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Recovering Joy in the Afterburn of Violence: Naming, Connecting, Building and Illuminating Dori Baker and Patrick Reyes

I. A Storied Introduction

Defining joy and flourishing through a liberatory lens, we address two questions: “How can the church best support young people who have experienced violence to thrive, flourish, and experience the joy that is their birthright? What is the church’s role in creating a culture in which violence is not the norm?”

We are two scholars in the field of religious education, who are also practical theologians, youth workers, and parents. We have experienced and witnessed violence as an inhibitor to joy: the ache for healing within broken childhoods and wounded adolescents lies at the center of our continuously unfolding vocations. In this chapter, we each share a story from our own lives and ministries to situate ourselves in the work that follows.

Patrick’s story:

I woke up after remaining asleep for nearly eighteen hours to find myself covered in my own urine. Embarrassed, I tried to gather my sheets and clothes to throw them away before anyone saw. My father caught me in the hallway, took the sheets and clothes from me and washed them. He asked if I was okay with a confused and concerned look on his face. Having no good answer to the question, I simply said, “I don’t know.” Pimply faced with braces, suffering from bad grades for the first time, and at the end of my first high school break-up, I was 16-years-old and couldn’t quite grasp “what was wrong with me.” I wanted to be normal.

Reflecting back years later, the incident makes more sense. I came to live with my dad full-time after my parents’ divorce, because I was a victim of domestic violence in my mother’s house. As if that wasn’t enough, while living with my father, I witnessed a drive-by shooting in which a little girl died. On my daily rounds at the park, I navigated drug dealers, gang members, youth-on-youth violence, poverty and life in a

community the rest of the country chooses to ignore. Growing up in a small, impoverished agricultural town in Northern California, my only dream as a 16-year-old was getting out.

Certain advantages allowed for me to escape the violence. I went to the Catholic college prep school in town. My father was the first in his family to get a college degree. I had a grandmother who intervened every time I seemingly lost my way. As one can imagine, while I had advantages that allowed me to find pathways to a flourishing life, joy was not easy to come by.

Dori's story:

I sit in my office with Danni, a 21-year-old woman who is now ready to tell her mother the truth of the past seven years. We hold a space for her story to unfold.

At 14, Danni was raped by an older friend, who then boasted to his friends about the encounter. He adjusted facts to portray Danni as desirous of future hook-ups, which fueled a whirlwind of rumors that came to define her. As Danni tells how she hid the true facts to protect herself from further scorn, her mother watches, honoring her daughter's story with silence, tears running down her face.

As a friend of Danni's mother, I witnessed those years.ⁱ We saw a lively, curious, athletic and academically gifted girl go underground. In the eighth grade Danni was a star student, but by ninth grade, a teacher described her as sitting in class like a zombie, eyes unfocused and completely absent. She lost interest in her passion for basketball and went through extended periods of silence punctuated by angry outbursts and tearfulness. Occasionally, her engaging former self would surface, but mostly she walked through her days a slim shadow of the girl she once was.

Back in my office, Danni tell us that she often cried herself to sleep night after night, unable to imagine a way out of her pain. Her mother shares that Danni's tears and outbursts were the backdrop to everyday life, a constant weariness that became a sad norm

Danni's parents sought counselling and eventually turned to medication for anxiety and depression as a means of simply keeping her alive. They supported her desire to change schools, where Danni found a new group of friends and eventually rebounded, returning to former passions and finding new ones. She graduated and moved away from home for college.

During all of those years, Danni's family never knew the source of their daughter's diminishment. In this small zone of safety that is my office, Danni names the violence she experienced and the ongoing trauma it causes. She avoids visiting the neighborhood where she grew up, distances herself from childhood friends, and does not keep a Facebook page, all for fear of revisiting the trauma associated with sexual abuse and resulting shame. During college she began to heal some of the memories that scar one-third of her life and became an

advocate for women experiencing sexual abuse. She carries a deep wound that surfaces unexpectedly: the healing of that wound is the slow work of returning joy in the afterburn of violence.

