

CREATED BY
NBA'S MENTAL HEALTH
EQUITY COHORT

Soul Medicine

A TOOLKIT FOR
COMMUNITY
LEADERS AND
CARE PROVIDERS



Soul Medicine: A Toolkit For Community Leaders and Care Providers

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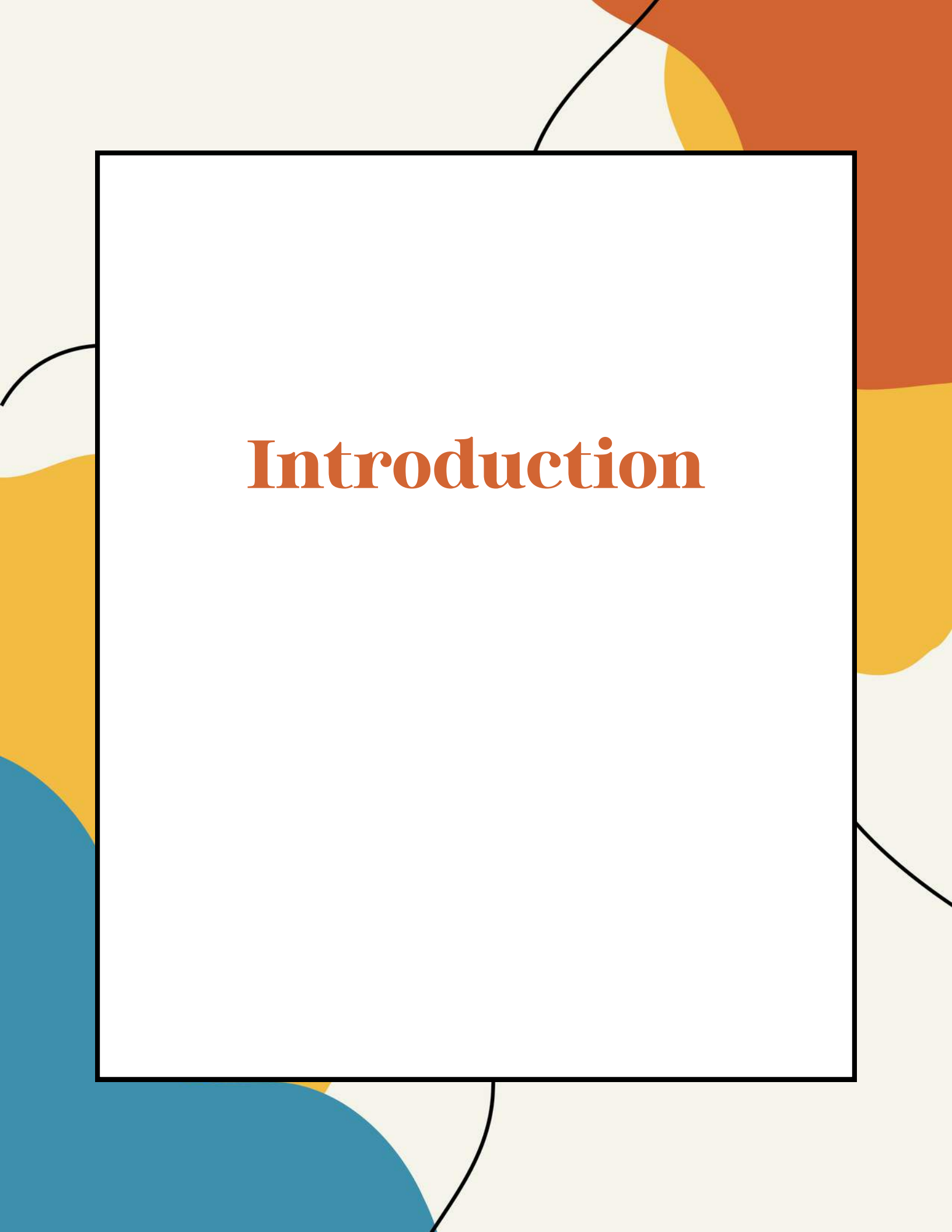
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Introduction

This Toolkit was developed for:

- Those who identify with the identities of marginalized communities and are in need of care as they serve
- Disciples of Christ affiliated clergy, leaders, and lay persons

Cohort Story

The 2023-2025 Mental Health Equity Cohort was created to:

- Be a supportive and creative space for Disciples mental health and justice professionals to explore the intersections of mental health, wellness, theology, justice, and equity.
- Address wellness disparities and issues of justice through the equitable sharing and creation of knowledge, resources, and support services to marginalized communities, for the upliftment of all.

In June 2023, the cohort began their journey together in Washington, DC where they explored issues of equity and justice together through museum visits (National African American History and Culture Museum, National Museum of American History (Gender, Asian American, and Latine exhibits), sharing their story of equity and justice work, meeting with NAMI DC president, and engaging



discussions on creating a world of mental health justice and wellness equity. From here, the cohort continued their journey exploring equity and justice together through readings, guest speakers, and discussion, which led to the start of developing this toolkit.

Toolkit development story and timeline

A staple of NBA's Mental Health Equity Cohort is developing a resource or gift for the church at large to assist with addressing issues of wellness equity and mental health justice. A model of a potential cohort of small group of two therapists and the Director of NBA's Mental Health & Wellness Program developed our BIPOC Clergy Retreat Model booklet, "The Corner," which became an annual BIPOC Clergy Retreat for Disciples leaders.

The current cohort landed on creating a toolkit for people just like them: community leaders and care providers. Each chapter of the toolkit consists of tools they use and need as people doing the expansive work of caring for communities in a variety of roles and as people belonging to marginalized communities. Cohort members gathered in Oakland, California June 2024 and in Albuquerque, New Mexico in March 2025 to work on the toolkit and experience the rest and practices they are providing to others .

Overview and Rationale of This Toolkit

This toolkit is medicine, and each tool is a gift from the hearts and minds of each cohort member, to be taken in a variety of ways.

Overview

Recent data underscores the urgent need for mental health support among care providers, particularly clergy, therapists, and community leaders. According to Barna Group, over half of U.S. pastors report needing psychological support, with 33% having considered leaving ministry due to burnout¹. Many cite emotional exhaustion, isolation, and a lack of institutional care as contributing factors². Similarly, therapists and other helping professionals face burnout rates nearing 50%, with compassion fatigue and chronic stress driving many to consider leaving the field³.

These challenges are compounded by the demands of leading communities through political polarization, social unrest, and collective grief. As the emotional labor of caregiving intensifies, so does the need for structured support systems, trauma-informed leadership training, and faith-integrated mental health resources. This toolkit was created in response to these realities—to equip leaders with practical tools, spiritual grounding, and pathways to care as they continue to serve others in complex and demanding seasons.

Footnotes

1. Barna Group, *Resilient Pastor Research*, 2025

2. Barna Group, *State of Pastors Report*, 2023

3. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), *Mental Health of Healthcare Workers*, 2024

Toolkit Rationale

Wes: “Churches have long been a place of refuge and respite for those in need, and for those who willingly serve others. As modern life has become more politically polarized, the Church is not immune; in fact, in some instances the Church has been part of that polarization. This is detrimental to the mental health and wellness of vulnerable and marginalized groups, and taking justice-oriented steps to bolster the health welfare of these communities is critical as we confront continued struggles and face new challenges.”



RJ: “More often than not there has been a complete lack of adequate responses, resources, and collective care towards how mental health and wellness impacts the life of the Church. Those of us living with mental health diagnosis, conditions, or struggles and are also participating in the church may even feel isolated. Pastoral leadership must be better equipped to respond to the multitude of fragmentations that people live with- and this must include holding space for not only spiritual health but also the mental health of our sisters, brothers, and siblings in Christ.”



Zae: “Many pastors and church leaders often deal with mental illness and burnout but may not seek aid for many reasons. There are several historical and cultural dynamics that come into play when it comes to pastors’ and church leaders’ resistance to help-seeking behaviors, especially regarding their mental health. They may believe that mental illness is a spiritual manner that can be healed through prayer.”



Additionally, help-seeking behaviors can be challenging for pastors and church leaders as they often involve self-disclosure, which can be difficult to do as they set an example for their congregants. These can include fear that congregants may view them unfit to be their spiritual leaders, the stigma involved with mental health, or the inaccessibility of mental health services. Therefore, this toolkit can help be a means for our church leaders to find ways to identify burnout and ways to prevent burnout and better take care of their wellbeing.”



Whittney-Marie: “I saw a message that read “you have grown to be the person who would’ve protected you as a child” I find that our tool kit gets to be a guide that can further resource ourselves and our community in being the sanctuary we’ve needed to feel safer, seen, and heard. This toolkit is the version of ourselves that will protect any child, no matter how old.”

Carolina: “I believe there are two primary reasons from what I understand our task to be and from what I have gathered through our interactions as a cohort:

- 1. To bring awareness and tools for church goers and leaders regarding mental health and the intersections of spirituality and holistic healing and wellness.** This toolkit may serve as a starting point and provide preliminary education and examples for how to engage in practices that increase wellness and appropriate linkage/access to additional resources and supports.
- 2. To engage in and encourage advocacy and action regarding those who identify with historically marginalized communities with less or more difficult access to information, resources, and quality mental health care. To help make more visible those who may go unnoticed, their stories, their needs, their contributions, and amplify their voices.** The toolkit can provide information, examples and ideas for how congregations and organizations walking alongside the church can be more mindful of the experiences and additional challenges that historically oppressed and marginalized individuals and communities face. To bring more light to who is not seen and what aspects of their identity/story are not seen and how this contributes to negative health outcomes while using the toolkit as a starting point to see the opportunities.”





Joi: “Personally and professionally, I believe offering this toolkit supports clergy and care providers but also contributes to broader societal change. It is empowering communities, enhancing understanding, and supporting resilience with healing. I feel this toolkit advocates and contributes to creating a more benevolent environment where everyone, regardless of background or identity, can feel held communally and access resources to thrive mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.”

Lee: “Nothing is more desirable than to be released from an affliction, but nothing is more frightening than to be divested of a crutch” (Baldwin, xii). Grief is the stuff of life from whence we experience the most pain and yet discern profound peace. This portion of the toolkit will assist Clergy to engage our church family on the subject of Grief after loss. This is the part of the work that takes place after the funeral, once the shock and immediacy of all the things have calmed.



This toolkit will assist in the journey of healing where we have perhaps built armor around our pain to protect the self thereby finding our self/church at a standstill. Hopefully, from this portion of this written toolkit we find physical tools that embolden us to release our necessary defense mechanisms (the scariest thing to do) in order for us to discern peace like we’ve never experienced before.”

“This toolkit is important because, though it may be an uphill battle, it is actually possible to have a Healthy Church. I can’t say I’ve seen many examples of a Healthy Church... perhaps it’s because we have a shortage of Healthy Church-Leaders... and yet I speak audaciously that a Healthy Church can be a norm for us. We’ve heard of a thriving church, a growing church, a dying church... I can’t say I’ve heard of a Healthy Church. This toolkit will assist the leadership of the church to intimately engage ministry toward a way of being that is not just Holy, but that is also Healthy! AND WE NEED THIS NOW MORE THAN EVER!!”

Much Peace

Chapter 1

Sacred Breath: Integrating Symbols of Faith and Mindfulness

Zaemelys Ramos
Rodriguez



Sacred Breath: Integrating Symbols of Faith and Mindfulness

Zaemelys Ramos Rodriguez



In this exercise, I have combined breath prayer with a breathing technique to cultivate a deeper connection between spiritual and mental reflection. Breath prayers are rooted in early Christianity, where monks and nuns brought prayer into every breath. They combined phrases of prayers with an inhale and exhale to enter into the sacred, creating a rhythm that helped them feel communion with God while fostering inner peace. This practice can help quiet the mind and body, creating space for God's presence. Additionally, breathing practices such as these can help one's overall health. Research underlines the benefits of intentional breathing in reducing stress hormones. Being mindful when breathing can help calm your body, especially in high states of stress, underlying the value not just for spiritual growth but also for improvement to one's mental well-being.

