

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary

SPIRITUAL RESILIENCE: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL
ANALYSIS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF ST. IGNATIUS' DAILY EXAMEN IN THE
INNER SPIRITUAL LIFE OF HURRICANE LAURA SURVIVORS

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Spiritual Resilience: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Experience of
St. Ignatius' Daily Examen in the Inner Spiritual Life of Hurricane Survivors

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This project explores the usefulness of St. Ignatius' Daily Examen in fostering resilience. A qualitative study analyzes the experiences of young adult, United Methodist hurricane survivors who prayed St. Ignatius' Daily Examen for three weeks. Young adults are largely absent from mainline churches hence many living in Southwest Louisiana experienced their first hurricane disconnected from spiritual resources churches can foster. The participants' low resilience scores confirm a need for intervention. Worship attendance and a theology of remaining are demonstrated as correlative factors to increased resilience.

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Is your heart as true to mine as mine is to yours? If it is, give me your hand.

-John Wesley, paraphrase of 1 Kings 10:15, in “Catholic Spirit.”

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In a time when increasingly fewer young adults are involved in organized religion and increasingly more communities are at risk of environmental disaster, the church struggles to take care to offer them spiritual disciplines that have the potential to contribute to their resilience. Human resilience is a person's ability to adapt and thrive in response to disruptive challenges. This project was designed for young adult members and constituents of University United Methodist Church (UUMC) in Lake Charles, Louisiana, four years after Hurricane Laura. The problem this project addresses is this: In what ways does the spiritual practice of St. Ignatius' Daily Examen contribute to the resilience of young adult, United Methodist hurricane survivors? The thesis statements explored in this project were (1) Some young adult hurricane survivors find the practice of the Daily Examen a meaningful way to engage with God at the end of each day, (2) The Examen is a spiritual practice with meditative, reflective, imaginative, and discerning elements, and (3) For some of the participants the Examen will be a Means of Grace that has the potential of being of spiritual help when they are feeling overwhelmed or facing a crisis.

Geographic and Historical Context

UUMC is situated in the heart of Lake Charles, Louisiana and in sight of both the United States Interstate 210 (I-210) bypass and the main road connecting downtown to the McNeese State University (MSU). Located in Calcasieu Parish, the community of

Lake Charles is part of the region of cultural Catholicism that dominates most of the width of Louisiana from I-10 and south to the Gulf Coast beaches and marshes.¹

The first known organized exploration of the region was led by Spaniard Jose de Evia in 1785. One historian described what de Evia experienced.

The area was remote from both New Orleans in the east and from San Antonio on the west. There [were] just no connecting waterways to allow for safe travel. Overland travel was near impossible with the rugged prairie of Southwest Louisiana and its blade edged grasses, intermittent streams, and marshes. The Calcasieu River twisted and turned with sandbars, snakes, [and] mosquitoes and [was] slow going. This isolation, even at this early date, delay[ed] settlement of the area and create[d] a history rather set apart from the rest of Louisiana.²

Whereas Acadians found refuge to the east and Spanish settlements were being established to the west, a no-man's-land was officially established by the United States of America (US) and Spain in this territory following the Louisiana Purchase until the countries could agree on an official boundary to establish. This agreement stood for 13 years until the Adams-Onis Treaty in 1819, but the region continued to be avoided by most prospective settlers due to the landscape deemed inhospitable by European and Colonial standards. With no government providing law, order, or infrastructure this neutral territory the Native Americans already well acclimated to the area were slowly joined by hearty and self-sufficient individuals and families, many of whom sought safe haven, including Spaniards, Acadians, fugitive slaves, freed slaves, squatters, and

¹ Marcia Gaudet, "Cultural Catholicism in Cajun-Creole Louisiana," *Louisiana Folklore Miscellany*, 2000.

² Adley Cormier, "A Timeline History of Lake Charles and Southwest Louisiana," paper delivered at November 17, 2007 meeting of the Southwest Louisiana Genealogical Society, <https://www.calcasieupreservation.com/home/historyofswla>.

outlaws.³ Most of the challenges early settlers faced have by now been eased by infrastructure (e.g. bridges), science (e.g. mosquito control), and engineering (e.g. river dredging). Among the environmental challenges that loom over Southwest Louisiana (SWLA) today are increasingly stronger and more violent storms due to climate change, and contamination and pollution caused by the operations and mistakes of petrochemical industries both on shore and offshore. Those who thrive in SWLA today continue to be fiercely self-reliant, loyal to extended family, and resilient in the face of adversity. The researcher moved to Lake Charles from Pennsylvania in 2003 when she was 34 years old. Despite the 22 years she has lived with her family in SWLA and her enthusiastic participation in much of the local cultural offerings, she is aware that she is even now serving in a cross-cultural context.

Cultural Catholicism

Local lore recounts that French and other European Catholics started officially settling in this area starting in 1871 followed by the Methodists who chartered their first church in Lake Charles in 1873.⁴ Unlike Hispanic influenced Catholicism and culture in neighboring Texas the Acadian (Cajun) Catholic cultural influence of this area was insulated and encouraged by the historical boundaries of the territories purchased from the French. The predominance of Roman Catholicism continues in Calcasieu Parish and all Louisiana Gulf Coast parishes today. Census numbers show that Catholicism is the

³ Keagan LeJeune, “Western Louisiana’s Neutral Strip: Its History, People, and Legends,” *Folklife in Louisiana*, essay written as part of the *Neutral Strip Folklife Survey* in 2015, 2, https://www.louisianafolklife.org/LT/Articles_Essays/nslejeune1.html.

⁴ City of Lake Charles, “History of Lake Charles,” <https://www.cityoflakecharles.com/egov/apps/document/center.egov?view=item:id=65>.

most popular religion with nearly one-quarter of parish residents identifying as Catholic as opposed to less than four percent of United Methodists. (Appendix 1).

The preponderance of Catholics in the community alone would suggest that even those who are not practicing Catholics are aware of the presence and possibly influenced by that religion. In this case, it would be hard to overemphasize how pervasively Catholicism has influenced the local folk religion of both Catholics and non-Catholics. The cultural rhythm of SWLA has been formed by the Catholic ecclesiastical calendar and uniquely local Cajun Catholic sacramentals. For instance, Catholics, Protestants, and Atheists alike wholeheartedly participate in Mardi Gras. Markedly different from New Orleans, communities in Calcasieu and surrounding parishes celebrate a more family-friendly, community-based Mardi Gras season which lasts from Epiphany (January 6) until Ash Wednesday (46-days before Easter). From king cakes sold in most stores to banners flying on the homes of Kings and Queens of Krewe's past and present, to daily parades throughout the region, everyone wears the purple, green, and gold colors of Mardi Gras. Whereas most US Catholics fast from meat with seafood on Fridays, most SWLA residents, regardless of their religion, get into the spirit of spring with regular Friday crawfish boils that are more of an event than a meal.

Cultural Catholicism in SWLA extends to sacramentals. Though there are seven Catholic sacraments, there are additional unofficial sacramentals. Some of these spiritual practices have been suggested or sanctioned by the church at some point, and others developed or were morphed over time from local folk theology or superstition. There are several examples of sacramentals and folk-spiritual practices influenced by Catholicism that are unique to this area borne out of the frequency of violent thunderstorms, which are

common, and hurricanes, which are feared. Weather lore has led to the practices of the sprinkling of holy water, the placement of palm branches on doors, the lighting of blessed candles, and either a physical cross or the sign of the cross to protect a person and/or property from bad weather.⁵ These practices are so prevalent that even Protestant pastors are often asked by community members if they can purchase these kinds of items from the neighborhood church.

Similarly, prayers associated with particular Saints are traditionally printed on cards to be distributed widely through the community. More recently the social media platforms of local Catholic cathedrals, churches, and dioceses post memes with versions of prayers intended to be used to ward off storms. (Appendix 2). For some, practices such as these can take on a religio-magical tone. But there is no denying that even the non-Catholic and non-religious have been exposed to these enjoinders to fall to their knees when storms approach. Cultural Catholicism in SWLA is well known, widespread, and relevant in the lives of all generations including young adults.

Diversity and Inequality

Information about the population including age, race and poverty are all relevant to this project and the community context in which it was situated. It is no secret that Louisiana is a state that consistently measures poorly in studies that measure the quality of life of residents including education, access to healthcare, and unemployment.⁶ For the

⁵ Gaudet, “Cultural Catholicism.”

⁶ Stephen Ross Johnson, “U.S. News Ranks the Best States for 2025,” U.S. News and World Report, May 6, 2025, <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/articles/us-news-releases-best-states-rankings>.

purposes of this project, it is important to take stock of some of the factors that contribute to inequalities that lead to disparities in disaster recovery.

Lake Charles is home to an institution of higher education in the University of Louisiana System as well as a community college (SOWELA). MSU currently enrolls 6,557 students across six academic colleges.⁷ As a result, Lake Charles is home to one-third more college-enrolled persons per capita than the national average. (Appendix 3). While the percentage of young adult residents in Lake Charles is consistent with state and national averages, there is a greater concentration of this age group living close to the university (Appendix 4).

The racial makeup of Lake Charles is vastly different from the nation's averages, where the 46.2% of black residents outnumber all other self-reported racial identities including whites (42.6%) (Appendix 3). This ratio does not extend to MSU enrollment where white students outnumber black students more than 3:1.⁸ There is a high level of racial segregation in most Lake Charles neighborhoods. (Appendix 5). Majority black populations are living in the north, northeast and eastern neighborhoods of Lake Charles, as well as in and near subsidized housing, and in MSU's student housing (Appendix 6).

The poverty rate in Lake Charles is more than 70% greater than the national average. (Appendix 3). A comparison of poverty map to race map shows that predominantly black neighborhoods have consistently greater poverty levels. Additionally, residents of many mixed-race neighborhoods that are predominantly white

⁷ McNeese State University, Institutional Research and Effectiveness, "Fall 2025 Cowboy Facts," accessed October 3, 2025, <https://www.mcneese.edu/ire/fall-2025-cowboy-facts/>.

⁸ McNeese State University, "Fall 2025 Cowboy Facts."

are also at greater risk of living in poverty. (Appendixes 6 and 7). One of the ways that poverty and racial inequities play out is that three-quarters of renters are in black households even though they are closer to half of the population. And the average black household can only afford (without burden) about half as much to rent a home as a white household (Appendix 8). The more limited earning power of women in Louisiana (67% of male earnings overall) compounds the situation and means that most single women cannot afford fair market rates to rent a home to accommodate the size of their households.⁹

The researcher is a witness of some realities and consequences of endemic poverty and environmental racism in this community. She has personally conducted countless Emergency Response Team (ERT) assessment intakes with residents following Hurricane Laura and several other previous natural disasters in Louisiana. Neighborhoods with higher poverty rates invariably present a disproportionate number of homes with deferred maintenance and lack of adequate insurance. Many families in vulnerable neighborhoods have not been able to afford the legal fees to complete heir succession requirements on family-held properties leaving them ineligible for FEMA assistance, and in some cases for non-profit disaster relief as well. This is an accurate description of the circumstances of at least five church members and many of the church's neighbors. Even now, five years post-Laura, less resourced neighborhoods are languishing. Practically all

⁹ National Women's Law Center, "The Wage Gap, State by State," February 21, 2025, https://nwl.org/resource/wage-gap-state-by-state/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=22045111430&gbraid=0AAAAAD7mv1Pcv9fZx-1ihz4zrmj2JSOdV&gclid=EA1aIQobChMI_pKh6fHfjwMVoYJaBR1k0wwjEAAYASAAEgIJlVd_BwE.

of Lake Charles' subsidized housing is deserted, and in some cases simply demolished and still awaiting long-ago-promised federal financial assistance.

Though it was likely that young adult members of UUMC of more than one race would agree to participate in this project, it is probable that all their families would be comfortably middle class. The scope of this project and the demographics of the ministry location, church membership, and the researcher within a place of privilege will limit the impact that this project can have on the issue of endemic poverty, environmental racism, and the inequalities built into non-profit, local, state, and federal systems.

Hurricane Laura

UUMC is 30 miles from the Gulf of Mexico and was in the direct path of four major hurricanes within the last two decades. Most recently, two back-to-back cyclones ravaged this community in the fall of 2020. Recovery is still expected to span many years. The initial crisis of mandatory evacuation and subsequent damage to physical property was a traumatic experience shared by all SWLA residents.

On August 27, 2020, Category 4 Hurricane Laura made landfall on the SWLA coast just nineteen miles south of Lake Charles, the eighth strongest¹⁰ and seventeenth costliest¹¹ storm ever recorded to make landfall in the United States. Forty-four days later, Hurricane Delta landed within thirty miles of Laura's landfall location. Both storms tore through the sparsely populated coastal area and quickly made their way to Calcasieu

¹⁰ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory, Hurricane Research Division, "Continental United States Hurricane Impacts/Landfalls 1851-2023, https://www.aoml.noaa.gov/hrd/hurdat/All_U.S._Hurricanes.html.

¹¹ National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, National Centers for Environmental Information and National Hurricane Center, "Costliest U.S. Tropical Cyclones," 2024, <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/billions/dcmi.pdf>.

Parish, home to 216,785 people.¹² This includes the City of Lake Charles with a population of 84,872.¹³ By November 2020, it was estimated that 99% of households in Calcasieu Parish had filed FEMA claims. Half of those claims had already been confirmed, including over 12% categorized as “major damage or destruction.”¹⁴ In their November 2020 report of recommendations, the Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana said that in addition to direct housing needs, other areas to address should include, “emotional support to be provided to a community prone to exceptional emotional fatigue from back-to-back disaster combined with anxiety from COVID.” The organization supplied examples of actions that could be taken to provide that emotional support:

Support mechanisms to deal with unique trauma from back-to-back disaster & COVID:

- Set up disaster support groups and mental health resources to address emotional fatigue in community confronted with back-to-back disasters on top of humanitarian and economic crisis linked to COVID.
- Consider initiatives to remove constant visible reminders of damage (e.g., designating priority landmark repairs, artistic initiatives).¹⁵

As if surviving a historic cyclone weren’t enough of a challenge, Laura hit just five months into the COVID-19 pandemic. Within nine months two more federally

¹² United States Census Bureau, “Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana,” accessed September 22, 2025, https://data.census.gov/profile/Calcasieu_Parish,_Louisiana?g=050XX00US22019.

¹³ United States Census Bureau, “Lake Charles city, Louisiana,” accessed September 22, 2025, https://data.census.gov/profile/Lake_Charles_city,_Louisiana?g=160XX00US2241155.

¹⁴ Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana, *Hurricanes Laura & Delta Recovery, Final Document*, November 2020, 25.

¹⁵ Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana, *Hurricanes Laura & Delta Recovery*, 68.

declared disasters befell SWLA: a five-day ice storm (February 13-17, 2021), and a flash flood event (May 17, 2021). In June of 2021 The Weather Channel named Lake Charles as the most storm-battered city in the United States.¹⁶

Disaster Preparedness

US Gulf Coast communities are accustomed to annual, pre-season “disaster preparedness” public service announcements (Appendix 9). Residents are encouraged to be ready to secure property, to gather essential supplies for survival, and to review evacuation plans. Although there are some professionals and volunteers who are trained to tend to spiritual and psychological effects of natural disasters on survivors and volunteers, there is not currently a movement to train spiritual leaders or teach area residents how to prepare their spirits with practices that have a potential to contribute to resilience.

United Methodists and other faith-based communities organize themselves to be ready to deploy ERT teams after a natural or human-caused disaster. Annual Conferences on the Gulf Coast and in parts of the US that are prone to natural disaster offer churches checklists to secure property and keep track of displaced members. All this disaster preparation advice is limited to issues of life, limb, property, and economics. Most local faith community leaders are unaware of any advice or resources on how to handle the post-traumatic experiences of survivors of past storms when a new cyclone’s path is predicted to enter the Gulf of Mexico.

¹⁶ The Weather Channel, “Lake Charles, Louisiana, Most Weather Battered City,” June 12, 2021, <https://weather.com/news/weather/video/lake-charles-louisiana-most-weather-battered-city>.

National Volunteer Agencies Active in Disaster (NVOAD) has 12 publications dedicated to spiritual and emotional care including points of consensus within which every member organization who provides such care during and after disaster agrees to operate¹⁷ NVOAD guidelines offer this definition of disaster spiritual care: “Disaster spiritual care is a process through which individuals, families, and communities affected by disaster draw upon their rich heritage of faith, hope, community, and meaning as a form of strength that bolsters the recovery process.”¹⁸ The same document speaks to the extreme circumstances in which such care is needed:

Disaster spiritual care is unique; the disaster spiritual care provider engages in concentrated spiritual care during which the waves of critical stress are often so frequent and intense – and of such duration – that the spiritual care challenge is differentiated from that which is usually encountered in the day-to-day life of the local community of faith. Thus, the severity level of disaster events and the context in which this support is provided requires well trained and credentialed disaster spiritual care providers.¹⁹

NVOAD is careful to distinguish between spiritual care and emotional care with unique but related guidelines for mental health professionals who bring emotional care in disaster response. Some uniquely credentialed and trained practitioners of spiritual care are also qualified to provide emotional care (i.e. trauma counseling or therapy). For most religious and spiritual leaders, being trained to recognize signs of emotional distress is critical to ensuring that no harm is done while offering spiritual care. Referral to the

¹⁷ National Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster, “Disaster Spiritual Care Points of Consensus” (2009), https://www.nvoad.org/wp-content/uploads/poc_disasterspiritualcare.pdf.

¹⁸ National Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster, Emotional and Spiritual Care Committee, “Disaster Spiritual Care Guidelines” (2014), 5, https://www.nvoad.org/wp-content/uploads/national_voad_disaster_spiritual_care_guidelines_final.pdf

¹⁹ National Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster, *Guidelines*, 7.

services of a credentialed mental health professional is always necessary to diagnose trauma. (More on this subject in Chapter 2.)

NVOAD is also careful to explain that in every aspect of disaster response the goal of all member organizations should always be to partner with local organizations and agencies. In this case partnership is needed with local leaders of religious communities and other practitioners of spiritual care to coordinate and provide appropriate disaster spiritual care. In fact, local spiritual leaders are designated as the “primary resources for post-disaster spiritual care.”²⁰ The Emotional and Spiritual Care Committee has identified what can and should be done for and with local spiritual leaders during the sunshine days between disasters:

Mitigate

Role - Educate responders and religious leaders about improving emotional and spiritual resilience, including strengthening interpersonal relationships, fostering wellness in spirit, mind, and body, finding purpose, and seeking help when needed. Demonstrate what can be done for the community in all phases. Help bring community leaders together before disasters and other traumatic events occur.

Benefit - This process not only provides education but also helps create connections that can help dramatically in the rebuilding process after an emergency.

Prepare

Role - Identify and include emotional and spiritual care leaders to be a part of emergency response trainings and exercises. Arrange meetings about emotional and spiritual preparedness, understanding protocols, the incident command system, and other important functions

Benefit - These trainings help ensure preparedness for smooth and productive emergency processes, helping those who need it most.²¹

²⁰ National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, *Points of Consensus*.

²¹ National Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster, “The Role and Benefit of Including Emotional and Spiritual Care during the Phases of Disasters,” July 20, 2021, <https://www.nvoad.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Role-and-Benefit-of-Including-Emotional-and-Spiritual-Care-During-the-Phases-of-Disasters.pdf>.

Beyond financial help in the form of grants to United Methodist annual conferences, United Methodist Committee on Relief's (UMCOR) unique contribution to NVOAD partners is disaster case management. UMCOR is well known for the exemplary training given to disaster case managers (DCM) and DCM supervisors who are hired by annual conferences to help local survivors in their disaster recovery. The researcher has been through two UMCOR trainings in this capacity, and mention of spiritual care is largely limited to the admonition to refrain from proselytizing clients in favor of demonstrating the gospel through their actions and care. Additionally, DCMs are warned that the work brings them close to humanity's suffering, and they can expect to experience compassion fatigue. They are encouraged to do what they need to do for their own emotional health and soul care. The UMCOR trainer offers a few examples, and discussion and questions are encouraged, but that is the extent of any training in spiritual care in that context.

To the researcher's knowledge, no pastor or other spiritual care provider in SWLA has been offered or encouraged to lead or participate in education or training about spiritual care as it relates to the disaster cycle during mitigation and preparedness phases. The teaching of spiritual practices during the sunshine days between disasters could promise to be a very real and present help to the soul when facing a crisis or a traumatic experience. United Methodist pastors and other leaders of faith who serve communities at risk for natural disasters need guidance in coaching spiritual survival skills. Individuals need appropriate and effective means of grace ready to deploy in times of future crises and/or traumatic experiences.

Ministry Context

Established in 1947, UUMC is the daughter church of historic downtown First United Methodist Church. It is nestled just behind one of the many strip malls and business that line Ryan Street, the road connecting downtown to MSU. The neighborhood doesn't have a name, but may be best known as "near McNeese," and members refer to the church's location as behind whatever business' back door abuts UUMC's parking lot. UUMC is best known in the community for its day care and preschool, convenient and affordable parking for parades, and its missional partnership with Amish and Mennonite partners in SWLA's disaster recovery.

The church is sandwiched between two poorly performing public elementary schools (D rated) and within a few blocks of the average-performing LaGrange High School (C rated).²² It is a mid to low-income and relatively integrated area with higher poverty rates. (Refer to church location on the maps in Appendices 5 and 7.) The majority-white membership is not as integrated as the neighborhood with 5.7% persons of color (POC) at UUMC and 42.1% POC within a two-mile radius of UUMC (Appendix 10).²³

The Louisiana Department of Education report cards show that the poverty rates of the students in the above-mentioned schools are over 80% which is much higher than census numbers in the neighborhoods they serve. This is in part due to the cultural reality

²² Louisiana Department of Education, 2022-2023 School and District Report Cards, searches for Calcasieu Parish schools, LaGrange High School, College Oaks Elementary, and Henry Heights Elementary done September 27, 2025, <https://www.louisianabelieves.com/data/reportcards/2023/>.

²³ Louisiana Conference of the United Methodist Church, *2024 Annual Conference Journal*, accessed 27 September 2025, [https://louisiana-email.brtapp.com/files/journal/2024journal+\(website\).pdf](https://louisiana-email.brtapp.com/files/journal/2024journal+(website).pdf), 524.

that families with means in the neighborhoods of poorly performing schools are likely to send their children to one of the city's four Catholic or other private schools or to homeschool their children.

There is a wide range among the members and constituents of UUMC when it comes to economic means. There are professionals with doctoral degrees and those living on adult disability fixed income and every situation in between. A congregational care fund is maintained at the pastor's discretion to assist individuals with an ongoing relationship with the church during times of hardship. This fund is tapped to help about six households each year. Overall, the church membership households are more well off than the majority households within five blocks of the church.

People who worship at UUMC reside in all kinds of neighborhoods across the city and beyond. A couple of families drive across bridges from neighboring towns, but most live within just a few minutes' drive, and some within walking distance. It is common for longtime members to worship with three generations of family. There are also many singles, divorcees, widows and widowers who live alone and think of their church as their family.

Before COVID-19, the 2020-2021 storms, and disaffiliations from the denomination the average combined weekly worship attendance at UUMC was 200 and today is 105. Even though the church is located less than a mile from MSU young adult attendance averages just three (or 3%) of total attendance. Nine young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 attend at least monthly or when they are home from college.

Every UUMC household sustained some measure of Hurricane Laura damage to their home, and quite a few remained evacuated or in temporary housing months to years

later. Several sustained serious injuries and even lost loved ones in incidents indirectly related to the storm (i.e. electrocution, exposure to COVID-19 while evacuated, debris clearing injuries, etc.). Though hurricanes have affected many communities in many places, these survivors attempted to recover through a pandemic. The church itself sustained an estimated \$5,000,000 in property damage and loss of business use. The congregation was without space of its own to gather or worship for thirty-three total weeks.

