starting place for healing. It is necessary for faith and community leaders to understand that prioritizing their own spiritual, emotional, and physical health is essential for the well-being of the community.

Jesus provides an example of self-care in the story where we find Him resting in the boat in the midst of a storm. A good reading resource that you might consider is "Rest in the Storm: Self-care Strategies for Clergy and other Caregivers" by Kirk Byron Jones.

Healing Congregations Discussion Guide Materials

Stories to explore:

A Second Day (p. 27)

Trunk Full of Shame (p 38)

Nurturing a Healing Culture (p. 103)

Content and practices to highlight:

- Read “A Second Day” and reflect on how your congregation or ministry setting cares for those struggling with mental health concerns.
 - How might your congregation/setting improve its understanding and care for those struggling with these issues?
 - How does your denomination/faith group understand the role of healing prayer and healing medicine? (p. 32)
- Read “Trunk Full of Shame.”
 - In what ways did the church add to Laneita’s suffering?
 - How might the congregation and/or pastor have responded differently to her pain?
 - How does this story resonate (or not) with your experiences of church in your life?
 - As a clergy person, how might you lead a congregation to respond differently to this kind of suffering?
 - Review the Six Rs (p. 55). Re-imagine Laneita’s congregation as one that embodies the Six Rs. How might this story look different?
- After reading “Nurturing a Healing Culture” and “Creating safe spaces of worship (p. 109), discuss how you might apply the Principles of Trauma-Responsive Worship and Leading Causes of Life in your worship setting.
- Which Congregational Strengths are shining brightly in your community? Healing Congregations Guide p. 129.

Resources:

8 Congregational Strengths: See 1-pager in Appendix

[8 Congregational Strengths Videos](#)



Roadmap for Theological and Spiritual Educators

Educators engaging those pursuing vocational ministry know the power of stories to shape and inspire learning and growth. As we learned through the writing of this guide, we discovered that we had our own stories to share to facilitate our healing and connection. Through our story-sharing—the telling and the listening—we met each other in a new way. We hope that current and future faith leaders who read and reflect on this guide in the community will also experience the urge to share and experience healing.

Those who have experienced [clinical pastoral education](#) or reflection seminars in field education already know the power of understanding one's own story and theological grounding as a vital part of one's spiritual formation and vocational call. We hope that some of these stories inspire future faith leaders to recognize and learn from their own vulnerability.

Some of the power of this guide is in the stories that show the pain of church hurt. It is healing to acknowledge that churches and religious communities can cause great pain, even while they can be wonderful and life-giving spaces. One question for reflection with students might be, "What stories need to be told that can lead to recognition, accountability, forgiveness, repair, and healing?"

In the world of sound bites and an incessant news cycle, humans are rarely given the space and time to reflect deeply. Simple answers fail to account for the complexity of our world. Educators have the opportunity to encourage our future faith leaders to remain open to the complexities of the human experience and the communities that we create. We can be agents of both hurt and healing. Educators can help future leaders resist the urge to reduce and dismiss narratives in ways that cause harm.

Healing Congregations Discussion Guide Materials

Stories to explore:

- Hope and Healing for One, p.44,
- Dad Had Two Very Different Faces, p. 58;
- My Son is Gay. Please Fix Him. p.119

Content and practices to highlight:

- After reading “Hope and Healing for One” and (Breaking down the wall of shame” (p.46), reflect on the ways in which leaders facilitate a culture that nurtures safety and vulnerability. What barriers get in the way of such a culture?
- Reflect on Perpetrators and the Image of God, p. 51. How does this resonate or challenge your own theology?
- After reading “Dad had two very different faces,” review “For everything, there is a season” p. 61 and respond to the questions raised.
- After reading “My son is gay. Please fix him”, reflect on when religious doctrine conflicted with your understanding of God. How did you navigate this? How do you as a future/present faith leader care for members of your community navigating these internal and external conflicts?