These stories provide brief personal glimpses into the vast wilderness of young people experiencing violence. For so many youth in our communities who suffer from domestic violence, sexual violence, youth-on-youth violence, and the multiple other forms of political, social, and racial violence prevalent in our world today, joy is inhibited by the fear of tomorrow not being a reality. Howard Thurman says it best:

Fear is one of the persistent hounds of hell that dog the footsteps of the poor, the dispossessed, the disinherited ... Fears are of many kinds—fear of objects, fear of people, fear of the future, fear of nature, fear of the unknown, fear of old age, fear of disease, and fear of life itself. Then there is fear which has to do with aspects of experience and detailed states of mind.ⁱⁱ

The fear of violence repeating itself creates the cyclical nature of trauma. The violent event repeats itself in memories, and similar sights, smells, sounds and textures of the traumatic event inhibit a young person's ability to experience joy in an ongoing reproduction of the initial violent act.ⁱⁱⁱ

A Pause for Practice

Opening Ourselves to Past and Current Realities of Violence

1. Think about a time in your own life or in your ministry when you experienced violence inhibiting joy in the life of a young person.
2. Allow yourself to become aware of the various kinds of violence suffered by young people you know.
3. Take a moment to care for the souls of those experiencing violence. That may mean imagining and caring for a younger version of yourself, lifting someone up in prayer, or journaling.

A Theological Framework for Meeting Violence Face-to-Face

We are certain of the value of creating small pockets of possibility, zones of imagination and creativity, where a measure of safety can emerge for a bounded period of

time.^{iv} When experiencing these holy moments of liberatory healing, young people learn to “read” their habitat with greater clarity and can imagine inhabiting spaces where sustained periods of freedom really are possible.^v From small beginnings and with the help of supportive community, young people can heal. Beyond mere healing, they can become agents of change, learning to envision ways to diminish structures that embed violence and taking part in creating structures that support the flourishing of themselves and others.^{vi} Agency, self-determination, and freedom from the “persistent hounds of hell” define joy in the afterburn, or more pointedly, the *afterburn*, of violence.^{vii}

This movement – from care of bodies and souls in the immediate afterburn of violence, to long-term healing, and the eventual capacity of the wounded to become part of culture-wide healing and structural change – is the hope we hold forth in this chapter and its accompanying curriculum.

The magnitude of violence facing young people today, coupled with the shrinking influence of the church in North American society, requires something more than the creation of small zones of healing within churches, where good pastoral care and religious re-education happens. While creation of these spaces is absolutely essential for healing the trauma resulting from violence, we propose a bolder curriculum, one in which congregations adopt a more public role, engaging in partnerships that support widespread cultural change, so that more young people might have access to joy and flourishing in the afterburn of violence. Following Maria Harris, we define curriculum broadly, to include not just the resources we use to teach people, but the entire “course of the church's life.”^{viii} This lays way for public forms of religious education which extend beyond the walls of religious organizations to disrupt violence and create more life-affirming cultures.

This rhythm of disruption and creation should feel familiar to Christians. The founder of our faith was a young adult spiritual and social innovator who migrated across the countryside surrounding Jerusalem, recruiting souls to form an alternative community. A brown-skinned man who accompanied those living on the underside of empire, he offered immediate relief for embodied, class-based pain, all the while subverting violent power structures sustained on the backs of the “least of these.”^{ix} A primary way Jesus operated was through *naming* the conditions in which he found himself in a theological framework, *connecting* isolated individuals to one another, *building* a larger community of practice, which then extended his ministry beyond his death, and *illuminating* the world to joy.^x In

various expressions of the Christian tradition, Holy Week embodies these four moves: We **name** the violence he experienced on Good Friday. We **connect** with one another to mourn and remember his death on Holy Saturday. We come together to build community through acts of remembrance during the Easter Vigil. Finally, we **illuminate** the joy of the resurrection, as we turn the lights back on at the conclusion of the Easter Vigil service.