Nevertheless, many members and constituents exhibit resilience. The church's Leadership Council continued to gather online to do substantial work, much of it in response to COVID-19 and the storms. A consistent remnant gathered for streaming worship and online Bible studies. Even the homebound visitation team found creative ways to reconnect with nursing home residents as they were slowly returned to repaired facilities and as COVID-19 protocols were loosened. A small number of members moved away from the Gulf Coast declaring it their "last storm." Most stayed to navigate the time-consuming recovery of their homes and businesses while helping the church do the same for vulnerable neighbors. From January 2021 through June 2023 UUMC hosted hundreds of Amish and Mennonite volunteers who assisted in the disaster recovery of more than 170 vulnerable households in SWLA neighborhoods. That the church members did all this while navigating their own recoveries is a testimony to their resilience and faith.

The after-the-storms reality is that SWLA is fundamentally changed. The researcher's own experience of venturing back into the disaster zone was a feeling of shellshock. Throughout the community, landmarks were either disfigured or gone

altogether. What were homes and neighborhoods just days before were apocalyptic-looking scenes. Roads were impassable and even homes with minimal damage were uninhabitable without electricity to power air conditioning in the heat and humidity of the late Gulf Coast summer. What remains of the survivors' interior lives can be unrecognizable as well. A community-wide traumatic experience forces every survivor to grieve losses that will never return in much the same way as they must when a loved one dies.

There is no triumphal restoration/resurrection/happy ending to the aftermath of a natural disaster. It takes at least three days to assess the condition of your property and three months for basic services to get back in motion. Even within three years not every building can be restored, not every neighborhood can recover, not every person can return to the same life and livelihood that was before. And as much as media, engineers, and city councils chant the mantra, "Build Back Better," survivors need to know if any good news exists in the remaining. This project turns toward the soul care that is needed and the search for spiritual practices that may have the potential to build resilience in preparation of the storms of life still to come. Embracing the cultural Catholicism of the ministry context with the Daily Examen prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola and building on previous resilience research explored in Chapter 2, this project tests the theory that spiritual practices exist that can contribute to an individual's resilience.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter defines important terms and examines relevant research and summarizes additional relevant literature. This includes a working definition of “resilience” and a clear explanation of spiritual bypassing. The literature includes a timeline reflecting the most up-to-date expectations of the phases of trauma response after a community-wide traumatic experience. Relevant research is shared that informs the practice of spiritual disciplines which promote resilience including the employment and validity tests of resilience scales and studies that examine the role of spiritual and secular methods of coping and attempts to discover what sorts of practices and attitudes correlate with resilience. An understanding of Generation Z’s (Gen Z) general worldview and expectations are also explored.

Definitions

A few definitions of the following key terms are necessary at the outset: resilience, stress, crisis, traumatic event, and unresolved psychological trauma.

The concept of resilience is currently used across a wide variety of disciplines and organizations with the same general idea. The word “resilient” likely derives from the Latin verb “resilire” which means to rebound or recoil like a mechanical spring. In 1818, the first recorded use of the English word “resilient” was to describe a physical property of timber.²⁴ For more than a century resilience was attributed in industry publications and

Alastair McAslan, “The Concept of Resilience: Understanding Its Origins, Meaning, and Utility,” (Torrens Resilience Institute, March 14, 2010), 2,

research to describe materials including wood, iron, and bronze in their relative ability to regain their shape after enduring pressure or other changes in environmental conditions. By 1856, a modulus (or measure) of resilience was developed as a way to evaluate how materials stand up to severe conditions. Hence the early nineteenth century concept and measurability of resilience transformed shipbuilders from woodworkers to ironsmiths. The same modulus of resilience is still used in the fields of civil and mechanical engineering as well as naval architecture, and resilience has been picked up by other scientific and theoretical fields including ecology and evolution,

More recently, the concept of resilience has been used to describe and measure how people respond to traumatic situations. One of the first of these instances was a 1971 psychology study with children that discovered an unexpected resilience in some individuals.²⁵ By now usage has been picked up by other disciplines like psychology, sociology, and economics and is used by institutions to describe organizations and communities. For example, in the field of psychotherapy, “resilience refers to the human ability to withstand stressful challenges and retain or regain normal functioning.”²⁶

Any aspect of the human life comes with a potential of disruption. Physically, a body can get sick, or bones can be broken. Relationally, trust can be betrayed or someone

<https://www.flinders.edu.au/content/dam/documents/research/torrens-resilience-institute/resilience-origins-and-utility.pdf>.

²⁵ N. Garnezy, “Vulnerability research and the issue of primary prevention,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 41, no.1 (1971), 101–116. <https://doi-org.turing.library.northwestern.edu/10.1111/j.1939-0025.1971.tb01111.x>.

²⁶ Steven M. Southwick, *Resilience and Mental Health: Challenges Across the Lifespan*. 1st ed., Edited by Matthew J. Friedman, Dennis Charney, Steven M. Southwick, and Brett T. Litz, (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 90, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511994791>.

close will die. Economically, a job can be lost, or an emergency expense can arise. Sometimes a single event is capable of disrupting a life on many levels as in the case of an automobile accident. When it comes to a community-wide event like a hurricane, many lives are disrupted in multiple ways. Each disruption, large or small, is a challenge to the status quo. The question of what a person's life can be after the status quo is upset is at the heart of resilience. The most significant disruptions a person experiences are likely to change the future trajectory of their life. In this sense human resilience is not like a mechanical spring which when made of the right stuff returns back to its original state after being stretched by external forces. One can survive an accident but lose a limb. One can survive a flood but lose the contents of their home. Resilient recovery requires dynamic adaptation to a post-disruption reality. For the purpose of this project the working definition of human resilience is a person's ability to adapt and thrive in response to disruptive challenges. The goal of the intervention is to contribute to the overall resilience of participants who happen to all have survived the community-wide disruption of Hurricane Laura.

Stress is the experience of emotional and/or physical tension and can be positive or negative, and short-term or long-term. Stress is a universal experience in everyday life. Unwelcome disruptions, like the ones previously mentioned, are examples of negative stress. Examples of positive stress or welcome disruptions include the birth of a child, starting a new job, or going on a first date. The greater the intensity, frequency, and duration of the stressors in a person's life, the closer they come to the threshold of stress that may require medical attention or professional counseling.

A traumatic event is a case of extreme negative stress or disruption in which an occurrence of overwhelming force threatens one's safety and strips the person who experiences it from their control. In this project, the presenting traumatic event is Hurricane Laura. "Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary adaptations to life."²⁷

Unresolved psychological trauma is when one who has experienced a traumatic event (or series of events) "cannot resume the normal course of their lives because the past trauma continues to interrupt their present lives."²⁸ An unresolved trauma diagnosis in therapy could be due to a community-wide experience, or another more personal event such as bullying or domestic violence. Though every resident of Southwest Louisiana experienced Hurricane Laura, not all have unresolved psychological trauma.

Spiritual Bypassing

The researcher is aware of the dangers of spiritual bypassing which is a strategy to avoid deep and necessary psychological work by attempting to use spiritual practices and beliefs instead. Robert Masters says that spiritual bypassing "is a very persistent shadow of spirituality, manifesting in many forms, often without being acknowledged as such."²⁹ Since 1743, the first General Rule for Methodists has been to do no harm.³⁰ That makes it

²⁷ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, 2015 ed, (Basic Books, 2015), 33.

²⁸ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 33.

²⁹ Augustus Masters, *When Spirituality Disconnects Us from What Really Matters* (North Atlantic Books, 2010), 2.

³⁰ United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (United Methodist Publishing House, 2020/2024), ¶102.

even more important that the researcher acknowledges this pervasive possibility at the outset and design this project so as not to fall into its trap.

Pastors, chaplains, and others serving in religious vocations have a unique calling and training for the inner spiritual life for those in their care. This also includes a responsibility have genuine concern for the whole person, spirit, body and mind. With few exceptions pastors are not trained as medical doctors or psychologists. Just as a pastor would call emergency services if a parishioner was in physical distress, so too a pastor should always lean on mental health professionals and refer when it comes to the mental health of the souls in her care. Spiritual bypassing delays dealing with unresolved pain, unhealed psychological wounds, and developmental growth.³¹ Often, a referral to the right professional is the most therapeutic or spiritual intervention a pastor can provide. This Doctor of Ministry project is not a panacea, and the researcher is not trained to treat unresolved psychological trauma of any kind.

Spiritual bypassing is a seductive mode of escape from painful realities. “What spiritual bypassing would have us rise above is precisely what we need to enter, and enter deeply, with as little self-numbing as possible. To this end, it is crucial that we see through whatever practices we have, spiritual or otherwise, that tranquilize rather than illuminate and awaken us.”³²

Masters warns that meditative practices that seek calm at the expense of discernment and insight are classic spiritual bypassing traps. At its worst, it can lead a

³¹ Masters, *When Spirituality Disconnects Us*, 9.

³² Masters, *When Spirituality Disconnects Us*, 14.

person to rationalize that prayer alone is the answer to all problems and to avoid or even reject the healing and growth that is uniquely suited to counseling, psychology, and psychiatry. This would be akin to numbing the pain of a broken bone and devoting time and energy to actively ignoring the offending appendage and imagining that it is just a nuisance rather than to go through the pain of surgery so that with time, healing, and intentional physical therapy, the limb can be reintegrated in the daily activities of the person. Unresolved wounds, physical, emotional, relational, and otherwise, hold the whole person hostage until the source of the woundedness is located and appropriately addressed. Additionally, awareness of spiritual bypassing traps can help a person to discover practices that could contribute to their well-being and resilience, “to identify their sources of strength that allow them to maintain their humanity in the midst of harrowing disaster or long-term oppression, what practices get them in touch with their resilient power, and how resilience might be strengthened or enhanced.”³³

Collective Trauma Response Timeline

NVOAD has drawn on a wide body of knowledge and experience in creating their training and informational materials for member organizations. This includes the widely used and accepted “Phases of Collective Trauma Response” timeline (Appendix 11). The most recently updated timeline shows a sudden break and drop at the time of the impact of the community-wide traumatic experience.³⁴ The immediate rebound after the sudden

³³ Robert J. Schreiter, “Reading Biblical Texts through the Lens of Resilience,” *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, ed. by Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette (SBL Press, 2016), 194.

³⁴ Institute for Collective Trauma and Growth, “Phases of Collective Trauma Response,” <http://www.ictg.org/phases-of-disaster-response.html>.

drop may seem surprising given the unexpected and unwelcome experience that precedes it, this uplift is widely accepted as a universal experience as responders and volunteers arrive bringing much needed help and survivors are running on adrenaline 24-7. The more widespread traumatic experience, the longer each subsequent phase takes. In the case of back-to-back-to-back-to-back disasters in one community, the heroic phase is shorter and less pronounced if noticeable at all, and the disillusionment phase stretches out longer. That initial rebound is not the same as resilience, rather it is on the other side of the chasm where the community can see the true measure of its resilience. When the community has passed the low turning point to reach the rebuilding and restoration stage there is enough distance from the impact for survivors to gain perspective and to envision and plan for a better future. Marked by creativity and new initiative, this phase also begins the season of preparedness. The project at hand is targeted for the rebuilding and restoration phase of SWLA's disaster recovery timeline.

Relevant Studies Review

The researcher found ten relevant projects that inform the problematic for this one. They include studies that explore mitigating factors of spirituality among young people, the practice of spiritual disciplines as a mitigating factor in trauma, the relationship of sense-making and meaning-making, and cognitive restructuring to resilience, and processes of resilience in disaster survivors. The most recent study explored potential benefits of the Examen prayer for health and wellbeing. The final study gives details to explain the resilience scale selected for the current project.

The following two studies explored the mitigating factors of spirituality among young people. In the first, over a six-year period, 135,200 adolescents in four Gulf Coast

US states were surveyed through a qualitative study. Adverse effects of living in a hurricane-prone region were measured in terms of substance use/abuse. Religious salience was found to have a positive coping effect, although attendance at religious services was not. Peer gatherings (i.e. youth group) were not considered, and participants may or may not have been directly affected by disaster³⁵ In the second study involving young people, 240 Muslim participants who were enrolled at Iran University were part of a quantitative study, the majority of whom were 18 to 21 years of age. To test the mediating role of self-esteem to spiritual health and resilience, data was collected through a series of surveys: Spiritual Health Questionnaire (developed for use with Iranian populations), Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, and Donor-Davidson resilience scale. Among the authors' conclusions: "spiritual training is one of the most influential ways by which human beings can prevent physical and psychosocial illnesses. Since spiritual and religious beliefs are important in the lives of the people of Iran, it is possible to strengthen the field of self-esteem and resilience through education on spirituality and increase Iranians' positive attitudes toward life."³⁶ The authors suggest that future studies should be done with people of other religions and other cultures.

There is evidence in two more studies that point to the practice of spiritual disciplines as a mitigating factor in trauma. The first of these was a quantitative study of 554 disaster relief volunteers (three months post-Hurricanes Katrina/Rita) who were each

³⁵ Theda Rose, Joseph Shields, Stephen Tuller, and Sharon Larson, "Religiosity and Behavioral Health Outcomes of Adolescents Living in Disaster-Vulnerable Areas," *Journal of Religion and Health* 54, no.2 (2015), 480-94.

³⁶ Mitra Borji, Nadereh Memaryan, Zahra Khorrami, Elahe Farshadnia, and Maryam Sadighpour, "Spiritual Health and Resilience among University Students: The Mediating Role of Self-Esteem," *Pastoral Psychology* 69, no.1 (2020), 8.

also students at one of five professional schools that train mental health professionals. Data was collected through survey instruments to measure depression (CES-D), positive attitudes (Hope Scale), altruism (Self-Report Altruism Scale), spiritual support (Spiritual Support Scale), using prayer for coping (Using Private Prayer as a Means for Coping Scale), strength of faith (Three-Factor Religiosity Scale), peritraumatic emotional responses (Types of Peritraumatic Emotional Responses), and demographics. Among the study's conclusions was that deep connections, both spiritual and interpersonal, seemed to strengthen the resilience of disaster relief volunteers. The authors posit that more research is needed about the effects of spirituality "on resilience and its underlying mechanisms."³⁷ The authors also suggest that future studies should make use of a standard measure for resilience. Though this study was done with volunteers responding to disaster rather than survivors of disaster, they were certainly witnesses to the aftermath of a traumatic event. They are also close in age to the target group of young adults for this project.

The second study that points to the relevance of the practice of spiritual disciplines was a qualitative study involving Australian students who were 15 and 16-years-old. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and was analyzed using grounded theory technique. The authors report that "spirituality emerged as an important

³⁷ Amy L. Ai, Catherine Lemieux, Roslyn Richardson, Terrance N. Tice, Carol Plumber, Bu Huang, and Christopher G. Ellison, "Character Strengths and Deep Connections Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita: Spiritual and Secular Pathways to Resistance among Volunteers," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 3 (2013), 554.

factor in dealing with low-point experiences.”³⁸ Eight youth coped with a spiritual understanding that meaning and purpose can be found in every circumstance. Seven youth leaned on their relationship with a higher power. Five youth credited spiritual practices which promote mindfulness (exposure to nature, meditation, and listening to music). The results show a connection between these dimensions of spirituality and the resilience of participants. Among their conclusions, the authors posit that youth with existing belief systems should be encouraged to nurture them, and that practices should be encouraged that nurture their inner life.

Some studies point to evidence that how one makes sense of traumatic experiences can contribute to one’s resilience. One quantitative study looked at personal examination of cognitive dissonance when previous assumptions clash with a recent traumatic experience. Participants were 116 survivors of the 2010 Chilean earthquake who were still living in shelters three years post trauma. To study various impacts on participants posttraumatic growth (PTG), the following instruments were translated into Spanish and administered over three months: Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), and Brief-RCOPE. Results suggest “that the rethinking or reworking of religious assumptions in the light of a traumatic experience was measured to be a main factor to help these earthquake survivors overcome the impact of their trauma. Conversely, negative religious coping has a deleterious effect on PTG. Also, social support is a positive factor on its own and a

³⁸ Mary Raftopoulos and Glen Bates, “‘It’s That Knowing That You Are Not Alone’: The Role of Spirituality in Adolescent Resilience,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 16, no. 2 (2011), 160.

boost to positive religious coping. Limitations include the three-year gap between trauma and the study as well as differing results in studies from other cultures.³⁹

Another was a quantitative survey that attempted to measure resilience and post-traumatic growth in 482 adults over the age of 18. The scales the author chose for the study were LEC (Life Events Checklist), SRRS,R (Social Readjustment Rating Scale, Revised) to assess trauma, BPF (Baruth Protective Factors Inventory) to measure resilience, and ISLES (Integration of Stressful Life Experiences Scale) to assess meaning making. 100 questions from these scales were incorporated into a single survey. The author found that “making sense of uncontrollable events is a process involved in developing resilience.”⁴⁰ Also in the findings is that compounded traumatic events have an adverse effect on both meaning making and resilience. In conclusion, “this research empirically demonstrates that individuals who focus on making meaning out of trauma increase their ability to adapt and grow, becoming more resilient.”⁴¹

One study more directly relevant to the proposed project was a two-wave, qualitative study to discover processes of resilience in adult survivors of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti.⁴² Forty-eight participants completed surveys at six-months-post-

³⁹ Felipe E. Garcia, Dario Paez, Giordana Cartes Zurtia, Hector Neira Martel, and Alejandro Reyes-Reyes, “Religious Coping, Social Support and Subjective Severity as Predictors of Posttraumatic Growth in People Affected by the Earthquake in Chile on 27/2/2010,” *Religions* 5, no.4 (2014), 1132-45.

⁴⁰ Laura L. Lehmann, “Resilience and Meaning Making,” Order No. 3635402, Michigan School of Professional Psychology, 48, <http://turing.library.northwestern.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/resilience-meaning-making/docview/1615085675/se-2>.

⁴¹ Lehmann, “Resilience and Meaning Making,” 49.

⁴² Kari Ann O’Grady, James Douglas Orton, Carol K Stewart, William W Flythe, Nicole C Snyder, and Jean-Philippe Desius, “Resilience in the Wake of Disasters: A Two-Wave Qualitative Study of Survivors of the 2010 Haiti Earthquake,” *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 37, no.1 (2018), 43-56.

disaster and/or at three-years-post-disaster. Using a qualitative content analysis strategy, four overarching themes emerged in relation to resilience: sense-losing, improvising, sense-remaking, and renewing. Additional emergent themes identified include that religion/spirituality can have a key role in individuals' post-disaster resilience, but that not all theologies or religious practices offer coping measures which contribute to resilience (e.g., "rigid sensemaking" is a hindrance to resilience). The authors posit that, "adaptive deliberate rumination and psychological flexibility may be core ingredients of post disaster resilience."⁴³ Also important in resilience are relationships through social and religious support. Though conducted in a different culture, there are two threads of similarity to the context of this project: a significant role of religion and family in the deep US South, and religiously affiliated post-disaster survivors. The authors emphasize the importance of religion/spirituality in post-disaster work with religiously affiliated survivors to improve their mental health. Specifically, resilience-contributing interventions should promote "psychological flexibility [like meaning-enhancing interventions], adaptive deliberate rumination, and enhanced social and religious support."⁴⁴ The authors encourage future outcome research to evaluate the effectiveness of various approaches.

In summary, some of the personal spiritual disciplines identified in past studies that contributed to resilience have meditative, reflective, imaginative, and/or discerning elements. A meditative practice is non-verbal and opens time and mental space for a

⁴³ O'Grady, "Resilience in the Wake of Disasters," 51.

⁴⁴ O'Grady, "Resilience in the Wake of Disasters," 52.

person to fully inhabit the moment. Examples of meditation include mindfulness meditation, listening to music, and silently observing nature. One could also meditate with a verse of scripture by repetition as in a breath prayer. A reflective practice is one in which an individual takes time to examine their present circumstances or the reality of a situation and deliberately examines the complexity of relationships and series of events involved. Reflective Bible Study is likely to consider a reflective question like, “What is the Spirit saying to you through these verses?” Spiritual direction is a reflective experience as the spiritual director asks questions to encourage the directee to consider more deeply their relationships with God and others and how their faith connects to their life. Imaginative practices are those that open possibilities for new directions or ideas that have not yet been considered. Creative endeavors often open space for imagination to be fostered either directly or indirectly. It is an imaginative discipline to pray for God’s guidance through an anticipated new experience, to search for signs of hope during difficult times, or to believe in the resurrection in the face of death. An imaginative way to read the Bible is to put oneself in the shoes of one of the characters to experience what happens from their point of view. Vocational discernment and considering a divine calling require consideration of future possibilities for which one may not have direct experience and imagination is at play. Discernment is a way of revealing reality, considering options, and choosing a way forward can be an aspect of many kinds of spiritual practices. Practicing discernment is especially important when new or conflicting ideas, relationships, or circumstances arise. Spiritual direction, Christian conferencing, reflective and imaginative prayer, and theological study are among the practices that foster discernment.

Different scales of resilience have been developed by many researchers, and those proven most effective are now copyrighted. Some quantitative studies that have made use of resilience scales have attempted to pinpoint the nature of support and interventions which are most likely to contribute positively to resilience.⁴⁵ For instance, in the CD-RISC-10, the questions are not a diagnostic tool, but a research tool designed to measure flexibility, self-efficacy, self-regulation of emotion, optimism, and cognitive focus.⁴⁶ Scoring on a scale from 0 to 40, higher scores suggest greater resilience while lower ones suggest less. The authors posit, “A score in the lowest or second quartile may suggest problems in coping with stress or bouncing back from adversity.” They also suggest that the survey score can change over time as a result of circumstances including therapeutic interventions like counseling or stress management.

Accompanying written permission to use the CD-RISC-10 was an unpublished manual with administration and scoring instructions as well as summaries of the outcomes of all the approved projects utilizing CD-RISC surveys prior to 2023. In quantitative control studies of the CD-RISC-10 US residents had mean scores ranging from 31.8 to 32.1. The authors found that scores are likely to be evenly spread in each of four quartiles:

- Lowest quartile 0-29
- Second quartile 30-32
- Third quartile 33-36

⁴⁵ Amy N Madewell, Elisabeth Ponce-Garcia, “Assessing Resilience in Emerging Adulthood: The Resilience Scale (RS), Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC), and Scale of Protective Factors (SPF),” *Personality and Individual Differences* no.97 (2016): 249-55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.03036>.

⁴⁶ KM Connor & JRT Davidson, *Scoring and Interpretation of the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC)*, 2020.

- Top quartile 37-40

Looking at studies working with a similar population to this project, the researcher assembled two tables. The first table displays the outcomes of all studies utilizing the CD-RISC-10 with a young adult population in the US (Appendix 12).⁴⁷ The mean scores of these six studies ranged from 27.2 to 33.5 with an overall mean score of 29.7. This is a deviation of roughly -2.8 points from the control mean.

Studies attempting to measure the resilience of survivors of ecological disasters were lower still. The second table shows the outcomes of all studies utilizing the CD-RISC-10 with individuals affected by ecological disasters in four countries (Appendix 13).⁴⁸ The mean scores of these nine studies ranged from 20 to 36.7 with an overall mean score of 26.6. This is a deviation of roughly -5.9 points from the control mean. The researcher will be able to compare participant scores with each of these three mean scores.