As a leader within my church, a student psychologist, and the many other roles I juggle, I often feel overwhelmed. The demands of caring for others while balancing responsibilities can create physical and emotional tension. I notice my heart racing and my body tightening with stress. In these moments, I am reminded the importance of caring for my well-being is just as important as the roles I play for others. This is where mindfulness in the form of breathing can make a profound impact. I have recently started to incorporate breathing exercises in moments of high stress or anxiety, which has helped immensely to calm me. Mindfulness can be defined as being aware of one's surroundings and body. Pairing these exercises with visualizations like a dove, adds a spiritual layer, connecting my breath with peace and faith. This practice of mindful breathing has opened a holistic approach to prayer and meditation, where rhythmic breath, contemplative words, and imagery foster a calmer state of mind and deeper connection to God.



This chapter highlights mental health equity and justice by underlining the value of creating culturally responsive and accessible practices, integrating faith with mindfulness, and offering a holistic tool that honors both faith and mental well-being to promote overall healing that can resonate with people of faith. Often, mental health practices do not consider the cultural context of individuals, so this practice integrates our faith into a traditional breath prayer with modern techniques, allowing clergy, community leaders, and care providers to use a familiar approach to cope with stress and anxiety while deepening their spiritual connection to God.

Chalice

“You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings.” Psalms 23:5 (NLT)

Purpose: Reflecting on how Christ can provide abundantly even when there is chaos.

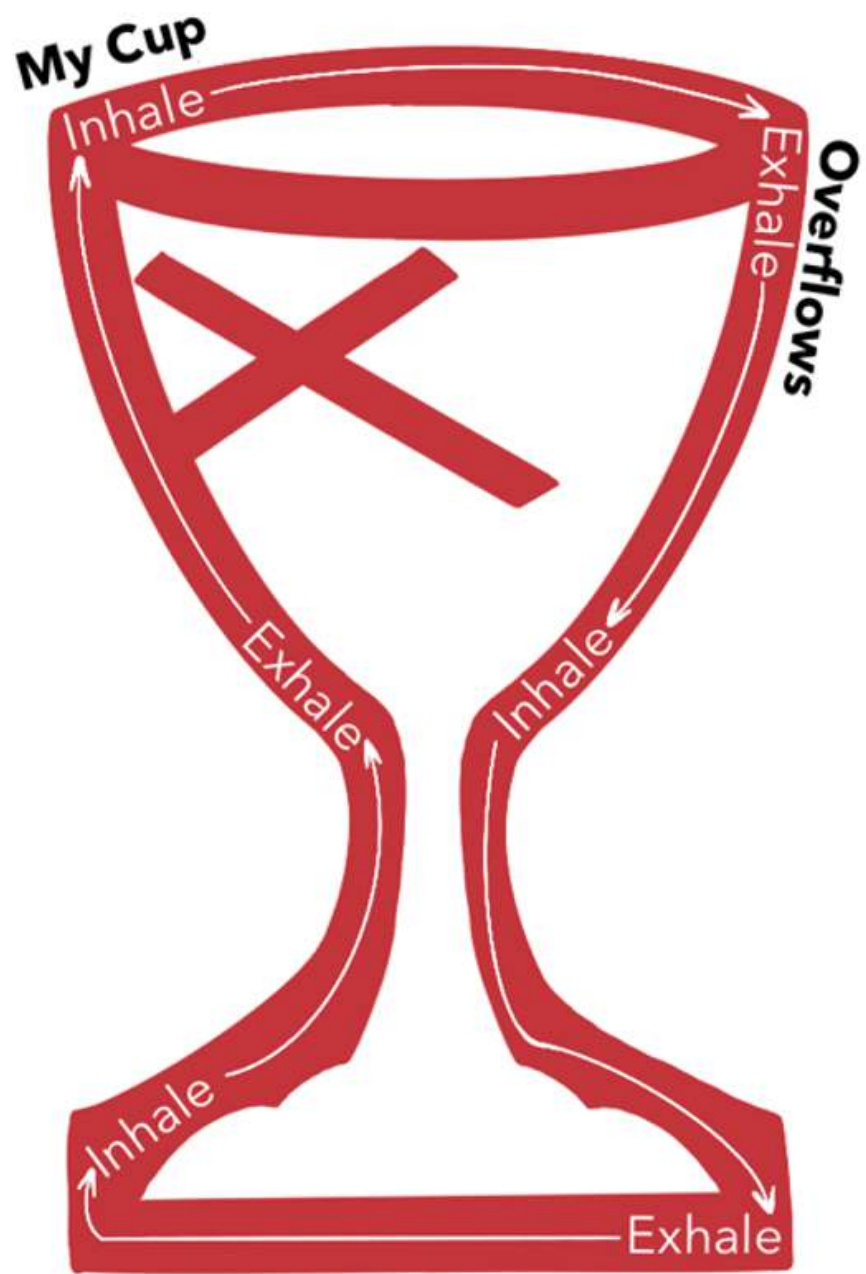
Symbolism: The chalice can represent Christ’s sacrifice and new covenant in which we are sustained by His love and mercy.

Directions: Trace your fingers along the outline of the chalice, following the arrows to guide your inhalation and exhalation. As you feel calmer and more centered, focus on the words “My Cup” as you inhale and “Overflows” as you exhale.

Breath Prayer: Inhale: “My Cup” & Exhale: “Overflows”

Chalice Breathing Technique:

1. Start at the top of the chalice: Inhale as you trace to the top of the cup.
2. Move along the side of the chalice: Exhale as you trace to the side of the cup.
3. Continue down the side of the chalice: Inhale as you trace towards the bottom of the cup, continue exhaling and inhaling as you move through the entire chalice.
4. Repeat as needed.





Dove

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." John 14:27 (NIV)

Purpose: Invoking the presence and peace of the Holy Spirit.

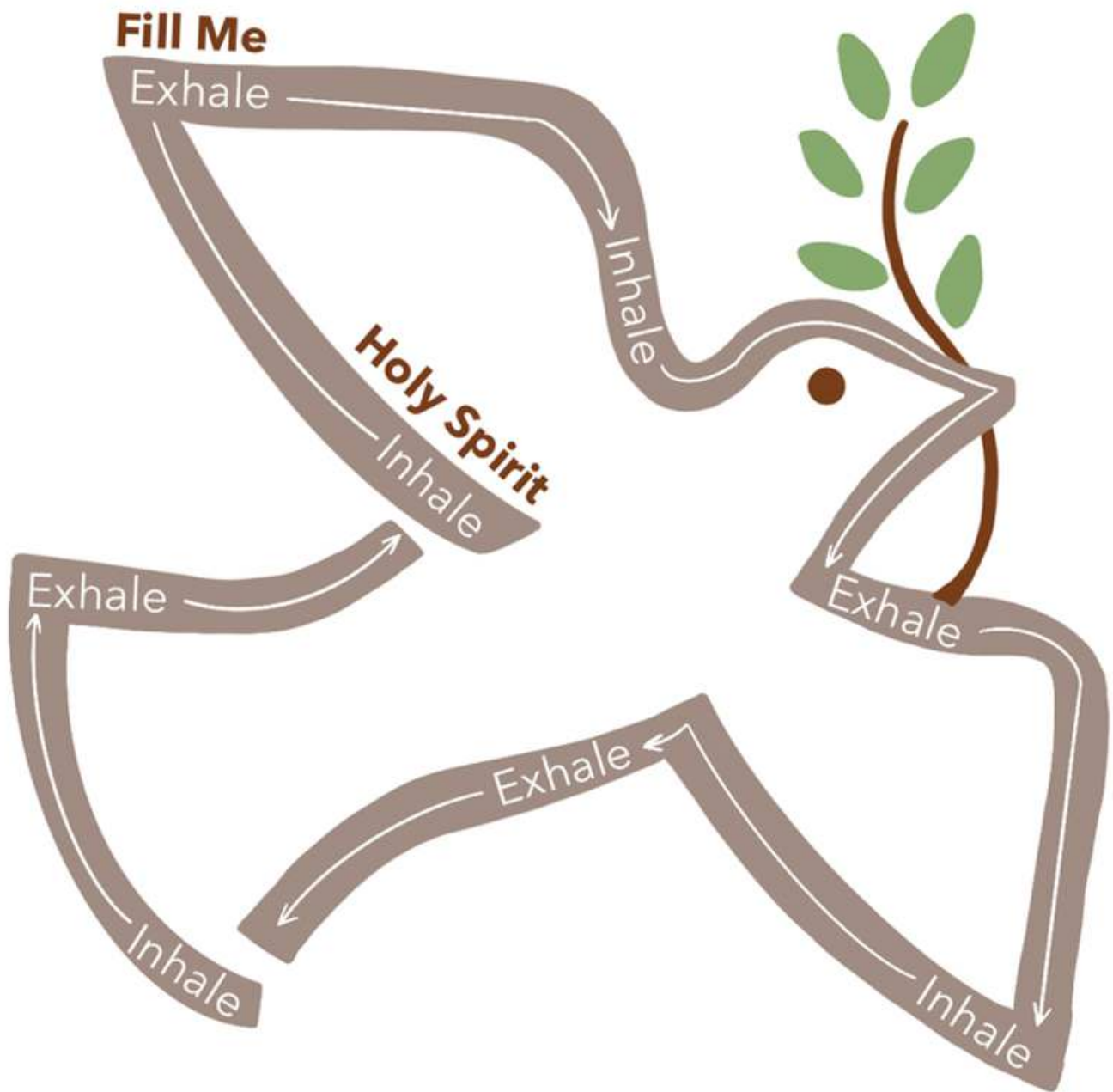
Symbolism: The dove represents the Holy Spirit and signifies peace.

Directions: Trace your fingers along the outline of the dove, following the arrows to guide your inhalation and exhalation. As you feel calmer and more centered, focus on the words "Holy Spirit" as you inhale and "Fill Me" as you exhale.

Breath Prayer: Inhale: "Holy Spirit" & Exhale: "Fill Me"

Dove Breathing Technique:

1. Start at the bottom of the dove's body: Inhale as you trace up.
2. Move to the left wing: Exhale as you trace to the tip of the wing.
3. Move to the head of the dove: Inhale as you trace to the left wing.
4. Continue side of the head of the dove: Exhale as you trace to the head.
Continue exhaling and inhaling as you move through the entire dove.
5. Repeat as needed.





Shepherd's Staff

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul." Psalm 23:1-3a (ESV)

Purpose: Seeking guidance and leadership from Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd.

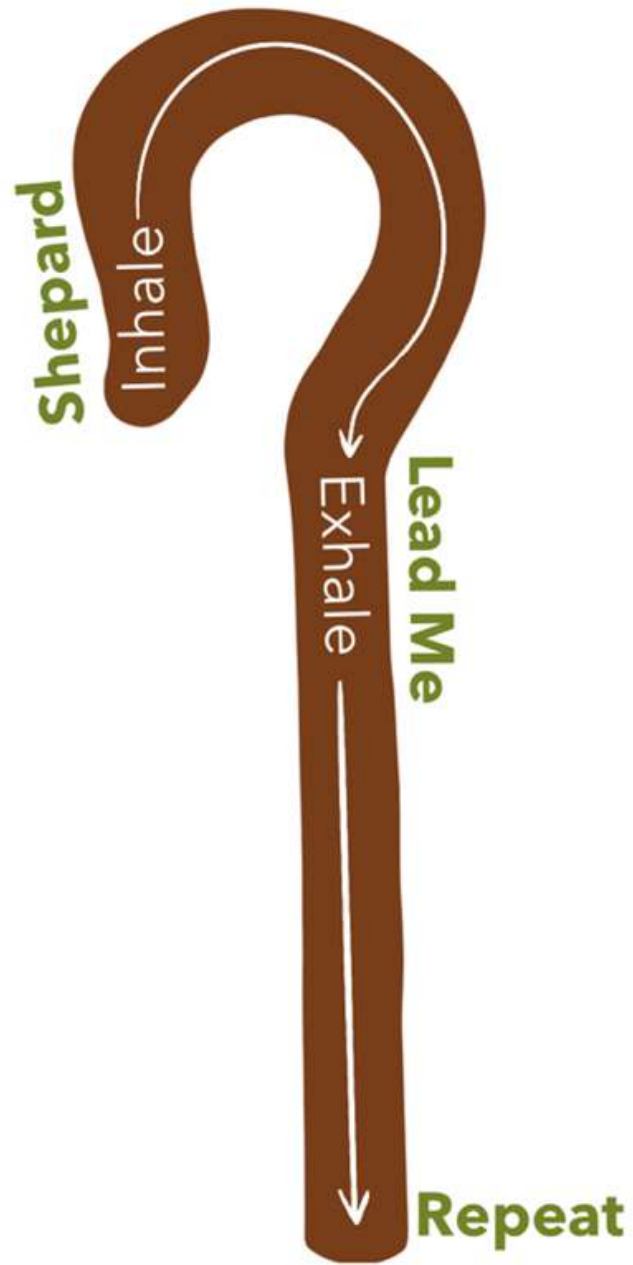
Symbolism: The shepherd's staff represents Jesus as the Good Shepherd who leads and cares for his flock.