In this chapter, we offer a thread of possibility that the church can use its remaining influence in North American society to address joy in the afterburn of violence in a way that is patterned after the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. After briefly documenting the prevalence of violence as an inhibitor of joy in North American youth today, we will define joy and flourishing through a liberatory theological lens and offer a framework for faith communities to use in helping create cultures in which more young people can reclaim joy in the afterburn of violence. This framework is informed by our Christian tradition and systems theory,^{xi} which we see mirroring the way of Jesus as described above:

- *naming* violence as a primary inhibitor to adolescent joy,
- *connecting* isolated individuals and organizations who are addressing this issue through liberative pedagogies,
- *building* communities of practice which strengthen one another and share contextually adaptable resources, and finally,
- *illuminating* practices that lead to new systems of influence and cultural change.

II. *A Closer Look*

The uniqueness of violence experienced by young people and the communities that surround them is directly tied to the conditions in which they find themselves. The only way out of this ecosystem of violence is a critical intervention to create conditions in which young people can thrive and experience joy. In this section, we define violence, explore its impact on youth, and consider the afterburn of violence through the literature of practical theology, specifically as it integrates trauma theory.

Defining Violence: Through and Beyond the Numbers

The World Health Organization defines violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or

community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation.”^{xii} Expanding this definition through a theological lens, Mai-Anh Le Tran defines violence “a distortion of the sacred vitality and intimacy of bodies, of communities, or social structures, and of earthly habitats.” Tran goes on to extract three features of violence: 1) violence is the violation of the vitality that is sacred and intimate to one’s being and one’s relation in and to the world; 2) violence is sustained by built-in logic, accompanied by rationalization from crude to complex ways to either justify or explain away its implementation; 3) violence is most potent when it is felt, not seen.^{xiii} Illuminating the third feature of violence, Tran quotes South African professor of missiology Tinyiko Sam Malulke: “Violence is at its deadliest when it does not speak its own name; the time when it hides in apparently benign policies, in culture, structures, in traditions, in the ‘rule of law’ and in ‘law and order.’”^{xiv}

In these terms, violence includes both the localized pain of particular bodies experiencing harm and the systemic ways bodies experience harm as a result of structural injustices such as generational poverty, rape culture, and racism.

Local, physical violence among youth in our communities is present and overwhelming. The Department of Justice found that more than 60% of children were exposed to violence each year. Exposure includes both experiencing it as victims and witnessing violence. The same study also found that almost 40% of American children were direct victims of two or more violent acts. Not surprisingly, the report found that these children suffer from “depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic disorders; fail or have difficulty in school; and become delinquent and engage in criminal behavior.”^{xv} Homicide is the second leading cause of death of young people ages 15-24 years old. For communities of color, homicides were the leading cause of death for African Americans ages 10-24, and second leading cause of death for Hispanic and Latinxs ages 10-24.^{xvi} Sexual violence against young women is rampant in our culture. The perpetrators of these acts are known to the victims: 44% being acquaintances, 29% are intimate partners, 27% are family. 35% of girls who were raped as minors, were raped again as adults.^{xvii} In 2017, we witnessed the #metoo movement provide a platform for women experiencing sexual assault to share their experiences with the broader public, naming violence that had been long hidden.

A Pause for Practice

Opening Ourselves to Past and Current Realities of Violence

1. Imagine for a moment both the visible and hidden forms of violence affecting the young people in your ministry setting. Do these statistics surprise you or confirm what you already know about violence?
2. Lift up the first names of young people whom you believe might be experiencing violence or create an ofrenda.
3. Sit with their names and experiences, holding them with care for a moment, refusing to gloss over or move beyond your connection to the violence in your own community.

Impact of Violence and Its Aftermath

Young people suffer from not just the initial onslaught of violence, but also its afterburn. Mai-Anh Tran, who was a seminary professor near Ferguson, MO at the time of Michael Brown's death, responded to that crisis in both its immediacy and in its afterburn. Her writing frames violence as a public health crisis – a “worst communicable disease” – in which a violent outbreak is only the symptom of a chronic system of infection. The localized expressions of violence experienced by young people in our communities are merely symptoms of a larger machine of violence. Tran writes:

The *dis*imagination machine would have us stare at some smoking gun as the piece of singled-out evidence for targeted outrage -- for example, a “thuggish” Black teenager, a racist White cop, a corrupt court, a biased police chief. It is easier to rail against just one thing than to confront an ominous death world in which all of us are plagued citizens, and some of us are dying more rapidly than the rest.^{xviii}

