

ABSTRACT

My eight years of ministry among the dying and bereaved in two settings rife with sorrow and suffering—The Grady Hospice Program at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia and The Hospice at Mission Hill, an acute inpatient hospice in Boston, Massachusetts for persons dying of AIDS—left me with an indelible awareness of and curiosity about the ironic joy and creative energy for justice-making that emanated from these communities. This dissertation is an attempt to further substantiate, better understand, and test the validity of my awareness and the legitimacy of my curiosity.

After developing the dissertation topic around my awareness, curiosity and passion, I arranged interviews with people and communities who seemed to exude the joy and energy I had experienced at Grady and Mission Hill. I interviewed people engaged in ministries and not-for-profit agencies in various cities in the United States: Boston, Massachusetts; Columbia, South Carolina; Lewiston, Maine; Portland, Maine; San Francisco, California; and Washington, D.C. I interviewed the survivors of abuse and genocide.

In Part One, I explore the theological grounding, the psychological traits, and the spirited courageousness of the fragile, which empowers them to make a way through the impermeable and emerge radiant. The investigation leads to the construction of a pastoral psychology of lament that is less a way of caring for the sorrowful and suffering and more a manner of being in relation in and for a broken world. In Part Two, I detail the design of lamentational relation and formulate a nascent lamentational ecclesiology as that which may contribute to the renewal of the presently sluggish spirit of mainline religion in America.