Resources:

Three Realms of ACES: <https://www.pacesconnection.com/blog/3-realms-of-aces-updated>

[8 Congregational Strengths Videos](#)

Roadmap for Children and Youth Ministers

This section is for Children and Youth Ministers to use for their own reflection and learning.

There are two critically important truths for Children and Youth Ministers to hold onto in this healing work. Keep these principles in mind as you explore the stories and prepare to work with children and youth in your care.

1 Healing is possible!

Research tells us and many of our lived experiences prove this, even in the most extreme cases of childhood traumatic experiences, the presence of just one positive and strong relationship with a caring, healthy adult can change the trajectory of a child's life from merely surviving, to truly thriving.

2 We are not the worst thing that has happened to us!

Changing the question from, "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?" is an important shift but we must go a step further to ask, "What is RIGHT with you, what is STRONG in you?" Keeping this question before us helps shift our thinking from a deficit mindset to focusing on the strengths and assets that helped the child or young person arrive before us today.

Healing Congregations Discussion Guide Materials

Stories to Explore:

- Poet Laureate (p. 17)
- My God Gives Chances (111)
- My Baby's Baby, (p. 123)

Content and Practices to Highlight:

- Read *Poet Laureate* and reflect on the ACES (37) and HOPE (38) present in that story. How does/might your ministry setting be sensitive to ACES and proactive with HOPE?
- Read *My God Gives Chances* (111) and *A Moment of Patience and Care* (112).
 - How did ACES appear to impact Obie's life?
 - What nurtured his resilience?
 - As a children's or youth minister, how does your life story inform your work?
 - Who are the children/youth with whom you are most connected? Who are the ones most difficult to connect with?
 - How might ACES and HOPE enhance your ministry with this population?
- Read *My Baby's Baby* (123).

- How did the church nurture this family?
- What are some of your takeaways from this story?
- How likely is your congregation to offer the same support?
- In what ways can you enhance your congregation's ministry to children, youth, and families who are struggling?
- Consider how the CARMA principles are evident in all of the stories.

Resources

- Positive Child Experiences, PACES Connection:
<https://www.pacesconnection.com/>
- Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences, Tufts University:
<https://positiveexperience.org/>
- 5 Healing Gestures: <https://changingmindsnow.org/gestures/>

Appendix

Additional Resources and Handouts



Six Principles That Guide A Trauma-Informed Approach

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration - SAMHSA



Safety on Multiple Levels – physical, psychological and emotional safety. Creating an environment where everyone feels that they can be themselves related to their identity, religion, race, gender, and sexuality and speak about their needs, grievances, or concerns.



Trustworthiness & Transparency – Trustworthiness is holding integrity and doing what you say you will do and transparency is being open about the way you do things and why you do them. Trust is developed by being present and accountable to the community you serve.



Peer Support – With peer support, we are creating community and fostering meaningful relationships that connect and empower us to address the issues that lead to burnout and also celebrate successes and the joy of the ministry that we do.



Collaboration & Mutuality – Addressing the power dynamics that often exist between different people and groups includes analyzing the notion that one group of people are the hurting ones and that others are the healers. We need to have mutual respect and acknowledgment that all of us have experienced trauma or hurt in order to co-create and be co-responsible for the work.



Empowerment, Voice & Choice – Trauma robs you of your autonomy and personal power and the ability to make decisions. When we work with trauma survivors it is important to help them regain the power they have lost by honoring their voice and choice in the services they receive.



Cultural, Historical & Gender Issues – To be trauma-informed means that we take into account the ways marginalized identities are oppressed and commit to respecting differences in identities such as race, culture, identity, gender, sexuality, ability, age, and history, and honor the strengths of these communities.

Adapted from My Healthy Citizen™ | Powered by My Healthy Globe, Inc. & SAMHSA

The Six Rs

The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) recommends thinking about how we can be trauma-informed in terms of 4 Rs.

1

Realize.

People at all levels of the congregation have a basic realization that experiences of trauma and adversity are common and widespread and that they affect our responses when we are under stress or feel overwhelmed. Our congregations and communities can also go through traumatic experiences and this can shape how our congregation or community behaves.