In lived experience, violence consumes all. It extends beyond initial physical harm to include ongoing psychological and emotional trauma. It is an inhibitor to joy because it captures a young person's ability to live and thrive. Haunted by their experiences, young people are caught in cycles of violence and often struggle to even remain living, much less imagine joy. On a very embodied level, young people who've experienced violence become prone to anxiety, depression, and suicide. These are the young people in our pews and participating in our programs. They are also in our neighborhoods, often invisible to organized religion. They are not “out there” or somewhere else. They are right here! By not

seeing them, we participate in the “disimagination machine” and its system of reproducing violence.

As psychiatrist James Gilligan, notes in his book *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*, “American violence is the result of our collective ‘moral choice’ to maintain those social policies that in turn maintain our uniquely high level of violence; and I call that choice a moral choice because it is very explicitly rationalized, justified, and legitimized on moral grounds, in moral terms.”^{xix} It is a moral choice that the church and religious leaders make when we turn attention away from youth and young adults who have experienced violence. Not having the capacity to address their needs is a moral choice. To quote Gilligan again,

For those of us to whom this [violence] applies—and of course all of us are vulnerable to violence—we have an obligation not to trivialize this subject, not to distance ourselves from it, and not to withdraw from it. For while we may wish to avoid violence, it does not always avoid us.^{xx}

The theological task – how we move from violence to joy – is best framed by practical theologian Kathleen Greider, who asks, “Is it possible to find or create among us a power finely tuned enough to destroy what needs to be destroyed – the structures of violence and other evils – without destroying each other? Is it possible to find or craft among us a power finely tuned enough to construct what begs to be constructed?”^{xxi} In other words, can we construct a theology of joy in the afterburn of violence that names violence for what it is, cares for those in the midst of and in the wake of violence, and creates the space and capacity for joy to emerge? We believe Christianity, when grounded in the suffering of Holy Week, hears the pain of youth experiencing violence and trauma and points a way forward toward healing a violent culture.

III. *Theological Dimensions:*

Joy, Flourishing, and Resilience: Putting Theology into Practice

In his book *Nobody Cries When We Die*, Patrick describes the harrowing violence of his youth. He talks about how gang violence, witnessing innocent lives being snuffed out too early, and the poverty that engulfed his community nearly destroyed his life. On an embodied level, he describes how a stranger nearly strangled the life out of him. He asks, “How am I going to live when the world wants me dead?”^{xxii} and even more pointedly:

The feeling of my body slowly rising against the wall, the force of the constriction, and the strain to the body as it rose are all sensations I do not remember as vividly as the strikes. I only remember rising off the ground, placed up on my cross, my body nearly lifeless. No child desires a cross; no one wants to suffer; there is no redemption in suffering.^{xxiii}

During and after experiencing violence, Patrick remembers asking: Where was God? Where was his father? Where was the church? As person of faith, being raised in the Catholic Church and taught in a Catholic school, he asked an additional question: “Why was the church (or God) not present to stop the violence?”

Sadly, in many cases, the church is not merely an innocent bystander to violence but is actually complicit in it. Particularly notorious are instances of sexual violence committed by priests in the Roman Catholic Church. Similar accounts continue to surface within evangelical and fundamentalist Protestant churches in the wake of the #metoo movement. While it seems abundantly obvious that the church and its leaders should not perpetrate violence against anyone, much less young people, that clearly is not true in contemporary Christian lived experience.

In *Joy and Human Flourishing*, Charles Mathewes proposes that the ultimate purpose of the church is the cultivation of joy. The church, he writes, is a “form of theopolitical soul crafting and community creation whose ultimate purpose is to enable for its members an embodied deliberative life that cultivates a hopeful joy” that is a foretaste of our eschatological hope.^{xxiv}

As practical theologians employing a liberation theology lens, we must then also ask: “What is the church’s role *now* in creating a culture in which the experience of joy after violence is a possibility? How can the church *now* best support young people who’ve experienced violence to thrive, flourish, and experience the joy that is their birthright?”