Generation Z

The researcher has eleven years of campus ministry experience and has long been concerned with how disconnected young adult members and constituents are from spiritual formation resources at their churches. In seeking to develop an intervention with a potential for positive effect in the age group of 19 to 25 years, research reveals the following information about Generation Z (Gen Z). Members of Gen Z were born

⁴⁷ JRT Davidson, *Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) Manual, Unpublished*, (2023), 19.

⁴⁸ Davidson, *Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) Manual*, 40.

between 1997 and 2012.⁴⁹ The American National Family Life Survey points to Gen Z’s declining confidence in organized religion.⁵⁰ The MissionInsite.com database includes a culturally informed Mosaic feature which uses the data from multiple surveys to identify local sociological trends within specific age groups. The largest percentage of local residents in the targeted age group for this project land in the Mosaic category of “Segment O51: Digitally Savvy.”⁵¹ Uninterested in traditional evangelism and bored by worship and Sunday School, digitally savvy Gen Zer's seek a customized personal religion. They are willing to gain spiritual insight, glean experiential wisdom, and discover their hidden potential from other religious traditions and disciplines. They also seek mentors they can trust to guide them in this quest. “Education unfolds through virtual experiences: blogs, forums, instant messaging, spreading out through social media. Occasionally people may even meet face to face in a café or other social setting and talk about it.”⁵² This generation is constantly connected online, and they tend to “communicate in frequent short bursts of energy with instant messaging.”⁵³

Conclusions

Taking care to avoid spiritual bypassing, the researcher endeavored to take the research in this chapter’s review into account in developing an intervention with

⁴⁹ Michael Dimock, “Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins” (January 19, 2019), <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.

⁵⁰ Daniel A. Cox, “Generation Z and the Future of Faith in America” (March 24, 2022), <https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/generation-z-future-of-faith/>.

⁵¹ Thomas Bandy, “Segment O51: Digitally Savvy,” *Mission Impact 4.0*, last rev. Dec 2021 (ACS Technologies, 2021).

⁵² Bandy, “Digitally Savvy,” 3.

⁵³ Bandy, “Digitally Savvy,” 5.

Hurricane Laura survivors. In choosing a spiritual discipline, it would be important to find one with one or more aspects to which studies have pointed that contribute to resilience. These include meditative, reflective, imaginative, and discerning elements. The timing of the project should keep the collective trauma response timeline in mind, waiting at least long enough to account for the turn from the disillusionment phase to a time of rebuilding and restoration, if possible. The project should be accessible and attractive to Gen Z participants with appropriate and creative use of technology and virtual experiences.

Chapter 3

Biblical and Theological Grounding

The Hebrew Testament experience of Wilderness and the Greek Testament experience of Holy Saturday will serve the Biblical contexts of the middle, between life and death, where survivors of traumatic experience remain. Shelly Rambo's work, *Spirit and Trauma: a Theology of Remaining*, is the central theological text underpinning the formation of this project. Rambo encourages the reader to resist skipping over the messy middle and expecting the happy resurrection ending to be the answer to the aftermath of traumatic experiences. The alternative is an invitation to the place of remaining and God's invitation to an abiding, enduring relationship. The theological concepts that help shape this project include survival, suffering, death, redemption, grace, and the presence and role of the Holy Spirit. Finally, the theological underpinnings of Wesley's understanding of the means of grace and the Daily Examen of Ignatius of Loyola are explored.

If we read this sacred story as a story of survival, we are pressed to think about what it means to remain in the aftermath of a death that escapes our comprehension. To witness this sacred story is also to receive it for the truth that it tells: love remains, and we are love's witnesses.⁵⁴

The Wilderness

Wilderness is a middle place, no longer Egypt but not yet the promised land. Yet after the great escape from Egypt an entire generation of God's people were born and

⁵⁴ Rambo, Shelly, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2010,) 171.

came of age neither where they came from nor where they belonged. It was a place of grief, regret, and grumbling. However, it was also a place of growth, meaning making, and developing of purpose. Wilderness is also a place that God inhabits with us. The pillar of cloud and fire tabernacles in the midst of the people in the most trying of times.

At Passover, Jewish households still tell the Exodus story. “Tell it to your children on that day, saying, ‘This is what the Breath of Life, the Wind of Change, did for us, bringing us from slavery to freedom.’ The Passover Haggadah, from Exodus 13:8.”⁵⁵ Freedom from slavery didn’t feel like the victory they expected it to be. The people emancipated by Moses' leadership shared the collective and compounded traumatic experiences of being enslaved, fleeing a well-equipped army on foot, and trying to stay alive and united in extreme desert wilderness.

Long before the people were instructed to build a tabernacle that would invite God to dwell with them, God was present in the pillar of cloud and fire. With the pillar God came to and remained with the people leading, comforting, defending, and remaining with them. The unique traumatic experiences of the people included fleeing the Egyptian army and becoming refugees in the uncompromising desert. The cloud gave them direction by day, a beacon by night, and always an assurance that God was with them. “The Lord went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day

⁵⁵ Arthur O. Waskow and Phyllis O. Berman, *Freedom Journeys: The Tale of Exodus and Wilderness across Millennia* (Jewish Lights Publishing: 2011), iv.

and by night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people” (Ex 13:21-22, NRSV).

The Hebrew word “panim,” translated in both instances above as “in front,” presents dual and complimentary meanings in these verses. The first sentence (verse 21) mentions God’s leadership, which demonstrates that the cloud is at the face (or front) of the entourage, and the cloud is God’s guidance toward the way they need to go. In verse 22 “panim” is preceded by a preposition which offers the Hebrew speaker a slightly different meaning of the same word. In this second case, “from in front” has a second layer of meaning: “in the presence of.”⁵⁶

Even after God’s people cross over the Jordan River into the Promised Land, they continue to remember how God was present with them throughout their collectively traumatic wandering. The Passover Haggadah is the ongoing annual witness of every generation that God’s intent was and is to dwell among and be in the presence of God’s people through the transformations that mark the end of one world and navigating what remains. “Why do we eat this flat, unleavened matzah? Because the decision to act came upon our forebears so quickly that their dough had not yet risen when You, the Breath of Life, bore them to freedom through a hurricane of transformation.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Blue Letter Bible, “Lexicon :: Strong’s H6440 – pānîm,” Accessed 8 July 2025, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h6440/kjv/wlc/0-1/>.

⁵⁷ Arthur Waskow, “The Freedom Seder Passover Haggadah for the Earth” The Shalom Center: 2014, (c) 2002-Present, Contributors to the Open Siddur Project, חלק מהזכויות שמורות | Some Rights Reserved. <https://opensiddur.org/compilations/table-guides-and-haggadot/passover-seder/the-freedom-seder-haggadah-for-passover-by-the-shalom-center-and-rabbi-arthur-waskow/#:~:text=All%20this%20we%20do%20because,as%20seed%20into%20the%20world.>

After God’s cloud led the people to the foot of Mount Sinai and Moses to the top, God provides the people a way to reciprocate God’s invitation and make a place where God and people can dwell together, each mutually and intentionally remaining with the other. Together they will follow YHWH’s instructions to make a tabernacle, or dwelling place, which will be a portable sacred space that is capable of bearing the presence of God. “Even the God who has all earth and heaven for a dwelling place can swell with pride at imagining the place where one small people will come to worship with the Presence.”⁵⁸

In the last chapter of Exodus, as the final touches are put to the structure, leadership, and rituals of the newly assembled tabernacle, God says, “And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them; I am the Lord their God,” (Ex 29:46, NRSV). The theological concept of Shekhinah is borne out of the Hebrew phrase “shakan tavek” translated above as dwell among.⁵⁹ Other possible translations include “reside with,” “remain in the midst,” “stay in the middle,” and “abide.” The Spirit of God remains and that presence can be experienced in the world, however messy it is and however broken people are. “God is all there is, there is no ‘away’ from God.”⁶⁰ The modern-day Hebrew word for “neighborhood” derived from “shakan” is “shikun.”

⁵⁸ Waskow and Berman, *Freedom Journeys*, 98.

⁵⁹ Blue Letter Bible, “Lexicon :: Strong’s H7931 – shâkan,” Accessed 8 July 2025, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h7931/niv/wlc/0-1/>.

⁶⁰ Waskow and Berman, *Freedom Journeys*, 91.

Holy Saturday – Luke 24:13-32

“The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood,”
-John 1:14, The Message.

The hours between Jesus' final agonizing breath and his confusing resurrection appearances are an overlooked interval of the disciples processing a traumatic experience. Even as the absence of their friend, teacher, and spiritual guide was acute in their grief and confusion there was also evidence of a liminal space. Liminal space is where the invisible dividing line between life and death is no longer impermeable, and the thread of the Holy Spirit bridges the void. The disciples were never as abandoned or alone as they thought they were.

The man they had left their families and livelihoods to follow died a torturous death just two days before. The one who was to lead them into a just, new day had become the closest of companions. The twelve had just heard from the women that something was afoot. How could anything the women had to say about what they saw at the tomb undo their collective traumatic experience and the dystopia they were facing? Nowhere was the unwelcome reality of their loss and memory of their trauma more palpable than in Jerusalem. As the inner circle celebrated the Seder meal together, the kingdom of God was as present as the pillar of cloud was in the Exodus story they remembered. How did it all spiral from there: Judas, the centurion, the trials, the crowds, the crown of thorns, and the cross? It was too much for most of the twelve to witness firsthand. Instead, they were in hiding when the sun turned black at midday. They were trying to wrap their heads around their horror and grief and even trying to figure out what kind of trouble they would be in if it were discovered that they were disciples of the executed one.

The account of Cleopas and his companion in Luke 24 found them walking away from the place they could not bear to be and realizing that there was no escaping their trauma and grief. It was a journey like many of the journeys they took together with the others over the last three years. By no means could they have gained enough distance from Golgotha on that day to even begin to contemplate a theology of the cross. On that day-after which had the potential to stretch into who knows how long, all they could feel was the suffering of their shared traumatic experience. From the beginning to the end of the Emmaus Road account Luke uses verbs to describe the movement of this journey: drew near, went with, went in to remain. The physical movement points to God's initiative remaining in the unwelcome aftermath of their shared traumatic experience.

First, Jesus drew near to join the two on their journey becoming one entourage together. Definitions of “engizo” include coming close and joining one thing to another.⁶¹ Luke uses the verb “engizo” twice describing Jesus' journey when he approached a city gate, and each time he encountered someone who was subsequently blessed with a miracle (Lk 7:12, 18:35). It is the same word used as Jesus neared his final entry into Jerusalem as they assembled at the Mount of Olives. It is also worth noting that “engizo” is used to describe how the tax collectors and sinners sought out Jesus. All these references ultimately point to Jesus' conclusion in his instructions to the disciples as he deployed them in pairs in Luke 10:9, “tell them the Kingdom of God has come near.” And now, for the first time in reference to Jesus directly approaching someone, Luke says

⁶¹ Blue Letter Bible, “Lexicon :: Strong's G1448 – engizō,” Accessed 14 July 2025, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1448/kjv/tr/0-1/>.

“While they were walking and discussing, Jesus himself came near...” (Lk 24:15a, NRSV).

Luke says that the disciples do not recognize the risen Jesus. But there was something about the question that the stranger asked that brought this journey to a full stop: “they stood still, looking sad” (Lk 24:17). Perhaps if they had recognized him, they would have nodded knowingly, expecting Jesus to use the circumstance as a teaching moment. Or perhaps they would have wanted to build a tabernacle right there. Nevertheless, they had a sudden impulse to be still. A moment was opened to make eye contact with the stranger and each other. They were somehow able to take in this moment even though they were trying to escape their trauma just a moment before. Was the Spirit whispering the words of the psalmist, “Be still and know that I am God?” (Ps 46:10a, NRSV). Maybe it was simply out of incredulity that the stranger seemed to be acting like everything was normal when the shape of what remained after their collective traumatic experience was unrecognizable.

The brokenhearted halted their escape and tried to answer the stranger’s questions by putting into words the devastation of loss and unrealized dreams. “But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place,” (Lk 24:21, NRSV). Cleopas and his companion spoke of a future that they could foresee so clearly days ago but that was erased from their timeline by the government sanctioned execution of their friend. They could only describe echos of shadows of what once was. They were caught up in the grief of seeing the future they had imagined knowing that they would have to let it go because it could not be. The finality of the end of what they knew (or thought they knew) was not allowing any room

to see what future the new timeline could promise. Never mind that the evidence of the resurrection had come alongside them. Twenty-first century westerners want the disciples to shake out of their trauma trance and wake up to the triumph of the resurrection. But that did not seem to be Jesus aim in those moments.

Jesus did what he had done with followers over the last three years. He came close and journeyed together with them. As Jesus recounted God's salvation plan from its genesis, they continued to walk together away from Jerusalem. Few of Jesus' words during this journey were recorded by Luke. The author fixes the reader's gaze on Jesus movement throughout the day. Already he has come close and has journeyed together with the survivors. When they reached the fork in the road at Emmaus, it was the disciples' turn to act. They invited the stranger to remain.

“As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So, he went in to stay with them,” (Lk 24:28-29, NRSV). From the view of the survivors of collective traumatic experience this was the pinnacle moment of the resurrection sequence, perhaps even more so than the meal they subsequently shared: their sudden recognition of Jesus, and his disappearance. None of that would have been set into motion without their invitation to Jesus to remain. This was no casual invitation. With singular intention the two companions used one very particular word in issuing their invitation. “Meno” is translated in the NRSV simply as

“stay.”⁶² Luke uses “meno” just six times in his gospel including when Mary went to stay with Elizabeth during their pregnancies, when Jesus was instructing his disciples how to receive hospitality on their missionary journeys, and on the day that Jesus invited himself to Zaccheus’ home. In each of these instances, as at Emmaus, the remaining that happened had a deeper meaning than where one intends to eat a meal or lay one’s head. Here two friends opened their home, but also their friend circle, toward a new path forward – together. Where two or more remain together, intentionality and commitment are forged, and deeper and stronger relationships are built in the remaining. God with humans, humans with God, and people with each other, we see life taking hold and growing toward abundance that looks like love, hope, and resilience. The resurrected Christ came close and journeyed alongside their pre-resurrection trauma of his own accord. The choice to remain was mutual, the invitation both given and accepted. And that Christ entered in and remained was the good news that the survivors needed. The moment of recognition as Jesus disappeared did not immediately transport them to the happy ending of resurrection triumph. Rather it took the weary travelers’ memories back to earlier that day and to realize that they had already started to feel alive when Jesus was still the stranger who came close to them on the road. “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Lk 24:32, NRSV). God’s CPR began the moment Jesus came close. They felt their hearts begin to come alive

⁶² Blue Letter Bible, “Lexicon::Strong’s G3306 – ménō,” Accessed July 16, 2025, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3306/kjv/tr/0-1/>.

while still navigating the unrecognizable terrain and before any recognition of a resurrection possibility. Having survived, the Spirit's remaining with them in the aftermath was the path to resilient life. God draws near, goes with, and comes in to remain.

A Theology of Remaining

Rambo's exploration of the Johannine concept of remaining (Gk. *meno/menein*) is central to a theological understanding of "what it means to remain in the aftermath of a traumatic experience that escapes comprehension."⁶³

Rambo describes a "middle territory" between the trauma of the cross and the triumph of the resurrection. This messy middle is mostly crowded out of the Biblical accounts by the immediacy and horror of the Good Friday disaster and a rush to get to the happy ending of the Resurrection. Holy Saturday reveals a more tangled, non-linear understanding of life and death. Behind locked doors and on dusty roads assumptions that death and life are enemies are exposed to reveal a more dynamic, interactive, and overlapping relationship.⁶⁴ To survive a traumatic experience is to continue to live in death's shadow.

Rambo points to an early Jacques Derrida essay in which he took a close look at what it means to survive. The English word "survive" itself comes from the French "survivre": literally "to live" (*vivre*) and "on" (*sur*). To survive is to live beyond or past a death, or even to live a life marked or affected by the death of someone or something.

⁶³ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 171.

⁶⁴ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 46.

“The term conveys a sense of life exceeding itself.”⁶⁵ The life that remains is shaped by the experience of what has been lost. Not as final as one would assume, death remains with the living. It is not so much that the survivor escapes death as that the survivor's life is prolonged and modified in the after. The survivor remains in an altered landscape accessible by the Holy Spirit but not yet within sight of a triumphal victory. Once the trauma is experienced, there is no going back to the innocence or naivete of before. There is only existing in the after.

Biblical narrative leans into this universal experience. After the exodus, there is no returning to the before of being slaves in Egypt. After Jesus' execution, there is no returning to the hope that their friend would lead a decisive political change of regime. And yet, these stories do not end in tragedy. “Perhaps the divine story is neither a tragic one nor a triumphant one but in fact, a story of divine remaining. The story of love that survives.”⁶⁶ The Spirit of God remains in a way that can be experienced like a pillar of presence or a companion on the journey.

Rambo's theology of remaining describes the love of God that witnesses suffering and makes its way through death to remain with those who live on. The fifteenth chapter of John's gospel is replete with God's willingness and impulse to remain. Many translations use the old-fashioned words “abide” or “dwell” when translating the Greek “menein” which is the root of the invitation “meno” previously examined in Luke 24.

⁶⁵ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 25.

⁶⁶ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 172.

Rambo makes a case that “remaining” better captures the essence of a presence that survives and is reshaped by death.⁶⁷ ”Remain in me as I remain in you,” (John 15:4a).

Jesus goes on to explain how God’s remaining will survive his death. “When the Advocate (Gk. Paraclete) comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, he will testify on my behalf,” (John 15:26, NRSV). Through the Advocate/Paraclete/Holy Spirit, God makes a way to remain. The Spirit witnesses the grief and suffering, remains with the survivors, and invites them to discover what counterintuitive, resilient, fruit bearing life is opened through this relationship in what remains.

Distinct from a theology of suffering, the experience or endurance of suffering is not the source of redemption in a theology of remaining. God’s initiative and invitation to remain is the redeeming action, “the persistence of love in the midst of suffering.”⁶⁸

Why is the remaining presence of God such good news? The human experience is complicated, flawed, and tragic. For those who have survived traumatic experiences the disaster recovery mantra of rebuilding, restoring, and recovering is not redemptive. It just sounds like an insurmountable amount of work for someone just trying to figure out how to live on in the “aftermath.” The power and promise of God’s presence is perennially available before, during and after each storm. God’s presence brings with it assurance, companionship, being seen, and having one’s experience acknowledged (not minimized). Being loved makes all the difference.

⁶⁷ Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 102.

⁶⁸ Serene Jones, “Hope Deferred: Trinitarian Reflections on Infertility, Stillbirth and Miscarriage,” *Modern Theology* 17, no.2 (April 2001), 242.

Wesleyan Means of Grace

If the abiding presence of God is important to the resilience of a person going through or in the aftermath of a traumatic experience, then it follows that it would be important to know spiritual disciplines that practice an awareness of God's presence. In his sixteenth written sermon to the members of the Methodist Societies, John Wesley described spiritual practices of faithful people that God uses regularly for the purpose of "conveying his grace into the souls of men [sic]."⁶⁹ "And, First, all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the way of prayer."⁷⁰ This is our own "remaining." Wesley's understanding of the spiritual practice of prayer as a primary Means of Grace provides the framework for understanding how specific human spiritual practices can be channels of God's grace.

The Wesleyan understanding of grace is pervasive and multilayered. God's unfathomable and uncompromising love is the original source of all that has ever existed as well as the beacon that calls to each person showing the way to a relationship with their Creator. Humans were lovingly designed to thrive when in right relationship with God and neighbor. God being God, and humans being human, an individual invariably falls short of being worthy of divine love. God wants to be in relationship nonetheless. God makes a way for atonement, forgiveness, and homecoming. This is grace. In fact, this grace pervades every aspect of every human interaction with and perception of God.

⁶⁹ John Wesley, "The Sermons of John Wesley – Sermon 16: The Means of Grace," Edited by Darin Million with corrections by Ryan Danker and George Lyons (Wesley Center for Applied Theology, 1999), I.1., <https://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-16-the-means-of-grace/>.

⁷⁰ Wesley, "Sermons," III.1.

It goes before us to call us and gather us in (prevenient grace). It encourages us to move from passive acquaintance to active participation in and surrender to a life-giving relationship with God in Christ (justifying grace). And it guides the companion of Christ to grow toward that same perfect love of God which is more and more reflected in the life of a disciple of Christ. In short, the grace that is always as available to us as the air we breathe is an undeserved gift. Like air, we are often unaware of its presence even when it is the essence that sustains our spiritual life. Alone we are vulnerable. Aware of God's presence and grace we can be resilient.

While admitting that God is never limited to imparting grace in response to human action Wesley describes several ordinary human religious practices that are "ordained of God," to be the most common avenues whereby believers may experience the presence of God. The three means of grace Wesley describe as essential and "ordained by God," are prayer, scripture, and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.⁷¹ This project lifts the first of these means to a relationship with God: prayer.

Prayer, whether practiced alone or with others, filled with words or silence, is a cornerstone of the spiritual life. If grace is always drawing us to relationship with a God we cannot see or touch, we need other channels to not only be reminded about God, but to notice God's very real presence. Not every act of prayer results in a profound experience of divine presence. Rather prayer is meant to be practiced regularly so that presence might be experienced, whether during the time of prayer or through prayer, to become aware and mindful of when God makes Godself known. It is common not to

⁷¹ Wesley, "Sermons," II.1.

perceive what is not anticipated. Prayer can put one in an attitude of anticipation to notice movements of the Spirit of God that would otherwise be imperceptible.

Individuals may vary widely in their preferred prayer practices. And sometimes doing the same thing over and over by rote can dull the experience. The researcher is challenged to choose from among the countless modes and modalities of prayer that Christians have practiced over the last two millennia.

Ignatius of Loyola and the Daily Examen

The literature examined in Chapter 2 noted that of the aspects of spiritual practices that are indicated to contribute to resilience are mindfulness, reflection, imagination, and discernment. In the cultural context of SWLA protestants are largely comfortable with the pervasive cultural Catholicism and would be receptive to learning a traditionally Catholic prayer practice. Other reasons to choose Ignatius' Daily Examen as the intervention for this project include the potential appeal to the targeted age group and recent online tools that have been designed to make the Examen accessible online.

Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), like Wesley 200 years later, carefully considered both the ends and the means to a sanctified life. Whereas Wesley posited that Wesleyan spiritual Means of Grace were to know and be influenced by the presence of God's grace, Ignatius' described that Jesuit spiritual Means were to achieve "the greater glory of God," meaning worship and praise that naturally leads to Christian service.⁷² Ignatius developed the Daily Examen in the context of his Spiritual Exercises after his own traumatic experiences of war and a life-altering battle injury.

⁷² Ignatius, and George E. Ganss, *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works* (Paulist Press, 1991), 12.

Having been raised in the Loyola family castle in the Basque countryside of Spain, Ignatius was formed by the cultural Catholicism of that time. He was destined for court life in the house of King Ferdinand's treasurer, so he received an education unlike most Spaniards of his generation. Ignatius' life took a dramatic turn in 1521 when in a moment of vainglory, he volunteered to join take part in a military expedition against the French army. In May of that year his leg was mangled by a cannonball in battle. By June he was in bad shape and continuing to decline when the French delivered him back to Loyola. He turned a corner after the June 28 feast of Saints Peter and Paul and began the long process of healing from the trauma to both body and spirit.⁷³

During his long convalescence and confined to his bed, Ignatius begged for reading material. He asked for novels about the conquests and character of heroes, but was given a book about the life of Christ and subsequently de Voragine's *Legenda aurea* (1265) which accounts the lives of the saints.⁷⁴ It was during this time of healing and reading about the life of Christ and the spiritual lives of giants in the Christian faith that Ignatius' life meaning and purpose took a dramatic turn. He made a firm decision to put his past behind him and seek a life devoted to Christ like the saints. Beginning with a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and followed by many years of study and acts of piety, Ignatius was on a path to become the founder of the Jesuit Order which continues around the world to this day.