2

Recognize.

People in the congregation recognize the signs of trauma and the practices of resilience and hope.

3

Respond.

All members of the congregation actively practice what we know brings healing and resilience in all areas of the community.

4

Resist Re-Traumatization.

There is a communal commitment to be gentle with each other, apply relational healing modes, especially in situations of conflict or disruption.

In Chicago, the Trauma Informed Congregations Network, added two more Rs that came up as we talked together about how faith communities can be trauma informed.

5

Repair.

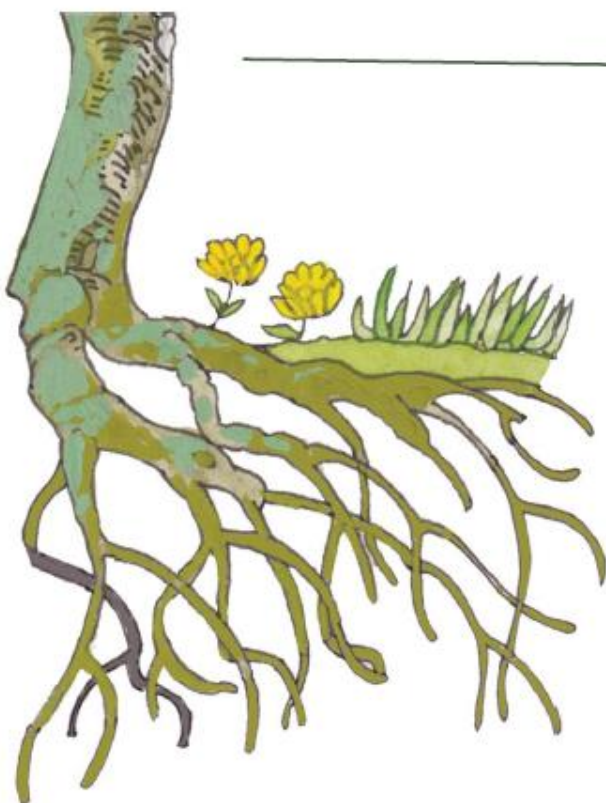
It was important for us to acknowledge the ways in which our faith communities have been sources of trauma through judgment, rejection and flat-out abuse. We believe that faith communities need to take accountability for pain they have caused and actively work to repair relationships.

6

Resilience.

We think it's important to also recognize the importance of resilience and trusting the power and wisdom of our scriptures and spiritual practices to cultivate resilience and well-being across all ages.

See References at the back for resources on the Four/Six Rs



Healthy Outcomes of Positive Experiences (HOPE)

Experiences. Researchers at Tufts University discovered four kinds of positive experiences in childhood that increase the likelihood that someone who has experienced adversity and hardship will have better health outcomes.

1. Nurturing and Supportive Relationships

- Individuals that recall having these types of relationships during childhood experience significantly lower rates of depression and poor mental health during adulthood. These include: relationships with parents

who respond to a child's needs and offer warm, responsive reactions; adults outside of the family who take a genuine interest in a child and support their growth and development; and healthy, close, and positive relationships with peers

2. **Safe, stable, protective, and equitable environments in which to develop, play, and learn** - Children who live, learn, and play in safe, stable, and equitable environments are less likely to experience poor mental and physical health as adults. This includes: adequate food, shelter, and health care; a nurturing home where a child is emotionally secure; a stable school environment where children feel valued and receive high-quality education; and a community environment to play and interact with other children safely and equitably
3. **Constructive social engagement and connectedness** - Children need to feel connected to their communities, loved, and appreciated. This includes: being involved in projects, peer mentoring, or community service through one's school or religious organization; participating in family cultural traditions; and joining a music, art, or sports group
4. **Social and emotional competencies** - Children need opportunities to develop their sense of self-awareness and social cognition, learn how to self-regulate emotions and behavior, and acquire skills needed to respond functionally and productively to challenges. These include: developing a sense of emotional and behavioral self-regulation; having the ability to respond to challenges in a productive way; and developing key social and culturally-appropriate communication and interpersonal skills

Sound familiar? What is your congregation doing to create these HOPEful opportunities, both for children and for adults in your community?

