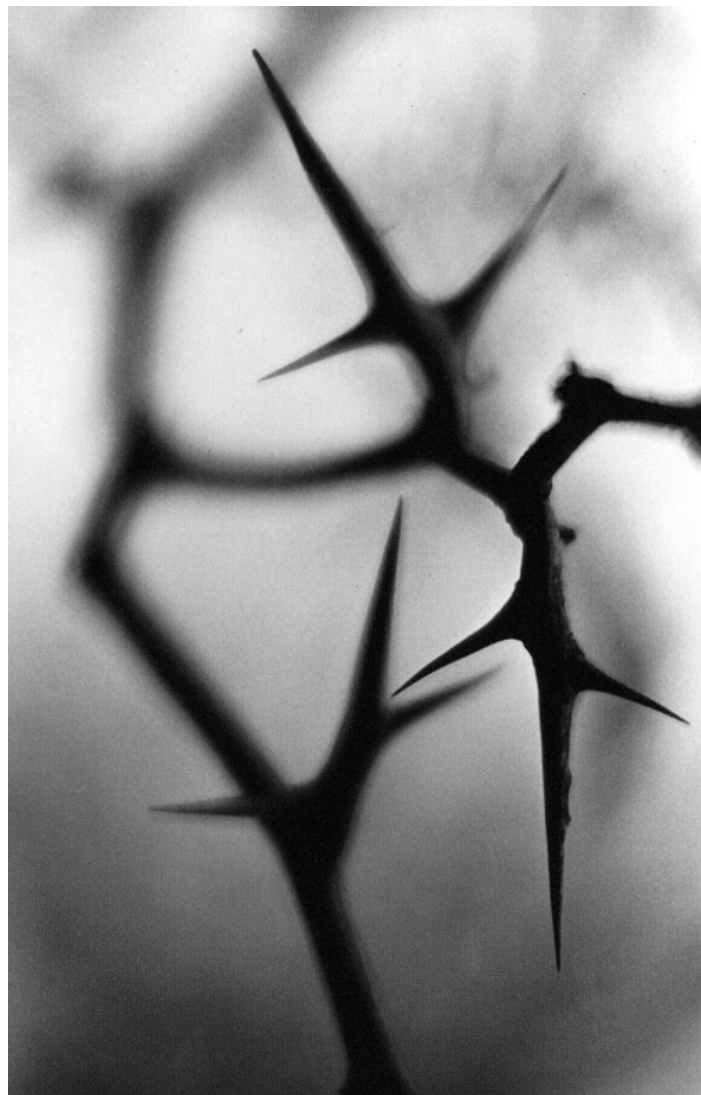


Pathways: theological focus

Strength in suffering encounter



Central understanding

- suffering is part of life's journey but God does not leave us to bear this alone; God gives us the strength we need through God's presence and the gift of others

Key question

- where do we find strength and support in times of suffering?

Biblical narrative

- the story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50)

Theological perspective

- theology of the cross
- sin and evil
- discipleship

Response

- to issues specific to the encounter

Facilitator theological notes

Focus questions

- Why do we suffer?
- Where is God in suffering?
- How can we provide support for those who are suffering?
- Where can we find strength in times of weakness?

A real life scenario

Scenario 1

The senior staff were suddenly called to the office of the principal just before the bell went for the beginning of the school day. They could see immediately from the face of the principal that something was very wrong. 'I have just received terrible news', he said. 'Mrs Pearce and her daughter were on their way to school and were both critically injured when their car was hit by a truck which went through a red light just near the school. Both are being taken to hospital but the situation looks very bad. Some other parents saw the accident and a number of other students already know about the accident. The news will go through the school like wildfire, especially because Mrs Pearce is so well known in the school for her work in the tuck shop and Kate is such a popular girl. This is really going to distress the whole school community, and we can expect all kinds of reactions from staff and students. I just can't understand why this has happened to two such beautiful people. We have to work out how we are going to tell the students.' The receptionist knocked on the door. 'Some of the parents are saying that they have heard that Mrs Pearce has died on the way to hospital and that Kate is in a coma. But we haven't heard anything from the hospital or the Pearce family. There is a whole group of parents waiting in the car park for any news.'

