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**Mary Clark Moschella**

Calling and Compassion: Elements of Joy in Lived Practices  
of Care

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Mary Clark Moschella  
Roger J. Squire Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling  
Yale Divinity School  
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## Calling and Compassion: Elements of Joy in Lived Practices of Care

The field of pastoral theology and care has been conceptualized as a form of religious response to human suffering. It is said that our research begins “at the point where human suffering evokes or calls for a religious response and sometimes at the point where a religious response is given and/or experienced.”<sup>1</sup> In light of this widely shared understanding, it is not surprising that, with a few important exceptions,<sup>2</sup> joy is as under-studied in this field as it is in the other theological disciplines represented in this volume. Given the power and pull of experiences of suffering that call forth a religious response, ranging from grief and trauma to poverty and prejudice, it is not easy to assert that human experiences of joy merit the focus of this field of study. Joy seems to be a comparatively lightweight topic, unrelated to human suffering and the need for pastoral care. Yet, as I have found in my research, lived experiences of suffering and joy are not polar opposites, but often close companions. In this field that “pursue(s) a participatory, performative, and proactive kind of knowing that stays close to the ground, attends to human agony and ecstasy, and attempts to relieve suffering,”<sup>3</sup> we have attended more to agony than ecstasy. “Making room for joy” in our research, teaching, and lived practices of care is necessary in order to more fully and deeply understand human life, and the range and power of religious responses that contribute to human flourishing.<sup>4</sup>

In order to advance this claim, I will begin with an exploration of the meaning of joy, using experiential and pastoral theological frameworks. This will be followed by a brief synopsis of the recent history of the field of pastoral theology and care, and an explanation of how joy became to a large degree absent from the conversation. Then I will offer a brief overview of my current research and analysis of the workings of joy in the lives of religious leaders and other caregivers, and my efforts to identify in their stories the ideas, theologies, practices, and habits that support joy and human flourishing. Finally, I will reflect upon the story of one of these caregivers—the physician and human rights advocate, Paul Farmer—in some detail, focusing on references to vocation and

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<sup>1</sup> Bonnie Miller-McLemore, “The Subversive Practice of Christian Theology,” in *Christian Theology in Practice*, ed. Bonnie Miller-McLemore (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 143.

<sup>2</sup> These exceptions include: Peggy Way, *Created by God: Pastoral Care for All God's Creatures* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2005); and Angella Son, “Agents of Joy: A New Image of Pastoral Care” in *The Journal of Pastoral Theology* 18 (1) 2008: 61-85. Also see, Volney P. Gay, *Joy and the Objects of Psychoanalysis: Literature, Belief, and Neurosis*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology*, 138.

<sup>4</sup> This chapter draws on my current project, “Making Room for Joy,” the title of which comes from two sources: Peggy Way, *Created by God*, 136–137; and Bill Clarke, *Enough Room for Joy: The Early Days of Jean Vanier's L'Arche* (New York, NY: BlueBridge, 2007). I am indebted to the Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology Program for its support of this research. I also thank Carrie Doehring, Beverly Mitchell, and Douglas Clark for reading this chapter.

compassion in his story, and advancing the case that calling and compassion are two elements of joy-full work that helps to increase human flourishing.

### What Is Joy?

The noun, “joy” has been defined as “the emotion of great delight or happiness caused by something exceptionally good or satisfying; keen pleasure; elation.”<sup>5</sup> I think of joy as an embodied awareness of holy presence and extravagant love, an awareness that dawns upon us like grace. It carries a sense of the unexpected, of surprise. When C.S. Lewis wrote his of his childhood in his memoir, *Surprised By Joy*, he noted that joy involves both memory and longing. “All joy reminds. It is never a possession, always a desire for something longer ago or further away or still ‘about to be.’”<sup>6</sup> The experience of joy is something intensely felt, perceived as an ancient memory bubbling up from deep inside even while it also feels given, from some great beyond, an experience so unexpected and profound that one can only try to take it in. At the same time, joy leaves a lasting impression, one that comes to surface just as grief does, in the most ordinary of days. The experience of joy is not fleeting or shallow, but deep and striking. It is linked to some object of goodness or wonder.

### *Joy versus Happiness*

Any attempt to define joy inevitably brings up the idea of happiness and the question of how they differ or overlap. While some make vociferous distinctions between the two, I view joy and happiness as what William James might call “near relatives.” James suggested that we could learn a good deal about a phenomenon by comparing it to other phenomena that are similar.<sup>7</sup> Happiness is similar to joy, though happiness suggests something milder, such as a good mood, good fortune, or a happy turn of events. The root “hap,” related to “happenstance,” suggests good luck. As Darrin McMahon puts it, “. . . happiness has deep roots in the soil of chance.”<sup>8</sup> We are happy when things go our way, when we laugh and have fun, or when we have experience ourselves as fortunate.

In the U.S. we are familiar with the phrase, “the pursuit of happiness” from the Declaration of Independence. This idea has long been associated with the private pursuit of material goods, such as in “the American dream.” Today, the pursuit of happiness that is linked to prosperity can be seen in the near-explosion of popular literature known as “happiness studies,” and in the personal coaching for success industry that follows from it.<sup>9</sup> We can appreciate the goodness of human happiness, good mood, and even the pursuit of health, strength, and reasonable material wellbeing. Indeed, these experiences can give rise to a sense of gratitude, which sometimes leads to joy.

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<sup>5</sup> Dictionary.com. See <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/joy>.

<sup>6</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Surprised By Joy: The Shape of My Early Life*, (New York & London: Harcourt Brace, 1955), 74.

<sup>7</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (1902) Ed. Martin Marty, (Hammondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Darrin M. McMahon, *Happiness: A History*, (New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2006), 11.

<sup>9</sup> McMahon, 471–3.

However, joy and happiness are not one and the same. Joy indicates something deeper, more embodied, more acute—it is akin to aliveness, or animating force. According to C.S. Lewis, “it must have the stab, the pang, the inconsolable longing.”<sup>10</sup> Joy also signifies a broader and more transcendent sense of goodness, one that links not just to personal wellbeing, but also to the larger reality, and to a vision of broader human flourishing. Joy is both corporeal and corporate in this reading. It is linked to what we feel in our bodies and in our communities, our bodies of faith. Joy often arises out of deep interpersonal connections and the experiences of loving and being loved. It may also arise in communities of resistance to evil or injustice. It is something that is deeper for being shared. Joy has an expansive quality, a sense that there is enough, more than enough, goodness and love to go around.

