



THE CONFOUNDING POWER OF FAITH IN THE FACE OF THE UN-FIXABLE

BILL GAVENTA, CRAIG REHABILITATION CONFERENCE, MAY 12, 2017

The background is a solid teal color with a gradient. In the corners, there are decorative white line-art elements resembling circuit traces or neural network connections, with small circles at the end of the lines.

TWO PASSIONS THAT POWER OUR TIME

WE CAN FIGURE THINGS OUT, FIND THE ANSWER

WE CAN FIX IT

FIGURE THINGS OUT

- TO BE EXPERT IS TO KNOW AND BE IN THE KNOW
- AND TO KNOW IT QUICKLY
- A SHARED VALUE OF HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS AND CLERGY: I.E., THE EXPECTATION THAT YOU/WE WILL HAVE THE ANSWERS.

THE SHADOW SIDE OF THAT EXPECTATION

TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY AND ANY FORM OF INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY CONFOUNDS THAT EXPECTATION/ILLUSION.

- ANSWERS TAKE TIME
- SOMETIMES THERE ARE NONE
- SOMETIMES THERE ARE BAD ONES
- SOMETIMES THERE ARE MULTIPLE ANSWERS ALL JUST AS VALID AS ONE ANOTHER, E.G., THE QUESTION OF WHY?

TO BE PROFESSIONAL: HEALTH AND FAITH

- RECOGNIZE THE TEMPTATION TOWARD OMNISCIENCE
- RECOGNIZE THE VALUE OF MYSTERY IN OTHERS AND OURSELVES
- TO BE PROFESSIONAL: SOMEONE WHO KNOWS WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW AND THUS ARE WILLING TO ASK

RILKE: *BE STILL TOWARDS ALL THAT IS UNANSWERED IN YOUR HEART AND LEARN TO LOVE THE QUESTIONS THEMSELVES.*

#2: AFTER KNOWING, DOING AND FIXING

THREE MODERN NARRATIVES OF ILLNESS AND INJURY

1. THE INCREDIBLE CURE
2. CHAOS
3. JOURNEY

-ARTHUR FRANK: THE WOUNDED STORYTELLER

WE SEEK:

- THE MOST SKILLED SURGEON
- THE RIGHT THERAPY
- THE MAGICAL MEDICINE
- THE RIGHT BELIEF
- I.E., WHAT WE CAN DO THAT WILL FIX

CAUTION SIGNS IN BOTH PASTORAL CARE AND HEALTH CARE

- DOING VS. BEING: DO. BE. DO.
- LISTENING AS INTERNAL ALGORITHMS, AND TAKING OVER THE STORY
- THE DANGER OF A SINGLE STORY

DANGERS OF “FIXING”

- TOO OFTEN TRANSFORMS AGENT INTO PATIENT
- SUBJECT INTO OBJECT
- GETS IN TH WAY OF LISTENING

BUT WE WANT:

- FAITH IN THE PROCESS, THE TREATMENTS, THE PROFESSIONALS.
THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING
- THAT LEAVES ROOM FOR DESPAIR, DISCOURAGEMENT,
HOPELESSNESS
- THE HOLINESS/WHOLENESS OF LAMENTATION AND
MOURNING

CAUTION SIGNS: ABUSES OF FAITH

- WHAT DID YOU DO THAT CAUSED THIS?
- IF YOU PRAYED HARD ENOUGH YOU COULD BE HEALED.
- NOT JUST AN ISSUE FOR CLERGY AND PEOPLE OF FAITH.
MEDICAL VERSIONS OF THE SAME THING.

SO WHY IS FAITH SO IMPORTANT?

- FIRST, TO KEEP US IN THE ROOM. PRESENCE
- PEOPLE TERRIFIED OF BRAIN INJURY AND DISABILITY. “THE WORST”
- HARDEST TO KNOW WHY. HARDEST TO FIX, TO KNOW WHY, TO KEEP AWAY ILLUSION OF IMMORTALITY AND CONTROL
- EASIEST TO PROJECT ONTO.
- BE WITH. PRESENCE. STAY THERE. LISTEN. EVEN THOUGH IT CHALLENGES ALL OF OUR ANSWERS AND CONTROL.
- WHY SO SCARED? WHAT WILL THAT CALL US TO?

ALL OF THE MAJOR FAITH TRADITIONS

- PRESENCE ON THE JOURNEY
- BE WITH ME.
- GOD IS WITH ME.
- ABIDE WITH ME. STAY HERE A WHILE.
- HARDEST THING TO DO, E.G. JOB'S FRIENDS
- EACH PERSON AND STORY IS UNIQUE, EVEN THOUGH IT MAY SEEM ROUTINE.

LISTEN AND ACCEPT

- CHALLENGES A CULTURE OF “I AM NOT OK UNTIL I ACCOMPLISH THIS, OR REACH THAT GOAL.
- YOU ARE OK AS YOU ARE.
- BY GRACE ARE YOU SAVED, NOT BY WORKS.
- FREES US TO STRIVE AND GROW.