Directions: Trace your fingers along the outline of the staff, following the arrows to guide your inhalation and exhalation. As you feel calmer and more centered, focus on the words "Shepherd" as you inhale and "Lead Me" as you exhale.

Breath Prayer: Inhale: "Shepherd" & Exhale: "Lead Me"

Shepherd's Staff Breathing Technique:

1. Start at the top of the staff: Inhale as you trace down to the hook.
2. Turn to the bottom: Exhale as you trace back down and repeat as needed.





Meet the Creator

I'm Zaémelys (Zah-Eh-Meh-LEES) Ramos-Rodriguez, and I feel called by God to bring equity to the mental health care system by creating affordable, culturally responsive care for underserved communities. Growing up in a Puerto Rican home, I was immersed in our rich history, traditions, and values while becoming deeply aware of the systemic injustices and cultural stigma that impact mental health care for Latiné communities. These experiences shaped my identity and strengthened my passion for serving my community through accessible, meaningful mental health interventions.

I graduated from Biola University in 2021 with a B.A. in Psychology and a minor in Art, recently earned my M.A. in Clinical Psychology in 2024, and am now pursuing a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at Alliant International University's California School of Professional Psychology. My academic journey reflects my call to addressing mental health disparities and empowering underserved individuals.

I have conducted research focusing on developing culturally responsive mental health interventions. I lead a student research lab that implements a comic-based intervention to reduce stress in Latiné youth. Additionally, my master's thesis was on creating Christian-based mental health literacy workshops to reduce faith-based stigma in Latiné churches. Additionally, my dissertation explores how story-based interventions can improve self-esteem and self-compassion in Latiné adolescents in California and Puerto Rico.

As an artist, I use my creativity to explore and process my internal struggles, believing that art is a powerful therapeutic tool. I've done freelance work designing logos, flyers, and children's illustrations, and I see my artistic ability as a gift from God that I integrate into my work as both a clinician and a follower of Christ.

In addition to my academic and professional work, I've been an active member of Casa de Refugio Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Covina, CA, for over ten years, serving in both worship and children's ministry. My faith has been a guiding force in my life and continues to inspire my dedication to creating meaningful change.

Looking ahead, I'm working toward my vision of creating a nonprofit program that uses creativity to make mental health care accessible for Latino children and families. As a member of the National Benevolent Association's Social Entrepreneurship Cohort, I'm taking concrete steps to bring this dream to life, combining my faith, research, and creativity to bring healing and hope to underserved communities.

Chapter 2

Reclaiming Our Voices and Increasing Connection Through Storytelling

Rev. Carolina Fuentes,
LCSW



Reclaiming Our Voices and Increasing Connection Through Storytelling

Rev. Carolina Fuentes, LCSW



What is your story? Feeling seen and heard, being able to bring multiple aspects of who we are, our stories and our culture brings peace to the deep voices within that long to cry, sing, shine and be cared for...fully. Having to constantly mask, code switch, or work to protect other people's comfort, expectations and privilege is both exhausting and painful. **Being seen and heard is medicine and is liberating.**

As we serve our communities of faith, the community at large, and work alongside colleagues with other identities and intersectionalities, we graciously hold space for others. But are you creating space for you? **For all of you?** What part(s) are you missing? Connecting, acknowledging, and creating space to bring more aspects of you, to be more playful, bolder, gentler can increase your overall sense of wellness/wellbeing and prevent or ease stress and mental health concerns allowing to increase protective factors and effective coping.

I am a Latina first generation immigrant. I am a mother, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, an adjunct lecturer at a graduate program, and a lay leader in my local church, currently going through the process of ordination. I long for more spaces where I can bring and share aspects of my story, and more fully explore and claim my voice. What I would like to offer in this chapter is options for storytelling opportunities to create more spaces for ourselves and others to feel more fully seen and heard.



Ideas to create storytelling opportunities and bring more of ourselves in community:

1. Sing/pray in your heart's language during worship and other church events
2. Share and model what others can ask or do to check-in with you and show their care for you in meaningful ways
3. Host storytelling meals where you and others can share aspects of their stories that connect to their family's legacy, unique elements of who they are, childhood or youth memories, and highlight what is important to them, what increases their sense of belonging and helps them feel safe.
 - a. Keep the group small (8 or less) - if a larger number of people is interested, set up multiple tables with small groups having simultaneous storytelling time
 - b. Encourage people to bring food to share from their culture or their favorite snacks and dishes. You may take turns or team up if hosting these meals periodically.
 - c. Encourage people to bring small objects, pictures, music that may represent important parts of their stories/background
 - d. Begin with a moment to create group norms or a safety agreement to ensure everyone has opportunities to speak, people will listen non judgmentally and prioritize safety and connection; minimize response and discussion. Encourage participants to let others just share.
 - e. Offer 4-5 questions that participants can choose from or choose a topic for the sharing and provide a combination of options that allow for lighter topics as well as more difficult ones.



The following questions are examples that can support reflection and connection through storytelling and community sharing:

1. What is the story of your name?
2. What are some fun memories that you have from your childhood/youth?
3. How would you describe the natural environment of the place/places where you grew up? How did it shape you? What if anything do you miss?
4. Share the stories of your food
5. What are the stories of your ancestors that are important for you to share?
6. What have you overcome? Focus on a particular season of your life or topic (e.g. college years, health, doubt, discrimination, moving to another country)
7. If you were describing your life with colors, textures, fabrics, images, smells, or other tactile or sensory elements, how would you describe it?
8. What is your journey of faith? How have you related to the divine in different seasons of your life? Where/when have you seen God?
9. What is the story that you would others to share about you
10. What aspects of who you are have you not been able to fully express or explore in this community? What do you miss that was part of your experience in other cultural/religious contexts?
11. When was a time that you felt connected/belonging within this faith community? What helped you feel this way? Who contributed to this experience?
12. When was a time that you felt disconnected/outside/uncared for in this faith community? How can our church/community recognize unhelpful beliefs, assumptions, unrecognized privilege?

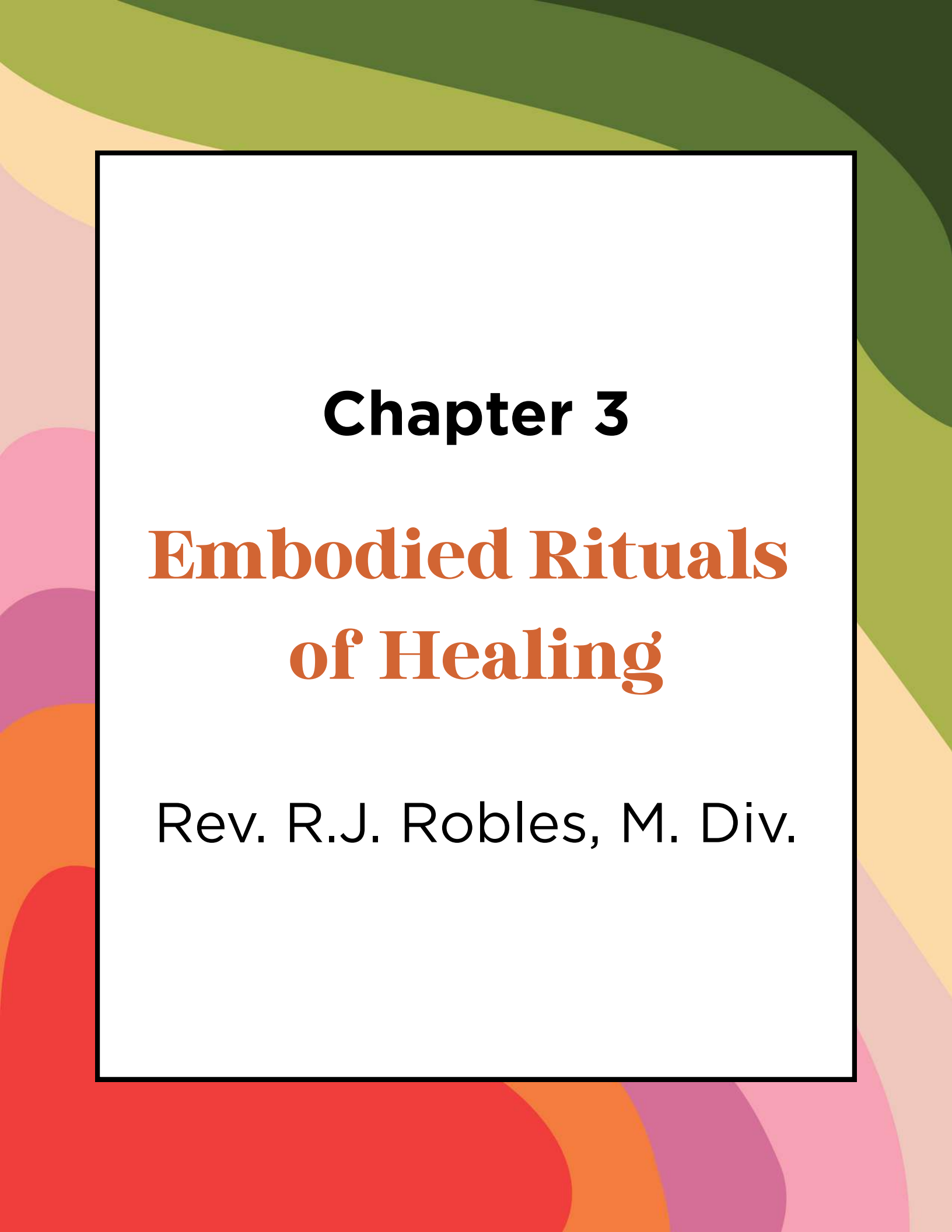


Author's Note

This chapter illustrates mental health equity and justice by providing an overview of how those who identify with marginalized intersectionalities or anyone who in any way may not reflect the characteristics of the majority in a group, may feel isolated, unseen, and/or unable to express more fully who they are within the group.

This chapter encourages communities to intentionally connect through small group discussion and storytelling, thus creating spaces for people to share safely more about their story, needs and identity. This chapter prioritizes creating opportunities for voices not equally heard to be amplified, increasing education, awareness, belonging and hopefully accountability for the (faith) community. This may help decrease assumptions, microaggressions and improve ways the community members care for each other.

I believe this chapter can be a starting point for communities wanting to be more multicultural by helping them better understand the experience of those currently in their community and be more prepared to connect with visitors and new members from diverse backgrounds.



Chapter 3

Embodied Rituals of Healing

Rev. R.J. Robles, M. Div.



Embodied Rituals of Healing

Rev. R.J. Robles, M.Div.



Writing practices and embodied rituals can create opportunities of healing. Engaging in a writing ritual amplifies and assists with one's core healing. Writing can be restorative, revelatory, and prophetic. Developing a writing practice may also be a catalyst for engaging in one's prophetic imagination. This embodied ritual is a vehicle for taking ownership of your healing.

What practices work for you may or may not work for someone else. Different moments and seasons may also ask of us to lean into different tools of self-care, healing, and wellness that address the particularities of your needs. Poetry is a ritualistic practice of healing that helps create radical worlds of possibilities.