### Joy in Caregiving

In my investigation of joy as it is experienced and expressed in life-giving ministries of care, I have arrived at a pastoral theological description, rather than a definition, of joy. This description is provisional and particular, with no claim to being comprehensive or universal. In the narratives I have studied, joy comes down to this: to being awake and deeply alive, aware of the love and goodness of God, and mindful of the wondrous gift of life. This is a holistic awareness, involving thoughts, emotions, breath, body, and community. In these stories, joy emanates from love of neighbor and a sense of calling to stand with “the least of these,” those who are socially, economically, or politically marginalized. This joy is not naïve, but seeing, and committed to caring.

Joy in pastoral ministries is magnified by the blessing of a sense of vocation that challenges one to step outside of one’s self into relationships of care and communion. Heidi Neumark uses the term “ecstasy” to describe her experience of ministry in the South Bronx. She writes:

*Ecstasy* comes from the Greek ‘*ek stasis*’ and implies moving out of stasis, out of a set position. Of course, the word is used for spiritual transport, but it strikes me that the church ought to see its daily role as following a path of ecstasy, leaving behind all that is stagnant and staid and stepping out into the unknown, allowing ourselves to be displaced as we enter into relationship with others in their space. Ecstasy, then, is not just interior communion with God but communion with our neighbor.<sup>11</sup>

It is the privilege of entering into deep communion with one’s neighbor that holds the potential for enlarged and ecstatic joy for those engaged in care giving ministries of diverse sorts.

### What Joy is Not

Along with this rather basic description of what joy is, I have also determined some things that joy is not. First, joy is not an escape from sorrow or a turning away from suffering. Ann Voscamp writes: “Joy and pain, they are but two arteries of the one heart

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<sup>10</sup> Lewis, 72.

<sup>11</sup> Heidi B. Neumark, *Breathing Space: A Spiritual Journey in the South Bronx* (Boston: Beacon, 2003), 31.

that pumps through all those that don't numb themselves to really living."<sup>12</sup> Joy involves being awake and not numb, attuned to life in the present moment, with all of its sweetness as well as its sorrows. As caregivers well know, it is often while in the midst of working through a great sorrow that a glimmer of something like joy breaks through. Oddly, joy allows one to experience deep sorrow with less fear, because the precious and precarious dimensions of life present themselves as intertwined.

For the Romantics, who celebrated depth of feeling, the link between pain and joy was explicit. Coleridge, in his poem, "Dejection: An Ode" wrote: "Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud."<sup>13</sup> The intertwining of these deep feelings is evident to many of us. We can cry tears of pain and tears of joy. The Romantics understood joy as "subjective, intimate, and personal," and yet, also as an experience of something larger, transcendent. Carlyle used the term "blessedness" to describe it.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, deep joy seems often tinged with spiritual force. It feels like the gift of God, in that it arrives on its own, connecting us to something larger than ourselves, something beyond us that we cannot quite fathom.

Second, joy is not a frill, an extra that we can do without. We do not live by bread alone.<sup>15</sup> Joy and some of its other "near relatives," such as wonder, beauty, and hope, can hold us and heal us when words and the usual distractions fail.<sup>16</sup> Whether encountered through nature, art, prayer, work, play, or human relationship, embodied experiences of joy in this sense of aliveness and awareness of the good are needed to feed and sustain us in sorrow, and to open in us pathways to the love of God and neighbor.

We also need joy in the sense of aliveness, awareness of both pleasure and pain in the body, for moral reasons, as Paula Cooley has pointed out.<sup>17</sup> The bodily awareness of pleasure and pain affects our capacity to empathize with other bodies in pain or in joy. We need this holistic aliveness in order to know right and wrong "in our bones," in order to be able to understand, know, and defend basic human dignity, and to promote human flourishing.

Finally, joy is not a distraction from broader social needs. Rather, as Jürgen Moltmann and numerous others have suggested, experiences of joy may help to fund

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<sup>12</sup> Ann Voscamp, *One Thousand Gifts: A Dare to Live Fully Right Where You Are* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010), 84.

<sup>13</sup> Coleridge, cited in McMahon, 285.

<sup>14</sup> Darrin McMahon, 290.

<sup>15</sup> Deuteronomy 8:3. Cited in a similar way in Troeger, *Wonder Reborn Creating Sermons on Hymns, Music, and Poetry*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 169.

<sup>16</sup> For example, Marcia Mount Shoop, reflecting on her tragic experience of rape, speaks of her experience of "God's lure toward greater Beauty and a life of zest." Marcia Mount Shoop, *Let the Bones Dance: Embodiment and the Body of Christ* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 30.

<sup>17</sup> Cooley writes, "Although it provides no single all-purpose solution, the body, in all its particularity and in its ambiguity as artifact in relation to sentience, serves nonetheless as one common condition shared by us all, a condition that relates us to all other sentience, a condition that further stands as an ethical criterion by which to assess the significance of our work, one from which we should not detour." Paula M. Cooley, *Religious Imagination and the Body: A Feminist Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 128.

movements of social resistance and liberation.<sup>18</sup> The human longing for joy, especially when shared and nurtured in community, tends to irrupt into artistic and creative resistance to that which holds people back and restricts them. Such artistic expressions themselves often spur human responses, delight, and determination to work for change.<sup>19</sup>

It is this deeper understanding of joy as aliveness and attentiveness to the goodness of God<sup>20</sup> that I consider necessary, not ancillary, to the fullness of life, and to the abundance and flourishing that God desires for all people as well as for all creation.