#2: GUIDE ON THE SEARCH - THROUGH THE VALLEYS OF THE SHADOWS OF DEATH

- WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO ME?
- TEST AND REINTERPRET OLD BELIEFS, SYMBOLS, ASSUMPTIONS, AND UNDERSTANDINGS
- GET PAST FREUDIAN UNDERSTANDINGS OF RELIGION AS SYMPTOM RATHER THAN SUPPORT
- WHAT'S BEHIND THE BELIEFS? ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS. EG, WILL OF GOD.
- WELCOME THE LAMENT AND THE MOURNING.
- CELEBRATE THE ARRIVALS...A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES

#3: ADVOCACY: THY ROD AND THY STAFF

- WORK WITH ME IN MY STRUGGLE. SUPPORT IT.
- REMEMBER WHO THIS PATIENT IS.
- THE COMMUNITY BEHIND THEM.
- PUTTING FAITH INTO ACTION IN A PUBLIC ARENA: POLICIES, PRACTICES, SYSTEMS

#4: EMBRACE BY A CARING COMMUNITY

- ENABLING THE “BODY” TO RESPOND.
- RE-MEMBERING WHO YOU ARE.
- CONCRETE SUPPORTS: RESPITE CARE, ACCOMODATIONS, FINANCES, YOU NAME IT.
- PLACE WHERE YOU ARE WANTED AND VALUED
- PLACE TO CONTRIBUTE
- POWER OF A COMMUNITY OF FAITH TO RESPOND TO INDIVIDUAL, PERSONAL NEEDS. HOW TO SUSTAIN OVER THE LONG HAUL?

IN COMMUNITY, WE WORK THROUGH

- WHO AM I NOW?
- WHY AM I NOW? WHAT IS MY PURPOSE?
- WHOSE AM I NOW? TO WHOM DO I BELONG?

POSSIBILITIES INCLUDE:

- GROUP ACTION PLANNING/CIRCLES OF SUPPORT: “IT’S AWESOME”
- PUTTING FAITH TO WORK-CONGREGATIONS AS PATHWAYS TO CONTRIBUTION AND EMPLOYMENT
- OTHERS YOU FIND BY LISTENING AND ACTION.

THE CONFOUNDING POWER OF FAITH: NO OTHER RESOURCE HAS THE POWER

- TO COMBAT LONELINESS, ISOLATION, “NO BODY KNOWS”
- TO EMBRACE THE QUESTIONS AND FEELINGS AND WALK ALONGSIDE OVER THE EVERYDAY AND LONG HAUL.
- TO BE THE ADVOCATE AND AMPLIFIER
- TO BE COMMUNITY OF WELCOME, INCLUSION, EMBRACE AND BELONGING

A COMMUNITY OF FAITH

- SHOWS ITS FAITH BY ITS FAITH IN ITS MEMBERS
- KEEPS LOVING WHEN HOPE DESPAIRS
- KEEPS YOU HOPING WHEN LOVE SEEMS RARE
- THESE THREE...BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE.

RESOURCES ON CONGREGATIONAL SUPPORTS

- National Collaborative on Faith and Disability
 - Summer Institute on Theology and Disability
 - Putting Faith to Work Manual
- Resource Listing on Spirituality and Traumatic Brain Injury
- Clergy here in Colorado, brain injury survivors

Booklets

[Brain Injury: When the Call Comes. A Congregational Resource.](#)

Bill Gaventa. 25 pp. Booklet, product of collaborative project between the Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities and the Brain Injury Association of New Jersey. 32 pp. Downloadable PDF.

[Spiritual Care Handbook on PTSD/TBI: The Handbook on Best Practices for the Provision of Spiritual Care to Persons with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury.](#)

Rev. Brian Hughes and Rev. George Handzo. 100+ pages. Downloadable PDF.



BRAIN
INJURY

WHEN THE
CALL COMES

A Congregational Resource

Brain Injury Association
of New Jersey, Inc.
The Elizabeth M. Boggs Center
on Developmental Disabilities



Putting Faith To Work:

A Guide for Congregations
and Communities

Connecting Job Seekers with Disabilities
to Meaningful Employment

Books on Theology and Disability that Include
Discussions of Traumatic Brain Injury;

Hans Reinders. *Disability, Providence and Ethics*.
Baylor Press. 2015

John Swinton. *Becoming Friends of Time. Disability,
Timefulness, and Gentle Discipleship*
Baylor Press. 2016

Dementia: Living in the Memories of God. Eerdman's
Publishing Co., 2013

SUMMER INSTITUTE
on **THEOLOGY**
& **DISABILITY**

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The background is a teal-to-blue gradient. In the corners, there are decorative white line-art patterns resembling circuit traces or fiber optic paths, with small circles at the end of the lines.

THANK YOU! BE IN TOUCH.

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