

Spiritual Care through the Prisms of Mental Illness and Process Theology

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A relational model of spiritual care, developed from clinical experience with homeless, mentally ill patients, is presented, focusing on the way of companionship and the practices of hospitality, a side by side stance, pastoral listening and accompaniment. Four basic spiritual care tasks are explored: discerning the spiritual at work in the midst of illness; building explanatory frameworks which integrate faith and science; identifying religious resources supportive of healing and addressing issues of meaning, purpose and vocation. Operational definitions of spirit, faith, soul and religion are offered which invite patients to share their beliefs, provide a framework for dialogue with and in a multi-disciplinary care team, and encourage a holistic understanding of treatment and well being. Individual case studies and a description of Plymouth House, a healing partnership between a public mental health program and a local faith community, illustrate the use and scope of the model. The relational model of spiritual care is located, finally, in the perspective and principles of process theology, a theoretical approach which illuminates both the singularity at the heart of spiritual experience and the repeatable, researchable patterns which are at the core of science and medicine.