### Joy in Pastoral Theology and Care

In the academic field of pastoral theology and care, there is a decided need for joy. With the few important recent exceptions noted earlier,<sup>21</sup> it has been a neglected topic in our scholarship and teaching. Typically, in seminary or divinity school courses in pastoral theology, care, and counseling, students are taught very deliberately how to get a feel for what is bothering a person, how to see through surface matters to deeper issues and problems, how to stay with a person in sorrow and not try to fix it; how to explore theologies of suffering and accompany people on their journeys into questions of theodicy. Students are not usually taught how to sense a glimmer of gladness in someone's story or in some community's story, much less how to stay with it or help magnify an uplifting experience of God's grace.<sup>22</sup> The result of this is that we often train pastoral practitioners to become focused on crises, such as illness, trauma, loss and grief, psychiatric illness, interpersonal violence, and disaster relief, to the degree that pastors become almost pain specialists.

While these various sorts of crises and need are all real conditions that rightly require pastoral care energies and skills, these conditions do not comprise the whole of human life. Nor does the duty to empathize with pain fulfill the whole range of pastoral care obligations in the cure of souls tradition.<sup>23</sup> Caregivers who look to be "carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders" may in fact be at least mildly depressed themselves, whether from second-hand stress or habits of neglecting their own wellbeing, their own souls. Thus they are unaccustomed, untrained, and perhaps unable to care helpfully for people who are longing for the fullness of healing, hope, joy, strength, or

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<sup>18</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology and Joy* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1973), 26–28; Paula M. Cooley, *Willing the Good: Jesus, Dissent, and Desire* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 8; Barbara A. Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices in the Black Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004). See especially Holmes' reflections on the role of improvisational jazz in African American resistance movements, pp. 174–177.

<sup>19</sup> Mary Field Belenky, Lynn A. Bond, and Jacqueline S. Weinstock, *A Tradition that Has No Name: Nurturing the Development of People, Families, and Communities* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> Way, "The Goodness of God," 138–152.

<sup>21</sup> See note 2.

<sup>22</sup> An exception to this can be found in the work of pastoral theologians who make use of narrative therapy and its strategies. See Christie Cozad Neuger, "Narrative Therapy," in *The Concise Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Ed. Glenn H. Asquith Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2010), 17–22.

<sup>23</sup> William A. Clebsch and Charles R. Jaekle, Eds., *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1994).

wellbeing. These experiences need nurturing and care as well, so that persons and communities can flourish and practice the love of God and neighbor with vitality and zest.

An example of the way in which experiences of joy are under-acknowledged in pastoral ministry can be found in the pastoral prayers that are part of United Church of Christ worship services, where there is commonly a time set aside for congregants to offer their “celebrations and concerns.” In many of these churches, worshippers are good at sharing their concerns, often describing their medical problems in almost gory detail, sharing their vulnerability, and receiving the sympathy, care, condolences, and prayers of the congregation. By contrast, when it comes to naming their blessings or joys, worshippers are much more reserved. Perhaps it is because people do not wish to gloat, brag, or inspire envy. Yet when joys or celebrations are routinely abbreviated or even omitted, Paul’s injunction to the Romans to “Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep,” (Romans 12:15) goes only half-heeded.

For the congregation, this is a two-fold loss. First, there is the loss of the experience of enjoyment or pleasure that can come from sharing good news, both for the one who is speaking, and for the faith community that is hearing it. The congregation misses out on a chance to truly celebrate and rejoice in the blessings that are named. This momentary joy in another’s blessings could potentially be a source of solace or perspective for a person who, though struggling, might benefit from the experience of vicarious delight in another’s wellbeing. But when the expression of blessings and thanksgiving (*eucharisteo*) is held back, the community loses out on the opportunity to marvel, wonder, rejoice, and honor the Giver of all gifts. Though hymns of joy may be sung, there is no connection made linking the joy of the liturgy and music to the realities of people’s lives.<sup>24</sup>

The second loss involved in this practice of avoiding mention of celebrations or blessings, is the loss of important chances for theological reflection. If we were accustomed to going more fully into joy, really taking it apart and savoring every aspect of it, this might lead us to ask theological questions, questions such as, “Why me? Why have I been so blessed?” “Why have I been given this talent or this love or this bounty?” These questions might lead to discerning more deeply the meaning and purpose of our lives, and ways in which we might use our gifts, interests, and callings to further human flourishing. Just as pastoral counseling offers persons the opportunity to plumb the depths of their sorrows, it ought to be offering persons the opportunity to explore the heights and breadth of their experiences of grace, strength, goodness, beauty, and joy.

Experiences of joy, when explored more fully, offer avenues for a deeper understanding of God’s goodness and love. When we are attentive and aware of God’s presence in us and all creation, when we feel the joy of this first hand, we are freed from the paralysis of fear or despair, if only temporarily. We can experience what Carrie

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<sup>24</sup> On the need to link pastoral care and Christian worship, see Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001).

Doehring calls the “ordinary goodness of life.”<sup>25</sup> Moments like this, when they accumulate over time, strengthen and steady us, and teach us what is good, help us know what wellbeing looks and feels like. Such experiences free us to do our best creative work, and thereby enlarge the possibilities for proactive ministries that contribute to human flourishing. “Perhaps there is a reason you have been so richly blessed with such great intellect,” one might say, for example, in a pastoral conversation. “Is there a use to which you can put your gift, that it might grow and expand?” It takes time to discern what might emerge, to find out where deep joy might lead. But in a world that sorely needs the strengths and gifts of every person, pastoral practitioners ought not to neglect the links between experiences of joy, expressions of gratitude to God, and the wellbeing of the faith community. To put it another way, joy is not a scarce resource to be hoarded or hidden, kept like a light under a bushel. Joy is rather more like the loaves and the fishes; when offered up and shared, it tends to multiply.

The paucity of attention paid to joy in this field is related to the ways in which pastoral care has been conceptualized in the last century. In part due to Anton Boisen and the Clinical Pastoral Education movement begun in 1925, pastors and chaplains in US seminaries have been taught to realize that healing and faith can emerge “out of the depths” of sorrow and psychiatric illness, as they did for Boisen.<sup>26</sup> While this insight is critical, it does not address the possibility that spiritual wisdom and strength might also grow out of experiences of wellbeing, beauty, wonder, or creative endeavors.<sup>27</sup> Though Abraham Maslow’s humanistic psychology pointed in this direction, as did Howard Clinebell’s concept of “growth therapy,”<sup>28</sup> the pastoral care movement of the mid-twentieth century more broadly adopted psychodynamic models that were based on the study of pathology. Freud focused on curing neuroses, and the religion and health movement promised that ministers could do the same.<sup>29</sup> Freud famously told one patient that: “Much will be gained if we succeed in transforming your hysterical misery into common unhappiness.”<sup>30</sup> Perhaps there is small wonder that joy has not been a central theme in pastoral theology and care.