We live in a society where many of us are told to be strong and not weak. We are told we have no time to slow down and cry. We are conditioned and socialized in gendered and racialized ways regarding the practice of crying. When crying is sacred. Crying is the fruit of the soul. The invitation is to allow yourself to cry throughout these rituals.

What is Poetic Healing?

I define it here as a style, a process, and a methodology, to heal through the practice and art of poetry. The speaking of truth to power by writing and naming emotions, thoughts, realities, conditions, imaginative, creative, and lived experiences. The intention is for the following poem to begin to express and create space for your beautiful teary eyes.



Poem Prompt: Pick a line from the below poem and write your own poem. Do not worry about the flow. Free write your poem. Speak to your crying practice. Cry if you must. Write and cry. Cry and write. Write from your heart space. Allow yourself this time and the space below to be vulnerable.

These Teary Eyes

Lamentations says, “my eyes will flow without ceasing,
without respite until the Lord from heaven looks down and sees-
and as I called on your name- my plea was heard-
and the words you said to me were- do not fear.”

My eyes flow with rivers of tears
because of the destruction of my people.

Our collective tears and prayers
honoring our loved ones that have been killed.
Sometimes this is all the prayer I have and can offer.

Rivers of tears roll down the side of my cheeks
as I bear witness to violence and genocide.
Knowing that the revolution will not be televised.
The revolution will flow from the river to the sea.



Daily Poetic Ritual Instruction

Recite the following poem:

Gift yourself with a moment of silence, stillness, crying,
And your own poetic magic.
Allow your divine tears to flow.
Repeat as often as you must each day.
May this be a healing resource to you.

Gender Rigidity is a colonial legacy.

Author's note: This ritual was written by and for transgender people in mind. It is a ritual that invites trans folks to recenter themselves and create a tender moment of intimacy with their bodies. Regardless of where you may be at in your transition, this spiritual bath will hold you and allow you to cultivate more self-love and gentleness. Please note that this ritual can be shared and engaged by anyone regardless of gender.

Items: Please read this ahead so that you are able to gather all of the following ingredients and items. The following items are needed for this ritual: rose petals; rose water (may be found in your local botanica, apothecary, or grocery store); running water and/or a water station, and a self-love playlist.

Please note: The items in this practice can be modified to accommodate your own context and needs. For example, if you do not have a bathtub, a shower or a sink works too. If you cannot find rose water, a rose or scented oriented body spray or gel works too.

Context: Sometimes, centering colonial legacies and norms around gender can recreate pain rather than liberate us from colonial paradigms. I recenter myself in my freedom through moments of intimacy that hold decolonial wisdoms and remind me that I am free to express my gender in all the ways authentic to me. It helps with our minds, emotions, and stagnant energy that may be causing blockages at the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual realms.



Ritual Instructions

1. Turn on your self love playlist and head to your water station of choice.
2. Place your hand tenderly on your chest, and say, “I am grateful for my bodily autonomy. I honor our collective transcestors by honoring me. I am grounded and connected to this earth. I let go of my past and the colonial ways I may have treated my body. I am open to new possibilities. I am open to loving myself as a practice of collective liberation.”
3. Take some time and space to be slow and intentional. Gently take a hot bath, hot shower, or wash your hands gently and lovingly. Fill up the tub or sink with rose petals and add some rose water. Notice how it feels to be practicing bodily autonomy.
4. Apply rose petals and rose water to your smooth skin.
5. Stay present to this moment of self-love. It is important to be present with the discomfort that might come with this moment of touch and body intimacy. As a community, oftentimes we may find ourselves struggling with our bodies, societal ideas of our bodies, and/or gender dysphoria. I invite you to stay a little longer in the warm water as you feel comfortable.
6. Place your hands on your heart and whisper to it, “Thank you for tenderly holding me. And for the divine decolonial wisdom that you’ve shared with me. Ashé”



Artist's Statement

This chapter highlights mental health equity and justice by inviting folks to engage in two embodied rituals of healing: poetic healing and spiritual bathing. The poetic healing exercise includes a brief reading from the Book of Lamentations. In Lamentations, scripture says “my eyes will flow without ceasing, without respite until the Lord from heaven looks down and sees- and as I called on your name- my plea was heard- and the words you said to me were- do not fear.” We are each uniquely positioned to resist fear, dismantle systems of oppression, and live a life free from fear. And doing so requires that we spiritually sustain ourselves through embodied rituals from time to time. All the time, if you ask me!? In this world we live in specifically for those of us navigating the medical industrial complex, the western psychiatric pipeline, entrenched in white supremacist cis-heteronormative complicity; a different world is radically possible.

How do you take care of your mental health? One way I was taught was an ancestor practice of spiritual bathing which you will learn more about below and be invited to practice. Spiritual bathing is an ancestral technology of resistance and self-love. It is a powerful embodied practice that may accompany one as we continue to resist colonial paradigms, realities, and realms. As a Afro- Puerto Rican practitioner, I can share this practice as it comes from a long lineage of boriken healers and healers of the Puerto Rican diaspora and my family from Lares, Puerto Rico. Hasta la victoria! Siempre! Pa'lante!

About the Creator

Rev. RJ Robles, M.Div is a queer and trans Afro-Puerto Rican community organizer, certified movement chaplain, movement trauma healer, and a peer mental health advocate based in Nashville, TN. As a scholar, healer, and faith leader in the Christian Church Disciples of Christ, they hold a Master of Divinity (M.Div) from Vanderbilt Divinity School, where their research focus was on the intersections of race, gender, sexuality and religion. RJ is also a practitioner of Puerto Rican espiritismo, IFA, and Reiki. They enjoy supporting families and connecting survivors of mental illness to community-based resources and healing practices.

Rest Break 1

Rev. Joselyn Spence



Rest Break 1

Rev. Joselyn Spence



Pause here and to take a breath.

Allow your feet to sink into the floor

Allow your back to rest against your seat

Flip your palms up in your lap

Close your eyes

And

Breathe

Deeply

In counts of 4-6

Allowing all you have read to settle within you

Continue to use this rest practice again and again as you move through this toolkit.

Chapter 4

Collective Joy: Affinity Through Black Women

Joi McCreary, MA,
MFT, CLC, CCHW
Rev. Whittney-Marie
Murphy, M.Div.



Collective Joy: Affinity Through Black Women

Created from the Hearts of:
Joi McCreary, MA, MFT, CLC, CCHW
Rev. Whittney-Marie Murphy, M.Div.



Our Love Letter to Black Women

To Our Beloved Sisters,

We write this letter with a heart brimming with love, gratitude, and pride. It's a letter to you, for you, and about you. As a Black woman, we see you, and in seeing you, We see ourselves.

You are magic. You are the alchemy of resilience and grace, of beauty and brilliance. You are the evidence of survival, of overcoming every storm meant to destroy you. In a world that often denies us the softness of being seen, you remain, unapologetically radiant.

Let us tell you this: You are enough. You have always been enough. When the world tries to convince you otherwise, remember the legacy you carry. Our mothers, grandmothers, and ancestors planted seeds of strength in us that bloom with every step we take. We are their dreams realized; their prayers answered.

You do not have to carry everything. You are allowed rest, to breathe, to simply be. I know the world expects us to be strong, to be the rock, but remember, even rocks erode under constant pressure. Prioritize your joy, your peace, your healing, and your sisterhood.



Celebrate yourself boldly. Whether you're wearing the crown of a mother, an entrepreneur, a student, or anything else you choose, know that your contributions are valuable. Your journey, no matter where it leads, is uniquely yours, and it is beautiful.

Lift your sisters, but don't forget to lift yourself. Empower each other, but don't forget to seek power in your own reflection. We are unstoppable when we recognize our collective strength, when we refuse to believe the lies that tell us we are in competition.

Know this: Your skin is poetry, your voice is a song, your essence is revolutionary. Every laugh, every tear, every stride you take redefines what it means to exist in a world that has tried to dim us for too long.

We love you. We love the way you rise. We love the way you love. We love the infinite possibilities of who you are and who you will become.

With empathy, encouragement, and unwavering pride,

Your Sisters in Love and Light

Joi & Rev. Whittney-Marie



About Collective Joy

The **Collective Joy Toolkit** is more than a resource—it's a sanctuary for affinity, belonging, and transformation. Created by **Rev. Whittney-Marie Murphy** of Come As You Are Collective (CAYA) and **Therapist Joi McCreary** of JoiOlogy 5155 Center of Joy and Transformative Growth, this toolkit emerged from their shared vision: to cultivate a space “for us, by us, so that we can be us.”

Rooted in the lived experiences of two Black queer women who reconnected after more than a decade of parallel journeys, the Collective Joy movement centers people, not just ideas. It is a tangible representation of what happens when spiritual, mental health, and holistic resources are designed by those who intimately understand the communities they serve.

Rev. Whittney-Marie and Joi found their way back to one another through a mutual commitment to entrepreneurship, social justice, and service. Their paths—marked by triumphs, challenges, education, and advocacy—revealed the power of affinity in its most authentic and transformational form. Together, they created the Collective Joy Toolkit to reflect their belief in the power of communal care and connection.

The **Collective Joy Toolkit** is part of a larger movement that celebrates the power of community and connection. Life is not meant to be lived in isolation; when we step out of solitude and into shared spaces of belonging, we create opportunities for growth, healing, and transformation. As the Bible reminds us in Matthew 18:20 (NIV), “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” This truth lies at the heart of Collective Joy: the divine is present when we come together in unity.



By uniting around shared experiences, identities, and intersections, we not only uplift one another but also cultivate an energy greater than the sum of its parts. Community is where we find strength, purpose, and fulfillment—reminding us that joy and divine presence are amplified when we journey through life together, not alone.

This toolkit celebrates unity, collaboration, and shared purpose. It's a movement that thrives on the synergy, camaraderie, and joy that emerge when we come together as a community to overcome challenges, achieve goals, and celebrate victories. Whether in work, activism, or personal endeavors, **Collective Joy** enriches the journey, reminding us that we are stronger, more vibrant, and more fulfilled when we journey together.

Our Language Key

This key provides a foundation for understanding the language of affinity and belonging as used in the **Collective Joy Toolkit**.

Key Definitions

Affinity Group

A group of individuals who share a common identity, background, or interest and come together to support one another, amplify their voices, and foster a sense of belonging within a larger community.

Belonging

The feeling of being accepted, valued, and included in a group or environment, where one's identity and contributions are acknowledged and respected.

Collective Joy

The movement and toolkit that expresses a sense of happiness, fulfillment, and connection that arises when individuals unite in affinity to live in mutual growth, celebration, and challenge.



Intersectionality

The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, gender, sexuality, and class, which can create overlapping systems of discrimination or advantage.

Sacred Space

A physical or metaphorical environment intentionally created to provide safety, healing, and affirmation, often with spiritual or emotional significance.

Safe Space

An environment where individuals feel secure, free from judgment, harm, or discrimination, and empowered to express their authentic selves.

Empowerment

The process of gaining strength, confidence, and autonomy to make decisions, advocate for oneself, and contribute meaningfully to a community.

Resilience

The ability to recover from challenges or adversity, often drawing on inner strength, community support, and learned coping mechanisms.

Representation

The presence and visibility of individuals or groups within a space, particularly those historically excluded or marginalized, ensuring their perspectives and identities are reflected and valued.

Transformation

A profound change or shift in perspective, understanding, or environment, often leading to growth, healing, and a deeper sense of purpose or belonging.



Retention

The ability of an institution, community, or group to keep individuals engaged, supported, and committed over time.

Collaboration

The act of working jointly with others toward a common goal, emphasizing mutual respect, shared contributions, and collective success.

Holistic Resources

Tools, services, or supports that address the whole person, including their mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being.

BIPOC

An acronym for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, highlighting the unique experiences and challenges faced by individuals from racially marginalized communities.

LGBTQIA+

An acronym representing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and other identities that exist within the spectrum of gender and sexual diversity.