Scenario 2

Lee had just come back to school again after two weeks of leave to travel interstate to attend her mother's funeral. Lee's mother had died from a very aggressive cancer which had been detected only a few months earlier. She had been a very active and apparently healthy woman in her early 50s and the whole situation had been very distressing for Lee and her father. Lee's father had reacted very angrily to the news of the cancer and even more so when some well meaning friends had tried to help the situation by saying that 'this must be God's will' and 'you will see later the good which will come from it.' Lee's father recognised that Lee expressed her faith much more openly than he did and so began to say things to her like 'Where is your God in all of this? He can't be much of a God to let this happen!'

Michelle was waiting for Lee to arrive. She just wanted to hug her and say how sorry she was. Michelle had been through a similar experience some years earlier and she knew that often people simply didn't know how to react in this sort of situation. They tended to avoid her because they didn't know what to say. Everything which they wanted to say seemed so inadequate and pointless.

Scenario 3

Craig was fairly new to the Lutheran school. He had formed a good friendship with Jade and they frequently used to eat lunch together. Craig had become a Christian only a few years earlier and it had led him to apply to teach in a Christian school because he thought he would feel more at home in that environment. However, he was now becoming a little disillusioned.

Facilitator theological notes

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Craig felt that he was not seeing Christianity being expressed in the school as he had expected. He confided to Jade that he wasn't hearing the sort of Christianity he had heard from the TV evangelists who had influenced him to become a Christian. 'We don't seem to hear much in this school about how God blesses us because we are Christians. Shouldn't we be telling the students that being a true Christian means that they will be successful and that God will bless them with everything which they need? I thought we would see much clearer evidence of people living a victorious Christian life. Perhaps they just don't have enough faith! If they did we would surely see much more evidence of it.'

Scenario 4

Andrea was surprised that Liz was not there on Monday morning when she got into the staffroom. They usually tried to catch up for a few minutes before school started. She wondered if Liz had caught the flu. When Liz was not there on Tuesday morning, Andrea asked the Deputy if he knew whether Liz was unwell. He said that she had requested some days of sick leave and that she and her two boys had gone to stay with her parents. Andrea tried to phone Liz during the recess break but her mobile was not on. Andrea was concerned, but she didn't have phone numbers for Liz's parents. On Wednesday morning the Deputy called Andrea and the other teachers who worked closely with Liz into his office. He said that Liz had asked him to let them know that there was a major problem with her marriage. At this stage there was no more information but she would not be coming back until the following week. Liz asked for them to pray for her and her two boys, but not to try to contact her.

On Friday afternoon the deputy called Andrea and the other teachers into his office again. Liz had informed the Deputy that on the previous Friday when she and the boys got home from school, they realised that things were missing from the house. Liz's husband Tony had taken his clothes and other personal things from the house. There was a note on the table to say that he would not be coming back. He had been having a relationship with another woman for more than a year and he realised that he had never really loved Liz but had now found real love. He would not be coming back and wanted a divorce. Liz had not suspected any of this and her world had shattered completely.

Scenario 5

Jo had noticed that Hannah had been going through a difficult time with some of the students in her class. It was clear that Hannah was really struggling with her teaching. She had taken a number of sick days and seemed more and more depressed. This was so different from the positive and vibrant person Hannah had been earlier in the year. Jo asked Hannah to go for coffee with her after school. Hannah seemed reluctant at first but then agreed. However, it didn't take long for Hannah to open up on her problem. Hannah had always wanted to be a teacher. She felt this really was her vocation. She had been enthusiastic and keen during her first years of teaching, but something now seemed to have gone wrong. 'I think I'll have to give up on my teaching', she confided to Jo. 'I can't believe what has happened. Everything seems so futile and worthless. I just don't seem to be able to teach any more and I am feeling so negative about the students. I always thought God wanted me to be a teacher! I have composed my letter of resignation in my head a number of times. I think I'll go home tonight and write it. I just don't think I'm meant to be a teacher.'

Facilitator theological notes

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A biblical insight

Preamble

Where is God when things fall apart? When disaster hits us, has God abandoned us? Where can we find strength in suffering or in our experiences of weakness?

These are questions which have perplexed human beings from the beginning of time – or in biblical terms, since the sin of Adam and Eve. In philosophical debate, they have led to the 'theodicy' question: 'How can evil exist if God is truly good and completely powerful?' This then leads on to such questions as: 'What sort of a God would let innocent children suffer?' or 'Why would God permit this young mother to die from cancer and leave her three young children without a mother?'