If the goal of the field of pastoral counseling shrunk, in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, to individual psychotherapy to cure neuroses, this was soon challenged by the influence of various liberation theology movements that drove the development of broader theories of

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<sup>25</sup> Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 140-142.

<sup>26</sup> Anton Boisen, *Out of the Depths: An Autobiographical Study of Mental Disorder and Religious Experience*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: Harper, 1960). Also see Glenn H. Asquith, ed. *Vision from a Little Known Country: A Boisen Reader* (Journal of Pastoral Care Publications, 1992).

<sup>27</sup> Paul Tillich, who was another important figure in the religion and health movement and the so-called “New York Group,” did address the importance of creativity. See Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1952), 48. Allan Hugh Cole, Jr. interprets: “To be spiritually active, or spiritually alive, one needs to create.” Allan Hugh Cole, Jr. *Be Not Anxious: Pastoral Care of Disquieted Souls* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), 85.

<sup>28</sup> Abraham Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1994); and Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., *Contemporary Growth Therapies* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983).

<sup>29</sup> Brooks Holifield, *A History of Pastoral Care in America* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983); and Allison Stokes, *Ministry After Freud*, (New York: Pilgrim, 1985).

<sup>30</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Studies in Hysteria*, translated and edited by James Strachey.

pastoral theology and ministry.<sup>31</sup> Due to this influence, the field has shifted to a more communal, contextual paradigm.<sup>32</sup> While Anton Boisen had coined the term, “the living human document,” to signify the need for a pastor to study the actual person for whom one is caring, in 1996 Bonnie Miller-McLemore proposed the phrase, “the living human web,” to indicate the complex, interrelated social systems that pastoral theology and care must now address.<sup>33</sup> Family systems as well as “psychosocial systems” theories became central to our concern.<sup>34</sup> As various forms of social marginalization and injustice are becoming better understood, the challenges posed for students of pastoral care multiply, and the list of needed capacities for sensitive care continues to grow.<sup>35</sup> This more complex, contextual approach has greatly expanded and enriched pastoral theological models and repertoires of care.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, joy is still mostly missing in our ever-expanding course syllabi. It may be that instructors assume that human experiences of joy do not require any time, attention, or special skill to interpret or support.

This message inadvertently gets conveyed in various forms of training in ministerial formation. Students are told to know themselves, to know their own issues, so that they do not haplessly project these issues onto care-seekers. Usually this means: “Know your wounds, your sore spots, your unprocessed losses.” This is important. Those who offer care-giving ministry must tend to their own losses, needs, and wounds, lest they avoid listening to other people’s pain or impose their neediness upon those for whom they attempt to care. John Savage notes that “. . . you can enter the pain of another only at the level that you can enter your own.”<sup>37</sup> I contend that the same principle also applies to experiences of embodied wonder, healing, hope, and joy. One can empathically imagine the deep joy of another only to the degree to which one can access the grace and love of God in one’s own experience. We need to make room for joy in the formation of pastoral caregivers and clergy, as well as in pastoral research exploring joy and human flourishing at personal, social, and political levels.

## The Study of Caregivers’ Narratives

In my current research, I have taken a somewhat circuitous route to identifying pastoral theological themes and practices that create space for joy in caregivers’ lives and

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<sup>31</sup> Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, “The Living Human Web: Pastoral Theology at the Turn of the Century,” in Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner, Ed., *Through the Eyes of Women*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 15.

<sup>32</sup> Nancy Ramsay, *Pastoral Care and Counseling: Redefining the Paradigms* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Miller-McLemore, “The Living Human Web.”

<sup>34</sup> For a historical explanation of these expanding and evolving models, see Donald Capps, *Giving Counsel: A Minister's Guidebook*, (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001). Also see Larry Kent Graham, *Care of Persons, Care of Worlds: A Psychosystems Approach* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992) and Valery M. DeMarinis, *Critical Caring: A Feminist Model for Pastoral Psychology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

<sup>35</sup> A good example of this expansion can be found in Sheryl Kujawa-Hollbrook and Karen Montagno’s edited volume, *Injustice and the Care of Souls*, which catalogs various forms of social injustice and offers guidance for sensitive pastoral care in numerous diverse religious, cultural, geographic, and social contexts. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook and Karen B. Montagno (eds.) *Injustice and the Care of Souls*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Charles J. Scalise, *Bridging the Gap* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003).

<sup>37</sup> John Savage, *Listening and Caring Skills in Ministry: A Guide for Groups and Leaders* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 96.

ministries. I started by studying several first person narrative accounts of religious leaders and caregivers, narratives that I read as joyful in the sense of deep aliveness or attentiveness. This was an attempt to “catch” joy in action, or more precisely, in the authors’ reflections upon lived ministries in a variety of contexts. The authors do not all address the theme of joy per se, but their writings reveal the awareness of joy or ecstasy in that sense of “stepping out” toward the wellbeing and flourishing of the people they serve.<sup>38</sup> These accounts also describe life-giving or fruitful ministries, and here I am relying on Henri Nouwen’s distinction between fruitfulness and success.<sup>39</sup> Fruitfulness implies growth and flourishing, which cannot always be measured in quantitative terms.<sup>40</sup>

Though it was not intentional, I find that I have been drawn mostly to stories of life-giving and joyful ministries in contexts marked by poverty, struggle, and/or marginalization of some kind. This selection process developed in this way because of my interest in experiences of joy that occur “in the midst of chaos,”<sup>41</sup> in the midst of lived ministry, and not off in a retreat house or in a particularly privileged or protected setting. I also looked for accounts that in some way exemplify the meaning of pastoral care as “communicating the gospel to persons at the point of their need,”<sup>42</sup> as the pastoral theologian Carroll Wise once defined it. It is not an easy joy that I have been after, but a deep joy that knows sorrow and yet leans toward the light.