Healing Centered Engagement

A healing centered approach to addressing trauma requires a different question that moves beyond “what happened to you” to “what’s right with you”. It views those exposed to trauma as agents in creating their well-being rather than victims of traumatic events. Healing Centered Engagement is akin to the South African term “Ubuntu”, meaning that humanness is found through our interdependence, collective engagement and service to others. Additionally, healing centered engagement offers an asset-driven approach aimed at the holistic restoration of young people’s well-being.

The healing centered approach comes from the idea that people are not harmed in a vacuum, and well-being comes from participating in transforming the root causes of the harm within institutions. Healing centered engagement also advances the move to strengths-based care and away from the deficit-based mental health models that drive therapeutic interventions.

Four key elements of healing centered engagement may overlap with current trauma informed practices but offer several vital distinctions.

1. **Healing centered engagement is explicitly political rather than clinical.** Communities and individuals who experience trauma are agents in restoring their well-being. This subtle shift suggests that healing from trauma is found in awareness and actions that address the conditions that created the trauma in the first place.
2. **Healing centered engagement is culturally grounded and views healing as the restoration of identity.** It uses culture to ground young people in a solid sense of meaning, self-perception, and purpose. This process highlights the intersectional nature of identity and how culture offers a shared experience, community and sense of belonging. Healing is experienced collectively and is shaped by shared identities such as race, gender, or sexual orientation.
3. **Healing centered engagement is asset driven and focuses on well-being rather than symptoms we want to suppress.** An asset-driven strategy acknowledges that young people are much more than the worst thing that happened to them. It builds upon their experiences, knowledge, skills and curiosity as positive traits to be enhanced.
4. **Healing centered engagement supports adult providers with their own healing.** Adult providers need healing too! Healing centered engagement requires that we consider how to support adult providers in sustaining their own healing and well-being. We cannot presume that adulthood is a final, “trauma-free” destination.

Principles:

- Move to “what’s right with you?”
- Focus is political, not clinical—what caused the trauma in the first place?
- Healing happens in the restoration of identity
- Focuses on assets. What is the well-being we want versus symptoms we don’t want
- Centers the provider’s own healing

Practices:

- Build empathy
- Encourage dreams and imagination
- Build critical reflection and loving action

(Adapted from Shawn Ginwright’s article on Healing Centered Engagement)

Deep Listening as a healing tool

Deep listening is a process of listening to learn. It requires the temporary suspension of judgment and a willingness to receive new information – whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

Deep Listening Happens at Several Levels

Deep listening can happen at

- The *intrapersonal level* at which an individual listens deeply to their own interior experience. Inward listening. Mindfulness practice is foundational training for deep listening at this level.
- The *interpersonal level* at which one individual is focused on listening to another. We are often preoccupied with our own inner dialogue, preparing our response or advice. But often, the best response is more listening or a gentle question.
- The *group level* at which one or more individuals are listening deeply to the voices of many others. Here one can also be open to listening for common threads and patterns in the group thinking and culture.

Principles for Deep Listening in a healing situation

There are several fundamental principles and practices for deep listening:

- ✓ Listen without judgment.
- ✓ Listen to understand what are people trying to say?
- ✓ Listen for what is alive and changing.
- ✓ Listen for what is hidden and stuck.
- ✓ Listen for what lies behind people's thinking and assumptions about themselves and others.
- ✓ Listen for their feelings, which point to the things that matter to them.
- ✓ Listen for what people want, even if they are only dimly aware of these.
- ✓ Ask questions that gently encourage opening up. Like "Can you say a little more about..."