There are numerous sections of the Bible which give some insights into these questions. One of these is the story of Joseph.

Narrative: The story of Joseph [Genesis 37-50]

The story of Joseph is told in great detail as the conclusion to the book of Genesis. While it contains many themes and theological reflections, it gives important insights into the way God works with his people through times of success and blessing but also through times of disaster and suffering. Only this theme will be considered here.

We meet Joseph at the beginning of the story [Genesis 37] as the favoured son of his father Jacob. Jacob made no secret of his love for Joseph and demonstrated this very clearly in the special long coat with sleeves which he made for him. The jealousy and hatred of Joseph's brothers was intensified through the dreams which Joseph had and which, according to Joseph, clearly indicated that he would one day rule over them all, including his father and mother.

The brothers became so furious and jealous that they plotted to get rid of their hated brother. The plan to kill him changed into the opportunity to sell him into slavery in Egypt and to deceive their father that he had been killed by wild animals. Joseph's situation had suddenly changed dramatically from being the favourite son to being a slave in a foreign country where the God of Israel was not even known. Things had certainly fallen apart for Joseph. Evil had triumphed.

However, the story reminds us that in his humiliation, 'the Lord was still with him' [Genesis 39:2,3]. Joseph rose to importance in his master's household and Potiphar made him overseer of his whole property. But evil was again to intervene, this time through the attempted seduction by Potiphar's wife. Joseph was again plunged into a degrading situation as a prisoner in Egypt. However, God continued to be with him in these changing situations [Genesis 39: 21,23].

Although the interpreting of the dreams of the Pharaoh's chief butler and baker presented a possibility for Joseph to be freed from prison, he again experienced rejection [Genesis 40]. He was forgotten by the butler and had to remain in prison for a further two years. The dreams of the Pharaoh [Genesis 41] provided an opportunity for Joseph to be released. However, he claimed no special gifts of interpretation for himself but pointed to God as the one who could reveal the future [Genesis 41:16].

Facilitator theological notes

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Finally after 13 years of anguish, suffering and rejection, Joseph became the second most powerful man in Egypt. However, as Joseph was later to reveal to his brothers, all of this had happened for God's purposes.

[Chapters 42 – 49 develop other themes as the story turns to the journey of Joseph's brothers to Egypt and finally the resettlement of Jacob and his whole family in Egypt where they could be kept alive through the years of famine. However, whether it was recognised or not, the hand of God was behind all that happened.]

After the death and burial of their father Jacob, Joseph's brothers were afraid that Joseph would now take revenge on them for what they had done to him. However, this is where we come to the climax of the whole story of Joseph. In response to his brothers' fears, Joseph declared his recognition of the way in which God had used evil for his own good purposes. 'Don't be afraid; I can't put myself in the place of God. You plotted evil against me, but God turned it into good, in order to preserve the lives of many people who are alive today because of what happened' [Genesis 50:19]. Joseph recognised that despite all he had suffered, God had been working out God's plans. This did not make sense to Joseph at the time, but it was now something which he could accept and to some extent understand. Joseph could therefore forgive his brothers since God had used their evil plotting for God's good purposes.

The story of Joseph gives some clues as to how God can work through the evil and suffering which we experience in life. It also give us an important glimpse forward to the plans God had to deal with evil and suffering through the evil which Jesus suffered at the hands of human beings, but through which God worked for his saving purposes.

Facilitator theological notes

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Aspects of theology of the cross

Introduction

As indicated in the preamble to the biblical narrative above, the problem of evil has perplexed human beings throughout history. Various answers have been attempted from suggesting that there are two gods, one evil and one good, to arguing that evil is simply an illusion ['Christian Science'] or that we can control it through processes such as meditation, or that there is no good and loving god at all.

However, the Bible is clear that evil exists but that God is in control [cf Isaiah 45:7]. The devil is not all powerful as is clearly shown, for example, in the story of Job and in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness [Matthew 4:1-11]. When the disciples questioned Jesus about the man born blind [John 9:1-3] to try to determine whose sin had caused the blindness, Jesus' response does not correlate with the Jewish thinking of the time that suffering was somehow directly connected to a particular instance of sin. Jesus' response, 'He was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him' indicates a God-given purpose for his suffering.