These accounts include: Heidi Neumark’s *Breathing Space*,<sup>43</sup> the story of her ministry for twenty years in the South Bronx; Gregory Boyle’s *Tattoos on the Heart*,<sup>44</sup> his reflection on ministry with gang members and their families in East Los Angeles, where he founded “Homeboy Industries,” an organization which has in the last thirty

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<sup>38</sup> Even in making this decision to study accounts of caregiving ministries that are fruitful and joyful, I am intentionally diverging from the more standard problem-centered approach. This choice of focus is in some ways analogous to positive psychology’s intentional effort to study wellbeing rather than pathology. Duane Bidwell and Donald Batisky have begun to work along similar lines in their study of hope in children with end-stage renal disease, where they attend to “the hope-generating experiences and practices” of the children in their study and draw from these, implications for revising pastoral praxis. See Duane R. Bidwell, “Eschatology and Childhood Hope: Reflections from Work in Progress” in *The Journal of Pastoral Theology* 20: 2 (2010): 109–127; and Duane R. Bidwell and Donald L. Batisky, “Abundance in Finitude: An Exploratory Study of Children’s Accounts of Hope in Chronic Illness” in *The Journal of Pastoral Theology* 19:1 (2009): 38–59.

<sup>39</sup> Nouwen wrote, “A successful person has the energy to create something, to keep control over its development, and to make it available in large quantities. Success brings many rewards and often fame. Fruits, however, come from weakness and vulnerability. And fruits are unique. A child is the fruit conceived in vulnerability, community is the fruit born through shared brokenness, and intimacy is the fruit that grows through touching one another’s wounds.” *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> I also decided to exclude narratives related to the “prosperity gospel.” For example, see Marla Frederick “Rags to Riches: Religion, Media, and the Performance of Wealth in a Neoliberal Age” in *Ethnographies of Neoliberalism*, ed. Carol Greenhouse (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

<sup>41</sup> Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *In the Midst of Chaos: Caring for Children as Spiritual Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> Carroll Wise, *The Meaning of Pastoral Care* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), cited in Emma J. Justes, *Hearing Beyond the Words: How to Become a Listening Pastor* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 8.

<sup>43</sup> Heidi Neumark, *Breathing Space: A Spiritual Journey in the South Bronx* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Free Press, 2010).

years provided jobs for over 40,000 ex-gang members; Henri's Nouwen's book *Adam*,<sup>45</sup> a reflection on his work in the L'Arche community in Toronto, along with current studies and reflections on the L'Arche communities around the world, and their sustained caregiving ministries to and with persons with severe dis/abilities; Desmond Tutu, in particular, his narrative co-authored with his daughter, Mpho Tutu, *Made for Goodness*,<sup>46</sup> a story of memories and reflections upon the struggle against apartheid; and finally, (expanding the definition of caregiving ministries), Paul Farmer, one of the founders of Partners in Health, reflections in his own writings as well as his comments cited in *Mountains Beyond Mountains*,<sup>47</sup> a close study of Farmer's early work in medical ethnography and care in Haiti. I have tried to interrogate these narratives in order to identify in them some of the key themes, theological ideas, and practices that create space for joy in these caregivers' experiences and in their various ministries of care.

The main themes and practices that I have found in these accounts include: a sense of calling or vocation, along with a conviction that one is fulfilling the vocation; a practice of presence, attentiveness to moments, people, and the good; a capacity for feeling gratitude and wonder; a habit of collaboration with and connection to colleagues and communities of care; the practice of compassion; habits of theological reflection and self-awareness; and, finally, a tendency to notice and perceive beauty, strength, and/or goodness, in God, in human beings, or in creation. Not all of these themes, capacities, and practices were evident in all of the accounts. But a good number were discernible in each.

I will now turn to the story of Paul Farmer, highlighting two of these themes: the first, a sense of calling; and the second, a practice of compassion. These are two of the elements in his story that seem to help him gain access to a deep sense of hope, even in circumstances that are often daunting and sometimes painfully discouraging. Farmer's commitment to the good, and the joy that it gives him, help to motivate and propel forward his important work that directly supports human flourishing through his calling to a medical mission serving the poorest of the poor.

### Paul Farmer's Story

In *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, journalist Tracy Kidder describes the early work of Paul Farmer, a physician who began conducting medical ethnography in Haiti in 1983 in order to understand better how to offer effective care to people living in Mirebalais, Haiti, and the surrounding arid mountains. Farmer eventually became a medical professor as well as one of the founding directors of *Partners in Health*, a highly effective international organization devoted to treating HIV-AIDS, eradicating drug-resistant tuberculosis, as well as treating other diseases and lifting the standard of living among the world's poorest populations. Partners in Health works to provide basic medical care and alleviate poverty in Haiti, Lesotho, Malawi, Rwanda, Mexico, Peru,

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<sup>45</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Adam: God's Beloved* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997).

<sup>46</sup> Desmond Tutu and Mpho A. Tutu, and Douglas Carlton Abrams, *Made for Goodness: And Why This Makes All the Difference* (New York: HarperOne, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> Tracy Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains* (New York, NY: Random House, 2004).

Russia, Kazakhstan, and in the US as well.<sup>48</sup> This work takes place in prisons, in rural villages, and in urban centers.

According to Kidder's account, Farmer was brought up in a large, quirky, Catholic family that lived alternately in a bus, a boat, and a trailer park. His father was a force of nature, demanding that the children work hard to support his many projects, by cleaning the bilge of their home, for example. A bright child, Paul threw himself into schoolwork and extra-curricular activities. He was not particularly interested in religion.

It was as a college student at Duke in 1980, when Archbishop Oscar Romero was killed, that Farmer first read liberation theology. And it was through his acquaintance with some of the nuns working in migrant labor camps in North Carolina, not far from Duke, with Friends of the United Farmworkers, that Farmer first met Haitian immigrants working on tobacco farms. He was shocked by the conditions in which the Haitian laborers were living, and he began to think of them as the poorest of the poor, or in his words "the shafted of the shafted."<sup>49</sup> He began to study medical anthropology, and was particularly influenced by the theories of Rudolf Virchow, who Farmer understood to have had a comprehensive vision that linked "pathology, social medicine, politics, and anthropology."<sup>50</sup> Farmer then spent part of a year in Paris, where took one of the last courses offered by Claude Levi-Strauss, while working as an au pair and becoming fluent in French.