⁷³ Ignatius and Ganss, *Ignatius of Loyola*, 69.

⁷⁴ Ignatius and Ganss, *Ignatius of Loyola*, 70.

An example of resilience himself, Ignatius dedicated his life to the establishment of the Jesuit Order which included innovative spiritual practices which became a target of the Spanish Inquisition at the time, but which turned out to have a timeless endurance, even to this day.⁷⁵ Two of the most well-known of the Ignatian spiritual practices are the Exercises and the Examen. In fact, the Examen is the prayer practice first introduced to those presenting themselves (both lay and clergy) to take part in Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises even before the first exercise begins. As they begin the first day of the Exercises participants are instructed to order each day to be framed with three prayers: morning, noon, and evening. The second and third prayers are meant to be an "examination of conscience," to be aware of and take note of any particular sins or shortcomings since the last prayer. At the end of each Examen, one is instructed to resolve to make improvement before the next scheduled prayer.⁷⁶ In this methodical way, and by keeping a simple journal, participants can track their progress over time. Once participants completed the month-long Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius encouraged them to continue the daily Examen prayers to keep them connected to the experiences they had at the retreat.

The traditional Daily Examen has dynamic elements that go hand in hand with some of the aspects of spiritual practices that were shown in previous studies to contribute to resilience: mindfulness, reflection, imagination, and discernment. In Chapter 4 a complete outline of the Examen prayer is laid out. At this point a walk

⁷⁵ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation* (Viking, 2003), 215.

⁷⁶ Ignatius and Ganss, *Ignatius of Loyola*, 130-131.

through a traditional version of the Daily Examen will identify how each resilience-building element is at play in this spiritual practice.

To start, the person preparing to pray the Daily Examen is given directions for a time of centering and quieting down of the mind. “I get into a comfortable position. I let my muscles relax and mind quiet down. I take a deep breath and ask God to make his [sic] presence known around and in me. I feel this presence and soak it in.”⁷⁷ These directions are an invitation to practice mindfulness, which is an experience of fully inhabiting the present moment. Such an experience is often attained by letting go of active thoughts, stilling the body, and focusing on the breath.

Once centered through meditation, one is invited to reflect on the events and blessings of the day:

I ask God to reveal all the gifts and graces [God] has given me today, from the big ones (life, safety, love) to the small ones (a good night’s sleep, a phone call from a friend, a compliment). I thank God for each of these gifts... Going hour by hour I review my day. I continue thanking God for the gifts I find in my day. I pause at any of the difficult moments of my day.⁷⁸

This intentional reflection gives the participant an opportunity to reinhabit the recent hours they have lived but during which she may not have been fully aware. Opening the memory to deep reflection of past events also involves imagination. “In my imagination, I relive each significant moment of my day. I linger in the important moments and pass

⁷⁷ Loyola Press, “Reimagining the Examen,” Vers. 2.0, Apple App Store, 2018 (accessed 6 January 2026), <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/reimagining-the-examen/id1065042173>.

⁷⁸ “Reimagining the Examen,” Vers. 2.0.

quickly over the less relevant ones. I try to sense [God's] healing mercy wash over me..."⁷⁹

After imaginatively reflecting unhurriedly on the day that has just past, Ignatius encourages the one in prayer to discern interactions and choices that reveal any waywardness from following or imitating Christ. "I pay attention to any missed opportunities, when I could have acted in a certain way but didn't. When I find moments in which I was not the person I was called to be, I ask God's forgiveness."⁸⁰ Discernment continues and imagination is again encouraged as the person praying is asked to think forward to the next day. "I ask God to show me what kind of person [God] is calling me to be tomorrow... I ask God to show me, concretely, how [God] wants me to respond or what [God] wants me to do tomorrow."⁸¹ Thus through the course of the Examen prayer one receives the prompts to meditate, reflect, imagine, and discern.

The Examen prayer can be prayed anytime and anywhere. It would not require Gen Z participants to come to church or have any resource on hand except their smartphones. Ignatius always intended the Examen to be adaptable to the person praying and the context in which they pray. This adaptability leans into the Gen Z proclivity to select wisdom from among many traditions. Finally, the cultural Catholicism of the SWLA community makes trying an ancient Jesuit prayer an integrative experience, even

⁷⁹ "Reimagining the Examen," Vers. 2.0.

⁸⁰ "Reimagining the Examen," Vers. 2.0.

⁸¹ "Reimagining the Examen," Vers. 2.0.

in a UMC where people are seeking God's grace which is at the same time chasing after us.

Chapter 4

Project Methodology

This qualitative research project was designed to introduce a spiritual discipline to young adult (Gen Z) participants to glean whether they would experience or demonstrate any difference in their resilience. It was hoped that religious leaders and spiritual care providers will be informed by its results to help them facilitate the spiritual formation of those they lead and care for in ways that can contribute to the resilience of individuals and their communities. It was also hoped that this project could add to the body of research and give direction to future research about spiritual practices that have the potential to contribute to resilience.

Intervention consisted of an assigned daily prayer practice with meditative, reflective, imaginative, and discerning potential (the Daily Examen of the Ignatian tradition). Data was collected via (1) an exit interview, (2) a daily journal entry, (3) an entrance and exit survey, and (4) worship attendance records. The resulting data was analyzed to evaluate the researcher's thesis questions and by utilizing IPA to discover and explore themes and categories that would arise from the participants' thoughts, ideas, stories, and reflections.

The project was designed to allow Gen Z participants to use technology endemic to their habits by putting the daily spiritual formation tool and data collection in the devices that were already in the hands of the participants. The aspects of the project that were designed to appeal to Gen Z comfort with the use of technology include a smartphone application to lead them through the daily prayer practice, daily text or email

reminders, Google Form surveys and journal entries, DocuSign consent forms, and Zoom video calls for introduction orientation and exit interviews.

Recruitment of Participants

Using purposive sampling the researcher attempted to recruit twelve to fifteen young adults (aged 19 to 25) from among families and individuals that are active at UUMC and were living in SWLA in 2020. With twelve to fifteen participants, it was hoped that six to ten participants would complete all requirements, and it was anticipated that at least three would discontinue before the end.

A variety of methods and resources were used to find eligible young adult participants. The primary source was the church's membership database (Planning Center) that the church uses to keep track of members and constituents. A search for all people recorded in the system by birthdate produced a list of everyone aged 19 to 25. Both those listed as "active" and those listed as "inactive" were on the list. This list yielded 53 names, but only 36 included any contact information. Nearly all the phone numbers and email addresses listed were parental contacts. Contacting many parents, siblings, and grandparents was necessary to get up-to-date cell numbers and email addresses for each young adult.

To ensure an adequate number of participants, pastors at the other United Methodist Churches within a thirty-mile radius were also asked to share the invitation with the young adults in their congregations. Most said upfront that there are no young adults in their congregations. A local professor also offered to share the opportunity in some of his classes. Through these two extended recruitment efforts the contact information of three more qualified young adults was obtained.

The researcher had twice started to reach out to potential participants when it became clear the timing was wrong for the commitment required. A good window in the researcher's schedule would conflict with the invitees' schedules due to midterms or other life stressors. The project finally gained traction by inviting the list of potential participants in person or via text, email, and/or phone in the week between Christmas and New Year's Eve of 2024.

In the end, personal invitations were extended to 28 young adults who had a relationship in some way with a United Methodist Church within 30 miles of Lake Charles, Louisiana. Thirteen young adults accepted the invitation to join the researcher on a forty-minute zoom call or recorded video to be introduced and oriented to the project. Eight participants signed consent forms and started the intervention, and seven of these were able to complete the intervention. Each of them lived in Southwest Louisiana in the fall of 2020 when Hurricane Laura made landfall.

Orientation and Consent

Each participant was offered the choice of an in-person or Zoom gathering to inform them about the project and walk through the requirements, consent form, and field any questions. Each one preferred an online gathering. To accommodate varied schedules, a variety of days and times to meet via Zoom was offered. Four were able to gather at one of two online sessions. At the second session, the invitees verbally consented to recording the session so that it could be shared with those whose schedules did not permit meeting virtually with the researcher in real time. As a result, five additional potentials were able to view the video.

The forty-minute information session started with an opportunity for the researcher and participants to introduce themselves. Topics covered in the session included an overview of the researcher's degree program and the reasoning behind the project. The intervention and data collection details were spelled out as well as a section by section walk through the consent form. Finally, each participant was asked how they would prefer to receive their twenty-one consecutive days of daily reminders, whether via text or email. Directly following the session, attendees were sent the consent form via DocuSign and a Google Form version of the Entrance Questionnaire.

The Human Subjects Review approved consent form to be signed by each participant ensured that participants understood that their stories and experiences would be collected and that the information they shared in their journal and interview would be used to write the researcher's project report. The consent form outlined the structure and measures that were in place to protect their privacy and to what extent that was possible.

Intervention

The core intervention was three weeks of praying with Ignatius' Daily Examen. As explained in Chapter 2, the Examen is the spiritual discipline that was chosen for this project because it has the potential to invite the participant to the kinds of experiences that studies have shown can be resilience-building. These practices include elements of meditation, reflection, imagination, and discernment. The Examen is widely accepted in both catholic and protestant circles as one method of prayer. It encourages the practitioner to meditate with an attitude of centering and moments of listening for the prompting of the Spirit. It invites mindfulness by asking the person praying to sit still in God's presence and become more aware and see more clearly their situation and their

relationships with God and others. When the Examen prompts the participant to review their day hour by hour, it is an invitation to do more than just replay a mental recording. In taking a beat to think the day through, a person is also invited to find deeper meaning to make sense of things that have happened and what might be going on in and through the minds and lives of all parties to a situation. This is the beginning of meaning-making. Before the prayer ends the participant is asked to consider something God is prompting them to do tomorrow or in the future. This is a question about adaptation in consideration of the insights, meanings, and any repentance that has resulted from the Examen practice.

The researcher utilized *Reimagining the Ignatian Examen* by M. Thibodeaux and the corresponding smart device application “Reimagining the Examen” as the daily spiritual exercise. The traditional five-step outline of the Examen are (1) give thanksgiving, (2) ask for the Spirit, (3) review and recognize failures, (4) ask for forgiveness and healing, and (5) pray about the next day.⁸² Thibodeaux demonstrates that this form of devotional prayer naturally lends itself to a variety of foci roughly following the same outlines, and he provides 33 unique sets of prayer prompts in his book.

Participants were either texted or emailed a daily reminder to pray the Examen for twenty-one days. Each daily reminder included a traditional outline of the Daily Examen, a website link to the participants’ unique Google Form journal entry, and local contact information for counseling resources (Appendix 14).

Participants were asked to begin with the traditional prayer on the first day. The application rotates through the 33 versions of the prayer as the suggested prayer for the

⁸² Mark E. Thibodeaux, *Reimagining the Ignatian Examen: Fresh Ways to Pray from Your Day* (Loyola Press, 2015), x-xi.

day. Participants were told to use the smartphone application however it best suits them on any particular day. They could pray the prayer the application suggested for that day, pray the traditional prayer, or choose the one that best fits them on any given day.

Alternatively, they could utilize the traditional outline included in the daily text or email reminder they received. In the video orientation the researcher told participants that the Examen was designed to be prayed at noon or end of day, but each participant was ultimately encouraged to choose for themselves a consistent time of day that would work best for them to pray and journal.

Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative data was collected during and after the intervention by (1) entrance and exit questionnaires, (2) daily journal entries, (3) an exit interview (semi-structured) within four weeks of completion, and (4) worship attendance.

The entrance questionnaire asked for participants date of birth, asked yes/no questions about seeking counseling or receiving a mental health diagnosis within the last four years, and included the CD-RISC-10 survey. The questions about recent mental health treatment or diagnoses were included to help eliminate individuals from the project with unresolved psychological trauma. As was established in Chapter 2, the CD-RISC-10 has been established in the research as reliable in measuring resilience in emerging adults.⁸³ Among the statements included in the CD-RISC-10 are, “I am able to adapt when changes occur,” “I believe I can achieve my goals, even if there are obstacles,” and

⁸³ Madewell, “Assessing Resilience in Emerging Adulthood,” 249–55.

“Under pressure I stay focused and think clearly.”⁸⁴ Each statement is ranked by the participant on a scale from 0 (not true at all) to 4 (true nearly all the time). The researcher procured written permission from Duke University to use the copyrighted CD-RISC-10 for this project.

The exit questionnaire (identical to entrance) had the potential to quantitatively measure the potential change of each individual, if any, as well as offer a validity check against any IPA findings.

A digital journal was created for each participant in Google Forms (Appendix 15). In this way the journal entries were collected in real time from each participant. At the end of the project participants were asked if they would like a copy of their journal entries.

The semi-structured interview was designed to be the primary data source. Nine open-ended exit interview questions were provided to the interviewers (Appendix 16). Two independent interviewers were recruited, both of whom are tenured professors at MSU. Up to ninety minutes was allotted for each interview to allow for unhurried responses. Each interview was recorded with permission, and the participant was offered a choice as to whether to interview in person or via Zoom. Once all the interviews were completed the researcher transcribed them verbatim.

⁸⁴ Leslie Riopel, “How to use the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC),” *Positive Psychology.com*, September 3, 2019, <https://positivepsychology.com/connor-davidson-brief-resilience-scale/>.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Because there is a lack of depth in understanding of how survivors of natural disaster make sense of what contributes to their resilience in recovery an IPA method was determined the most useful way to analyze the qualitative data generated by this project. IPA is a qualitative approach that endeavors to gain insight into how participants make sense of the intervention. The hermeneutic stance of IPA is exploratory and meaning gleaning. This involves a double-hermeneutic in which the researcher is making sense of how the participant makes sense of her/his experience which gets at the core of the research questions. The goal was to allow the data collected from participants to form the categories rather than bringing categories to the project biased by the researcher's assumptions.

A constructivist paradigm of narrative analysis was used to analyze the transcribed interviews and journals according to the format outlined in Smith, et. al.⁸⁵ First, the researcher transcribed and then read and re-read the interviews one at a time. Next, starting with one transcript, comprehensive exploratory comments were made. After these were reviewed, emergent themes were identified and organized. When the major themes and sub themes of one interview had been identified and phrases and quotes to exemplify them had been referenced, the process started with the next interview, and so forth, pausing at the end of each analysis to look for patterns across participants' experiences. Finally, deeper levels of interpretation bubbled up from the collective analyses.

⁸⁵ Jonathan A. Smith, Paul Flowers, and Michael Larkin, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method, and Research* (Sage Publications Ltd, 2009), 78-107.

Disclosures of Potential Bias

There are several factors of which the researcher is aware that are potential sources of bias in the analysis and interpretation of data for this project. The researcher is a pastor to the participants and three decades older than the oldest participant. How participants perceive elders and those in authority will most likely be a factor in their participation and reflective responses.

Embedded in the community and a resident of SWLA since 2003, the researcher shares significant factors in common with the participants. The most obvious are that she (1) lived in SWLA in 2020, (2) has a connection to the United Methodist Church, and (3) is a survivor of Hurricane Laura. While every competent researcher endeavors to be as objective as possible there is an innate subjectivity when analyzing qualitative data. Given that the researcher shares the community-wide traumatic experience of Hurricane Laura with the participants it would be only natural to read participants' accounts through the lens of her own unique experience. There were several periods throughout the preparation, execution, and evaluation of the results when the researcher made a choice to pause and take a step back from the material due to post-hurricane triggers. She noticed in herself that certain seasons and anniversaries were amplifying post-traumatic experiences. The month of May is hurricane preparedness month which can prompt anxiety about climate scientists' predictions of how many major hurricanes can be anticipated that year. Anniversaries of hurricanes prompt a flood of historic images on news and social media. With the twenty-year anniversary (2025) of Hurricane Katrina several documentaries were released during the same week as the five-year anniversary of Hurricane Laura.

The researcher has relied on a counselor, spiritual director, and spiritual disciplines to process her own experiences, feelings, and anxiety sometimes triggered by such reminders. She has tried to maintain a level of objectivity with the raw data by purposefully taking breaks from the project when she feels herself identifying too closely with participants or when coping with anxiety. Insofar as possible, taking an adequate amount of time away from the project when needed and with as much self-awareness as possible, it is hoped that the researcher has been able to be as objective as humanly possible.

There is also potential for value in the shared experiences and cultural immersion of both researcher and participants, as in Critical Participatory Action research (CPA) for scholarship. CPA makes the experiences and input of those central to the questions the central focus and priority of a project.⁸⁶ In other words, this intervention was not done to or for participants but with them. As such, participants were not treated as objects to be studied but people invited to take agency in their own spiritual lives while potentially contributing to research that had the potential to contribute indirectly affect others' resilience in the future.

The researcher expected to hear in each person's story of their Hurricane Laura experience a description of suffering and traumatic experience, and all were invited to share a recounting of their disaster recovery. It was hoped to be able to glean the insight of a younger generation into the role of spiritual disciplines in their lives. The researcher hoped to hear, in what was said and what was left unsaid, what is most relevant and least

⁸⁶ Michelle Fine and Maria Elena Torre, *Essentials of Critical Participatory Action Research* (American Psychological Association, 2021), 13.

relevant about the church in their lives. Finally, there was an expectation to discover whether the experience of Ignatius' Daily Examen is useful or meaningful to the participants.

Chapter 5

Project Results

The project results in this chapter will first exhibit demographics of the participants, survey results, and basic information about the qualitative data collected through the journal entries and the exit interviews. Then the researcher examined the qualitative data to determine if there is any validity to the thesis statements. Finally, common themes observed from narrative analysis are shared. All journal entries and interviews were collected and conducted confidentially. The names of the participants were withheld by mutual agreement. Each participant was randomly assigned an italicized letter in place of their name, and each is referred to by the pronouns “they/them” to further protect participants’ anonymity.

Participant Demographics

Six young adults (aged 18-25) completed all the elements of the proposed project. An additional person participated only in the intervention and the exit interview, and another quit the intervention after just a few days but in the end agreed to an exit interview. All the participants were residents of SWLA in 2020 and have a connection to a UMC.

The demographics and backgrounds of the participants were surprisingly diverse for a church whose membership is more than 95% white. Four were persons of color, and four identified as white. One openly identified as LGTBQIA+. Two were immigrants, and English was the second language of one of these. One was adopted as an infant. Four were UMC members, and four were constituents. Their childhood experiences of church varied as well. Four grew up in the UMC, three had a Roman Catholic background

(church and/or school), and one was from an African American church tradition. In August 2020, when Hurricane Laura hit, four participants were attending MSU, three were attending high school, and one was an employed high school graduate. Every participant was evacuated or displaced anywhere from a few days to a year. All but one participant's home or rental was damaged by Hurricane Laura to some extent and in need of repair.⁸⁷ Participants' involvement in their families' disaster recoveries varied from being sheltered from afar while the adults took care of it to taking care of what Dad would have done if he could have been there. Two of the participants have since moved away from SWLA.

All participants chose to use the online tools and media rather than the in-person option that was offered. As a result, the researcher connected via Zoom with all but three of the participants for the initial information session. The last three watched a video of the second Zoom session before signing the consent form. During the intervention six of eight participants attended Sunday worship at a UMC at least once.

Survey Results

All but one participant took the resilience survey at the start of the intervention. All but two completed the survey at the time of the exit interview. Of the seven that completed the entrance survey, all but one scored in the lowest quartile of the CD-RISC-10. The outlier scored in the second quartile. Intake scores ranged from 21 to 30. Of the six that completed the exit survey, three scored in the lowest quartile, two in the second

⁸⁷ No questions were asked, and no information was received about whether participants were in any way affected by the other three federally declared natural disasters in Southwest Louisiana in the nine months following Laura.

quartile, and one in the highest quartile. Exit scores ranged from 23 to 40. One participant's score dropped by three points and another's dropped by two points. It is curious that one participant's score jumped from the lowest to the highest quartile with a 19-point difference. But the other three that saw increases in their resilience scores did so with either four- or six-point margins (Appendix 17).

According to initial quantitative studies conducted by the authors of the CD-RISC-10 US residents' scores are likely to be evenly spread in each of four quartiles. Though the sample for this study is not statistically significant, it is worth noting that the scores of this group clearly lean low compared to the national average. Also, all pre-intervention scores were at or below the national average for studies with young adults, and closer to the mean of studies with those affected by ecological disasters (Appendix 17).⁸⁸ Authors of this survey indicate that these kinds of results could suggest problems with stress or bouncing back from adversity.

One noteworthy correlation is that all four of the participants who were observed to attend at least one church service during the intervention realized increases in their CD-RISC-10 scores. The two participants with decreased scores were not observed to attend church during the project. (Appendix 18).

Journals

The number of journal entries made by each participant may be an indication that even those who completed the project may not have prayed the Examen prayer every day of the three-week intervention. F spoke about their difficulty in getting started with the

⁸⁸ Davidson, *Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale Manual*, 19, 40.

new, daily prayer practice. “I had to like, start over at one point, I think, or, or continue it from a different point. ‘Cause I, I, it was, it was new to me, so I had to like, keep reminding myself, I gotta do this Examen, I gotta do this Examen...”⁸⁹

Six of the participants made journal entries. The fewest number of entries per participant was seven, while the greatest number was sixteen (Appendix 18). Most of the participants’ entries included details of how the Examen fit into their day, how they experienced their time in prayer, the subject matter of the Examen application prompts for that day, or some of the feelings, thoughts or insights that were lingering after their prayer time had ended. Occasionally, an entry seemed to be a communication with the researcher if the participant had missed an entry or wasn’t sure about the nature of the journal assignment. “I’ve been forgetting to do the journals the past few days...”⁹⁰

Exit Interviews

Two tenured professors at MSU (one retired) conducted four interviews each, one per participant. All were recorded via Zoom at a mutually-agreed-upon time and were subsequently transcribed by the researcher. Due to several factors, the interviews were held at varying intervals following the completion of the intervention and more than the two-week gap the researcher had anticipated. The first exit interview was recorded 47 days after *A* completed day 21 of the intervention. The final interview with *H* was recorded 115 days post-intervention. The open-ended interviews lasted between 9:48 and 26:15.

⁸⁹ Interview with *F*, April 3, 2025.

⁹⁰ Journal Entry by *F*, January 13, 2025.

Theses Validity

Examen Experience Aspects

The collected data revealed aspects of participants' experiences of praying the Examen. One participant indicated this project was the first time they had engaged in an independent spiritual practice: "It felt that this journey has always been accompanied by other people, and this was the first time that I, I had to sit with it on my own."⁹¹

Previous studies noted in Chapter 2 indicated spiritual practices that include meditative, reflective, imaginative, and/or discerning elements would have the potential to contribute to the resilience of an individual. To answer the first thesis statement, the researcher scoured the journals and interviews to find each instance a participant experienced one of these elements while praying the Examen (Appendix 19).

Four of seven participants mention at least one meditative experience while praying the Examen, e.g. "I got more time to focus on being in the moment..."⁹² All of the participants mentioned having the experience of reflection while praying the Examen, with 51 total instances in the collected data, e.g. "I felt connected to the prayer and really took time to think and reflect."⁹³ Five participants reported at least one experience involving their imagination or envisioning the future in the context of praying the Examen, with twelve total instances, e.g. "It made me reflect on my day and how I treated others and think about how I could be better tomorrow."⁹⁴ All participants

⁹¹ Interview with *C*, March 30, 2025.

⁹² Interview with *B*, March 29, 2025.