The origin of evil

The early chapters of Genesis provide some insight into the impact of evil in creation. However, no explanation is given for the origin of evil. Satan is able to use the snake, one of God's good creatures, to tempt Adam and Eve to disobey God. As a result the vertical relationship between humans and God is ruptured and the horizontal relationships between our fellow human beings, within ourselves, and between us and the earth and the whole of creation are destroyed. Evil forces can be seen at work in the world, but Jesus also teaches us that evil comes from within, from the heart [Matthew 15:10-20]. The story of Adam and Eve is the story of each one of us because we all by nature ['the old Adam/Eve'] want to put ourselves in the place of God.

The impact of sin

The impact of sin in the Garden of Eden was immediate. For the first time, Adam and Eve were afraid of God and ashamed of their nakedness. Human beings were now mortal [Genesis 3:19]. They would now have to work and sweat and suffer as they cared for the earth which was now cursed with thorns and thistles rather than blessed [Genesis 3:17-18]. The human race would now continue through the pain of childbirth [Genesis 3:16].

The book of Genesis then records the way sin multiplies. The first murder happens. Humanity becomes so evil that God destroys all but the family of Noah in the great flood. However, behind all this are already glimpses of how God was working in grace and mercy to provide a means of restoring the relationship between himself and his creation. The promised saviour will come.

The response of God to suffering

Where is God in all this suffering? God is with people in their suffering. He suffers with them. He also hears the suffering of creation and suffers with it [Romans 8:22-23]. While the Bible does not give us all of the answers we would like to have about sin and evil in the world, the Bible has as its central message that God not only suffers *with* his creation but *for* his creation. This is the emphasis of 'theology of the cross'.

Facilitator theological notes

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Theology of the cross

'Theology of the cross' is theology of revelation, revealed through faith by the Holy Spirit. It is a distinctive way of understanding theology which recognises that true theology can only be known through God's revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. And this is seen most clearly in the death of Christ on the cross. Theology of the cross puts the cross of Christ at the centre of our theology as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 2:2.

The challenge of theology of the cross is that it seems to work in contradictions or paradox. It speaks about seeing God where he is hidden: God revealing himself by concealing himself: God being hidden under the opposite of what is expected. This is why Paul speaks of the cross of Christ as a 'stumbling block' [literally 'a scandal'] or as 'foolishness' [1 Corinthians 1:5 – 2:16]. Human beings tend rather to look for God in signs of God's majesty and power and glory. Following this 'theology of glory' they look for examples of 'victorious faith', and powerful signs of God's blessing in their life, often associated with material success and prosperity. Lack of these signs is seen as lack of faith with the encouragement to pray harder and believe more without recognising that all of this is the gift of the Holy Spirit. 'Theology of glory' finds it difficult to cope with suffering and weakness and tends to blame it on the suffering individual.

Seeing with the eyes of faith

Only with the eyes of faith given by the Holy Spirit is it possible to begin to see God 'hidden under the opposite'. God shows himself and his love for us most clearly in his humanity. He was not born in a palace, but in a stable; he walked the earth as a humble teacher with no place he called his home; he associated with those who were outcasts in his society. Rather than the political Messiah the Jews expected, he came 'not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' [Matthew 20:28]. While his disciples disputed about who was the greatest and most important [Mark 9:33-37], Jesus washed their feet [John 13:1-20].

However, the clearest revelation of the true heart of God is on the cross. In spite of the appearance of defeat, the cross is rather the place of victory. Where God seems most vulnerable, where God the creator of life dies, there God's power is shown most fully. Jesus' cry on the cross 'It is finished!' [John 19:30] is the cry of one who has conquered sin and death and Satan. He has completed what he came to do. And all this was confirmed when God raised Jesus from the dead. This paradox of the cross that defeat is victory is shown clearly in the 'Christ hymn' which St Paul records in his letter to the Philippians [2:6-11].

The victory over sin and evil

Through his death and resurrection Jesus Christ has won the victory over sin and evil. However, as long as this world remains, the influence of sin and evil remains until the end of the present creation and the advent of the new creation. Then all things will be new [Revelation 21:1-4]. In the meantime, we see this victory only by faith given to us by the Holy Spirit.