Before he began his studies at Harvard Medical School, Farmer won a scholarship that enabled him to travel to Haiti for the first time. He began conducting medical ethnography in Mirebalais in 1983. His interviewing took him to the surrounding mountain communities, where he got to know many of the people. In one of these communities, Cange, he noted that the roofs of huts were made of banana-bark thatch, and patched with rags, because the people could not afford tin. The poverty and sickness that Farmer witnessed here were both extreme and, he noted, community-wide.<sup>51</sup> Moved by the faith of the people in Cange, Farmer was drawn back toward Catholicism and specifically, liberation theology. The peasants seemed to have their own version of it. "Everybody else hates us," they'd tell him, "but God loves the poor more. And our cause is just."<sup>52</sup>

As he was formulating a vision for his life's work, Farmer took for his motto, one theological idea: "O for the P," as he calls it, shorthand for God's preferential option for the poor. He also learned a Haitian proverb, "Bondye konn bay, men li pas konn separe," which translates as "God gives but doesn't share." Farmer interprets this to mean, "God gives humans everything we need to flourish, but he's not the one who is supposed to divvy up the loot. That charge was laid upon us."<sup>53</sup> In a very pragmatic way, Farmer has

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<sup>48</sup> For more details, see the Partners in Health website, [www.pih.org](http://www.pih.org)

<sup>49</sup> Kidder, 63.

<sup>50</sup> Kidder, 61.

<sup>51</sup> Kidder, 77.

<sup>52</sup> Kidder, 78.

<sup>53</sup> Kidder, 79.

devoted himself to re-divvying up the loot of health care, on a worldwide scale. Over the last thirty years, his work with Partners in Health has directly refuted the once prevailing medical wisdom that it simply was not practical or possible, “viable” or “sustainable” to treat certain infectious diseases, such as HIV-AIDS, in poor countries.<sup>54</sup>

In 2013, Farmer’s work is still guided by his conviction of a preferential option for the poor. He now considers health care a human right, and has written extensively in this topic.<sup>55</sup> The goal that he and Partners in Health now embrace is a bold one: “global health equity.”<sup>56</sup> Farmer is not a lone heroic figure, but one who works together with a committed and growing group of associates and supporters with diverse talents, resources, and gifts.<sup>57</sup> Yet Farmer’s particular love of medicine, his zeal for treating the patient who is in front of him, and his drive to find the best possible treatments and most intelligent systems of delivery for the poorest of the poor, captured my attention.

What, you might ask, has joy got to do with it? Farmer does not present himself as a happy-go-lucky type, but his writings and comments express the vibrant and deeply alive quality of joy. What gives him joy? Is it the hope that the goal of global health equity will soon be realized? Is his joy in the successes that Partners in Health has had, such as in treating large numbers of people with HIV-AIDS in Africa, or in the recent construction of a gleaming new teaching hospital in Mirebalais? Is it in treating that one patient before him? Or in teaching the many medical students who come to learn from him? Or does it come from rising to the intellectual challenge of seeing the connections between poverty, disease, resources, and needs, and mobilizing people to meet them?

In Farmer’s writings, it becomes clear that the joy of this work does not come from naïveté about the magnitude of the problems besetting the goal of global health equity, or any sense that there is currently enough political will to achieve this goal. Farmer is well aware of the stark conditions on the ground, and he is clearly saddened, particularly by what he calls “stupid deaths,” premature deaths that could be prevented with appropriate medical care and resources. Farmer does celebrate even the small improvements and accomplishments, though he is also aware of failures, continuing needs, and is driven to evaluate and improve the healthcare systems that PIH designs. Farmer seems to be able to allow the pressing needs of people to spur him on, rather than drag him down into pessimism or despair. For example, in offering a New Year’s message in January of 2012, he spoke of gratitude and determination, and of the need to share his uplift with others even if it might be only, “to give myself hope and to spur all of us to launch, continue, or finish some ambitious and urgently needed projects.” He calls hope the “secret sauce.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Haun Saussy, “Introduction: The Right to Claim Rights,” in Paul Farmer, *Partner to the Poor: A Paul Farmer Reader*, Haun Saussy, Ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2010), 5-11.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, “Rethinking Health and Human Rights: Time for a Paradigm Shift,” in Farmer, 2010, 435–470.

<sup>56</sup> Paul Farmer, “Two Years After the Quake,” Partners in Health Website, 01/17/12, p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> The most well known of the co-founders of Partners in Health is Jim Yong Kim, current president of the World Bank.

<sup>58</sup> Farmer, “Two Years After the Quake,” 2012, p.1.

Farmer's hope goes further, though, in that he approaches the work with a focus on resources, insistently challenging the notion of scarcity, in spite of all that he has seen. He asserts that efforts to treat one disease are inevitably linked to efforts to treat other diseases, provide jobs, and alleviate poverty. He sees interrelationships between all of these and claims that resources directed toward one project will not take away resources from another, but help lift these interrelated projects.

Farmer writes, "None of our ambitious programs should be curbed by the pernicious notion of goodness as a limited commodity. We need to expand the notion of good and the notion of excellence and the idea that one flagship project might raise the aspirations of all of our efforts."<sup>59</sup> He expands upon this notion of meliorism with a citation from one of William James's talks to teachers. James said:

Spinoza long ago wrote in his *Ethics* that anything that a man can avoid under the notion that it is bad he may also avoid under the notion that something else is good. He who acts habitually *sub specie mali*, under the negative notion, the notion of the bad, was called a slave by Spinoza. To him who acts habitually under the notion of the good he gives the name of freeman. See to it now, I beg you, that you make freemen of your pupils by habituating them to act, whenever possible, under the notion of the good.<sup>60</sup>

I think that the joy in Paul Farmer's story is related to this, that he works under a notion of the good, a vision of the good that he can imagine. He does not believe that good is scarce. Though the good—in terms of resources, medical technology, training, teaching, and direct service—is not yet fully harnessed for human flourishing, Farmer believes that it can be and directs his life energy toward that goal. Farmer is tuned in to the possibilities for the good in the demanding and sometimes overwhelmingly sad work in which he and his numerous partners around the world are engaged. What are the ideas, habits, and practices that contribute to Farmer's joy and commitment to the good? Two themes that stand out in my reading are: a sense of vocation and a practice of compassion.