The flip-side of a theology of joy is often a theology of suffering that appears to justify suffering and violence as a necessary path to deeper joy. Young people suffering the afterburn of violence often hear implicit or explicit messages that “everything happens for a reason,” “God doesn’t give us more than we can handle.” As Judith Herman reminds of us, especially of those children and young people who are sexually assaulted, victims can come to see themselves as somehow to blame for both the violence and their own suffering.

Because of the prevalence of these perceptions, Teresa Pasquale claims a theological truth we want to underline for victims of any soul-rending violence:

The bitterness of acute pain impacting the soul changes us...It doesn't mean we deserved to hurt because we were divined for this particular kind of ache. It doesn't mean it isn't more than we can handle. It just reminds us that we are creatures born for unimaginable resilience and an unending capacity for hope ... We lean into joy with more urgency because we know the density of a guttural and deep lament. ^{xxv}

If a young person enters the doors of the church and finds the pastor, elders, and other leaders of that community concerned with stewarding the resources of the church toward “traditional programs” such as Sunday services, religious education, preschools, sacraments and major events, violence is implicitly acknowledged as an *interruption* to the work of the church. Responding to violence experienced by any congregant – especially a young person already marginalized in both ability to access support and capacity to psycho-socially process the violent event – should not be treated as an interruption to the day-to-day workings of our churches and religious institutions. Rather, it is for such moments as this that the church exists. From the perspective of Christians whose faith is grounded in the suffering, crucifixion and death of Jesus, the ability to redirect energies away from violence and toward a sort of “business-as-usual” approach actually creates conditions in which violence thrives.

Alternatively, God and God's people know how to show up and be present in the afterburn of violence. As Frank Rogers says,

Where is the God who hears the cry in whatever tangled form it wails? God is not center-stage. God is in the graffiti. In the vandalized back room of every teenage soul, a sacred presence whispers, 'I hear the cry of your story. Your story is mine. The graffitied anguish on the wall...I did it, too.'^{xxvi}

A theology of joy in the afterburn of violence and trauma emphatically names that no child or young person wants or deserves to experience violence. In the the words of Rubem Alves, children begin and end with the “impossible possibility of a world open to freedom and joy.”^{xxvii} In theological language, he says “Children's play ends with the universal resurrection of the dead. Adult's play ends with the universal burial. Whereas the resurrection is the paradigm of the world of children, the world of adults creates the

cross.”^{xxviii} Alves is clear that violence is not a precondition of childhood, youth or young adulthood. It is not a necessary or inherent part of *lo cotidiano*, our day-to-day lives. In other words, la *lucha* – the struggle in which we find ourselves, including conditions of violence – is not necessary to one’s experience of the divine, but our experience of the divine does take suffering into account. Rejecting prescriptions of violence that often come from theologies of the cross and redemptive suffering, Alves reminds us that the cross is not part of the theological imagination of young people. For youth who want nothing more than to live, to breathe, to experience freedom from the hauntings of violence, and to experience joy in its fullest, and in Patrick’s words, “there is no redemption in suffering.”^{xxix}

Heeding the work of trauma theorists and practical theologians, a theology of joy in the afterburn of violence simultaneously pays attention to the suffering cries of young people and the conditions in which young people find themselves. Each time we refuse to turn away from violence and listen to the cries of the oppressed and their violated bodies, especially the broken narratives of our youth, we engage in the life-giving work of resurrecting broken bodies. We begin to live into a theology that can hold possibility for joy in the afterburn of violence. Here we turn to systems theory to frame our understanding of attending simultaneously to both the micro and macro nature of violence affecting our young people.

IV. A Way Forward: Healing Violence in Living Human Systems

Margaret Wheatley invites us to consider the institutions within which we operate as living human systems. More like an old growth forest than a factory, our institutions have life cycles of birth, growth, peak, decline, and death. Within these systems, leaders operate to create change. They can choose to align themselves with growth that creates systems of freedom, rather than systems of violence. This framework provides a way forward for educators and pastors hoping to heal both the direct needs of young adults experiencing violence and the long-term needs of shifting a culture away from violence. In the accompanying resource, we provide step-by-step guides to three group experiences, all of which find affinity with Wheatley’s framework of a living human system. As a reminder, this cycle has four fluid moves:

1. **Name** - the conditions that give rise to the necessary intervention. Theologically this means acknowledging God’s presence with those who suffer and asserting that violence is not a necessary part of daily life.