⁹³ Journal Entry by *D*, December 28, 2024.

⁹⁴ Journal Entry by *B*, January 13, 2025.

described at least one experience of discernment during their Examen practice, with twenty total instances, e.g. “Today’s Examen helped me realize that the harboring feelings I’m holding for a certain individual is leading me to carry [sic] mountains of stress and anxiety that I am unloading onto others and myself. Very eye opening.”⁹⁵ While every aspect with the potential to contribute to resilience was experienced by someone, the reflective and discerning elements were universal.

Meaning Gleaning

The second thesis was that the participants would find the practice of the Examen a meaningful way to engage with God. The participants’ descriptions of their experiences demonstrate that all described engaging with God at least once, e.g. “God was with me today.”⁹⁶ Six out of seven participants describe meaningfulness they gleaned from one or more Examen prayer: “I felt led in a direction...,”⁹⁷ “It helped me realize...,”⁹⁸ “It’s time to be able to not have to question myself [about this situation anymore],”⁹⁹ and “I thank God for making me appreciate these moments of connection [with family and friends],”¹⁰⁰ (Appendix 20).

⁹⁵ Journal Entry by *A*, December 29, 2024.

⁹⁶ Journal Entry by *D*, January 17, 2025.

⁹⁷ Journal Entry by *D*, January 7, 2025.

⁹⁸ Journal Entry by *A*, January 4, 2025.

⁹⁹ Journal Entry by *E*, January 15, 2025.

¹⁰⁰ Journal Entry by *C*, January 1, 2025.

Spiritual Helpfulness in Crisis

The final thesis statement was that some participants would think that the Examen has the potential to be of spiritual help in the future when feeling overwhelmed or facing a crisis. This question was not posed directly to the participants in the interviews. However, to evaluate this thesis, the data was examined for reports of positive and negative experiences, indications that participants had any intention to continue all or part of the spiritual discipline after the intervention, and whether any participant attributed the practice as a spiritual help when facing something difficult during the intervention.

Assuming one would only continue a practice if they have had a positive experience, the data was examined to find participants' reports of any positive and negative experiences with the intervention. Overall, the participants reported nearly eight times more positive experiences of their 21-day Daily Examen practice (Appendix 20). “[Praying the Examen] today felt so amazing and is a big step into not only de-stressing my mind but also building a closer relationship with God which is something.”¹⁰¹ Two participants mentioned negative aspects of their intervention experience. *F* had a difficult time starting a new daily habit and trying to start back up when they could remember to do so. *C* did not have a positive experience with making journal entries. In all, five out of seven participants reported at least one positive experience, two reported at least one negative experience, and the ratio of positive to negative was 8:1. As one measure of helpfulness, the Examen shows promise in providing a mostly positive experience.

¹⁰¹ Journal Entry by *F*, January 10, 2025.

All participants indicated that they intended to continue at least some aspect of the Examen practice in the future. Three participants indicated that they wanted to continue all or most of the Examen in their regular spiritual practices. “I’m going to try and continue this app after this project as well.”¹⁰² Four others intended to continue one or more parts of the Examen that they had found helpful during the intervention, including making note of things to be thankful for each day and having a regularly scheduled time for prayer, meditation, and/or reflection. The fact that all participants intended to continue one or more parts of the Examen is an indication that they thought they might find the Examen useful in their portfolio of spiritual practices in the future.

Six of the participants described the Examen being of spiritual help in a hard time. In all, the researcher found eleven clear instances in the data (Appendix 21). In one journal entry, *A* was brought back to their own hurricane experience while also having compassion for others facing a real-time natural disaster:

I spent a majority of my time tonight during my examen thinking about the wildfires in LA, and the people who are being affected by them. Even though it isn’t affecting me it’s all over the news and social media that it’s impossible to ignore and not think about. Thinking about the people in LA brought back the feeling of how hopeless I felt during the hurricanes. I just hope and pray that they are able to find peace in this crazy and not peaceful time in their lives, because I’ve learned from experience that no matter what you go through, peace will find it’s way back to you.¹⁰³

A majority of positive experiences, the unanimous intention to continue all or part of the Examen, and firsthand reports from most participants who received

¹⁰² Journal Entry by *B*, January 16, 2025.

¹⁰³ Journal Entry by *A*, January 8, 2025.

spiritual help in a hard time through their Examen practice point to an affirmation of the researcher's third thesis. -

Prominent Themes

Through narrative analysis of collected data five prominent themes emerged. First, the interview with the participant who quit gave insight into what may or may not be the ideal time to learn a new habit or spiritual practice. Second, a close look at how the participants describe their experience of the storm's aftermath demonstrates that a holistic perspective including property, mental health, relationships, sources of stress, previous traumatic experiences, and concurrent life changes. Third, participants described a variety of coping strategies they employ ranging from avoidant to constructive. Fourth, when participants describe sources of their courage, many depend on the courage of others while few have developed an inner source. Finally, the researcher looked closely at how each participant makes sense of struggle.

“What made you change your mind?”

G quit the project a few days into their intervention. The researcher acknowledged *G*'s email with grace and pastoral encouragement and expressed confidence that the participant had made their choice with agency and without consequence. A few months later, when all the other participants had completed their exit interviews, the researcher made one last project-related communication with *G* to see if they would be willing to do an exit interview. Their response was prompt and affirmative. In place of the scripted question about their Examen experience the researcher had the interviewer ask this question instead: “Can you describe how you made the decision to sign up for the prayer project and what made you change your mind?”

Their reasoning for starting the project is probably at least part of the reason that most of the others did as well. “I just wanted to experience what it would be like, I guess.”¹⁰⁴ They described how it didn’t take them long to realize that they wouldn’t be able to start this new habit with the other challenges that were happening at the same time. “What made me decide to, uh, stop is because ... I was not keeping up with my assignments, and I was losing track of time for the project too. It was not the best time... It was just a lot keeping up with both things. So, I decided to stop.”¹⁰⁵ It is likely the case that the capacity to develop new habits or learn new spiritual practices is diminished during times of stress or crisis.

The Shape of What Remains

“I guess ever since then it’s like a constant fear of a hurricane... I know that now I do not like hurricanes.”¹⁰⁶ Descriptive words that the participants used in their interviews to describe the traumatic experience of Hurricane Laura and her aftermath include insane, stressful, terrible, upside down, not easy, changed, struggling, juggling, challenging, rough, confused, displaced, no longer reliable, crazy, lonely, inaccessible, destroyed, and fear. “It was just one step at a time. I didn’t really have time to pause and think about what was happening.”¹⁰⁷ “I didn’t know what to do about it. I was just kind of

¹⁰⁴ Interview with *G*, May 20, 2025.

¹⁰⁵ *G* Interview.

¹⁰⁶ *B* Interview.

¹⁰⁷ *C* Interview.

like, 'Okay, this is new. This is what we're gonna deal with. It's not gonna be normal stuff anymore.'"¹⁰⁸

When asked about their Hurricane Laura experiences, each participant described how the shape of their family, home, and community was changed by the storm. Many mentioned physical attributes of their home, e.g. "That was the first time I had experienced, like, property loss... When we came back from Laura, everything was gone."¹⁰⁹ The shape of their community shifted as well, e.g. "It was just a really, really huge change, you know, like, um, covid hit, so we couldn't go to in-class. Then the hurricane hit, then, uh, everything got moved, so, online for that whole semester."¹¹⁰ Some talked about how family dynamics shifted, e.g. "The whole family, we were all split up all over the place. And it was trying to, I had a hard time finding, like, people to, um, oh, what's the word I'm looking for? Lean on."¹¹¹

Since their father was away due to his work, it fell on *B*'s shoulders to help their mother and grandparents board up the windows. This is a task they had never done by themselves before. Their family returned to the area just a few days after the storm passed. The other members of the family stayed elsewhere while *B* was expected to stay alone at their damaged house with the pets. Their room had no damage, but power was

¹⁰⁸ Interview with *E*, April 4, 2025.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with *A*, March 4, 2025.

¹¹⁰ *F* Interview.

¹¹¹ *A* Interview.

not restored for weeks. “Kind of just having to be a lot more adult than you’d probably think a sixteen-year-old would have to be.”¹¹²

No one experiences a crisis in a vacuum. Many mentioned the COVID pandemic and other disruptive circumstances that they were already navigating before Hurricane Laura developed. Two participants shared that there were spiritual or relational challenges they had been facing which intensified their storm experiences. For example, *A* was coming to terms with their sexual orientation during this time, and *C* was navigating a self-described “spiritual trauma” and having only one family member nearby (Appendix 22).

Coping Strategies

During the interviews, participants were asked what they commonly do to feel centered and peaceful. One participant was candid about their deficit in this regard and their tendency to employ avoidance as a coping mechanism: “I never really had a pretty good track record at coping... Being by myself, um, you know, there’s not really any problems that can arise whenever I’m alone.”¹¹³ Distraction or avoidance were common tactics, while others joked and found humor in their situation (Appendix 23).

Some of the intentional and constructive practices that contribute to participants’ sense of calm and centeredness include meditating and praying alone or with others, journaling, reading the Bible or other books, spending time with family, baking or cooking, and making music. Most of these intentional practices could be considered

¹¹² *B* Interview.

¹¹³ *B* Interview.

means of grace (Appendix 23). *H*'s description of their storm experience points to an engagement in Wesleyan Means of Grace, both works of piety and works of mercy, "During the storm, uh, we were at my grandma's house, and we all said, like, a family prayer, which was nice. And then after the storm, like I said, the community came together. Churches were giving out hot meals, um, and everyone was helping each other out."¹¹⁴

Sources of Courage

When asked about their sources of courage, most of the participants pointed to an example of courage beyond themselves, naming other persons in their lives. Perhaps they were describing the courage they admire and emulate in this other person. Maybe, lagging in their own self-confidence, they are naming the person whose own courage teaches and helps them to be courageous themselves. It makes sense that during a young adult's stage of development they would still lean on the courage, strength, and experience of trusted adults. Six participants found external sources of strength in their mothers or other close family members (Appendix 24).

F starts by pointing to family members modeling courage and then explains that they are now internalizing what has been modeled for them.

Since I was young, I've, I've seen just such hard determination to, to do things, to achieve things from [many family members] ... If you're scared to do something, it'll never happen at all if you're scared, you know what I'm saying? ... So, um, the courage, I just, I just know that I just have to believe in myself and really just

¹¹⁴ *H* Interview.

make it happen, you know? And, have that motivation to get things done and face spear head on, you know?¹¹⁵

Reflecting courage from within, *H* and *E* also mentioned family, but in a slightly different sense. They don't describe riding on the coattails of others' courage. Rather they want to be courageous *for* their family. Their family members depend on them and are their motivation to move forward. The courage to do so is their own (Appendix 24).

Making Sense of Struggle

Suffering and sorrow are not things God sends our way, but they can and do radicalize life. We can allow that radicalization to grow within us. We can let it change, deepen, and ennoble us. Or we can run from the challenge it presents. But if we do run, then we will live our lives in hiding—hiding from ourselves, from one another, from life's realities, and from God.¹¹⁶

While describing their storm experiences or other challenges in life, many participants shared how they make sense of the struggles they endure. Several approaches emerged from the data. Often a participant was observed to engage in more than one approach to their understanding of human struggle. These approaches included dismissing or downplaying the experience, seeking perspective, feeling tested, seeking redemption, and finding comfort and strength in the presence of God and/or others (Appendix 25).

One participant made dismissive comments minimizing the reported traumatic experiences of Hurricane Laura survivors including themselves: "You know, there was a hurricane. And I, I feel like, to me, I've kind of forgotten most of it. So, I feel like

¹¹⁵ *F* Interview.

¹¹⁶ Frederick W. Schmidt, *The Dave Test: A Raw Look at Real Faith in Hard Times* (Abingdon Press, 2013) Kindle Edition, location 192.

whenever I hear people talk about the hurricane, um, I feel like they're making it a bigger deal than it is. But you know, we did have that."¹¹⁷ Three participants explicitly perceived the hurricane and/or other life challenges as a personal or spiritual test (Appendix 26). *H* made the strongest of these statements in their interview: "I believe that God is giving strong battles to people that he knows can deal with it..."¹¹⁸ Six participants sought signs of redemption, e.g. "I just have to have faith that, uh, when I get through this, there's gonna be something to look forward to and something better on the other side,"¹¹⁹ (Appendix 27).

Many sought perspective. One way to gain perspective of one's circumstances is to compare them with the experiences of another. Three participants shared a "there-but-for-the-grace-of-God-go-I" perspective like this one:

I saw some houses that were really messed up, and, uh, ours was kind of messed up ... But seeing that our house wasn't completely leveled like some houses, um, was pretty nice. And then my mom kind of pointed out that she had this, this cross that she put, uh, like just this wooden cross that you would think sometimes even in a normal storm it gets flung away, but it was, it was still in our flower bed, like completely fine even after the storm. So, after my mom pointed that out, I was like, well, maybe we're pretty lucky ... And, you know, my room wasn't like damaged at all, so I was pretty stoked about that. Um, so that made life a little easier too.¹²⁰

Another way to gain perspective is by putting one day in the context of a whole life. *A* demonstrated a "this-too-shall-pass" perspective after a particularly hard day:

¹¹⁷ *B* Interview.

¹¹⁸ *H* Interview.

¹¹⁹ *A* Interview.

¹²⁰ *B* Interview.

Today was one of those “when it rains it pours” kind of days. And when I prayed my Examen it helped me reflect and realize that not every single small thing is the end of the world. That it’s ok to fall, and it’s ok to laugh about it while you’re still down because those little things that made you fall aren’t big things, and it’s blessing that you’re still here to think about them.¹²¹

H seemed to have gained perspective by trying to see the human struggle from God’s point of view:

A lot of people were having doubts because, you know, “why would this happen?” ... My faith was strong in the fact that, you know, even though it did happen, it’s still part of God’s plan, and the reason might have been because, maybe there needed to be something to happen to prove that, you know, people need to come together and help each other. There was a reason it happened... It may not have been a good thing that happened, but he did it for most likely a good thing.¹²²

Half of the participants described finding significant meaning through the mere presence of God and/or others with them through their struggle (Appendix 28). Three of the four participants whose resilience scores increased described making meaning of suffering in this way. *F* described how experiencing their struggle with other people made their relationships stronger:

It is gonna sound kind of wild, but like the thing that with the hurricane, like, it was really crazy. And just like huge was stressful at times and everything like that. But I will say, like (a) it made our family be closer ‘cause we were, we couldn’t go nowhere... and (b) like we had to evacuate. And so just helping each other... It was a terrible situation, you know, from like retrospect, but, like, it really kind of brought us closer.¹²³

The idea of abiding with God and others is central to *A*’s practical theology:

I think in a time where it’s very dark right now, we all have to, I think the whole purpose of Christianity and God is leaning on and loving one another, and that’s something that the world isn’t doing right now. And so, I think that it’s something

¹²¹ *A* Interview.

¹²² *H* Interview.

¹²³ *F* Interview.

that drives me and something that keeps me going. ‘Cause having those people that I can lean on and love and just being an open heart to everyone. And I think that’s, that’s what’s most important about my spirituality, is just being there for others and having others be there for me, ‘cause if we don’t have each other, then we have no one.¹²⁴

Even among young adults who have had similar exposure to the theologies of the UMC have varying ways of understanding struggle and suffering. In many instances more than one perspective was at play in one person’s process of making sense and meaning out of their experiences.

Unexpected Interviewer Input

Unexpected interactions showed up in two interview transcripts. One interviewer went off script in two interviews to dialogue about their own traumatic experience. In one instance, it was after all the scripted questions had already been asked and answered, and the camera was still rolling. The other time they commented on an aspect of their own personal experience twice during the interview. It appears that listening to the participants’ experiences brought memories to the surface for the interviewer as well.

This exchange from *F*’s transcript is an example:

Participant *F*: ... plus COVID was happening at the same time. So, it ...

Interviewer 1: I call it the “Pandemi-cane Period.”

Participant *F*: Oh, that’s a good one. That’s a good one.

Interviewer 1: You know, it was everything. Yeah. I was out of my house for almost two-and-a-half years.

Participant *F*: O wow. Yeah, we weren’t out there for that long at all. Yeah, I think we...

Interviewer 1: I was coming down and stayed with a neighbor and checked what was going on...¹²⁵

¹²⁴ *A* Interview.

¹²⁵ *F* Interview.

Only someone who has been through a catastrophe can truly say, “I’ve been there too.” There is even today a strong feeling of a shared experience among survivors. Just like the participants and the researcher, the interviewers are Hurricane Laura survivors. It would have been impossible to find local, qualified interviewers who were not also survivors. There is no one within 200 miles of Lake Charles untouched by the collective traumatic experiences of 2020-2021. Everyone continues to cope, rebuild, process what happened, and make sense of the shape of what remains.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and Implications

Overall, the participants had a positive experience engaging in St. Ignatius' Examen prayer, and all planned to continue at least one aspect of that practice. The most significant conclusion of this project is not related directly to the Examen but to a strong indication that participation in worship contributes to resilience. While there was no indication that the Examen had any consistent effect on participants' resilience, there was a measurable, consistent, and positive effect between worship attendance and increased resilience survey scores. Collected data also indicates that a theology of "Remaining" has a positive influence on one's resilience. Examination of the young adults' traumatic experiences suggests a need for mature adults and mentors in their lives as they grow toward healthy self-differentiation and resilience-building. Future implications include suggestions for further research into resilience exploring a variety of factors and spiritual practices. Ministry implications include an imperative of spiritual leaders to teach means of grace and including young adults in intergenerational ministries and mentoring opportunities.

Conclusions

The Examen as a Desirable Spiritual Practice

No single pious or secular practice will have the same meaningfulness or efficacy for every person. Many private and corporate spiritual practices beyond the Examen have the potential to include one or more meditative, discerning, imaginative, and/or meaning-making experiences. Previous research indicated that these types of practices showed

promise in personal resilience building.¹²⁶ As one of the first studies to employ Ignatius' Daily Examen with disaster survivors to measure resilience, their experiences indicate that the Examen does indeed lead one to potentially experiencing some or all of these.

Some participants viewed the project as a continuation, or next step, or next level of their spiritual journey. Not everyone fell in love with Ignatius' Examen, but each participant named at least one part of that spiritual practice that they intended to continue. Three participants indicated that they wanted to continue all or most of the Examen in their regular spiritual practices. Four others intended to continue one or more parts of the Examen that they had found helpful during the intervention, including making note of things to be thankful for each day and having a regularly scheduled time for prayer, meditation, and/or reflection. Pastors have a responsibility to introduce as many people as they can to as many means of grace as they can. Over the course of a lifetime, each soul would have the opportunity to experiment, experience, and incorporate those practices that grow their relationship with the Divine, contribute to their theological understanding, and dig deep spiritual wells while the sun is still shining. In this way, potable water is available, and the bucket is ready before the storm is raging.

A Positive Correlation of Worship to Resilience

The strongest findings of this project are related to worship attendance. The only consistently noticeable effect for resilience was found for those who attended worship (Appendix 18). Only those who attended worship at a UMC during the intervention saw an increase in their resilience survey score. Conversely, those who did not attend church

¹²⁶ Raftopoulos, "It's That Knowing That You Are Not Alone."

realized a decrease in their score. These were the most straightforward correlative elements that the researcher could find related to improved resilience.

It is possible that there is a compounding effect, whereas practicing a certain combination of means of grace are mutually reinforcing in a way that contributes to resilience. While these indications are anecdotal, the idea compliments the observations of the researcher who observed UUMC leaders gain strength and purpose in doing all they could to help underserved neighbors with their disaster recovery while working on the recoveries of their church and family as well. Their works of piety were as evident and important as their works of mercy. The church leadership could have easily put mercy ministries on hold until the church was whole, and the facilities were restored from COVID and the storm. This would be a view that there is a finite amount of time, energy, and resources so we must be careful not to let the well go dry. But wholistic and regular participation in multiple means of grace allowed a deep spiritual well to be continually replenished. By engaging and being continually present with God's grace, God's presence was consistently enough.

If the phenomenon of a compounding effect of multiple means of grace for increased resilience is real, it would be one way to account for the decrease in scores when the Examen is practiced without attending worship. In this case prayer, journaling, and worship are acts of piety. Six participants practiced all of these during the intervention. Two of these means of grace are personal or solitary (the Examen and journaling) and the other is public or corporate (worship). When done in tandem each practice reinforces the other in one's spiritual life as much as the two greatest commandments do: to love God and love neighbor (Mt 22:37-40). There is a measure of

accountability and support that comes with being part of a group that is absent in private, personal disciplines but that can reinforce them. And when one is growing spiritually through their personal pious disciplines they bring what they have experienced in private to be reinforced, measured, or redirected by the experience of worship.

Alternatively, it could be that in-person worship participation is the sole reason for the increase in resilience scores. The project was carefully crafted to make it maximally attractive and accessible to Gen Z participants by utilizing digital resources and not requiring physical presence at the church. In fact, at least one previous study indicated that attendance at religious services was not an indicator of positive coping.¹²⁷ But in the present project, the unique and consistent increase in resilience scores only for those who attended worship may indicate a primary importance of deep interpersonal connections within the faith community to strengthen resilience. This conclusion is supported by two other studies. Garcia, et.al. asserted that social support may be a positive factor on its own and a boost to positive religious coping.¹²⁸ O’Grady concluded that social and religious support were important in resilience and relationships.¹²⁹

As a qualitative project there is not enough evidence to draw a statistically significant conclusion about the role of worship to resilience. Further study is warranted to determine the contribution of corporate means of grace such as worship participation

¹²⁷ Rose, “Religiosity and Behavioral Health Outcomes.”

¹²⁸ Garcia, “Religious Coping, Social Support and Subjective Severity.”

¹²⁹ O’Grady, “Resilience in the Wake of Disasters.”

and/or Christian conferencing to resilience whether alone or combined with other means of grace.

A Positive Correlation of a Theology of Remaining to Resilience

“Man [sic], suffering from himself in some way, at all events physiologically, rather like an animal imprisoned in a cage, unclear as to why? what for? and yearning for reasons – reasons bring relief...”¹³⁰

In Nietzsche’s view meaningless suffering leads to despair, but humans can endure hardships if they believe there is a way to make sense of disruptive circumstances. In making sense of personal struggle, the participants responses demonstrated that more than one way of understanding is often at play and sometimes held in tension. In the context of the project and in her role as a pastor, the researcher has often discerned that people can tend to parrot back what they think they are supposed to believe. Sometimes this can be observed when someone quotes a common platitude or cliché that is not exactly supported by scripture or church doctrine. A couple of examples from this project in a UMC context include “God is giving strong battles to people that he knows can deal with it,”¹³¹ and “challenges... they’re happening for a reason.”¹³² Nevertheless, reasons, whether or not they are logical or consistent, do seem to bring relief to the eternal question suffering evokes: “why?”.

Cognitive dissonance arises when overwhelming experiential evidence exists to the contrary of long held beliefs and understandings. Some religious traditions are more

¹³⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *“On the Genealogy of Morality” and Other Writings, third edition*, edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson, translated by Carol Diethe (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 107, [doi 10.1017/9781316562987](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316562987).

¹³¹ H Interview.

¹³² F Interview.

likely to expect adherents to assent wholeheartedly to orthodoxy than to coach or teach disciples to be theologians. When cognitive dissonance arises and alternatives do not seem to be available within the faith tradition, it is more expedient to come to theories and understandings outside of the church. In that context, if one seeks a different theological explanation that matches up with human experience it would be natural to assume that their pastor or other spiritual leader would tell them they are wrong or no longer orthodox in their beliefs.