### Vocation

In my study of caregivers whose stories express or evoke deep joy, a strong sense of vocation is one of the consistent themes. This is not surprising in that many of the other individuals whose stories I studied, were or are ordained Christian clergy men or women. However, what stands out in their stories is not just a sense of calling to the ministry, but a conviction that they are precisely where they belong, doing the exact work to which they are called. In these writings, there is a sense of freedom and delight in the conviction that one is called to a particular people or place, and that one is answering that

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 10, citing William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 113.

call, fulfilling his or her purpose. The delight seems to come, for these individuals, not from pride in great accomplishments, but from the actual engagement in the work, involving the exercise of talents and the freedom to “step out” from stasis into understanding the worlds of others, particularly others who live on the social, economic, or political margins of life.

### *Psychological Analyses*

What is vocation? Psychologically, it has been analyzed from at least two different points of view. Positive psychologists, who are attempting to study human wellbeing, often revert to theological language when they describe what it is like for people to be engaged in fulfilling work. For example, they point out that when people find a way to engage in work that requires their strongest skills, abilities, talents, and virtues, the work starts to feel more like a calling than a job. Positive psychologists assert that all people have a set of talents and personal strengths dubbed their “signature skills.”<sup>61</sup> These skills are said to provide “intrinsic motivation.”<sup>62</sup> This is a kind of delight that comes from exercising these skills or talents for their own sake. In trying to imagine examples of this, we might think of artists or musicians first. Annie Dillard describes a joyful painter who began painting because he liked the smell of paint.<sup>63</sup> There are many other activities (and related materials) in which diverse individuals find particular pleasure. I think for example of the man who was head of the moving van crew that packed and moved my family’s belongings to Connecticut two years ago. I watched him pack the china with amazement. He was caught up in a rhythm of folding each plate into a thick packet of newsprint, then securely tucking it into a padded spot in the box. “I love it,” he told me, smiling, not missing a beat.

The sense of deep delight or “flow”<sup>64</sup> that can come when one is absorbed in work one loves and at which one is good, is enhanced, it is claimed, when the person performing the work is convinced that he or she is contributing to some larger cause or purpose. So, a parent might take joy in working hard if he or she is convinced that it will help give a child a better life; or, one might get great joy out of building houses for Habitat for Humanity, (especially if one knows how). When these two things combine, that is, one is using his or her strongest skills, talents, or virtues, and one is convinced that he or she is contributing to a larger good, the work starts to feel expansive and richly rewarding. That sense of fulfilling one’s precise calling, especially when it is linked to a sense that one is increasing the greater good, is what brings about a deeper sense of purpose that we might call joy.

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<sup>61</sup> Alan Carr, *Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Human Strengths*, Second Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 70-78.

<sup>62</sup> Carr, 125.

<sup>63</sup> Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1989), 70.

<sup>64</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008).

This analysis from positive psychology raises several questions for pastoral theologians, some of which I have entertained elsewhere.<sup>65</sup> The most obvious, perhaps, is whether it matters that one's work is actually contributing to a larger good, or only that one thinks this is the case. We could imagine, for example, people experiencing a sense of joy and purpose in working with others in a political campaign, on either side of an issue. We cannot conclude that such experiences always lead to the increase of human flourishing.

Authors in another branch of psychology, the psychology of religion, take a different tack in studying joy. Classifying joy as an emotion, they suggest that joy, wonder, and interest are linked. They find that when people experience one of these three emotions, the other two shortly follow. Further, it is claimed that, joy, wonder, and interest help mobilize the capacity for compassion and empathy. As Robert Fuller notes, "Wonder redraws our world of concern, establishing true mutuality with a wider sphere of life."<sup>66</sup> Another way of putting this is to say that wonder, joy, and interest help us focus on larger questions, and therefore can keep us engaged in caring for wider spheres of life. Fuller points to an example of this is in the life of John Muir, whose sense of wonder, awe, and joy in the beauty of nature not only fed his own spiritual longings throughout his life, but also inspired his key role in the establishment of the national parks system in this country. Rachel Carson is noted as another figure whose strong sense of wonder led to her important and influential writing, which laid the groundwork for the environmental movement.<sup>67</sup> In the lives of these two individuals, a strong sense of wonder, interest, and joy significantly motivated their estimable contributions, not just to human flourishing, but also to the flourishing of the earth.

The insights from these two branches of psychological study shed light on the role of both calling and compassion in caregivers' stories. Though Paul Farmer is neither theologian nor religious leader, his personal writings and reflections suggest that he has found his calling in medicine, specifically in treating poor patients and in insisting that they be treated with dignity and respect. He has been using his considerable intelligence and skill to write articles and books documenting treatment strategies, evaluating their effectiveness, and creating a feedback loop between service, research, and teaching, which he compares to "praxis."<sup>68</sup> When thinking about his story in light of the strengths' research, we might start to suspect that Farmer's intellectual strengths, together with his professional training and his clinical skills, would almost require him to take on such prodigious and varied work in order for him to feel fully alive and enthusiastically engaged. Further, his genuine curiosity and interest in medicine and the complexity of global health care help keep him engaged in thinking about the larger and more complicated questions related to "divvying up the loot" and finding ways to deliver needed services. In his story, we find evidence of strong moral convictions and

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<sup>65</sup> Mary Clark Moschella, "Positive Psychology as a Resource for Pastoral Theology and Care: A Preliminary Assessment," in *The Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 21(1) 2011, 1-17.

<sup>66</sup> Robert C. Fuller, *Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press), 95; also see, Herbert Andersen, "Witnessing Wonder," in Herbert Anderson and Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Faith's Wisdom for Daily Living*, (Augsburg-Fortress, 2008).

<sup>67</sup> Fuller, *Wonder*, on Muir, 42-53; on Carson, 101-109.

<sup>68</sup> Paul Farmer, *Partner to the Poor*, 565.

vocational clarity, not in the sense of a religious vocation, but in the sense of a well-fitting match between his skills, interests, and convictions, and the work in which he is engaged. Further, we can see how this combination of theological values and professional strengths help him to live into his “vision for his life’s work” with zeal and commitment to a greater good.