2. **Connect** - those who individually and collectively addressing conditions of violence. Theologically this means connecting those who today witness and/or experiencing violent persecution, like that experienced by Jesus and his followers.
3. **Build** - a community of practice that regularly shares knowledge and best practices between those who are addressing the conditions in which young people are experiencing violence. Theologically, this is the Upper Room, a community of practice collectively mourning and discerning their next most faithful step together.
4. **Illuminate** - that highly contextualized expertise with the broader publics, insight on how to shift the culture and society. Theologically, this is bearing witness to the joy that is the resurrection and going out into the world.

The first group experience and curricular suggestion that creates a small zone of safety in which the cycle of naming, connecting, building and illuminating are at work in the face of violence is *Nuevo Comunidad*. *Nuevo Comunidad* was a group of young Latinos Patrick led in California in the early 2010s. All young people who had experienced some form of gang violence or witnessed the pain it caused, those gathered shared stories and practices with each other for healing. This small group of millennials recovered life-giving cultural practices that had been lost due to the historic violence caused by the church to people who had been indigenous to the land. This circle gathered regularly to decolonize Christian practice, carrying forward a creatively Chicano Catholicism that included *ofrendas* (sacred altars for those who have passed), *testimonios* (witnesses to one's experiences), and other embodied communal practices of ritual and healing such as sharing the good news as we find it, along with dancing, singing, and chanting. Each time they gathered, *Nuevo Comunidad* sent each other forth in community with partners to hold them accountable for their own healing. *Nuevo Comunidad* was modeled after Alcoholics Anonymous, a format from which some of the original members had benefited. Membership was free: one only needed to have the desire to heal his or herself and participate in collective healing of the group. We **named** that the violence we came into contact with and subsequent psychological trauma was largely beyond our control, and affirmed that **community and connection** to the divine were essential to one's long-term health and well-being. We **built** a community of practice that regularly met, typically outdoors so as to welcome the healing properties of being (re)connected to the land. We have **illuminated** this practice most importantly through the

individual transformations from victims to healers. *Nuevo Comunidad* is now adapted for a variety of contexts, including in youth groups, prisons, and higher education.

Girlfriend Theology is a second methodology in which these four steps occur within small zones created for healing. Girlfriend Theology is a method of doing theological reflection that Dori developed in the 1990s to use with girls who want to learn to name their lived experience of God as healer, liberator, friend, and co-creator. It begins with creating safe-enough space^{xxx} for a girl to tell a true story from her life to a group facilitated by two or more adult feminist supporters. It follows a four-step method that follows the acronym L.I.V.E. It involves: **L**istening to a real-life story from a young person's life; **I**mmersing oneself in the emotions, feelings, and associated stories that emerge; **V**iewing the story with a wider lens, looking for images of God that emerge in the overlap between stories from scripture or tradition and the contemporary story; and **E**nacting a next most faithful step, moving forward from the story-sharing space with one action that embodies a new image of God or right relationship. Based on the practice of female theologians, particularly womanists (African-American woman theologians), *mujeristas*, (Latina woman theologians), Asian-American female theologians, Girlfriend Theology sought to address larger issues stemming from patriarchal culture by starting small, in places where girls learn to name themselves in relation to a larger power that seeks their wellbeing.

In Dori's story from the beginning of this chapter, Danni experienced an initial violence in an incident of sexual abuse, an ongoing violence related to her community, and tertiary violence as a result to long years of silence and shame. In a situation such as this, Girlfriend Theology could have served at multiple points as an intervention that helped Danni and a circle of friends name the violence in their surroundings, connect around shared experiences of violence, build new ways of seeing themselves in relationship to violence, and illuminating a reflection of themselves as created in God's image and deserving of human flourishing. For over twenty years, social workers, pastors, youth ministers, and campus ministers have adapted Girlfriend Theology in multiple contexts where girls and women share in liberating themselves from images of God that keep them silenced and diminished by the ongoing effects of patriarchy.