Sisterhood

A bond between women based on mutual respect, love, support, and shared experiences, often transcending differences to foster unity and collective strength.

Legacy

The lasting impact or influence of an individual, group, or community, often shaped by shared history, culture, and values passed down through generations.



Rest

A deliberate act of pausing to recharge physically, mentally, and emotionally, acknowledging its importance in sustaining resilience and overall well-being.

Community

A group of people united by shared values, goals, or experiences, supporting and uplifting one another in a spirit of mutual care and collaboration.

Spiritual Care

A practice of providing emotional and spiritual support to individuals, often in times of transition, grief, or personal growth, respecting diverse beliefs and experiences.

What We Know

Affinity groups, also known as affinity spaces or caucus groups, are designed to create environments that foster belonging, respect, and equality within various settings, including religious ministries, educational institutions, and community organizations. These groups bring together individuals who share common backgrounds or identity characteristics, such as race, religion, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status, to engage in discussions and activities that promote mutual support and understanding.

This section in the toolkit demonstrates the research and transformative potential behind affinity groups, grounding the **Collective Joy Toolkit** in both data and heartfelt narrative.

The Research Behind Affinity Groups and Their Success

Affinity groups are more than mere gatherings of individuals with shared experiences—they are transformative spaces that nurture belonging, amplify marginalized voices, and foster empowerment.



These groups provide a foundation for connection and collaboration, creating sanctuaries of support and solidarity. Whether within workplaces, religious institutions, nonprofits, or personal communities, affinity groups serve as vital lifelines that strengthen individuals and advance equity.

The history of affinity groups reflects their essential role in addressing systemic inequities and fostering inclusion. One of the earliest known instances of affinity groups dates back to 1878 in Georgia, when Black teachers formed the first known affinity groups in their efforts to demand equal pay to that of their white colleagues. This early organizing laid the groundwork for what would become a vital tool for collective advocacy. The National Black Employees Caucus, founded in 1970 by Xerox during the height of the Civil Rights Movement, became the first workplace affinity group in the U.S. This group, now the National Black Employees Association, focused on confronting the injustices Black employees faced, offering a platform for advocacy, support, and change. In 1978, Hewlett-Packard (HP) launched the Gay and Lesbian Employee Network, the first known LGBTQ+ affinity group in corporate America, now known as the PRIDE Business Impact Network. These pioneering efforts expanded the definition of affinity groups to encompass spaces that champion inclusion and equity for all marginalized identities.

The **Collective Joy Toolkit**, created by Black queer women, honors this legacy by drawing from both research and lived experiences to demonstrate the transformative power of affinity. These groups not only respond to inequities but also create sacred spaces for healing, celebration, and collaboration. By centering the lived realities of those who have been overlooked, affinity groups uphold the truth that collective connection is a pathway to both personal and communal liberation. From workplaces to spiritual sanctuaries, affinity groups remain an enduring testament to the power of shared identity and intentional community.



Affinity groups succeed because they are rooted in a universal need: to be seen, heard, and valued. This is especially significant for Black women, whose experiences are often dismissed or marginalized. Studies have shown that **69% of participants in affinity group discussions** report these groups positively influence their practices and strategies (DASH Project). These spaces foster transformation, ensuring individuals and their contributions are not just acknowledged but celebrated.

Affinity Beyond Employment

Affinity is not confined to workplaces; it thrives in personal, spiritual, and communal spaces. In schools, affinity groups create critical safe spaces for students of color, leading to a **20% increase in retention** among minority students (EdWeek). These spaces validate identities and promote engagement, showing the necessity of affinity beyond professional settings.

Building Joy and Belonging

In workplaces, affinity groups boost belonging, which is directly linked to performance and retention. Companies with high belonging see a **56% increase in job performance**, a **50% reduction in turnover**, and a **75% decrease in sick days** (Seramount). However, the same principles apply to nonprofit initiatives, community groups, and faith-based environments. Affinity nurtures joy, strengthens relationships, and enhances personal well-being.

Centering Black Women in Affinity

For Black women, the stakes of belonging are even higher. Systemic inequities often deny them spaces to rest, grow, and thrive. The **Collective Joy Toolkit** is an answer to this denial, drawing from the lived experiences of Rev. Whittney-Marie Murphy and Joi McCreary. These women found their shared purpose in creating a sanctuary “for us, by us, so that we can be us.” This toolkit represents their collective strength, rooted in the affinity they discovered through their decade-long connection.



Their work embodies what studies affirm: individuals who participate in affinity groups are **70% more likely to feel their voices are heard** and are **three times more likely to remain in their communities long-term** (Catalyst). These statistics underscore the transformative power of spaces intentionally designed to celebrate shared identities and goals.

The Divine in Community

The **Collective Joy Toolkit** reminds us of a timeless truth: life is not meant to be lived in isolation. As the Bible says, “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:20, NIV). Affinity groups reflect this divine promise, offering spaces where the sacred is present, and individuals find healing, growth, and connection.

By uniting around shared experiences, Black women create an energy greater than the sum of its parts. Through joy, collaboration, and sacred connection, the **Collective Joy Toolkit** celebrates the transformational power of affinity—a testament to the magic that happens when we gather, support, and uplift one another. In these spaces, we amplify not only individual voices but also the collective spirit that fuels lasting change.

The Collective Joy Approach: 10-Step Guide to Creating Affinity Groups that Heal, Hold, & Empower

Step 1: Define the Purpose and Goals

- **Identify the focus:** Determine the specific common interest, identity, or goal that the group will center around (e.g., diversity, professional development, social justice).
 - *Example:* The focus of this affinity group is emotional well-being, specifically providing a supportive space for Black women to prioritize self-care, mental health, and emotional resilience.



- **Set clear objectives:** Outline what the group aims to achieve (e.g., empowerment, social justice, advocacy, support, education).
 - *Example:* The group's objectives are to provide a judgment-free space for healing, reduce the stigma around mental health care, and offer resources like wellness workshops, mindfulness exercises, and peer support groups.

Step 2: Gather Interest and Form a Core Group

- **Assess interest:** Gauge interest among potential members through surveys, informal conversations, or meetings.
 - *Example:* A survey is conducted via social media and local community organizations to assess interest in an emotional well-being-focused affinity group for Black women.
- **Form a planning committee:** Assemble a small group of dedicated individuals to help plan and launch the group.
 - *Example:* The committee includes a therapist, a community organizer, and two women with lived experiences of mental health challenges. They meet weekly to develop the group's framework and goals.

Step 3: Establish Structure and Leadership

- **Define roles and responsibilities:** Assign roles such as a chairperson, secretary, treasurer, and committee leads.
 - *Example:* The chairperson will lead the meetings and events, while the wellness coordinator organizes workshops, and the secretary handles communication.
- **Create a mission statement:** Draft a document that outlines the group's purpose, goals, membership criteria, and operating procedures.
 - *Example:* The mission statement reads, "Sisterhood of Resilience provides a safe, supportive space for Black women to center emotional well-being, offering tools for healing, shared resources, and a network of care for those navigating the challenges of mental health in our community."



Step 4: Plan Initial Meetings and Activities

- **Schedule the first meeting:** Choose a date, time, and location (virtual/in-person) that is convenient for potential members.
 - *Example:* The first meeting is scheduled for a Saturday afternoon at a local community center, with both in-person and virtual attendance options.
- **Plan the agenda:** Include introductions, a discussion of the group's purpose, brainstorming sessions for future activities, and a Q&A segment.
 - *Example:* The first meeting agenda includes a guided meditation, introductions, and a group discussion on "Caring for Your Mental Health as a Black Woman."
- **Promote the meeting:** Use emails, social media, newsletters, and word-of-mouth to invite potential members.
 - *Example:* The meeting is promoted through Instagram, flyers in local businesses, and an email campaign to local networks.

Step 5: Develop a Communication Strategy

- **Choose communication platforms:** Decide on the tools and platforms for group communication (e.g., email lists, social media groups, messaging apps).
 - *Example:* The group uses WhatsApp for ongoing communication, Facebook for event announcements, and email for monthly newsletters.
- **Regular updates:** Ensure regular communication to keep members informed and engaged.
 - *Example:* The group sends out monthly newsletters with mental health tips, upcoming events, and resources. WhatsApp serves for immediate updates and reminders.



Step 6: Plan and Execute Activities

- **Regular meetings:** Schedule regular meetings to maintain momentum and engagement.
 - *Example:* The group meets every month for “Sister Circles,” which include emotional check-ins, guided relaxation exercises, and discussions on self-care.
- **Events and initiatives:** Organize events, workshops, and initiatives that align with the group’s goals (e.g., guest speakers, networking events, volunteer opportunities).
 - *Example:* The group organizes quarterly wellness retreats focused on yoga, meditation, and stress management, offering a holistic approach to emotional well-being.

Step 7: Evaluate and Adjust

- **Collect feedback:** Regularly solicit feedback from members to understand their needs and improve the group’s activities.
 - *Example:* After each meeting, feedback forms are shared with members, asking about their experience and any suggestions for future events.
- **Measure progress:** Assess the group’s progress toward its goals and make adjustments as needed.
 - *Example:* The group reviews feedback and attendance numbers, making adjustments to the meeting format to focus more on expert-led sessions and mental health tools.

Step 8: Sustain and Grow the Group

- **Recruit new members:** Continuously look for ways to engage and connect with new members to keep the group dynamic.
 - *Example:* The group encourages members to invite friends and family members and promotes activities through social media and community events.



- **Build partnerships:** Collaborate with other groups, organizations, or departments to expand the group's reach and resources.
 - *Example:* The group partners with local therapists and wellness centers to provide free workshops and additional mental health resources.

Step 9: Document and Share Successes

- **Record achievements:** Keep track of the group's activities, successes, and milestones.
 - *Example:* The group documents attendance, successful events, and positive feedback from members.
- **Share stories:** Publicize the group's accomplishments through newsletters, social media, or internal communications.
 - *Example:* The group shares success stories on Instagram, featuring members who have found strength in the community and their mental health journey.

Step 10: Ensure Inclusivity and Accessibility

- **Promote diversity:** Encourage diverse participation and make sure the group's activities are inclusive.
 - *Example:* The group actively seeks out diverse voices within the community, ensuring all Black women feel welcomed regardless of their background.
- **Accessibility:** Ensure meetings and events are accessible to all members, including those with disabilities.
 - *Example:* The group provides sign language interpreters at events and offers captions for virtual sessions. In-person venues are accessible for wheelchair users.

By following these steps, the “Sisterhood of Resilience” affinity group becomes a powerful resource for Black women to nourish their emotional well-being. The group not only facilitates individual healing but also builds a supportive, vibrant community that collectively uplifts and empowers its members.



Affinity JEMS (Justice, Equity, and Mental-Health Strategies)

Justice: Promoting justice involves ensuring fairness, equality, and accountability in all aspects of life.

Here are some ways to advocate for justice:

- **Educate Yourself:** Learn about social justice issues, including systemic racism, economic inequality, and human rights abuses. Reading books, watching documentaries, and attending seminars can deepen your understanding.
- **Advocate:** Use your voice to speak out against injustices. This could involve participating in peaceful protests, writing to elected officials, or using social media to raise awareness.
- **Support Fair Policies:** Advocate for and support policies that promote fairness and equality. This might include criminal justice reform, voting rights protection, and economic policies that reduce inequality.
- **Volunteer:** Get involved with organizations that work towards justice in your community. This could involve legal aid services, community organizing, or supporting marginalized groups.

Equity: Equity focuses on providing everyone with the resources they need to succeed, recognizing that different people have different needs and starting points.

Here are strategies to promote equity:

- **Address Inequities:** Identify and address systemic inequities in your community or workplace. This might involve advocating for equitable hiring practices, supporting diverse leadership, or addressing gaps in access to resources.



- **Inclusive Practices:** Implement inclusive practices in your daily life and work. This might involve ensuring that all voices are heard in meetings, creating accessible environments, and supporting initiatives that promote diversity and inclusion.
- **Support Education:** Advocate for and support educational programs that address disparities in education. This might involve mentoring programs, scholarships for underrepresented groups, or supporting schools in underserved areas.
- **Equitable Distribution:** Work towards the equitable distribution of resources. This could involve supporting policies that address income inequality, healthcare access, and affordable housing.