The UMC asserts that all people of faith share the sacred work of theology, not just specialists.¹³³ Yet few young adults have taken a philosophy class or have been encouraged to question what they were taught to believe when they were young. It takes more intentional critical thought to lay aside indoctrinated theology than the vast majority have the experience or training to do on their own. The default is to double-down on existing beliefs and theological concepts we already have language and understanding to express.

Different theologies imply different assumptions about God's role in human struggle or suffering. A theology of redemptive suffering was almost universally expressed by all but one participant. Substitutionary atonement is widely accepted as orthodox and preached and sung in sacred songs across a wide spectrum of Roman Catholic and Protestant denominations. Does God have a master plan and coordinate tests of human will and endurance? Is God's plan to redeem unwelcome and traumatic human

¹³³ "Our Theological Task," *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church - 2020/2024*, (The United Methodist Publishing House, 2024), ¶105.

experiences? Does God demonstrate an enduring help by remaining present amid struggles?

The researcher found only one correlation in the data related to these questions. Three of the four participants who realized increases in their resilience scores found meaning in the experience of abiding with God and/or others when amid struggle (Appendix 25). For instance, they described feeling closer to God and experiencing divine help both offered and received. *A* defined this kind of practical theology as spirituality: “The whole purpose of Christianity and God is leaning on and loving one another.”¹³⁴ A “Theology of Remaining” coined by Dr. Shelly Rambo is a theological response to human suffering that was recently developed and is still overshadowed by resurrection and redemption narratives. Perhaps learning about this alternative theological perspective could contribute to resilience of those struggling through cognitive dissonance. The researcher suggests a line of inquiry into the role of predominant theological understandings and worldviews alongside a theology of remaining as they relate to resilience.

Resilience Scores

All the young adults in this project scored in the first or second quartile with their initial resilience survey. Authors of the CD-RISC-10 rubric indicate that this kind of result could suggest problems in coping with stress or bouncing back from adversity. If a qualitative study were to replicate this trend it could indicate that this age group (18-25) of Hurricane Laura survivors in SWLA are not as equipped to bounce back from

¹³⁴ *A* Interview.

adversity as their peers living elsewhere. In a qualitative project like this one it is impossible to say what the exact reasons may be for an individual's increase or decrease in subsequent scores. Nevertheless, this initial result is a confirmation of the researcher's concern from the start that young adults need special attention and resources that could contribute to their resilience. Correlations that have been explored in this chapter will indicate promising possibilities for future ministry and research with young adults.

Self-differentiation and Mentoring

The interview question about facing the future used the phrase "source of courage." We face an unknown future armed only with our past experiences. Resilience allows one to fully inhabit the present and face the future without being weighed down by the past, perhaps even to be in a better position for the present circumstances and challenges because they have survived and grown from past experiences. After a traumatic experience a sense of courage when facing the unknown would seem to indicate some measure of resilience in a person, perhaps including self-awareness and self-confidence. This could come from a source nurtured in the spirit or soul of a person, or one might rely on sources external to oneself.

The sources of courage described by the participants suggested questions related to developmental self-differentiation as well as the importance of mentoring and modeling resilience. Most participants described leaning on the courage of others in challenging times. Only three described a well within themselves from which to draw courage. Do the others lack a well or have a shallow one? Or do the others have a deep enough well but lack experience and/or courage to let go of the bucket someone else has been supplying? In one sense, asking for or depending on the help of others is not

necessarily a weakness. From another angle, the researcher wonders whether a well-developed sense of self is part of the resilience equation. There is no particular age when a person begins to differentiate themselves from their parents or other important adults in their lives. But young adulthood is often a stage when life circumstances encourage increased independence. Future research might consider how independence, self-differentiation, and/or a well-developed sense of self and one's own strengths and weaknesses play a role in resilience.

As revealed by the participants in this study, young people are looking to previous generations to model and mentor them in positive coping skills. Young people learn from trusted adults in their lives with whom they have significant relationships. There are many things to be learned in life that peers either do not yet know or are still trying to figure out. There is a deep wisdom that can only be gleaned from being mentored by a mature adult. All the external sources of courage mentioned by participants were adults in their family who were frequently present and who were personally invested in their well-being and the outcome of their future.

In an era when the culture within the church is accustomed to dividing into age groups when in the building, this project points to the importance of an intergenerational approach to have a potential of contributing to the resilience of future generations. There are a variety of programs that could be implemented to encourage mentoring to happen through the church. One-on-one or small group mentoring can be coordinated matching young people with mature adults in a safe environment to discuss topics or challenges of interest. Mature Christians can be recruited to not only chaperone but be an integral part of child and youth ministries in ways that appropriately encourage trust and lasting

relationships. Church members can be asked to teach life skills or share their life stories with younger generations. But even more than a programmatic focus, a church with an intergenerational culture that permeates all or most of its ministries and missions would multiply the opportunities for children and youth to gain mature adult mentors who are frequently present in their lives and personally invested in their lives and their future.

Limitations

Interview Format

The length and technique of interviews may have been a limiting factor. The project was designed with an open-ended interview in mind. The resulting transcripts were mostly a straightforward question and answer format. The researcher did not have interviewer experience and failed to instruct or coach the interviewers in best practices for open-ended interviews. As a result, the interviews were much shorter than the intended 90-minutes, limiting the amount of qualitative data collected for the project. A well-designed orientation would have corrected this limitation and might also have mitigated interviewer input as described in Chapter 5.

Resilience Survey

The authors of CD-RISC-10 asserted that subsequent results in survey scores could be affected by therapeutic interventions. Relatedly, it is possible that scores could also be affected by life circumstances between surveys. Regardless of any intervention, negative or positive feelings or recent experience at the time each survey was completed could have affected the outcome. In a quantitative study, one could expect these individual anomalies to balance each other out on average. In a qualitative project like

this one it is impossible to say what the actual reasons may be for an individual's increase or decrease in subsequent scores.

Although the researcher had hoped that participants' scores would increase post-intervention, the nineteen-point increase recorded in C's scores is an outlier. Some possible reasons for this dramatic increase beyond a radical three-week transformation might include wanting to please, impress and/or help their pastor with the outcome of the project. Or as noted above, negative or positive feelings or circumstances at the time they completed each survey could have been a factor. These same factors could have affected any of the participants' scores.

Timing of the Intervention

At what point on the timeline of Emotional Phases of Disaster Response was this project's intervention (Appendix 11)? This project started just after the five-year anniversary of Hurricane Laura. The Institute for Collective Trauma and Growth estimates that it could take anywhere from two to five years from the impact of one traumatic experience through all the phases to the "wiser living" phase." As previously noted, Hurricane Laura was not experienced in isolation from other potentially traumatic experiences. Additional historic weather events and a worldwide pandemic are the most notable of these and would be understandable reasons that the collective timeline in SWLA would stretch over a longer period. Other personal events and life circumstances described by participants could serve to either buffer or compound community-wide trauma. In this project such circumstances range from compounding factors like immigration challenges or extended separation from family to buffers like supportive family or a welcome marriage proposal. With these realities in mind, it is unlikely that all

participants were at exactly in the same phase in their response to their traumatic experiences at the time of the intervention. Introducing a new prayer practice in a phase of disillusionment could be a very different experience yielding different results than in a phase of restoration. Likewise, one cannot assume that all participants were approaching this new prayer practice from a wiser living phase just because five years had passed.

G's withdrawal from the project may be a case to this point. They attempted to start a new daily habit during a stressful time and reported feeling like they couldn't keep up with either the new spiritual practice or the demands of their life. This may indicate that they had not reached an emotional phase in their disaster response when they would be ready, willing, and able to prepare their spiritual life for future challenges. A second phase of this project with the same participants or the same age group in a few years would increase the likelihood that most would have reached the end stage of the disaster response cycle.

Absence of Anonymity

Though the researcher personally invited 28 young adults to participate in the intervention, seven of the eight who signed consent forms were already in relationship with the researcher (as their pastor) or the researcher's spouse (as their professor). Relationship capital could have been a factor in the participants' decisions to sign up. At least two were already personally acquainted with their interviewer as evidence was captured in the opening minutes of their recorded interviews. It is possible that these prior relationships are likely to have influenced journal entries, interview answers and comments, and at least one survey score. Though the project design promised anonymity

in the project report, they were not anonymous to the researcher and interviewers who knew them and heard or read their responses.

Additional Limitations

There were several additional limitations with this project. Qualitative data is anecdotal and cannot be extrapolated to assume that the same study with a different group of participants within the project's parameters would have reported similar experiences. Quantitative studies with interest in the implications of this project could attempt to determine statistical significance or validity to some of the conclusions the researcher has posited. More specific to the design, this project lacked a control group. Future studies should consider the use of a randomized control to avoid a placebo effect and enhance validity of findings.

Since the project relied heavily on self-reporting measures, it is unclear exactly how many days each participant prayed the Examen during the 21-day intervention. Self-reporting data often results in inherent bias. And this project is limited to the spiritual practice of the Examen and cannot compare to experiences of participating in other daily spiritual or secular practices. Finally, this project lacks follow-up beyond the exit interview. There could be value in a longitudinal study that checks in periodically with participants, both those who intended to continue the Examen and those who did not, to measure resilience and follow their evolving spiritual lives and practices.

Implications

Implications for Future Research

In general future research should keep in mind the seasonal rhythms of their target subjects, as well as private or public factors that may prohibit engagement in the

intervention. It would be advisable to consider the use of a randomized control to avoid a placebo effect and enhance validity of findings.

There would be value in a longitudinal study that checks in periodically with participants to measure resilience and follow their evolving spiritual lives and practices. A second phase of this project with the same participants or the same age group in a few years would increase the likelihood that most would have reached the end stage of the disaster response cycle. If such a continuation of study is possible, it would be important to incorporate one or more of the additional implications indicated below.

Inequality is currently built into non-profit, local, state, and federal systems. Future projects should qualitatively measure resilience across the areas of socioeconomics and race. Information gleaned from such a study could be crucial for FEMA as well as NVOAD organizations as they design and revise their policies and procedures addressing disaster preparedness, response and recovery into the future.

The following implications were discussed in the context of the conclusions in this chapter. Further study is warranted to determine the contribution of corporate means of grace, such as worship participation and/or Christian conferencing to resilience whether alone or combined with other means of grace. Also, spiritual practices that are truly practicing the presence of God such as contemplative prayer, meditation, yoga, and breath prayers should be explored as they may also have the potential to contribute to resilience. The researcher suggests a line of inquiry into the role of predominant theological understandings and worldviews alongside a theology of remaining as they relate to resilience. Other future research might consider how independence, self-

differentiation, and/or a well-developed sense of self and ones' own strengths and weaknesses play a role in resilience.

Implications for Future Ministry

In all honesty inequality is built into many of our religious institutions as well. If the resilience of human beings is truly important, simply because every person has sacred worth, then a narrow focus on building resilience in and through the spiritual life has limitations. For example, those who still lack permanent housing long after FEMA and NVOADs left would be likely to take exception if told that learning an ancient prayer practice would be the next best step for them to prepare for a future disaster. A holistic approach to resilience building would include spiritual preparedness, but also preparedness in property and assets, livelihood, mental health, and relationships, etc.

Nevertheless, faith leaders have a responsibility to introduce as many people as they can to as many means of grace as they can. Over the course of a lifetime, each soul would have the opportunity to experiment, experience, and incorporate those practices that grow their relationship with the Divine, contribute to their theological understanding, and dig deep spiritual wells

The young people in this project were looking to previous generations to model and mentor them in positive coping skills. In an era when the culture within the church is accustomed to dividing into age groups when in the building, this project points to the importance of an intergenerational approach to ministry in order to have a potential of contributing to the resilience of future generations.

Appendix 1

Church Membership Demographics

Catholic Rankings by Counties (Parishes)

Rank 2020 ▲	Rank 2010 ▼	Rank 2000 ▼	Rank 1990 ▼	Rank 1980 ▼	County ▼	Percent 2020 ▼	Percent 2010 ▼	Percent 2000 ▼
▶ 437	252	351	310	388	Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana	23.60	33.23	32.59

Screenshot from the ARDA Web Page: <https://www.thearda.com/us-religion/statistics/rankings?typ=2&cod=3&u=0&con=0>

United Methodist Rankings by Counties (Parishes)

Rank 2020 ▲	Rank 2010 ▼	Rank 2000 ▼	Rank 1990 ▼	Rank 1980 ▼	County ▼	Percent 2020 ▼	Percent 2010 ▼	Percent 2000 ▼
▶ 1548	1833	1810	1934	1901	Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana	3.65	3.82	4.67

Screenshot from the ARDA Web Page: <https://www.thearda.com/us-religion/statistics/rankings?typ=0&u=0&cod=449>

Source: The Association of Religion Data Archives, downloaded September 12, 2025, from thearda.com (see respective links above)

Appendix 2

Catholic Hurricane Prayer

This is a modern meme of a prayer for protection during hurricane season with a watermark of the crest of the local diocese, posted on the Facebook page of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Lake Charles, June 17, 2025.

**PRAYER FOR PROTECTION
DURING HURRICANE SEASON**


**By The Most Reverend Maurice Schexnayder
Second Bishop of Lafayette**

**O God, Master of this passing world, hear the
humble voices of your children.
The Sea of Galilee obeyed your order and returned
to its former quietude; you are still the Master
of land and sea.**

**We live in the shadow of a danger over which we
have no control. The Gulf, like a provoked and
angry giant, can awake from its seeming lethargy,
overstep its conventional boundaries, invade our
land, and spread chaos and disaster.**

**During this hurricane season, we turn to You,
O loving Father. Spares us from past tragedies
whose memories are still so vivid and whose
wounds seem to refuse to heal with the passing
of time.**

**O Virgin, Star of the Sea, Our Beloved Mother, we
ask you to plead with your Son in our behalf, so
that spared from the calamities common to this
area and animated with a true spirit of gratitude,
we will walk in the footsteps of your Divine Son
to reach the heavenly Jerusalem where
a storm-less eternity awaits us. Amen.**

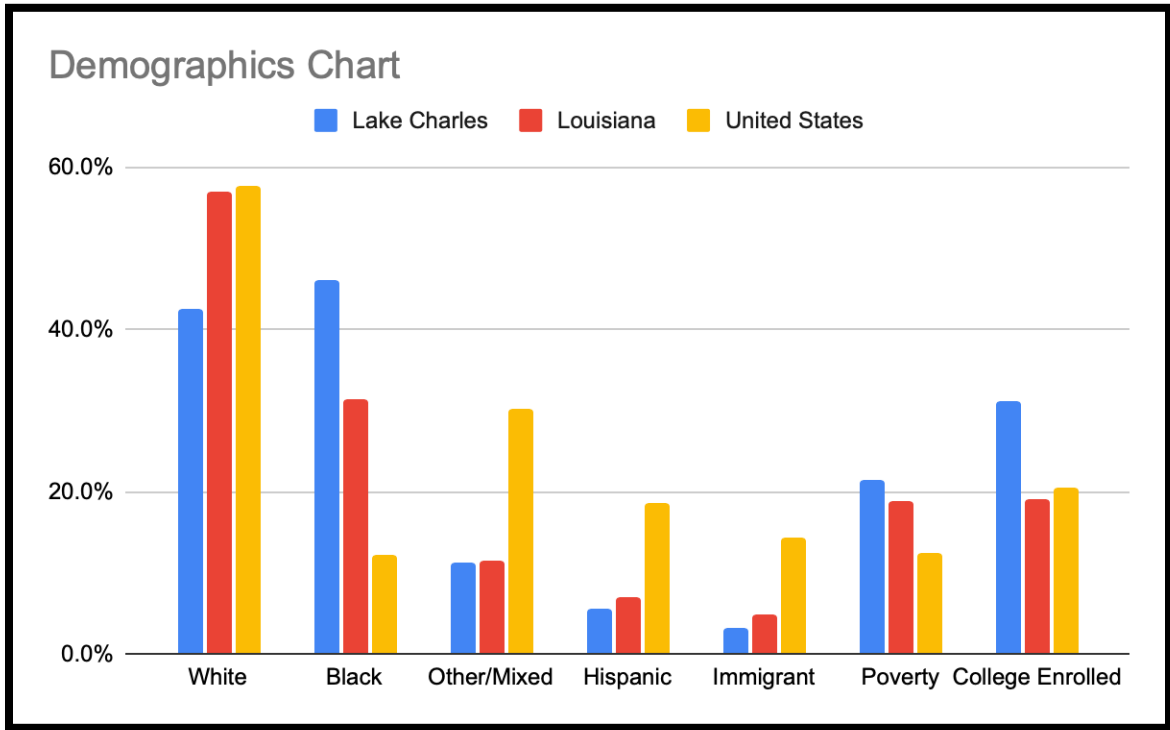


Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=1177488727746291&set=a.546560930839077>

Appendix 3

Demographics Comparison

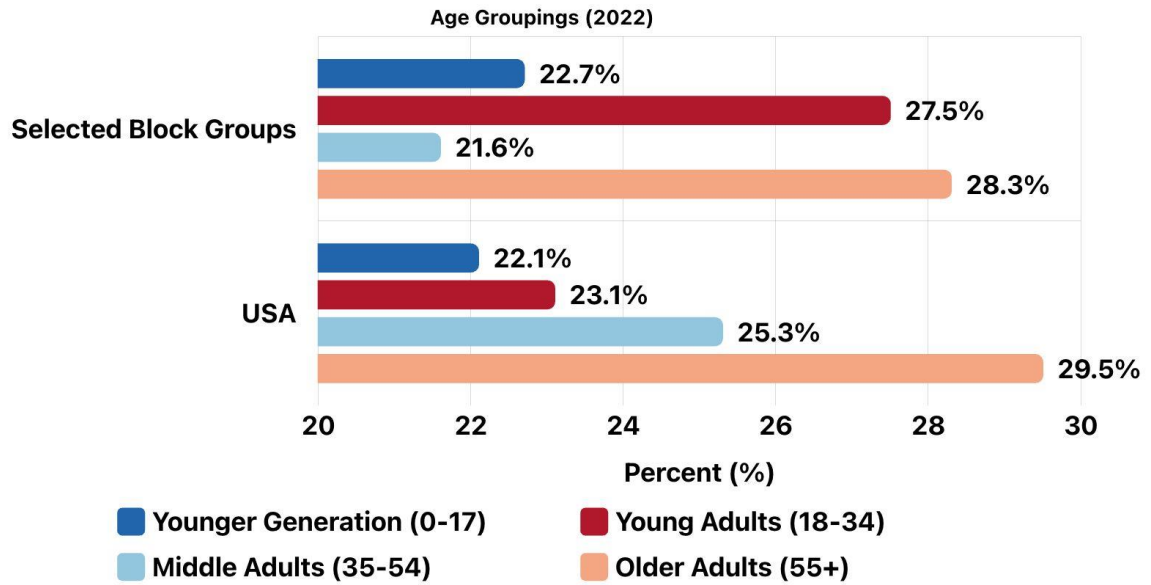


Source: United States 2020 Census, all zip codes in City of Lake Charles
<https://data.census.gov>.

Appendix 4

Age Groups in 2022

“Selected Block Groups” is the 2-mile radius around UUMC.

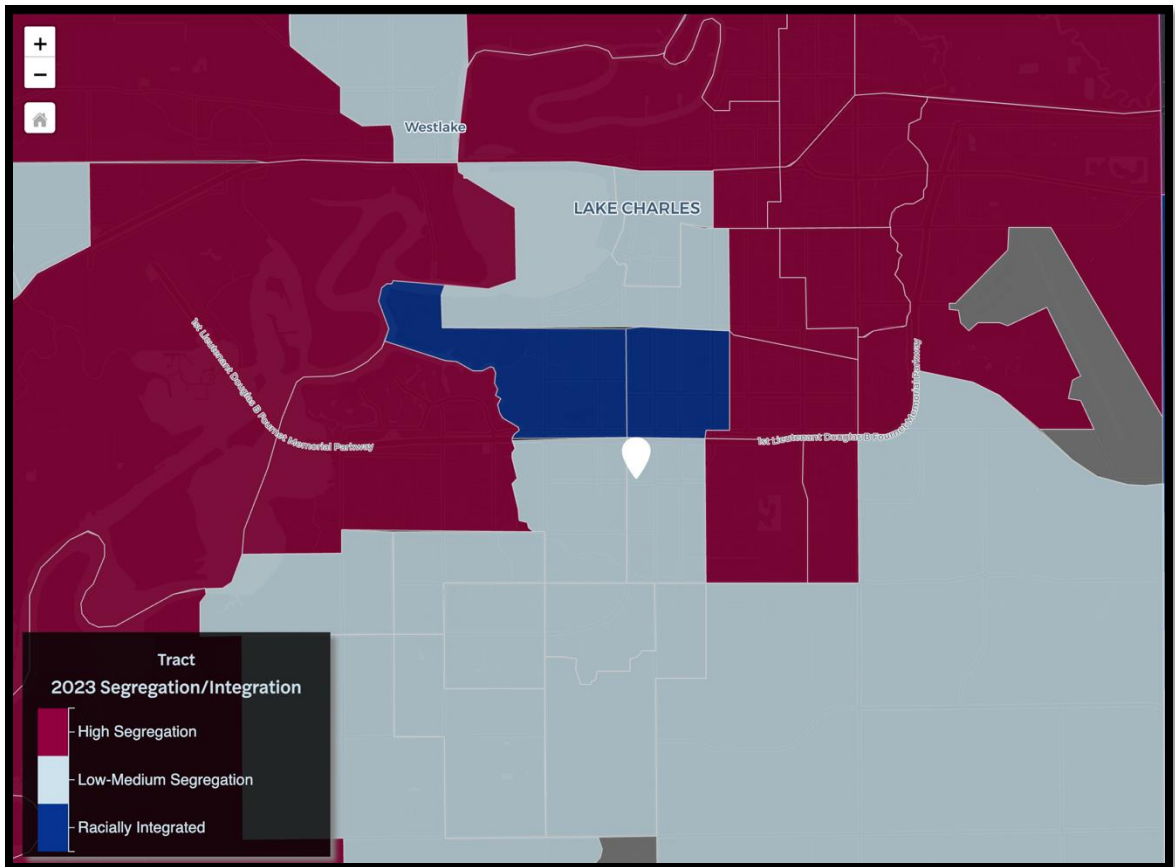


Source: The Association of Religion Data Archives, custom report of 2-mile radius around UUMC, <https://www.thearda.com/us-religion/cpb?y=3528464.239492277&x=-10376837.990372255&b=2>

Appendix 5

Segregation Map

Map indicating the levels of racial segregation by neighborhoods in and around Lake Charles, Louisiana. The approximate location of UUMC is denoted with a white pin.