Power in weakness

Theology of the cross takes seriously the impact of sin and evil in the world. However it also proclaims the victory which Christ has won and in which we share by grace through the forgiveness won for us on the cross. By faith in the work of Christ on the cross we can know this victory even though we may find it difficult at times to see it clearly in situations in our daily life.

Facilitator theological notes

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This was also the experience of St Paul who experienced great hardships and suffering and asked God to relieve him of a particular 'thorn in the flesh'. However, God's response was to point him to God's power which 'is made perfect in weakness' because suffering can also have positive results [2 Corinthians 12:7-10].

In our suffering, in our weakness God is with us. We are not alone. Christ continues to suffer in the pain of people and of the creation itself. The following hymn by Brian Wren expresses this very powerfully [Lutheran Hymnal and Supplement 761]:

Christ is alive! Let Christian sing,
His cross stands empty to the sky,
Let streets and homes with praises ring,
His love in death shall never die.

Christ is alive! No longer bound
to distant years in Palestine,
he comes to claim the here and now
and conquer every place and time.

Not throned above, remotely high,
untouched, unmoved by human pains,
but daily, in the midst of life,
our Saviour with the Father reigns.

In every insult, rift and war,
where colour, scorn, or wealth divide,
he suffers still, yet loves the more,
and lives, though ever crucified.

Christ is alive! His spirit burns
through this and every future age,
till all creation lives and learns
his joy, his justice, love and praise.

Taking up the cross

Just as Jesus Christ came not to be served, but to serve [Matthew 20:28], theology of the cross calls the followers of Jesus to a discipleship of service. Christians are called to identify with Christ in serving others as they 'take up their cross' to follow Jesus [Matthew 16:24].

Taking up the cross and following Jesus is not something which Christians have to seek out for themselves. It is part of their vocation as a Christian. As Christians, we will take up our cross in the various areas of responsibility in which we find ourselves in our homes, our schools and other places of work, in society and in the organisation of the church. It is in these situations that the Christian is called to share in the suffering which Christ continues to bear wherever there is suffering. This is where we face the challenges of living a life of love and service to others – even with those who may be antagonistic to us. This may also be the arena in which we face suffering because of our faith in Jesus Christ as Jesus predicted would happen for his followers, especially where the message of the gospel is in conflict with popular culture or other aspects of society [Matthew 5:10-12; 10:16-23].

Facilitator theological notes

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Theology of the cross means that the disciples of Christ recognise the face of Christ in those who are suffering [Matthew 25:40]. They identify with the suffering Christ in the world and participate in the struggle against evil and sin in whatever form that may reveal itself in people and within society.

Responding to issues relating to theology of the cross and suffering

1. Responses to adversity and suffering

Because sin has come into the world, we can anticipate that the effects of sin will be apparent in the lives of all people, also Christians, and be evident in times of adversity and suffering. While we cannot answer the question of evil and suffering, there are insights in the Bible which can help us in such times of adversity and suffering. However, pastoral care needs to be taken in using these insights in particular situations so that we do not appear to be giving simplistic comfort or be seeming to minimise or trivialise the reality of human suffering and end up with religious 'answers' which are premature and shallow. We also need to guard against creating confusion or a sense of guilt in a person who cannot share in the particular biblical insights.