Mental Health Strategies: Maintaining good mental health is crucial for overall well-being.

Here are some strategies to support your mental health:

- **Mindfulness and Meditation:** Regular mindfulness and meditation practices can reduce stress and improve mental clarity. Start with a few minutes each day, gradually increasing the duration as you become more comfortable.
- **Physical Activity:** Regular exercise has been shown to improve mood and reduce anxiety and depression. Find an activity you enjoy, whether it's walking, swimming, or dancing, and aim for at least 30 minutes most days.
- **Healthy Relationships:** Build and maintain supportive relationships. Surround yourself with people who uplift you and seek to maintain open and honest communication with them.
- **Therapy and Counseling:** Professional help can be very beneficial. Consider seeing a therapist or counselor to work through challenges and develop coping strategies.
- **Self-Care:** Prioritize self-care by engaging in activities that relax and rejuvenate you. This might include reading, taking baths, spending time in nature, or pursuing hobbies.



- **Balanced Lifestyle:** Ensure a balance between work, rest, and play. Set boundaries to protect your personal time and avoid burnout.
- **Journaling:** Writing about your thoughts and feelings can help you process emotions and gain insights into your mental health.
- **Sleep Hygiene:** Ensure you get adequate and quality sleep. Develop a consistent bedtime routine, avoid screens before bed, and create a comfortable sleeping environment.
- **Nutrition: Maintain a balanced diet rich in nutrients. Certain foods can impact your mood and energy levels, so aim for a diet that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins.**
- **Limit Substance Use:** Be mindful of your consumption of alcohol and other substances, as they can impact your mental health. Seek help if you struggle with substance use.

Affinity Ideas to Ponder

Here are some topics and themes that affinity groups can focus on to create meaningful connections, encourage professional growth, and promote inclusivity. These groups could be centered around various shared identities, interests, and professional goals.

Diversity and Inclusion

- **Race and Ethnicity:** Black, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, or multiracial affinity groups, celebrating cultural heritage and addressing unique workplace challenges.
- **Gender and Gender Identity:** Women's networks, LGBTQIA+ groups, and groups for gender non-binary individuals to promote gender equity.
- **Disability Inclusion:** Focusing on accessibility, neurodiversity, and promoting understanding around both visible and invisible disabilities.
- **Generational Groups:** Networks for millennials, Gen Z, Gen X, baby boomers, etc., to share cross-generational insights and experiences.



Wellness-Based

- **Mental Health and Wellness:** Groups dedicated to mental health awareness, stress management, work-life balance, and wellness practices.
- **Parenting and Caregiving:** Networks for working parents or those caring for elderly family members, offering support and resources.

Professional and Skill-Based

- **Leadership Development:** Groups focused on career growth, mentorship, skill development, and leadership training.
- **Tech and Innovation:** Networks for tech enthusiasts, programmers, engineers, and innovators to share trends and collaborate on projects.
- **Creative Arts and Media:** Space for creatives to discuss trends, collaborate on multimedia projects, or organize artistic events.
- **Hobbies and Crafts:** Groups focused on hobbies such as book clubs, cooking, photography, or DIY projects.

Social Responsibility and Community Service

- **Volunteering and Social Impact:** Groups centered on community service, social impact projects, and charitable initiatives.
- **Diversity Outreach:** Teams dedicated to outreach efforts in underrepresented communities, helping with education, recruitment, and community engagement.

Life Stages and Transitions

- **Early Career Professionals:** Support for those early in their careers, including recent graduates or interns navigating the professional world.
- **Empty Nesters:** For remote and hybrid employees to discuss unique challenges, connect virtually, and share productivity tips.
- **Aging:** Resources for individuals returning after extended leave, like parental leave or career breaks.



Affinity Group FAQ

What is an affinity group?

An affinity group is a gathering of individuals who share a common identity, interest, or goal. These groups often form to provide support, create a sense of belonging, foster connections, and advocate for social change. Examples include groups centered around race, gender, sexuality, professional development, and mental health.

Why should I join an affinity group?

Joining an affinity group provides opportunities for connection with others who share similar experiences or interests. It can offer support, a sense of belonging, personal growth, advocacy, and empowerment, as well as the chance to make meaningful contributions to important causes.

Who can join an affinity group?

While some affinity groups are exclusive to certain communities (e.g., Black women or LGBTQ+ individuals), others may be open to anyone interested in the group's focus or goals. Membership is typically defined by shared identity or interest but can vary depending on the group's purpose.

What are the benefits of being part of an affinity group?

Affinity groups provide a space for personal and emotional support, mentorship, networking, skill-building, and empowerment. They also offer opportunities to address shared challenges, advocate for systemic change, and contribute to collective efforts for equity and justice.

How do I start an affinity group?

To start an affinity group, define its purpose and goals, gather interested individuals, create a leadership structure, plan your first meeting, and choose communication tools. It's important to establish clear objectives, create an inclusive and supportive environment, and regularly engage with members to ensure the group's success.



What is the role of leadership in an affinity group?

Leaders in affinity groups are responsible for guiding the group's activities, ensuring that its mission is upheld, and fostering a welcoming and supportive environment. Leadership roles may include chairpersons, organizers, communicators, and facilitators, depending on the group's structure.

How can an affinity group maintain inclusivity and accessibility?

To maintain inclusivity, affinity groups should prioritize diverse voices and perspectives, create space for all members to share and participate, and make sure that activities are accessible to everyone. This includes considering physical and digital accessibility, offering language accommodations, and addressing barriers to participation.

How often should an affinity group meet?

The frequency of meetings depends on the group's goals and availability of members. Some groups may meet monthly, while others might gather more frequently for specific events, workshops, or initiatives. Regular meetings help maintain momentum and engagement.

What types of activities do affinity groups organize?

Activities may include social events, educational workshops, support circles, networking events, advocacy campaigns, and community outreach projects. The activities should align with the group's goals, such as promoting wellness, fostering professional development, or advancing social justice.

Can affinity groups collaborate with other groups or organizations?

Yes! Affinity groups can collaborate with other organizations, community groups, or businesses that share similar values or goals. Collaboration helps expand resources, increase impact, and build broader networks of support.



How do affinity groups handle conflict or disagreements?

Conflict resolution within an affinity group should be approached with respect, empathy, and open communication. Establishing ground rules for communication and conflict resolution at the outset can help prevent misunderstandings and ensure that all members feel heard and valued.

How can I get involved in an affinity group if there isn't one in my community?

If an affinity group doesn't exist in your community, you can start one by reaching out to others who share your interest or identity. It can begin with informal gatherings, outreach via social media, or speaking with local organizations to gauge interest. Starting small and building a committed group over time can lead to meaningful growth.

How do affinity groups support individual and collective well-being?

Affinity groups support well-being by offering a space for individuals to connect, share experiences, and receive emotional support. They provide resources, mentorship, and practical tools for personal development and collective action, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment.

What should I expect when I attend an affinity group meeting?

When attending an affinity group meeting, expect an environment that fosters open dialogue, mutual respect, and a sense of community. Activities may include discussions, workshops, support circles, guest speakers, and opportunities for networking and connection.

Can affinity groups influence change?

Absolutely. Affinity groups can be powerful agents of change by advocating for systemic reforms, raising awareness about important issues, and organizing collective efforts. They provide a unified voice that can amplify concerns and push for meaningful social and institutional transformations.

These frequently asked questions provide a general overview of affinity groups and their impact. Whether you're considering joining one or starting your own, understanding the purpose and practices of these groups can help you fully engage and benefit from the community and resources they offer.



Conclusion

This chapter, *Collective Joy: Affinity Through Black Women*, not only embodies mental health equity and justice but also serves as a powerful template for others to do the same within their own communities. By centering the lived experiences and unique identities of Black women, this chapter demonstrates the transformative power of creating spaces that affirm and celebrate those who are often overlooked in traditional mental health and spiritual care systems.

The **Collective Joy Toolkit** reflects the deep commitment of Rev. Whittney-Marie Murphy and Joi McCreary to cultivating sanctuary—spaces where people can gather, rest, and heal without fear of judgment or marginalization. Rooted in a shared understanding of what it means to exist at the intersection of Blackness, queerness, and womanhood, this resource shows the profound impact of designing care systems “for us, by us, so that we can be us.”

Moreover, the chapter empowers others to hold similar sacred spaces with those they share affinity with. It is an invitation to recognize the power of connection and shared identity, offering a blueprint for how to build and sustain sanctuaries for those who mirror pieces of your life and journey. This work is not only about receiving care but also about paying it forward—modeling how we can create communities rooted in mutual understanding, radical empathy, and collective healing.

In doing so, *Collective Joy* reminds us that mental health equity begins with a commitment to recognizing the divine within ourselves and each other. It calls us to the sacred work of holding space for those we love, uplifting their voices, and cultivating environments where joy, safety, and belonging thrive. This chapter isn't just a resource—it's a movement, inviting others to step into the work of equity, justice, and collective transformation.



About the Creators

Joi McCreary, MA, MFT, CLC, CCHW

Drawing from the rich sentiments, memories, and teachings from childhood, I can recall my first witness to affinity. My mother, grandmothers, aunts, and great aunts...bold, beautiful, and black powerhouses, who held each other up, celebrated successes, and stepped in in the time of need. These women embodied the magic, beauty, and grace of Black womanhood and I am now a living testament to the legacy of strength passed down from my ancestors—women who weathered storms and planted seeds of hope for future generations.

As a sister in love, light and a little bit of lightning, I am committed to lifting others while ensuring my own growth and well-being. I understand that collective strength is built when we recognize the power within ourselves and each other. Raised in a family and village where they taught me and held the belief that collaboration, empathy, and empowerment can spark revolutionary change and make a difference in the community, those you love, and those who love you.

I am Joi McCreary, multi-passionate and multidimensional. I am an entrepreneur and an advocate who believes in the power of joy, rest, and self-discovery. I have bravely chosen to honor my ancestors by creating sacred spaces through the founding of my organization, JoiOlogy 5155 Center of Joy and Transformative Growth. An organization dedicated to health, wellness, sex education, mental health, capacity building, training, and development. With conscious intent, to strive to create a safe, nourishing, educational, and healing space—not exclusively, but with a focused commitment to care and ministry leaders, community trailblazers, entrepreneurs, mental and medical healthcare providers within the BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ communities. I am dedicated to building bridges of understanding, creating spaces where authenticity and innovation flourish, and where we are allowed to prioritize our healing, to breathe, and to exist unapologetically.



Through a dynamic and diversified education and background, my work is profoundly shaped. Obtaining a Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Therapy, from Christian Theological Seminary, an Associate of Science degree from Indiana Tech of Technology, and a plethora of professional and graduate certifications I have developed practices and skills from my professional journey, and the wisdom drawn from my personal life experiences. These opportunities and spaces have uniquely positioned me to help others develop healthy personal and professional practices and spaces that serve them well.

Beyond my work, I'm a fun-loving free spirit who treasures family, friends, good food, travel, and, yes, my naps! I am the proud mother of two magnificent adult humans, whom I share with my wonderful husband of over 20 years. Being part of a village that ebbs and flows with me—offering an abundance of love and a constant source of strength through life's challenges, successes, and joys—has given me the capacity to pour that same love back into them, my clients, my community, and the world. At my core, I believe in the magic, strength, and resilience of Black women, as beautifully expressed in the “Our Love Letter to Black Women.” I know we are the alchemy of grace and power, carrying the dreams of our ancestors and paving the way for future generations. This belief fuels my passion for helping others heal, grow, and recognize their worth.

Thank you for being here and for allowing me to share my journey with you. Together, we can create a world where healing, joy, and empowerment are accessible to all.



Rev. Whittney-Marie Murphy, MDiv.

Growing up, I repeated the mantra: “Be who you needed when you were younger.”