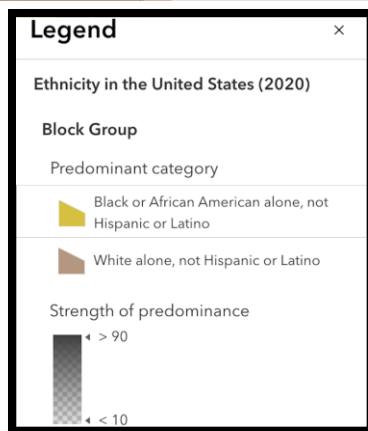
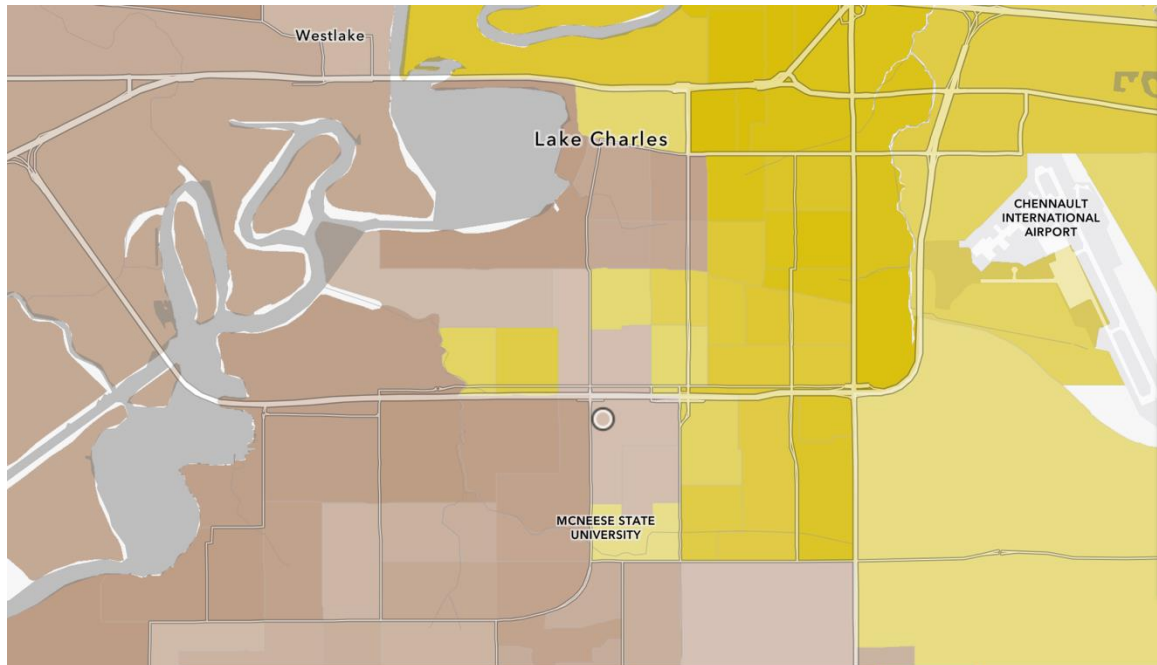


Source: Othering and Belonging Institute at University of California, Berkeley, “The Roots of Structural Racism Project: Twenty-first Century Racial Residential Segregation in the United States,” interactive map accessed September 13, 2025, https://belonging.gis-cdn.net/us_segregation_map/?bounds=30.25%2C-93.06%2C30.13%2C-93.30&year=2023&geo=tract.

Appendix 6

Race Map

Map indicating the predominant categories of race by neighborhoods in and around Lake Charles, Louisiana. The approximate location of UUMC is denoted with a black ring.

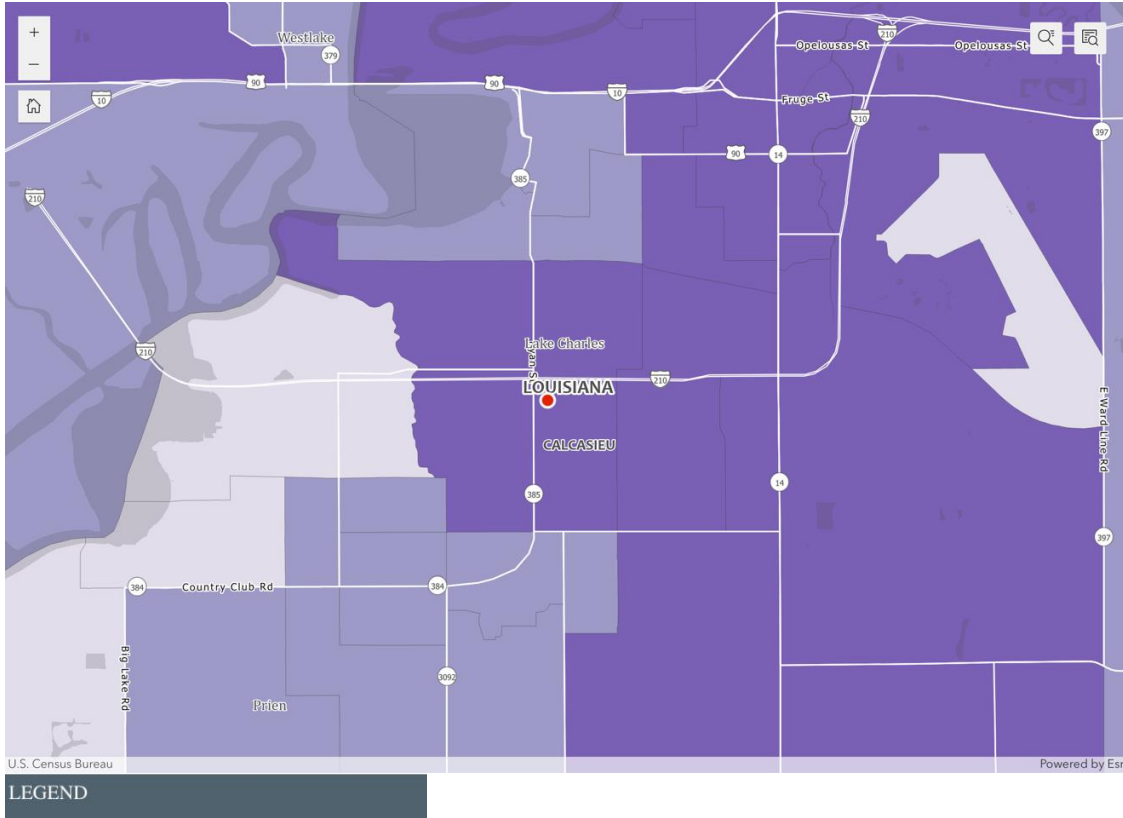


Source: National Geographic Mapmaker, “Ethnicity in the United States,” interactive map accessed September 13, 2025, <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/instant/atlas/index.html?appid=0cd1cdee853c413a84bfe4b9a6931f0d&webmap=c175fc83fb204fb0a98607c4acd7bf79>

Appendix 7

Poverty Map

Map indicating poverty levels per capita in Lake Charles, Louisiana. The approximate location of UUMC is denoted with a red dot.



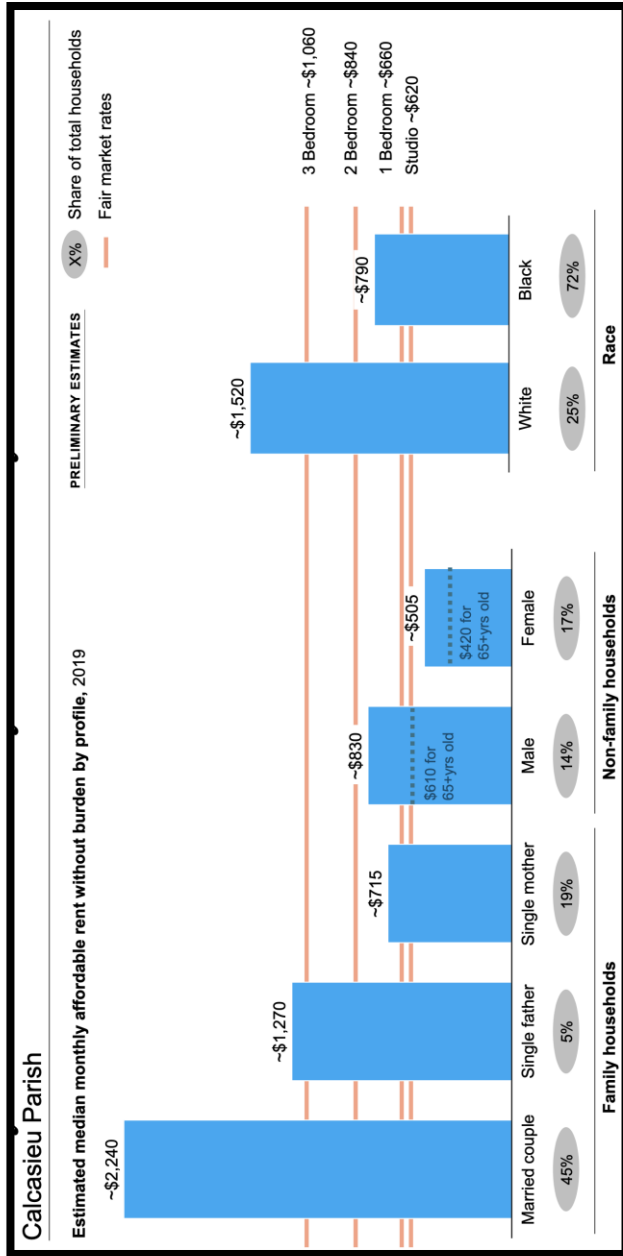
Modeled Poverty Rate
Percentage of all-age population in poverty by census tract

- 20.00 or more
- 10.00 to 19.99
- Less than 10.00
- Data not available

Source: United States Census and United States Commerce Department’s Economic Development Administration, “EDA-Census Poverty Status Viewer,” accessed September 13, 2025. <https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/experiencebuilder/experience/?id=ad8ad0751e474f938fc98345462cdfbf&page=EDA-Census-Poverty-Status-Viewer&views=Modeled-Tract-Area-Poverty>

Appendix 8

Affordable Rent Graph



Source: Community Foundation of Southwest Louisiana, *Hurricanes Laura & Delta Recovery, Final Document*, November 2020, 10,
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b6c60224611a06e12b5da29/t/600f4c5cd52c160bde1a735/1611615327310/202011+Hurricane+Laura+Delta+recovery_vFINAL.pdf



Appendix 9

Hurricane Preparedness Graphic

Hurricane Preparedness

weather.gov/hurricane 

Prepare Before Hurricane Season

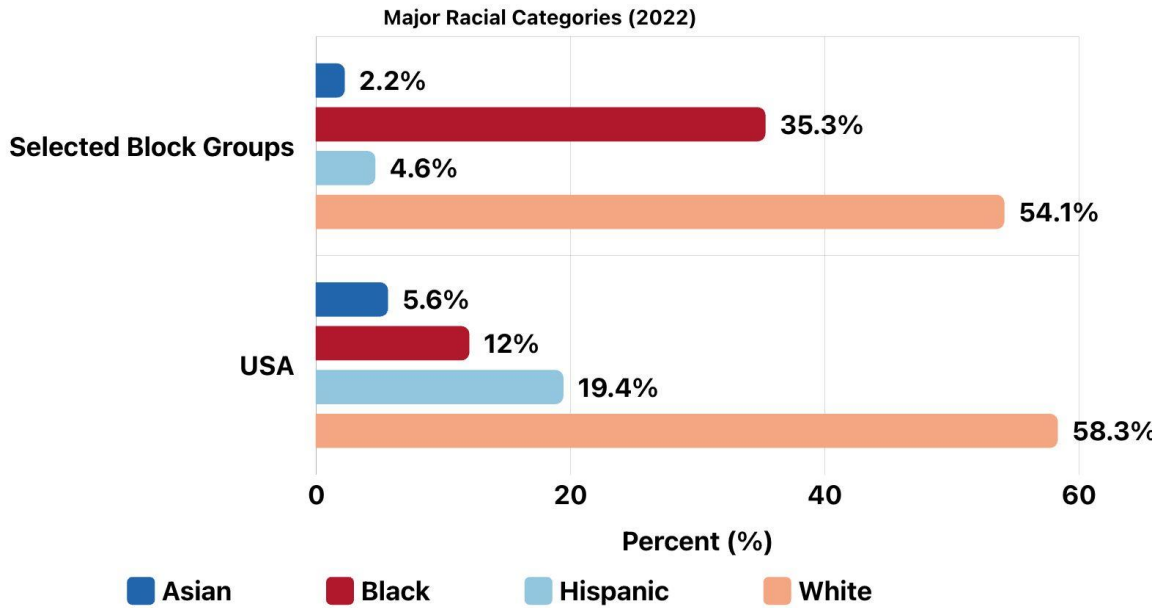
-  Develop an evacuation plan
-  Assemble disaster supplies: food, water, batteries, charger, radio, cash
-  Get an insurance checkup and document your possessions
-  Create a communication plan with a hand-written list of contacts
-  Strengthen your home



Source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's 2025 Social Media Plan.
Source: <https://www.noaa.gov/hurricane-prep-social-media-english#satmayb>

Appendix 10
Racial Demographics

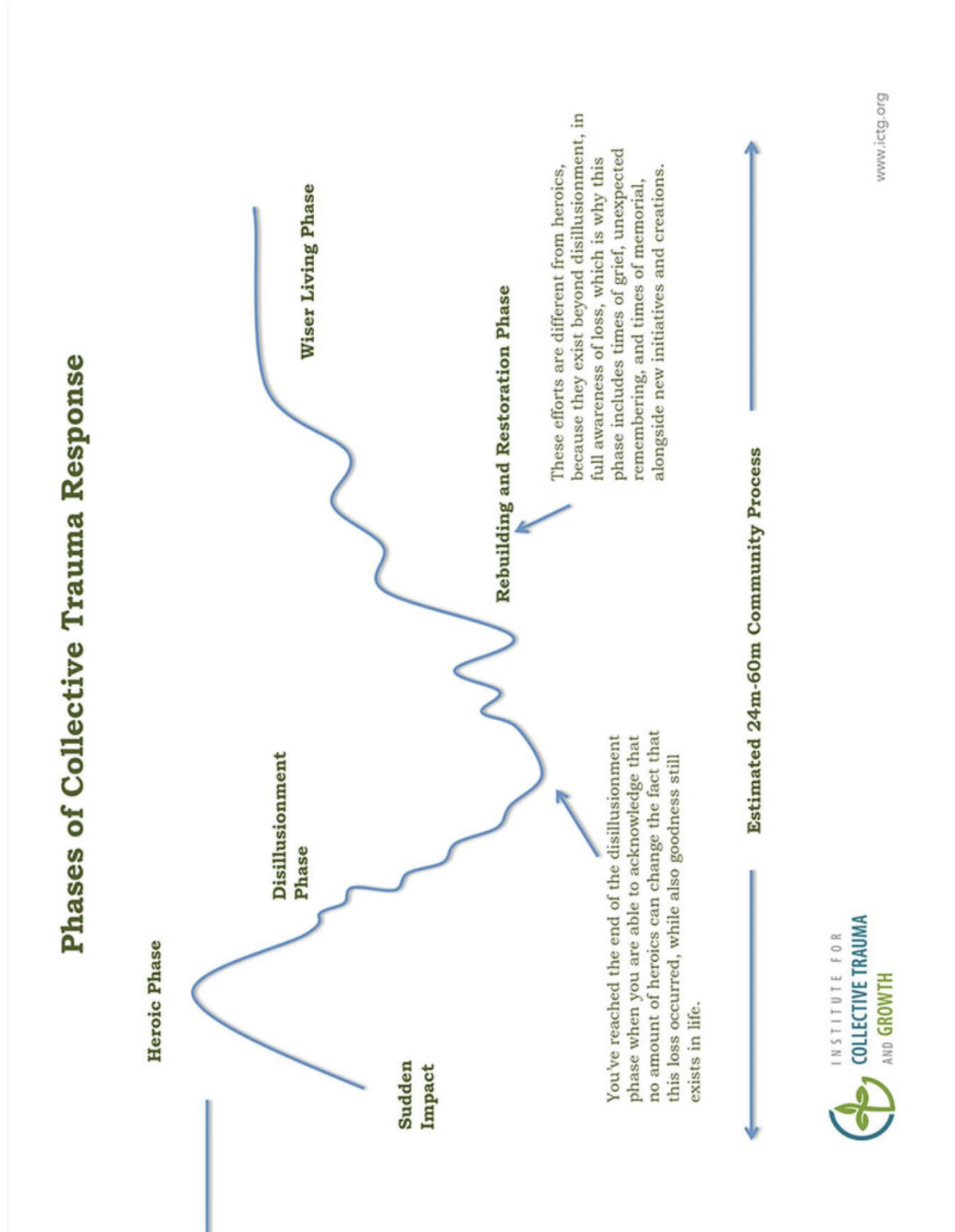
“Selected Block Groups” are in 2-mile radius of UUMC



Source: The Association of Religion Data Archives, custom report of 2-mile radius around UUMC, <https://www.thearda.com/us-religion/cpb?y=3528464.239492277&x=-10376837.990372255&b=2>

Appendix 11

Emotional Phases of Disaster Response



Source: Institute for Collective Trauma and Growth, <http://www.ictg.org/phases-of-disaster-response.html>.

Heroic Phase

Following sudden impact, or the sudden revelation of catastrophic event(s), generally, survivors experience an adrenaline rush often referred to as a "hero" phase. This phase tends to involve a lot of "business" related to what has happened. This time may involve getting people out of harm's way or evacuations, search and rescue, mucking out, psychological first aid, hospital visits, prayer chains, meal trains, memorial services or funerals, assessment, investigation, and countless other necessary tasks. This phase can last days, weeks, months, or, some communities find, over a year.

Disillusionment Phase

This phase tends to be marked by a pervasive feeling of exhaustion. As people experience adrenaline waning, they often describe feeling achy and lethargic. It also can be a time when survivors describe an overall sense that nothing they physically do can change what has happened. Many report feeling a lot of emotions in this phase, emotions that may have been held at bay during the hero phase due to so many tasks requiring attention. Emotions may include grief, sadness, sorrow, mourning, guilt, loneliness, gratitude, appreciation, peace, and much more. This phase generally lasts for weeks or months.

Turning

How does a group know they have started the process of rebuilding and restoring? Many communities make attempts to jump right to rebuilding during the hero phase. Some communities see the downward slope of disillusionment as a "negative" or as "depression" rather than a general loss of energy, which is normal following an adrenaline rush. Instead, some survivors hope to "stay up". However, many times, these attempts prove unsustainable. The more lasting attempts to rebuild and restore tend to occur after survivors have had a chance to rest and recoup following the adrenaline rush that commonly occurs following a disaster.

At ICTG, we find communities tend to know they've reached the end of the disillusionment phase when most people in their group honestly feel a sense of two truths: they can acknowledge the loss that has occurred, and they sense there still is good in the world. Coming to a sense of those two truths often takes time, and is most genuine when not rushed or forced.

Rebuilding and Restoration Phase

This phase involves business again, but this time it tends to be collaborative, patient, steady, and focused on the best interests of the range of people who have been impacted by what has happened. It also tends to be creative and inspired by mutual efforts representing a range of voices from the community. While survivors tend to feel a general momentum toward progressing forward during this phase, survivors also report experiencing ups and downs throughout this time when they may feel occasional bouts of sadness or experience sudden memories of grief. Still, in most cases, survivors tend not to feel these moments as lasting or debilitating.

Wiser Living Phase

This phase has many names, including "new normal." It generally refers to an acknowledgment that what has occurred has changed the community in a lasting way. Though healing can happen, there may be scars. This phase also represents the loss of innocence that may have occurred, a recognition that what has happened does not just happen in another part of the world or country, or only in the news, but it happens right here, at home. This phase represents an understanding of what types of measures and preparation will be helpful for future experiences.

Source: Institute for Collective Trauma and Growth, <http://www.ictg.org/phases-of-disaster-response.html>.

Appendix 12

Young Adult CD-RISC-10 Scores

CD-RISC-10					
Summary of Scores in Studies Related to Young Adults in the United States					
Authors	Number	Mean (SD)	deviation range	Location	Comments
Campbell-Sills et al (2007)	131	27.2 (5.8)	21.4 - 33	USA	College undergraduates
Hartley (2012)	605	30.1 (5.3)	24.8 - 35.4	USA	Normative student sample
Jones et al (2017)	39	33.5	15.1-40	USA	Juvenile male healthy controls
Reyes et al (2017)	20	31.8	26.5-37.1	USA	Student veterans
Lekan et al (2018)	100	28.6	28.6	USA	Nursing students
Klibert (2019)	48	31.6 & 28.1	31.6 & 28.1	USA	Undergrad students treatment and control groups - post study only
Overall Mean		29.7			

Source: *JRT Davidson, Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) Manual*. Unpublished (01-01-23), 19.

Appendix 13

Ecological Disaster CD-RISC-10 Scores

CD-RISC-10					
Summary of Scores in Studies Related to Individuals Affected by Ecological Disasters (Natural or Manmade)					
Authors	Number	Mean (SD)	deviation range	Location	Comments
Grattan et al (2011)	71	29.1 (6.1)	23 - 35.2	USA	Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill
	23	29.9 (5.9)	24 - 35.8	USA	
	47	30.0 (6.5)	23.5 - 36.5	USA	
	47	28.5 (5.5)	23 - 34	USA	
McCanlies et al (2014)	114	29.9 (6.3)	23.6 - 36.2	USA	Police officers post Hurricane Katrina
Turner (2015)	10	36.7	36.7	USA	Nurses responding to tornado casualties
Wang et al (2010)	341	26.8 (6.3)	20.5 - 33.1	China	Schoolteachers affected by earthquake
Wu et al (2015)	318	24.8 (7.5)	17.3 - 32.3	China	Earthquake survivors - corrected values given here
Xin (2021)	2130	32.1	32.1	China	High school children post earthquake
Okuyama et al (2014)	1,973	20.5 (0.2 SE)	20.5	Japan	Adolescent survivors of Great East Japan Earthquake
Okuyama et al (2018)	161	20 - 23 - 25	20 - 23 - 25	Japan	Adolescents followed over three years post-earthquake
Bakic & Ajdukovic (2019)	224	29.2	29.2	Croatia	Flood survivors
Overall Mean		26.6			

Source: *JRT Davidson, Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) Manual*. Unpublished (01-01-23), 40.


Appendix 14

Questionnaire Sample

Spiritual Resiliency Prayer Project Survey

This is the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 10 (CD-RISC-10). Please answer these 10 questions in advance of your participation in the Spiritual Resiliency Prayer Project.

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[Switch account](#)

* Indicates required question

Email *

Your email _____

Your Date of Birth

MM DD YYYY

__ / __ / ____

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements as they apply to you over the last month. If a particular situation has not occurred recently, answer according to how you think you would have felt. *

	not true at all (0)	rarely true (1)	sometimes true (2)	often true (3)	true nearly all the time (4)
I am able to adapt when changes occur.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can deal with whatever comes my way.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I try to see the humorous side of things when I am faced with problems.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having to cope with stress can make me stronger.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix 15

Daily Journal Prompt

Participant A's Daily Examen Journal

You are invited to find a place to pray away from possible distractions for the next 15 to 20 minutes.

Center yourself with one or more rituals of your choice to mark the beginning of this time of prayer as sacred (light a candle, sing or listen to a song, count several deep breaths - in and out, etc.).

Open your "Reimagining the Examen" app to begin today's Examen, or pray unhurriedly through the following 5 steps, then journal about your experience on the opposite page.

1. **Give Thanksgiving.** *I allow my mind to wander as I reflect on the ways God has blessed me on this particular day. I allow big things and small things to arise.*
2. **Ask for the Spirit.** *I ask God to fill me with the Spirit so that the Spirit can lead me through this difficult soul-searching.*
3. **Review and recognize failures.** *I look back at my day and ask the Lord to point out to me the moments when I have failed in big ways or small.*
4. **Ask for forgiveness and healing.** *If I have sinned, I ask God to forgive me and set me straight again. If I have not sinned but simply made a mistake, I ask for healing of any harm that might have been done. I also ask for wisdom to discern how I might better handle such tricky moments in the future.*
5. **Pray about the next day.** *I ask God to show me how tomorrow might go. I imagine the things I'll be doing, the people I'll see, and the decisions I'll be mulling over. I ask for help with any moments I foresee that might be difficult.*

Pray any final words, and then close with one or more rituals (The Lord's Prayer, extinguish candle, make the sign of the cross, a blessing or benediction, etc.).