In both of these methods, we, along with other pastor/scholar/activists, created small zones of safety where individual young people experiencing violence receive communal support that names the violence, connects them to support, builds community of

practice, and illuminates images of God, Jesus, faith community, and healing that can assist the survivor in recovering access to markers of joy and human flourishing.

In both cases, youth ministers and pastors provided direct body/soul care to young people in their contexts who hunger for access to joy and flourishing in the direct afterburn of violence, while *simultaneously*, deploying their resources (theological, financial, capital, social) to “come alongside” organizations who are already doing the work of interrupting violent social systems, thereby partnering to change the systemic conditions which allow violence to flourish.

We know that some young people will never darken the door of a church; we also know that some church communities find it hard to either acknowledge the hidden violence taking place within its sphere or to make the cultural commute to settings where violence prevails. For this reasons, we emphasize a third example of a group encounter that serves as a way of diagnosing a faith community’s social location in relationship with violence affecting its young people.. This tool -- called the Two-Loop Theory -- helps faith communities understand how they can be part of dismantling violence from whatever social location they occupy. The Two-Loop Theory provides a map of the living dying systems in which we live. It provides a helpful map for individuals and communities to see where and how they are: **naming** violence and addressing how it affects young people in their community; **connecting** people experiencing violence to organizations providing support, and connecting those supportive organizations to one another; **building** communities of practice that create alternative ways of being to death-dealing violence and collusion with violence; **illuminating** those people and organizations who have successfully intervened to create a new culture, one that supports young people in lives of joy and flourishing. Using Two Loop Theory invites faith leaders to metaphorically “walk the streets” of their community, seeing where violence exists and understanding how they might better collaborate to change the systems which allow violence to continue. A faith-based institution who might not see itself as in close contact with young people experiencing violence can use the framework to innovate new action to better engage violence and collaborate with other organizations to shift culture.

Violence is an interruption into the life giving narrative of God. It is the very conditions that adults create that inflict wounds on young adults. In *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lourde writes: “The aim of each thing we should do is to make the lives of ourselves and our children

richer and more possible.” We believe this echoes the gospel mandate and directs us to imagine *all* children as *our* children; not just the ones who make up our nuclear families, who look like us, or who inhabit our church programs. All young people are part of the human family that desires and deserves access to joy and flourishing.

V & VI. **“When Joy Rests Six Feet Under” a poem and prayer to los inocentes**

What do we do with joy in the afterburn of violence?

When bodies are mangled and tangled

When we see our friends and family members stand trial for violence

And the violent systems that put them there are acquitted of all charges

What do we do with Joy after the death of Hope?

When we stare into the abyss of lifeless eyes

When the voice of joy is silenced.

Touching a face that no longer feels and should, that was once warm and is now cold.

What do we do with joy when la lucha is lo cotidiano?

When the community turns to you for an answer

When your answer lies in a resurrection

A resurrection of broken bodies, of buried memories and subterranean hauntings.

What is joy when the violent memories repeat...over and over and over

And over.

When I place my faith in people that do violence

When joy is but a distant memory with them

Leaving me behind, to witness and to live.

What will you do with joy once you have seen the bodies laid out

On the street.

When the savior fails to appear

When others turn their back and remain silent

Between living and dying, where is the joy?

After the death of joy, we respond.

Sometimes in tears, sometimes in violence, sometimes in peace vigils and marches

Often in resisting prescriptions and preferring to value our own culture

Cultures of memory and resilience.

Our Joy is not for you.

Sometimes in representing and participating in the community.

Always in living after our embodied joys have died and rest six feet under.

VII. *Additional Resources:*

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ⁱ Danni's story is used with permission. Her name and details of her story have been changed to protect her identity.

ⁱⁱ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) 36.

ⁱⁱⁱ Judith Hermann, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 74.

^{iv} We have written of these spaces in Reyes, *Nobody Cries When We Die*, (Chalice, 2016) and Baker, *Doing Girlfriend Theology: God-Talk with Young Women* (Pilgrim, 2010), upon which we draw for the curriculum accompanying this chapter.