## Compassion

Now, let’s return to the second feature of his story noted earlier—the capacity for and the practice of compassion. Here Robert Fuller’s finding (that being engaged in something that holds one’s interest leads naturally to a capacity for greater compassion and empathy) is germane. Certainly this point is salient for pastoral theology and care, in that it suggests a natural association between joy and a genuine feeling of care or compassion.

Compassion is another key theme in Farmer’s story, as is illustrated in an incident that Tracy Kidder and others describe. In 2000, a Boston physician and Partners in Health volunteer named Serena Koenig was working in Haiti, treating a boy named John who was found to have a rare form of nasopharyngeal cancer. It was a treatable condition, but it could not be successfully treated in the hospital in Haiti, so Koenig persuaded her colleagues at Massachusetts General Hospital to provide free care for the boy. However, by the time Koenig went back to Haiti to transport the boy, John was too ill to travel on a commercial flight. Koenig decided, with Farmer’s approval, to airlift John out on a Medivac flight. John was brought to Massachusetts General, where it was determined that the cancer had spread to the bone, that he was in extreme pain, and that there was now no chance for his cure. Instead, John was given palliative care, and his mother was flown in to be with him until he died.

When Farmer was later asked why Partners in Health went to such great lengths to save this one child, spending close to \$20,000 on the airlift alone, he answered, “Because his mother brought him to us, and that’s where he was, in our clinic.”<sup>69</sup> The wisdom of this move could certainly be challenged from the point of view of those doing cost-benefit analysis, (especially since the patient died, though the progress of his illness could not have been determined with the technology available in Haiti at the time). Yet this story illustrates the way in which compassion is integral the philosophy of Partners in Health physicians. Theirs is an approach that says that the person in front of you is no less important than any other person. If it is possible to treat that person in front of you, then that is what you do. “If it were me in this situation, what would I want done?” is a question often cited.<sup>70</sup> This kind of compassion might also be interpreted as loving one’s neighbor as one’s self.

Paul Farmer is well aware that he cannot treat every patient, but he is determined to give his full attention to those he does treat, and to stay rooted in the experience of human care and compassion. “That’s when I feel most alive,” he told Kidder, “when I’m

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<sup>69</sup> Kidder, 287.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

helping people.”<sup>71</sup> Farmer’s vocational clarity and his practice of compassionate medicine contribute to his own joy, his sense of deep aliveness, as well as the joy and wellbeing of the many patients and communities that Partners in Health serves.

### Theological Reflection

Gregory Boyle, another caregiver in my study, writes, “Compassion is always, at its most authentic, about a shift from the cramped world of self-preoccupation into a more expansive place of fellowship, of true kinship.”<sup>72</sup> The practice of compassion opens us out to the spacious joy of recognizing our connection to each other, realizing that we are not alone or limited to our own resources. It is this expansive place of fellowship, made known in community, which can help motivate and sustain commitments to human flourishing.<sup>73</sup>

Compassion and calling are seeds of joy that are fed and watered by the abundant love and goodness of God. They are not merely psychological dynamics, but also spiritual experiences, through which the divine goodness, presence, and love are made known. It is no surprise, then, that Farmer’s story, like the others I was drawn to for their depth of joy, is a story of love for the poor, a story of kinship with those whom the world considers the least and the lost. It is in response to the gospel proclamation of good news to the poor that Farmer and others find the freedom to live “under the notion of the good,” the abundant goodness of God. And it is in responding with compassion to those who are marginalized that many find the joy of true kinship, mutual interest and connection, the wonder of human love.

Farmer’s is also a story of love for life, a story “filled with livingness.”<sup>74</sup> The story reveals not only Farmer’s sense of calling, his gifts, and talents, but also his wholehearted and creative engagement of these gifts. In responding to his calling Farmer discovers, not scarcity, but abundance, abundance that only needs to be re-divvied, so that humanity can flourish. Moltmann reminds us that God’s abundance is revealed in the imagination and courage to see the world, not just as it is—full of injustice—but as it could be, transformed.<sup>75</sup> God’s gift of joy, experienced as deep awareness and aliveness, as well as calling and compassion, illumines and creates pathways towards human flourishing.

Many years ago, the Presbyterian pastor and author, Fredrick Buechner, noted that, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s

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<sup>71</sup> Kidder, 295.

<sup>72</sup> Boyle, 77.

<sup>73</sup> For a study of commitment to the common good, see Laurent A. Parks Dolaz, Cheryl H. Keen, James P. Keen, and Sharon Daloz Parks, *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* (Boston: Beacon, 1996).

<sup>74</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, Trans. Margaret Kohl, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 57.

<sup>75</sup> Moltmann writes, “In hope we link far-off goals with goals within reach. What is last of all gives meaning to the next-to-last. So in the imagination of hope there is always a superabundance of what is hoped for.” *Ethics of Hope*, 3. While hope and joy are distinct gifts, they are not unrelated.

deep hunger meet.”<sup>76</sup> This is a definition of calling still worth communicating to students who come to divinity school with a vague sense of calling and a deep desire to help change the world. Their dreams of making a difference are not too big, for we live in a world that needs our aliveness and compassionate attention, on personal, communal, and global levels.<sup>77</sup> We need to nurture students as they try to discern their own joyful and life-giving vocations, so that they themselves can blossom and flourish, even as they use their gifts to meet the world’s deep needs.

God’s gift of joy, whether in caregiving ministries or in other realms of faithful living, is not a superfluous or trivial matter. Joy is not an extra thing to add on to a ministry or a life, like icing on a cake. Joy may seem unrelated to the seriousness of real work for human flourishing, but it is not. Rather, the absence of joy is a sign of diminished or constricted life, as Volney Gay has noted.<sup>78</sup> Joy is a critical component of attentive and engaged human living. Joy enlivens and sustains us, and flows through our commitments to life-giving work and vocations. And it opens up pathways toward compassion and connection, otherwise known as the love of God and neighbor. Joy is right at the heart of what it means to be fully alive, and right at the tender heart of God.

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<sup>76</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 95.

<sup>77</sup> Sharon Dolaz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Emerging Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith*, Revised 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011).

<sup>78</sup> Gay; see especially, chapter 1, “Neurotic Suffering as the Absence of Joy,” 19-54.