When I was younger, I longed to see someone who looked like me — a Black, queer, educated woman with locs, whose tongues included French, American Sign Language, and the Holy Ghost. I longed to see the audacity of someone who refused to compartmentalize themselves, who showed up fully, without fractions. I longed for the God-of-my-understanding to hold me completely, without the voices of shame from those tormented in the pews.

I’m Rev. Whittney-Marie Murphy, and I have become who I needed when I was younger. I found the divine images I longed for by looking in the mirror and seeing the beauty reflected back at me. I came to realize that the Images of God mirrored my own: thick wool hair, sun-kissed skin, and intentional full lips. Having grown up, I’ve made it my life’s work to curate spaces that center the “normally unseen,” placing their voices and truth on full display. This commitment led me to create Come As You Are Collective (CAYA), a nonprofit that provides affirming, accessible, and affordable spiritual direction and licensed mental health services to persons of color in the LGBTQ+ community. As a Black queer woman, I have chosen to hold others in the same way I desire to be held: completely.

My work is deeply informed by my education and ministerial journey. I hold a Master of Divinity from Christian Theological Seminary, where I cultivated a passion for justice-oriented and inclusive ministry. As an Interfaith Chaplain at UCLA Health and at The Hospice of Western Reserve, I have walked alongside people in some of life’s most vulnerable and sacred moments. As an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), I am grounded in a tradition that calls me to radical welcome, hospitality, and transformative care.



Through every role I've held — chaplain, spiritual director, pastor, officiant, and entrepreneur — my mission has been the same: to create spaces where people, especially Black women, can lay down their burdens, embrace their full humanity, and recognize their inherent worth. I wanted to build a sanctuary where Black women could be soft, celebrated, and seen for the magic we are.

This mission of creating affirming and transformative spaces led to the creation of the Collective Joy Toolkit — a resource born out of collaboration and affinity. The Collective Joy Toolkit is about the joys of gathering in safety. It emerged from the partnership between two Black woman-founded entities: CAYA and JoiOlogy 5155 founded by therapist Joi McCreary, MA, MFT, CLC, CHW. Through our shared commitment to expanding access to mental health, spiritual care, and holistic resources, we've built a toolkit rooted in connection and in shared purpose. Over a decade of knowing each other, our experiences — from social justice work and educational pursuits to life's challenges and triumphs — have come full circle. Together, we are living the work of affinity, embodying collective joy, embracing our softness, and celebrating our audacity to exist.

To my beloved sisters: It is my honor to walk alongside you, holding space for your infinite possibilities and ensuring you are seen, heard, and cherished.

Rest Break 2

Rev. Joselyn Spence



Rest Break 2

Rev. Joselyn Spence



Pause here for a moment of rest.

Close your eyes and settle in your seat.

Take 5 slow and intentional breaths.

Then pause for a moment of silence.

Repeat the breaths and after each breath,

Say a word representing what you need.

Then pause rest in silence with

the images of you receiving all you need.

Chapter 5

A Space-Holder's Grief: Culturing Sacred-Space for the Pastor

Rev. Lee B. Ivey III,
MA, LMHCA, MDiv.,
ABS



A Space-Holder's Grief: Culturing Sacred-Space for the Pastor



**A toolkit for church leadership to be a
HEALTHY-guide for congregants on the
journey of grief**

Rev. Lee B. Ivey III, MA, LMHCA, MDiv., ABS

"I noticed a tree standing alone... around it
-Stumps...

Gravel, puddles, mud, patches, inconsistencies...
-Grief.

I wonder HOW the tree cries... not if.
I wonder HOW you cry...not if.

Perhaps the tears flow from the corners of your soul
Maybe they actually do stream from the centerpoint of the eye
Maybe you cry on the inside like the greatest lake hidden by a
skyline...

-you know it's there you just can't see it..."
Unknown Author

*~A wise person once said, "the one that brings the preacher water is blessed. I
wonder if the preacher spoke their need out loud..."~Rev. Lee B. Ivey III*

For many 'Sacred-Space Practitioners', we uphold the pastoral office with an expectation to be strong for those that are hurting... and sometimes the 'strong' pastor is the one hurting.



For whom is this strength actually for? What is the guiding narrative behind this display of strength? For how long can the pastor uphold this confident stare? As pastors lead a congregation of people who are hurting, it can be liberating to witness a pastor who engages in a type of strength that is rooted in vulnerability and authenticity.

With the backdrop of the above, the intention of this portion of the toolkit is to provide preachers/eulogists/pastors/leaders with tools to hold sacred space for themselves in the midst of holding sacred space for others. My hope is that you can receive something from this contribution that serves your ministry well.

Why Grief?

Grief is likely the hardest work that a human can engage in. From loss of a loved one, to loss of a job, to loss of the last bite of food when it falls on the floor...the stages of grief are relevant to each of these occurrences. In this excerpt, I'd like to deal with five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

1. **Denial:** "This can't be happening."
2. **Anger:** "Why did this happen?"
3. **Bargaining:** "If only I had..."
4. **Depression:** "I can't go on."
5. **Acceptance:** "It happened and I'm still here."

Each of these stages are worthy of their own presentation and respect as they each manifest differently and yet look similar at times.



Why Grief and Equity/Justice?

Because I've witnessed the ways that a mishandling of grief from church leadership can harm a people. i.e. the preacher that loses a parent and eulogizes their funeral as an act of honor/strength and yet has no systems in place to take bereavement time and therefore suppresses their grief in the name of their duty to the pastoral office therefore placing in jeopardy the potency and effectiveness of their ministry... and it may not seem like an overt decrease in effectiveness... at first. The impact of a lack of self-care may begin with the gradual faltering of the pastor's administrative duties, which is followed by a decreased ability to be fully prepared for ministerial opportunities, and then ultimately overt impact becomes realized in the efficacy of pastoral presence. Where is there space for the pastor's depression? Where is there space for the pastor's anger? Thus, the messaging from this mishandling of grief that is preached by the pastor's lack of self-care is perhaps a mishandling of "renewed strength" (Isaiah 40:31).

Also true is that the church has traditionally fallen short of creating a healthy church culture that would make space for a grieving pastor. Here, I toggle the line of being too harsh/critical of the church and yet naming the realities that many of us have faced as an extension of the church.

Creating a toolkit to help pastors and leaders grieve requires a nuanced approach because they often carry the weight of others' emotions and can struggle to process their own grief. As a Clergy-Clinician with insight into both the demands of pastoral work and the complex emotional challenges that come with grief, my mission is to offer respect for the reader's unique proximity to 'the Cross', while addressing and supporting the reader's personal socioemotional, spiritual, and intellectual needs.



Understanding Grief in Ministry

- **The Pastor's Grief**

- Pastors are often “on the front lines” of others’ grief and loss, which can make it harder for them to process their own. They may also feel like they need to “set an example” of strength, which can prevent them from being vulnerable.

- **Potential types of Grief for Pastors:**

- *Personal Grief:* The loss of a loved one, friend, or family member.
- *Professional Grief:* The loss of a parishioner, church member, or ministry colleague.
- *Role Strain Grief:* Grieving the challenges and emotional tolls of leadership and burnout.
- *Spiritual Grief:* Struggles with God or faith during painful times of loss.

Emotional Self-Care Strategies

- **Acknowledge Your Grief**

- Begin by acknowledging your grief. It’s okay to feel sad, angry, lost, or confused. Allow yourself to mourn without judgment of yourself.
- Understand that grief isn’t linear. You might feel okay one day, and the next day, overwhelmed again. That’s normal.

- **Express Emotions in Safe Spaces**

- Find a counselor, therapist, and/or spiritual director who can listen and help you process emotions without expectations.
- Journal your thoughts, feelings, and struggles. Writing can help process internalized grief. Verbally journalling via voice memo or another recording app allows one to put voice to their pain.

- **Set Boundaries**

- It’s okay to step back from leadership roles temporarily if needed. Spiritual Leaders must recognize that they are human and need breaks to heal emotionally.
- It’s okay to say “NO” as a pastor. If you’re always the one casting your line, how then will they learn to fish?



Spiritual Practices to Support Grieving

- **Lament**

- Encourage the practice of lamentation, both personally and in your ministry. The expression of grief is a righteous work. Grieve well.
- Pray for guidance and clarity: Engage in open, honest prayers where you express grief and ask for comfort. God can handle the awful beauty of your emotions.

- **Develop an Intentional Practice of Rest**

- Make time for Rest. Resting is an intentional part of healing. It's a time to pause, reflect, and allow space for all the parts of your being to remember their relationship with each other.

- **Hold in your awareness- Sacred Words**

- This can look like keeping a scripture in your heart and a song in your body. Discover words that lift your spirits and then speak these words in the expansion of a deep breath, the rhythm of your heartbeat, and in the joyful noise of your footsteps whether you are speaking Matthew 11:28 ("Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest") or you're singing a beautiful song: "On my momma, On my hood, I look fly, I look good"

- **Grief Rituals**

- Consider setting up a small ritual that allows you to mark the process of grief—lighting a candle, playing a song, or visiting a meaningful place. Check in with the elders of your culture/community for guidance.

Practical Ways to Manage Grief

- **Delegate**

- Pastors often feel a sense of responsibility to be "strong" for the congregation, but they also need time to grieve. Reach out to other trusted ministry leaders or church members for help with church services, pastoral care, or administrative tasks during tough times. If you step away for a day, you may realize you're NOT that one Jenga piece holding up the other 53 wooden blocks.



- **Allow your body to express the grief it holds**

- Exercise can be a healing outlet for grief. Taking a long walk/drive, breaking something in a contained environment, or even practicing yoga to clear your mind and ease emotional tension held in the joints and bones

- **Keep Track of Your Emotions**

- Use a mood-tracking tool or app to monitor your emotional shifts over time. This can help identify patterns and signals for when you might need additional support.

Building a Support Network

- **Pastoral Peer Groups**

- Join or form a support group with other pastors who understand the unique struggles of ministry. A group where people can be open about the matters of their heart and mind and yet hold space for each other is invaluable. This builds upon the concepts of creating affinity groups from the previous chapters.

- **Mentorship and/or Spiritual Direction**

- Seek out a mentor who has walked the journey of grief, someone who can offer wisdom and guidance. And have this person in place prior to the grievable moment... Please.

- **Family and Trusted Friends**

- Don't isolate yourself. Make time for personal relationships with family or close friends who can listen and support without expecting you to "fix" anything. These are the relationships that keep you grounded. You may hold multiple layers of connectivity with these persons (i.e. maybe you are their sibling and they attend your church). These persons may give you the fullness of their thoughts, and perhaps you needed to hear it.



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Conclusion

The grief that pastors experience can be deeply isolating, but it is also an opportunity for growth, empathy, and transformation. This toolkit emphasizes a holistic approach, addressing emotional, spiritual, and practical needs, while reminding pastors that their grief is valid, and they deserve support in this painful journey. Through self-compassion, the right support, and a commitment to self-care, pastors can learn to process grief while maintaining their well-being thereby making them Healthy-Guides on the journey of grief for their congregation.

About the Creator

Born and raised in Indianapolis yet cultured by many journeys, Lee Ivey is inspired by a person's audacity to heal out-loud. In a world where masks are, at-times, protective and necessary, Ivey seeks to create a space where a person can be honest about their experiences and honor their feelings about them. As a mental health professional, Ivey engages the work as a classroom Professor, courtroom Family Advocate, hospital Chaplain, workshop Facilitator, and community Pastor. Ivey discerns the intersections between faith, mental health, and clinical-sexology to reveal the ways that discouragement has become ingrained in our reality and, unfortunately, our identity. Via the medium of individual/couple's counseling, consultation, and conference -it is Ivey's honor and desire to walk with you on this healing-journey!

Lee's therapeutic interests include: church-hurt, trauma, microaggressions, grief and loss, generational healing, sex-therapy, discouragement, passivity and aggression, expression, narcissism

Credentials: Board Certified Sexologist, CPE 1-Unit, Licensed Mental Health Counselor Associate, Ordained in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Master of Clinical Mental Health Counseling, Master of Divinity

Chapter 6

Please Care For Me

Wes Parks, M.S.,
LPC-S, NCC



Please Care For Me

Caretakers Seeking Care: When I Need Help, and How to Ask For It

Wes Parks, M.S., LPC-S, NCC



Caregiving

As community leaders, and often times as direct care givers, we have special needs of our own when it comes to mental health and unhealth. We are often the first line responders to people facing varying degrees of distress and crisis. We hold space for people who are suffering from traumatic loss, prejudice, discrimination, housing insecurity, food insecurity, unemployment, healthcare inequity, political stress, and on and on and on. The list of challenges we help navigate is as varied as the people themselves.