^v Paulo Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare to Teach* (Cambridge: Westview Press, 2005).

^{vi} At the time of this writing, teenagers who witnessed the violent massacre of their peers in Parkland FL were travelling to the state capital to lobby for gun control. Although much healing will indeed be needed for these survivors in the months and years to come, they nonetheless illustrating the power of young people to "read" their surroundings and become active agents of change in the aftermath of violence.

^{vii} Mai Anh Le Tran, *Reset the Heart: Unlearning Violence, Relearning Hope* (Abingdon 2017), 7.

^{viii} We follow Maria Harris (1989) in defining curriculum broadly, as rooted in the Latin verb *currere*, which means to run. (55) For Harris, curriculum is the "entire course of the church's life" (17), in which the church "does not *have* an educational program; it *is* an educational program. (47)

^{ix} Personal conversation with Stephen Lewis, president of The Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE). The idea of social innovation is one we engage frequently as colleagues at FTE, where Patrick serves as director of doctoral initiatives and Dori serves as senior fellow for research and learning. www.fteleaders.org

^x These four steps will be named more fully below as we appropriate the Berkana Institute's framework of a Living and Dying system to imagine a public curriculum for faith communities addressing this topic. See Deborah Frieze and Margaret Wheatley, *Walk Out Walk On: A Learning Journey on Communities Daring to Live Into the Future Now* (San Francisco: Berrett Koehler Publishers, 2015); Margaret Wheatley, *Who Do We Choose To Be: Facing Reality, Claiming Leadership, Restoring Sanity* (San Francisco: Berrett Koehler Publishers, 2017).

^{xi} *Ibid.*

^{xii} <http://www.who.int/topics/violence/en/>

^{xiii} Tran, 25-26.

^{xiv} Tran, quoting Maluleke on p. 26

^{xv} <https://www.justice.gov/defendingchildhood/facts-about-children-and-violence>

^{xvi} “Youth Violence: What We Need to Know.” Report of the Subcommittee on Youth Violence of the Advisory Committee to the Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences Directorate, National Science Foundation, 2013. The study investigated the root causes of youth violence looking at recent studies and data on violent crime. What the researchers found was that school rampages, for example, take place in “stable, close-knit, low crime and very small rural towns” and the “shooter is generally a white adolescent male.” In “high poverty neighborhoods, often plagued by illicit drugs and gun markets, are particularly at risk for youth violence...urban bloodshed, which often unfolds between known antagonists, is far more ubiquitous and hence exacts a terrible toll on families and communities destabilized by persistent violence.”

^{xvii} <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/2012FindingsonSVinYouth.pdf>, David Finkelhor, Anne Shattuck, Heather A. Turner, & Sherry L. Hamby, The Lifetime Prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse and Sexual Assault Assessed in Late Adolescence, 55 *Journal of Adolescent Health* 329, 329-333 (2014).

^{xviii} Tran, 32.

^{xix} Gilligan, 23.

^{xx} Gilligan, 31.

^{xxi} Kathleen Greider, *Reckoning with Aggression: Theology, Violence and Vitality* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 4.

^{xxii} Reyes, *Nobody Cries*, 3.

^{xxiii} Reyes, *Nobody Cries*, 11.

^{xxiv} Charles Mathewes “Toward a Theology of Joy,” in Miroslav Volf and Justin E. Crisp, editors, *Joy and Human Flourishing: Essays on Theology, Culture and the Good Life* (Fortress Press, 2015).

^{xxv} Teresa B. Pasquale, *Sacred Wounds: A Path to Healing from Spiritual Trauma* (Chalice, 2015), 8.

^{xxvi} Frank Rogers, *Finding God in the Graffiti: Empowering Teenagers Through Stories* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2011), 188.

^{xxvii} Rubem Alves, *Tomorrow's Child: Imagination, Creativity, and the Rebirth of Culture* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 94.

^{xxviii} *Ibid*, 91.

^{xxix} Reyes, 11.

^{xxx} On brave space, safe-enough space.