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Not shared

After you have prayed the Examen today, please take a few minutes to enter some of your thoughts about the experience.

Your answer

Thank you for participating in this project!

If you have a question or concern, please contact the researcher in any of the following ways:

Appendix 16

Interview Questions

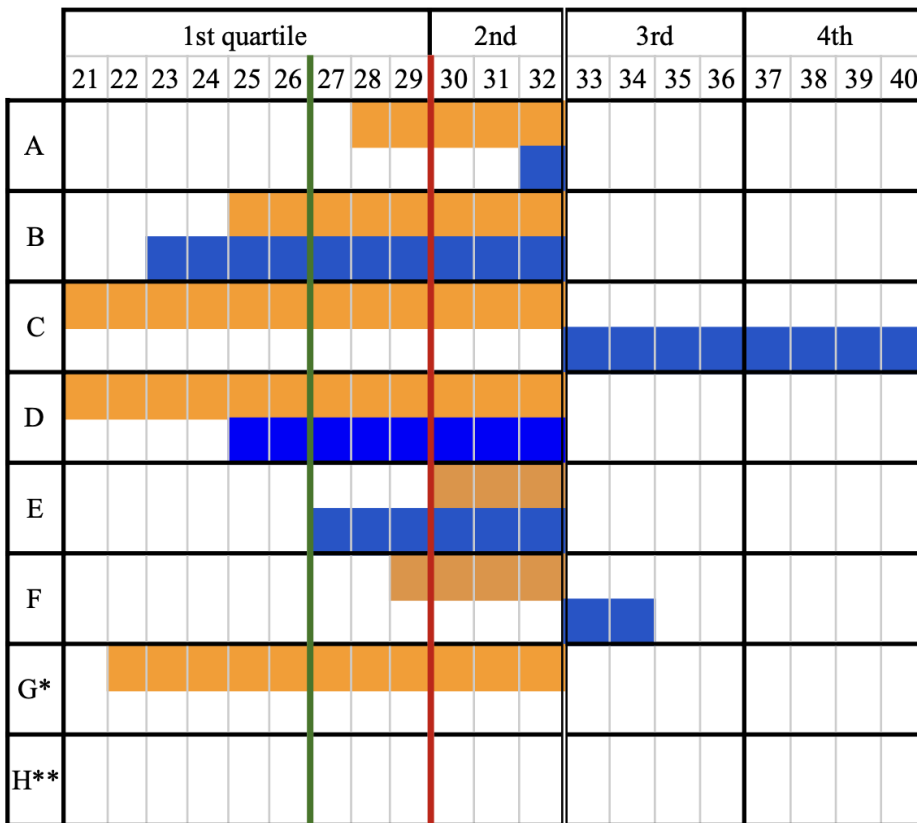
1. Please tell me about living in Southwest Louisiana.
2. Describe the things you normally do to feel centered and peaceful.
3. Think of a challenging time or tough time you have experienced. What helps your spirit cope in stressful times?
4. What was it like to live through Hurricane Laura?
5. Do you remember any things during that time that gave you a sense of peace in the midst of that storm?
6. What are the sources of your courage to face the future?
7. How satisfied are you that your spiritual life helped prepare you to face the challenges that came with Hurricane Laura?
8. Can you describe for me your experience with the Examen prayer these past weeks?
9. Is there any aspect in your experience of the Examen that you hope to use going forward?

Appendix 17

CD-RISC-10 Scores Graph

Participants' CD-RISC-10 scores shown as deviation from known averages

- ≡ US national mean (32.5)
- average US national mean for young adults (29.7)
- average mean for survivors of ecological disasters (26.6)
- before intervention
- after intervention



* Participant G discontinued intervention after a few days.

** Participant H failed to complete any surveys

Appendix 18

Qualitative Data Chart

Outline of qualitative data collected from each participant

Participant	Date Consent Form Signed	Entrance Survey Score	Number of Journal Entries	number of days from end of project to interview	Interview duration (minutes.seconds)	Change in Score		UMC Church Attendance during intervention?
						increase	decrease	
A	12/17/2024	28	11	47	15.03	32	yes	yes
B	12/19/2024	25	12	70	13.52	23	no	no
C	12/17/2024	21	8	73	10.47	40	yes	yes
D	12/27/2024	21	16	73	9.48	25	yes	yes
E	1/1/2025	30	7	67	14.58	27	no	no
F	12/31/2024	29	12	66	26.15	34	yes	yes
G*	1/2/2025	22	n/a	n/a	10:24	n/a	yes	yes
H**	1/1/2025	none	0	115	10.05	none	yes	yes

*Participant G discontinued intervention after a few days.

**Participant H did not submit any journal entries, or surveys

Appendix 19

Examen Experience Chart One

Participant Experience of Elements of the Examen

listed by the number of times evidence of or reference to the specific experience of each element is found in collected data in relation to practicing the Examen during the intervention.

(Journal/Interview) Total

Participant	Meditative	Reflective	Imaginative	Discerning
A	(1/0) 1	(9/2) 11	(2/0) 2	(3/1) 4
B	(0/1) 1	(8/1) 9	(3/0) 3	(2/0) 2
C	(1/1) 2	(8/1) 9	(5/0) 5	(5/0) 5
D	(1/0) 1	(7/2) 9	(0/0) 0	(4/0) 4
E	(0/0) 0	(7/2) 9	(0/0) 0	(2/0) 2
F	(0/0) 0	(2/1) 3	(1/0) 1	(0/1) 1
H*	(-/0) 0	(-/1) 1	(-/1) 1	(-/2) 2
Total	5	51	12	20

*Participant H did not submit any journal entries

Appendix 20

Examen Experience Chart Two

On experiencing the practice of the daily Examen a meaningful way to engage with God

by number of incidences in each participants' collected data (journals and interviews)

Participant	generally negative	generally positive	meaning-making	engaging with God	continue all or part of Examen
A	0	5	8	6	Yes
B	0	3	2	4	Yes
C	3	3	18	23	Yes
D	0	11	8	7	Yes
E	0	0	4	5	Yes
F	1	9	0	1	Yes
H	0	0	3	2	Yes
Totals	4	31	43	48	

Appendix 21

Examen a Spiritual Help in a Hard Time

I spent a majority of my time tonight during my examen thinking about the wildfires in LA, and the people who are being affected by them. Even though it isn't affecting me it's all over the news and social media that it's impossible to ignore and not think about. Thinking about the people in LA brought back the feeling of how hopeless I felt during the hurricanes. I just hope and pray that they are able to find peace in this crazy and not peaceful time in their lives, because I've learned from experience that no matter what you go through, peace will find it's way back to you.¹³⁵

Today's Examen on the app was about how I treated others today. It was a meaningful reflection as there was interaction I had earlier in my day that didn't go well, due to me, and I let my actions during that moment consume my thinking the rest of the day. Getting to reflect on that by not only being able to ask God questions or receiving the answers I knew to be true, but also being able to ask for forgiveness at the same time lifted a burden off my shoulders that I carried with me the whole day.¹³⁶

Today was one of those "when it rains it pours" kind of days, and when I prayed by Examen it helped me reflect and realize that not every single small thing is the end of the world.¹³⁷

This helped me relax tonight because I had some unfortunate occurrences today but was able to think outside the box and solve them.¹³⁸

My examen today... made me reflect and think about if I had any feelings I was suppressing or not admitting; I would admit now that I had a lot of anxiety today. It dictated how my day went and what I did and it interfered with my plans for the day. I ask God to help me tomorrow in having a good day and not being filled with anxiety.¹³⁹

This Examen reminded me that even in difficulty, God's presence is steadfast. I am thankful for the strength to face today, for moments of peace amidst the

¹³⁵ A, January 8, 2025.

¹³⁶ Journal Entry by A, December 28, 2024.

¹³⁷ A, January 4, 2025.

¹³⁸ Journal Entry by B, January 2, 2025.

¹³⁹ Journal Entry by B, January 10, 2025.

struggle, and for the support of loved ones who remind me I am not alone. I pray for clarity, wisdom, and courage as I navigate this challenge. I recognize moments when fear or frustration overwhelmed me. I ask for forgiveness in doubting Your timing. I pray for resilience as I continue forward.¹⁴⁰

This Examen reminded me of the need to find rest in God and to hold onto hope, even when things feel heavy. I am thankful for the strength to endure this difficult time. I pray for renewed strength and a hopeful heart. I know God will lift this heaviness and work even in the unexpected. I recognize that my faith wavered at times, and I allowed worry to overwhelm me. I pray for the courage to face tomorrow with hope and the assurance that You are guiding me every step of the way.¹⁴¹

This Examen reminded me of the importance of pausing and trusting God to carry me through moments of overwhelm. I am thankful for the ability to recognize my feelings and to find calm through steady breaths. God, thank You for giving me the tools to navigate these thoughts and for the peace that comes from leaning on You.¹⁴²

Today was a rough day for me. I spent the majority of the day with an intense numbing sadness just washed over me and sitting in my chest. When I did the prayer and got to step three I reviewed my day and felt led in a direction to help me better understand where this feeling was coming from. It honestly helped the feeling lessen up a bit. It's still there, but it's not as heavy and I feel a lot better and like I can handle it because I was reminded that God is with me and I can tell him my problems.¹⁴³

There was one of [the Examen prayers] ... it really stuck with me... It made me kind of thinking it'd be better to pray about it than just kind of stick it down, and kind of just reflect on that whole situation.¹⁴⁴

My experience [with the Examen] is it really helped me like to get out of some dark times that I've been having due to, uh, with like things that have been happening in my personal life, just being able to get closer with God and closer to my spiritual, like, journey. Um, just opening up myself in a way that, uh, seeing that everything's gonna be all right because I have God with me, and he helped

¹⁴⁰ Journal Entry by C, January 3, 2025.

¹⁴¹ Journal Entry by C, January 6, 2025.

¹⁴² Journal Entry by C, January 16, 2025.

¹⁴³ D, January 7, 2025.

¹⁴⁴ E Interview.

me through these times and everything is getting better. And it helped me be that and God is still there.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ *H* Interview.

Appendix 22

Compounded Circumstances

“And growing up in a religious background that doesn’t always equal, um, acceptance and positivity. And so, during that time I hadn’t, I hadn’t lost my faith in God, but I had, like, lost my faith in religion and people. So, I would say during that time of my life, I, there wasn’t much spiritually going on. I, I learned to rely on myself a lot during that time... When we came back from Laura, everything was gone, and it was just, I went and lived with [a family member]. My [sibling] went and lived with [another family member], and so the whole family, we were all split up all over the place. And it was trying to, I had a hard time finding, like, people to, um, oh, what’s the word I’m looking for? Lean on.”¹⁴⁶

I felt a lot of religious trauma from the church..., and it’s only recently that I’m starting to feel comfortable with that again... It was really challenging, ... but we have gotten through it. My mom is very religious, so... I know that every day that was tough, she would, uh, sit down and we would light a candle and talk about it.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ A Interview.

¹⁴⁷ C Interview.

Appendix 23

Coping Strategies

Humor

Interviewer 2: Tell me what, what it was like to live through Hurricane Laura?

Participant *H*: Um, definitely wasn't pleasant. Uh, it...

Interviewer 2: (*chuckles*)¹⁴⁸

We were hit with first COVID and then all the hurricanes. That was not on the bucket list of things to experience!¹⁴⁹

Interviewer 1: What was it like to live through Hurricane Laura?

Participant *F*: Oh, oh man (*laughing*) ... when you asked that previous question, that's part of what I was thinking about.

Interviewer 1: Yep. You knew that was coming in! (*chuckles*)

Participant *F*: It was really crazy...¹⁵⁰

Participant *F*: It was a crazy time. Like I said, plus COVID was happening the same time. So, it...

Interviewer 1: I call it the "Pandem-icane Period."

Participant *F*: (*amused*) Oh, that's a good one. That's a good one.

Distraction/Avoidance

I can just kind of go safely to my room and kind of play on my phone a little bit and then go out there after I kinda have that little peaceful time."¹⁵¹

Sometimes I can get on my phone, do Door Dash, so like make a little money. Um, I have a computer. I can, you know, play video games by myself. I can lay in bed and watch YouTube or Netflix or whatever.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ *H* Interview.

¹⁴⁹ *C* Interview.

¹⁵⁰ *F* Interview.

¹⁵¹ *E* Interview.

¹⁵² *B* Interview.

I like to read, maybe to distract myself and then come back to it later.¹⁵³

We made fun out of it, you know. We would play games and stuff. We would, you know, board games, whatever, and still do stuff to at least like, lighten up, you know, what was going on.¹⁵⁴

[I] play with my brothers. They're not all that peaceful, but you know. Yeah. I have fun with them.¹⁵⁵

Constructive Coping and Possible Means of Grace

I pray every morning and every night. I also, I like meditating at the end of the day. I write down in my journal three things that went well, three things that didn't go well, and what I could do to improve those. By things not going well, I mean ways that I reacted that might've been poorly to certain things, and so how I, what I could do to change it. I also do yoga a lot. That, that helps meditate and ease me... After the hurricane happened, that's kind of when I picked reading back up as a hobby. And so that's something I do all the time now.¹⁵⁶

And just, I just really like alone time. That's like a, um, for me it's very important to have some every single day, if that makes sense... Whenever there's a, I guess, hard time, I've, I've learned to cope with it a lot healthier or a lot more healthier. Um, but I, I think it just all revolves around back to alone time. I really like to, like, if something were to happen, I would like to just think about it rationally. 'Cause kind of the first think I do is blow it outta proportion and really, I don't know, um, kind of freak out. But I, I like to have some time to calm down. Um, you know, sometimes I like to talk about, you know, whatever happened to kind of bring me down or, you know, think about it by myself. But I don't think there's really anything specific that I'll do. Um, mainly because like, if I try to do something to distract myself, whatever is bothering me is [still] gonna be on the forefront of my mind. So, I usually like to just tackle it, whether that's, you know, listen out rational points or talking with somebody about it, um and rationalizing instead of freaking out and blowing it out of proportion.¹⁵⁷

I meditate now that I have the time to do that. Um, with this [Examen project] I have been praying and reflecting on my relationship with God, which is not something I have done in, a good bit... Being close to the people I love through

¹⁵³ Interview with *D*, March 31, 2025.

¹⁵⁴ *F* Interview.

¹⁵⁵ *G* Interview.

¹⁵⁶ *A* Interview.

¹⁵⁷ *B* Interview.

technology has helped a lot. And also... being close to my [mom] and exchanging that experience with her and all of our thoughts about it has, has been really helpful. 'Cause it was not easy. Um, but we have gotten through it. My mom is very religious, so... I know that every day that was tough, she would, uh, sit down and we would light a candle and talk about it.¹⁵⁸

I'll talk to my mom quite often to like, help work through like emotions and stuff. Um, I, like, do meditation or I pray a lot of that kind of stuff. If I am by myself or I don't feel comfortable talking to like my mom or my best friend about it, I'll do that... I do think I look to prayer and like just focusing on that a lot more than I did in the past.¹⁵⁹

[I] spend time with [my family] and [they] kind of just help me... I guess not only just praying about it... I kind of try to subside that anger for a little bit and kind of in a way think logically about it... to make sure I'm not overreacting or underreacting.... We did go to church a lot. Um, and then COVID hit, so that kind of physically stopped us there, but we still did virtual.¹⁶⁰

Anytime I'm either making music or playing, playing my [instrument] or even playing piano, whatever each, anything like that, um, nothing. Yeah, it's nothing. Any type of like, uh, stress or whatever, like outside stress just goes away when I'm doing that. I just feel like just centering and that peace when I do those things... I have a very supportive family. We all support each other in what we do. Um, whether it's moments of, you know, doubt or anything like that... I had been going to that church for two years... And so, I started to get, you know, involved more spiritually. And it really helped me, you know, face that challenge as well, you know? And plus, my grandma is also a very spiritual person, so um, we used to do Bible study growing up... One of my friends, uh, she invited me to a Bible study, I think two Wednesdays ago. And so, I went over there.

I like to draw a lot. I bake a lot... I really just, uh, read and talked to my mom a lot... Praying. Uh. Reading the Bible. And just looking forward to stuff because I have dreams and aspirations, I'd like to get to... I've always grown up in the church, so there's never a time where I wasn't like, uh, involved with God. So, we would always, we pray a lot all the time.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ C Interview.

¹⁵⁹ D Interview.

¹⁶⁰ E Interview.

¹⁶¹ G Interview.

During the storm, uh, we were at my grandma's house, and we all said like a family prayer which was nice.¹⁶²

¹⁶² *H* Interview.

Appendix 24

Sources of Courage

Leaning on the courage of others

My mother is the strongest person that I've ever met, and so I've always looked to her and to be even half the person that she is... I want to be as much as like my mom as I can.¹⁶³

I guess you could say, like, other people... My mom, my sister, my nana, girlfriend, stuff like that, kind of will push me to keep going from day to day, um, and trying to, I guess, stay strong.¹⁶⁴

God blessed me with headstrong women in my life who push me to be the best version of myself.¹⁶⁵

My mom... always prays for me, and she's always watching over me... That always made me feel, um, like I could do anything. Because she would always say, if, um, God is with you, no one is against you. You know, those types of things. And she, she would always motivate me that that would be really my one source of courage.¹⁶⁶

My mom really is like a big, like, I go to her for everything.¹⁶⁷

Just my family in general. 'Cause they help encourage me all the time. They are always there for me... My parents were spiritual and faithful, but also my grandma. She, I guess you can say she was more... even more spiritual. I guess as faithful as you, I guess, you can say. Where she always did her best to encourage us [to] include faith into a lot of our daily activities. My grandma would always pray for us. Not only would she tell us she would pray for us, but we can also see she would, uh, pray for us and encourage us.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ A Interview.

¹⁶⁴ B Interview.

¹⁶⁵ Journal Entry by C, December 28, 2024.

¹⁶⁶ C Interview.

¹⁶⁷ D Interview.

¹⁶⁸ E Interview.

I have a really positive family as well, so like, I have a very supportive family... Especially like my mom. Just seeing how hard she works to achieve things and seeing her long-term goals. And seeing how even in tough times, you know and it was very hard seeing her have her down moments, but she still persevered through that whole thing.¹⁶⁹

Courage within

I would say to my sources of courage would be... Basic answer is really my family and, um, also my [significant other]. Um, they gimme courage to go on, you know, whatever lies ahead. I know that I just need to fight that fight to be able to see them one more day, to be able to know that if I'm fighting this fight, it's for them, it's not for me. It's so that they can see me in the best way that I'm, I can be... 'Cause if they're happy, I'm happy.¹⁷⁰

When my [grandparent] passed away a few years ago, it seemed like there was a piece of a puzzle missing from my whole family... To me it seemed lonely, like there wasn't anyone to talk to or feel whole. But when I had my [child] it felt like he brought everyone that missing piece back to the family. [My child] has given me more confidence [in] myself than I had before... I thank God every day for this blessing He has given me and pray I can do better for [my child] the next day.¹⁷¹

Since I was young, I've, I've seen just such hard determination to, to do things, to achieve things from [many family members] ... If you're scared to do something, it'll never happen at all if you're scared, you know what I'm saying? The fear is like, you gotta go through fear, get through fear to achieve, you know, success, achieve what you want to do. So, um, the courage, I just, I just know that I just have to believe in myself and really just make it happen, you know? And have that motivation to get things done and face spear head on, you know?¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ *F* Interview.

¹⁷⁰ *H* Interview.

¹⁷¹ Journal Entry by *E*, January 10, 2025.

¹⁷² *F* Interview.

Appendix 25

Making Sense of Struggle

Making Sense of Struggle

by number of incidences in each participants' collected data (journals and interviews)

					increase
					decrease
Participant	dismissing the experience	a spiritual test	seeking redemption	remaining/abiding through struggle	Exit Survey Score
A	0	0	1	2	4
B	0	0	1	0	-2
C	0	0	1	3	19
D	0	0	1	0	4
E	0	1	1	0	-3
F	1	1	1	1	5
H	0	1	0	1	n/a
Totals	1	3	6	7	none

Appendix 26

Struggle as a Test

I had to try my best to keep a positive attitude and positive mindset for different things. Anytime there is like a stressful situation going on or anything like that, you know, I usually just, I know that it is something that is able to be overcome.¹⁷³

Anytime there is, like, a stressful situation going on or anything like that ... I know that it is something that is able to be overcome. You just gotta be motivated to overcome that... You gotta go through fear, get through fear to achieve, you know.¹⁷⁴

I believe that God is giving strong battles to people that he knows can deal with it and is taking those battles from people that he knows can't deal with it... That's what I believe. And that kind of helps me think, "Oh! God knows I am a strong warrior, so he gives me this battle, so I can do it."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ *E* Interview.

¹⁷⁴ *F* Interview.

¹⁷⁵ *H* Interview.

Appendix 27 Belief/Hope that Struggle is Redeemable

I just have to have faith that, uh, when I get through this, there's gonna be something to look forward to and something better on the other side.¹⁷⁶

I pray for renewed strength and a hopeful heart. I know God will lift this heaviness and work even in the unexpected.¹⁷⁷

I know even the hard times aren't for nothing. And after we, I mean after we die, there is something. It's not just nothing. The world's not just evil and out to get me. There is, there's good in it.¹⁷⁸

Whatever struggle I'm going through is not gonna last forever, you know. You gotta just be able to overcome those challenges, you know, and just know that they're happening for a reason. And you can, you will end up overcoming that at some point.¹⁷⁹

Just knowing that there's always something better coming the next day.¹⁸⁰

We've kind of been going through a little bit of like a family tough time right now... I've been trying to stay positive and just like saying, like, 'It's gonna get better. It's gonna get better.' Um, and I've been praying about it, but it's like just kind of like that. Like just repeating, like, 'It's gonna work out. Things are gonna be ok.' That repeating.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ A Interview.

¹⁷⁷ C, January 6, 2025.

¹⁷⁸ B Interview.

¹⁷⁹ F Interview.

¹⁸⁰ E Interview.

¹⁸¹ D Interview.

Appendix 28 Remaining/Abiding through Struggle

It is gonna sound kind of wild, but like the thing that with the hurricane, like, it was really crazy. And just like huge was stressful at times and everything like that. But I will say, like (a) it made our family be closer 'cause we were, we couldn't go nowhere... and (b) like we had to evacuate. And so just helping each other... It was a terrible situation, you know, from like retrospect, but, like, it really kind of brought us closer.¹⁸²

I think in a time where it's very dark right now, we all have to, I think the whole purpose of Christianity and God is leaning on and loving one another, and that's something that the world isn't doing right now. And so, I think that it's something that drives me and something that keeps me going. 'Cause having those people that I can lean on and love and just being an open heart to everyone. And I think that's, that's what's most important about my spirituality, is just being there for others and having others be there for me, 'cause if we don't have each other, then we have no one.¹⁸³

Even in difficulty, God's presence is steadfast.¹⁸⁴

This Examen reminded me of the need to find rest in God and to hold on to hope, even when things feel heavy.¹⁸⁵

This Examen reminded me of the importance of pausing and trusting God to carry me through moments of overwhelm. I am thankful for the ability to recognize my feelings and to find calm through steady breaths. God, thank You for giving me the tools to navigate these thoughts and for the peace that comes from leaning on You.¹⁸⁶

I think what I like about Southwest Louisiana specifically is that the people, whenever there is disaster, we know how to come together and put all of our differences aside and just be there for each other.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² F Interview.

¹⁸³ A Interview.

¹⁸⁴ C, January 3, 2025.

¹⁸⁵ C, January 6, 2025.

¹⁸⁶ C, January 16, 2025.

¹⁸⁷ A Interview.

It was reassuring knowing even in time of disaster people will still come together.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ *H* Interview.

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