Being a caretaker, in whatever vocational capacity has called you, is a sacred role. It is an important role. It is a critical role. And usually, it is a lonely role. In so many jobs, people can set and maintain regular 9 to 5 office hours, “leave it at the office,” talk about their day around the water cooler, and vent their frustrations on social media... all in hopes of having some clearly defined boundaries around the work and support to face the challenges that befall us every day. But not us. We work in those sacred spaces where we hold the most confidential of information. We are the most vulnerable and marginalized. Very heavy work.

And what happens to us? Frustration. Fatigue. Burnout. Studies have long shown higher rates of burnout among caretakers than other professions¹. Among mental health care professionals, burnout rates run as high as 67%^{2,3}. The Centers for Disease Control measured a 32% increase in healthcare burnout, including mental healthcare, since the COVID-19 pandemic⁴.



Research by the Barna Group revealed “an astonishing 40% of pastors now show a high risk of burnout. That’s almost a 400% increase since 2015, when that number was just 11%⁵. Moreover, that number jumps to 69% for pastors who are considering quitting their jobs⁶. So where does that leave us? A large group of well-intended helpers who need help.

Careseeking

As the adage goes, doctors make the worse patients. And the reason for that? The idiomatic notion that it’s hard to give advice or support to somebody who’s already an expert. The converse? They also don’t ask for help because they’re already experts. That may be true for all branches of caretaking.

This toolkit was envisioned as a way for caretakers to care for themselves. It is a form of self-care. We are all versed in self-care, and we all prescribe it to people who come to us in times of despair or distress. We can rattle off dozens of self-care activities ranging from pop psychology and TikTok trending to the tried and true tools of our academic training. Obviously, this toolkit is not all encompassing, but provides some new, and hopefully interesting, options.

Sometimes, though, self-care is not enough. We tried it all. We did the activities in this toolkit. We followed the advice in the latest self-help bestseller. We listened to our friends and colleagues when they suggest ways to feel better. And still we are in pain, still we are suffering. This is when WE need support from other caretakers so we can be the best versions of ourselves, so we can stay healthy and safe to care for those in our charge. How do I know if I need help? How do I talk to a therapist or a psychiatrist or a pastor or a social worker? How do I share who I am in a way that helps them help me? If I’m a provider of some sort, how do I encourage vulnerable and marginalized groups to seek help? How do I help them communicate what they need? To that end, we have developed these worksheets for recognizing and communicating symptoms.



Engagement

These worksheets are NOT screening tools. They are NOT diagnostic tools. They are communication tools. While it seems simplistic, we are focused on the first stage of engagement: sharing information. These worksheets can help someone identify and share basic information to start a dialogue with a helper. If we can start a dialogue, we can dig deeper over time and focus on larger treatment goals. The first necessary step is helping someone feel comfortable representing their lived experience.

On the face of it, these worksheets appear basic for educated professionals, trained clinicians, and lay leaders who have received Mental Health First Aid or similar training. That is exactly the point! We wanted to create a very simple tool to engage in a very specific and meaningful dialogue to triage and begin more intensive helping than self-care alone. We know that most of these questions would be included in intake forms and screening tools. We designed these forms to be used in conjunction with any tools a professional caregiver might utilize to focus an initial conversation or to refocus ongoing care.

- **Please Understand Me:** This worksheet is probably the starting point. It elicits the most basic information and would be used when considering mental health care (psychology, counseling, and social work).
- **Please Treat Me:** This worksheet is used to communicate with medical providers who prescribe psychotropic medications (psychiatrists, PCP's, nurse practitioners, etc.)
- **Please Guide Me:** This worksheet is used to initiate or refocus pastoral care.

Footnotes

¹ Leister, M.B. (2024). *An integrative approach to caregiver burnout*. Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-leading-edge/202405/an-integrative-approach-to-caregiver-burnout>.

² Ibid.

³ Morse, G., Salyers, M.P., Rollins, A.L., Monroe-DeVita, M., & Pfahler, C. (2012). Burnout in mental health services: a review of the problem and its remediation. *Administration and policy in mental health*, 39(5), 341-352. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-011-0352-1>.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/health-worker-mental-health/index.html>.

⁵ *Excerpt: A rapid decline in pastoral security*. Barna Group. (2024, March 5). <https://www.barna.com/research/pastoral-security-confidence/>.

⁶ Ibid.



Please Understand Me

I am sharing this information with you in hopes that we can have a conversation. This is not everything that causes me stress, just a starting point so I know what's happening in my life and you can understand a little bit more about me.

Feeling

Today I am feeling:

Happy	Mad	Sad	Glad
Worried	Excited	Bored	Scared
Annoyed	Upset	Sick	Nervous
Insecure	Lonely	Overwhelmed	Hopeless

I think I feel this way because:



Thinking

These are some things I thought about this week:

What happened	What I thought	How I felt	What I did

Sharing

The thing I most want to talk about today is:

This may be important for you to know, but it's not necessary to talk about today:



I know this is important to discuss at some point, but I absolutely cannot talk about it today:

Other things happening in my life that might be important for you to know:

Miracle Question

Let's imagine you woke up tomorrow and your biggest problem, the thing that you want to talk about today, was solved. How would you know? What is different?

Needing

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| ☐ I would like therapy | ☐ I need medications | ☐ I need help with basic needs, like housing and food |
| ☐ I would like pastoral care | ☐ My medications are not working | ☐ I need to share more, but I don't know how so please ask gently |
| ☐ I would like prayers | ☐ I'm having bad side effects from my medications | |
| ☐ I would like help connecting to professionals | | |



Please Treat Me

I am sharing this information so we can talk about my medication needs. This is not everything that causes me stress, just a starting point so we can talk about how medication might help me feel better.

Feeling

Today I am feeling:

Happy	Mad	Sad	Glad
Worried	Excited	Bored	Scared
Annoyed	Upset	Sick	Nervous
Insecure	Lonely	Overwhelmed	Hopeless

I think I feel this way because:



Thinking

These are some things I thought about this week:

What happened	What I thought	How I felt	What I did

Sharing

What I think is causing me the most stress or upset is:

My medications are:

- ☐ working for me
- ☐ not working for me

Here is what not working about my medications:



These side effects make it hard to take my medications, or make me not want to take my medications:

Here are some things I want to know about my current medications, or maybe about trying something new:

Something we might need to add to a treatment plan down the road:

Needing

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| ☐ I would like therapy | ☐ I need help with substance abuse | ☐ I need help with basic needs, like housing and food |
| ☐ I would like pastoral care | | |
| ☐ I would like prayers | ☐ I might need a higher level of care than therapy and education | ☐ I need to share more, but I don't know how so please ask gently |
| ☐ I would like help connecting to professionals | | |



Please Guide Me

I am sharing this information so we can talk about my spiritual needs. This is not everything that causes me stress, just a starting point so we can talk about how pastoral care might help me feel better.

Feeling

Today I am feeling:

Happy	Mad	Sad	Glad
Worried	Excited	Bored	Scared
Annoyed	Upset	Sick	Nervous
Insecure	Lonely	Overwhelmed	Hopeless

I think I feel this way because:



Thinking

These are some things I thought about this week:

What happened	What I thought	How I felt	What I did

Sharing

The thing I most want to talk about today is:

My spiritual practice during this time has included:



How the Bible, or the Church, has ministered to me in ways that bring me closer to the heart of God:

What is holding me back from drawing nearer to God's heart:

Miracle Question

Let's imagine you woke up tomorrow and your biggest problem, the thing that you want to talk about today, was solved. How would you know? What is different?

Needing

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| ☐ I would like therapy | ☐ I need medications | ☐ I need help with basic needs, like housing and food |
| ☐ I would like pastoral care | ☐ My medications are not working | ☐ I need to share more, but I don't know how so please ask gently |
| ☐ I would like prayers | ☐ I'm having bad side effects from my medications | |
| ☐ I would like resources to help with my spiritual life | | |



About the Creator

Wes Parks, M.S., LPC-S, NCC (he/him) is the owner of Metroplex Mental Health, a mental health private practice in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex specializing in LGBTQIA+ clients. Wes holds a dual master's degree in clinical psychology and neuropsychology. General treatment concerns in his therapy caseload include affective and anxiety disorders, psychotic and somatic disorders, trauma and abuse issues, career and employment, and neurodevelopmental disorders. Specialized treatment concerns include gender identity and gender expression, sexual identity and sexual expression, assisting families navigating gender transition, and coordinating gender-affirming care among treatment teams.

For more than a decade he worked at a private forensic and clinical psychology practice where he was involved in wide-ranging, and often high profile, forensic psychology and legal cases. Understanding that change is needed on all levels, he completed coursework towards a Ph.D. in Public Administration and Public Policy at the University of Texas at Arlington so he can focus on mental health policy analysis and decision-making. Part of this goal includes outreach activism with vulnerable and marginalized populations. He has been featured on terrestrial and internet media programs, as well as print and digital publications across the country.

Wes is a co-conspirator at Galileo Christian Church. In addition to membership, he also serves in servant-leadership as a member of the Missional Logistics Team, a group whose primary task is to keep Galileo Church true to its mission and missional priorities by overseeing church staff, financial matters, scheduling, and planning "next steps." Though part of a progressive church now, Wes grew up in the fundamentalist Church of Christ. Through his own journey in the queer community and working in mental health, his spiritual identity grew to include a focus on how the church can be an agent of social justice.

Rest Break 3

Rev. Joselyn Spence



Rest Break 3

Rev. Joselyn Spence



Pause here to stand in your rest.

Inhale deeply and sweep your arms overhead.

Exhale and lower your arms at your side.

Continue the movement slowly 2-3 more times.

Inhale and sweep your arms overhead into prayer palms

Then exhale and bring the prayer palms down to your heart.

Stand in prayer pose with eyes closed and rest.

Silently repeat a prayer for rest and close the moment

When you are ready.

Closing

Closing



Thank you for reading and using our Soul Medicine toolkit! I pray it has been a blessing to you as you continue your vocational gifts of being community leaders and care providers. This toolkit is a living document and a dynamic resource. All of the authors are available for continued conversations and collaborations in the future and can be reached at their contact information in each chapter.

As you go forward, I encourage you to use the toolkit in a variety of ways:

- Use with various populations/identities that may not have been listed. This work can be foundational and applied to a variety of contexts. For example, chapter 4 focused on affinity groups with Black women, however, the authors encourage using their format with other marginalized affinity groups.
- Pair chapters with one another! Perhaps you begin with the Sacred Breath practices in Chapter 1 or the Rest Breaks before leading people through the rituals in Chapter 3, or before completing the Care for Me documents in Chapter 6.
- Most importantly, remember that this toolkit is for YOU. Before using this within your work, be sure that it is being used for you. That you are able to receive from this soul medicine what you truly are in need of.

We pray it continues to be a blessing!

With care,

Rev. Joselyn

NBA's Mental Health & Wellness Program

NBA's Mental Health and Wellness work is centered in resourcing Disciples health and social service entities and reaches out to the whole denomination through general church partnerships, regional collaborations, support for congregations, seminaries, and community-based organizations.

Our Mental Health and Wellness Program takes a collaborative approach that is rooted in five core values: Holistic Wellbeing, Equity & Justice, Theological Integrity, Accompaniment & Collaboration, and Compassionate Care.

The program's focus areas include:

- **Leadership Wellness & Corporate Health**
- **Mental Health Justice & Wellness Equity**
- **Crisis Care & Support**
- **Integrative Wellness Support**

Learn more about NBA's Mental Health & Wellness program at www.nbacares.org/mental-health or scanning the QR code:





National
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Association