

Identity and Cultural Context in Pastoral Care Communication

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Motivation to work with Others

☞ Tathagatagarbha

- Womb or seed of Buddhahood
- How to cultivate?
- aspiration and application



☞ Outer: Expressed through liturgy, belief systems, culture

☞ Inner: personal understanding of 4 Noble Truths and to see the sacred moment – joining theory and understanding

Meaning Making: A Primary Task of Pastoral Care

- ☛ Premodern: accessing meaning through religious rituals, traditions, and spiritual experiences
- ☛ Modern: meaning that includes rational and empirical knowledge, such as psychology and medical science
- ☛ Postmodern: meaning that is aware of and addresses contexts such as cultural and social identity

The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach, 2nd edition,
Carrie Doehring, Westminster John Knox Press, 2016.

Meaning Making Beyond Intellectual Understanding

- Embedded theologies
 - Developed from childhood through family and social systems
- Lived theologies
 - What arises under stresses of caregiving
 - Empathetic stress
- Spiritual integration
 - Understanding how embedded emotions arise when interacting with social systems
 - For both care recipient AND caregiver

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Bearing witness to Bodhicitta

- ☞ Felt experience of Bodhicitta in clinical encounter
 - Dissolution of boundary between self and other
 - Clinically: exploration of how this might be evoked by patient/family/staff
- ☞ Not knowing
 - Meeting with empty mind (not blank mind)
- ☞ Bearing witness
 - Seeing the entire picture and allowing your heart to break
- ☞ Compassionate action
 - There to serve patient's needs

How to Step into Another's World?

☞ Begins at personal level

- Integration of own theological education into development as a caregiver
- Able to give care that identifies, assesses, and respects the unique ways care seekers make spiritual sense of and cope with suffering

☞ Theological Reflexivity

- Beliefs → Values → Behaviors
- Integrates theological and psychological beliefs, values in care

Doehring, Spiritual Care After Violence, 2014, <https://cct.biola.edu/spiritual-care-after-violence-growing-trauma-lived-theology/>

Engaging Buddhist Beliefs and Practices

Personal “formation”

- Values / beliefs : Ahimsa / compassion
- Practice : Mindfulness and awareness
- Meeting Modernity: psychological / conscious and unconscious

Contextual / social / cultural factors

Intersectionality

- Social and individual



Contributions from mindfulness

- ☞ Mindfulness: Research evidence
 - Emotional regulation and improved attention
 - Greater calm and stress reduction
 - Enhanced coping skills
- ☞ Befriend pain and/or fear
- ☞ Less emotional reactivity / more stability of mind
- ☞ Resilience and increased empathy

Zinn JK, Siegel D, Bauer-Wu S. The Healing Power of Mindfulness. A Shambhala Sun Forum, <https://www.upaya.org/uploads/pdfs/ShambhalaSunpaneldiscussionJKZDSSBW.pdf>



Supporting Pastoral Conversations

Intense emotions

- Race / Gender / Culture / Sexual orientation
- Anger / confrontation / attitude / silence

Why so difficult??

- Avoidance / politeness
- Making light / shifting topic / ignoring
- Code of silence
- Awareness of personal vulnerability

Building Awareness of Self and Social Environment

Body

- Somatic space / physical space
- Personal and environmental
- Contextualize flavor of communication

Speech

- Verbal / energetic
- Listening and silence
- Gap / fresh start

Mind

- What is taught
- What is experienced



Buddhist Chaplaincy in Context

- ☞ Cultural contexts vary
 - Embedded and explicit
 - Relevance to chaplaincy as practical theological training
 - Multiplicity in “global secular” world
- ☞ Asian sanghas
 - Historically embedded beliefs and practices
 - Defined relationships between monastics and lay practitioners
- ☞ Western sanghas
 - Chaplaincy to address multiple religions / spirituality
 - Mindfulness and personalized connection to liminal space



南無阿彌陀如來

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A Psalm of Life
Not enjoyment,
and not sorrow,
Is our destined end or way,
But to act,
that each to morrow
Find us farther that to day.

Current Projects and Research

- ☞ Research on Pastoral Care in Asian Buddhist communities
 - Indo-Tibetan – Deer Park
 - East Asian – Dharma Drum and Luminary
- ☞ International Network of Engaged Buddhists meeting in Thailand
 - Mindfulness and the Sattipatthana Sutta
- ☞ Pastoral Care workshops with monastics



Role of monastics in Asian communities

- ☞ Occupy a place of trust and respect in many communities
- ☞ Joining inner practices and outer activities
 - joining prajna and samadhi with shila
- ☞ Trained in Buddhist doctrine and ritual
- ☞ May not have skills or comfort to reach contemporary populations
 - Desire to develop additional self awareness and communication skills

Workshop topics

- ☞ To listen and “walk alongside” rather than “preach to” and provide expert advice
- ☞ To become aware of use and misuse of spiritual authority
- ☞ To develop of authenticity and recognition of power dynamics

Formats for Learning

- ☞ Lectures on basic chaplaincy and counseling skills
- ☞ Time for personal journal writing and reflection
- ☞ Role play and debriefs
- ☞ Follow-up in internship sites
 - Supervised practice



Some reflections

☞ My own “locations”

- Western-trained Buddhist chaplain
- Second generation Asian American

☞ Commonalities

- Doctrines – 4 Noble Truths, Bodhicitta
- Practices – shamatha/vipassana, compassion

☞ Differences

- How to communicate in different cultures
- Skills / expectations

Thank You!

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Cultural Humility

- A lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique.*
- Does not require mastery of lists of "different" beliefs and behaviors pertaining to certain groups
- Encourages respectful partnerships through patient-focused interviewing, exploring similarities and differences between his own and each patient's priorities, goals, and capacities.
- Most serious barrier to culturally appropriate care is not a lack of knowledge of the details of any given cultural orientation, but the failure to develop self-awareness and a respectful attitude toward diverse points of view.

Cultural Humility in Pastoral Care

- ☞ Knowledge, understanding, and skills
 - Related concepts: Cultural sensitivity; cultural awareness
- ☞ Ability to provide acceptable and relevant care
- ☞ An ongoing process
 - Accepting and respecting differences
 - Aware of personal beliefs
 - Not letting personal beliefs get in the way
- ☞ Includes having general as well as specific information