Listen with your soul

*Together we enter the threshold of mystery
Attune yourself to the silence
True listening is worship*

*Listen to what is unsaid and unsayable
True listening is worship
Together we enter the threshold of mystery
Within the possibilities and presence of silence*

*Come into rhythm
Together we enter the threshold of mystery
Attune yourself to the silence
Listen with your soul*

Beulah Tertiens-Reeler



Leading Causes of Life

"Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God." Micah 6:8

When we talk with each other, we are all yearning for hope, wholeness and well-being. We want to be rooted in those deeper ways of living that make us feel connected to each other with a more significant meaning and purpose. So all this work on being trauma-informed and healing centered is about getting us to that place where we can experience deep connection and work meaningfully together to create a peaceful and just world. Gary Gunderson calls these ways of being the Leading Causes of Life. He says,

We live in connections; we thrive in webs of meaning that make reality coherent; we flourish in our capacities to work together on things that matter; we bloom in our experience of giving and receiving blessings across generations; and we prosper as we are drawn toward hope.

These Leading Causes of Life are the things that drive our well-being, and no surprise...these are things that happen in our congregational life.

COHERENCE

We seek meaning from experience; our brains form and seek patterns. Coherence refers to the many ways we make sense of life, how life makes sense to us, to see our journey as intelligible, not wholly random, or victim to inexplicable forces.

CONNECTION

As human beings, we find life through complex social relationships and connections to one another, building communities of various kinds that enable us to adapt to changing threats and opportunities.

AGENCY

To have the will and the resourcefulness to act, and to act with our full capabilities as human beings, is a central 'cause' of life.

HOPE

Imagination helps us construct the lives we want to live and the legacies we want to leave. Hope, in the deepest sense, is about imagining a different, healthier future and finding the energy to do something to try to bring that future into being. If we can see a positive future, this nurtures the life force to enable it to happen.

INTERGENERATIVITY

We bridge, with gratitude and responsibility, what came before and what will come after us. When our lives are blessed and nurtured by those who come before and after us, we become encouraged, strengthened, enlivened and more able to shape our lives and make vital choices.



The Eight Congregational Strengths

There are eight strengths that are visible when people congregate. The earliest Christians called it the body of Christ. But these strengths are visible in every faith's social bodies, allowing all of us to tap deeper into the human design that makes life possible and sustainable.

These strengths lie latent within every congregation, expressed in infinite variations that emerge in an actual group of humans over time.

1. **Accompany.** We are born and only live in human connections. Like the smallest dendrites of the deepest roots, we find each other and help each other find our way.
2. **Convene.** We find ways of coming together. Sometimes by the hundreds with song and scent, but more often two or three people at a time, gathered around the possibilities for healing in one's life.
3. **Connect.** We find and create social nodes in which threads of relationships cross that allow food, money, time and grace to flow to where it is needed. Sometimes the patterns of the flow create large and sustained organizations, but more often, the weave is quiet, like a casserole after a loss.
4. **Stories.** We are held together by stories tested across centuries. As congregations, we live on the true stories of compassion, empathy and kindness that defy the hard-hearted times, sending a signal to those nearly out of hope. We learn to trust our own vulnerability by participating in these stories and find we need not fear our own passage of dependency.
5. **Sanctuary.** We find and create safe spaces for the hardest human passages, some of which rise with sculpted stone, brass and glass hundreds of feet high. The most crucial are those intimate groups of shared silence, touch and tears that keep life alive.
6. **Bless.** We wish for the strength to command, instruct and correct. But all healing and sustained change spring from blessing, which usually feels like forgiveness and unconditional acceptance. Congregations sometimes do that but often settle for mere instruction.
7. **Pray.** Rituals can be brittle, awakening old wounds, but when nurtured skillfully and with Spirit, the array of symbols and practices of faith can let healing flow. Who knows what happens when the Ultimate and human mingle?
8. **Endure.** The odd and often ragged group of people in any one congregation at any one time can seem unimpressive and frail over against the enormity of the world and its subtle web of troubles. But congregations do tend to endure, adapting, inviting, and finding a way. They break ground and give seeds a chance to take root. Sometimes they do.