2. Insights into suffering which may be helpful in particular situations

- God may *permit* evil but he is not the *cause* of evil. God opposes evil. However, as we saw in the story of Joseph, God can and does use evil to serve his own good purposes. This is difficult to see when we are in a situation of suffering or adversity. It is therefore not helpful to suggest to someone who is suffering that 'God is doing this for your good'! However, it is sometimes possible for people to recognise some positive outcomes some time after the crisis has passed. An extreme example of this is the response of Job, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord' [Job 1:21].
- The Bible gives frequent examples of people who in their suffering cry out bitterly to God and complain vigorously against God. In fact the book of Psalms gives us a large number of so-called 'complaint psalms' where the individual is protesting bitterly to God [eg Psalm 22; 43; 44; 74; 102]. These complaints are not only protests against God and what is happening, but also contain an expression of faith in God, despite the circumstances, and the recognition that God is a source of help and comfort. The book of Job in its entirety deals with this situation and the whole theodicy question.
- God does not use suffering as a form of punishment. People in the situation of grief or adversity can sometimes feel that God is angry with them or punishing them for some particular sin or problem. This was a common attitude in biblical times but as mentioned above, when Jesus' disciples asked who had sinned in relation to the man born blind, Jesus clearly indicated that this was not the reason for his blindness, but so that God's glory could be shown in him [John 9:1-3]. [Note, however, that some suffering may be a result of some self-inflicted behaviour such as alcoholism or drug addiction.]
- While God does not use suffering to punish, he can use it to shape and discipline our Christian life [Hebrews 12:5-11]. Suffering can also help to develop Christian character [Romans 5:3-4] and to grow in hope and the certainty of faith [1 Peter 1:6-8]. However, this does not mean that Christians should seek out suffering, or employ self-inflicted suffering as a way to attempt to gain some spiritual merit or enlightenment. We are saved by the innocent suffering of Jesus Christ, not by our own suffering.

Facilitator theological notes

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- Suffering may also be a situation in which an individual realises their mortality and need for God. In a situation of suffering a person may be more open to the work of the Holy Spirit than in times of success and prosperity. The willingness of people to turn to prayer in times of tragedy, illness and distress may be the opportunity for the Holy Spirit to create faith in an individual or strengthen growing or uncertain faith [John 11:4].
- Christians may also be called on to suffer as they share in the suffering of others. Paul reminds us that we are called to 'carry each others burdens' [Galatians 6:2]. In doing this we join Jesus as he too suffers with those who are suffering. Responding in a supportive role to someone who is suffering allows us to show love and care in a particular way for that person.
- Within the Lutheran school community there may also be situations where students and/or staff suffer because of their Christian faith. Anecdotal evidence from students suggests that this may be more common than might be expected. The words of Peter to Christians suffering persecution may be helpful here. He comforts and encourages those suffering for their faith by suggesting that suffering can both help to strengthen faith and also be a witness through which others may be brought to faith by the work of the Holy Spirit [1 Peter 3:14-17; 4:12-16].
- In dealing with the problem of suffering, St Paul warns against the dangers of sin and evil which can threaten the lives of Christians and through inappropriate behaviour lead them into situations of trouble and distress which may threaten to overwhelm them. In this situation, Paul says to the Christians in Corinth, 'If you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it' [1 Corinthians 10:12-13]. In the middle of suffering, this promise of God may be all that we have on to which to cling. God is with us in the situation.

3. **Carrying our cross in our vocation**

While suffering can be dramatic and severe, carrying our cross in vocation can also be seen in the failures, frustrations, and conflicts which we may experience frequently in our vocation. We may even begin to wonder if our opportunities for service are futile or worthless. This can apply in schools whether in the vocation of staff or of student. Through these experiences God helps us as Christians to recognise our natural sinful human responses and to allow the Holy Spirit to work the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

Because God is at work through us in our vocation, this can also be the place where the devil tries to undermine what God is wishing to achieve. We can be led to see our vocation as an opportunity for developing our own success, pride and achievement rather than the challenge to serve and show love to others. There can also be the temptation to abandon our vocation or to fail to develop the gifts and abilities which God has given to us to serve others in our various areas of responsibility.

Facilitator theological notes

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4. **The place of prayer**

Experiences of suffering and weakness are also a call to prayer. Initially this may be the prayer of complaint, desperation, or even of anger and frustration towards God. It may be a plea to try to make some sense out of the situation or simply a cry for support and strength. It may be like the cry of the father whose son Jesus' disciples were unable to heal: 'Lord I believe; help my unbelief' [Mark 9:24]. It may be a situation in which we come to realise that when we are unable to pray, God's Spirit is praying for us and with us [Romans 8:26-27]. Ultimately our experience may be like that of St Paul which ends in complete confidence that nothing can separate us from the love of God [Romans 8:18-39].

5. **The Lutheran school as a supporting community**

A situation of suffering in a Lutheran school provides a challenge for the community and an opportunity to demonstrate sensitive pastoral care. There are dramatic situations which the school community can face, such as accidental death of students or staff, severe sickness, suicide, arson. In all of these cases the support, care and compassion ['suffering with'] of the community provides a concrete example of God's love in action. People can see how a Christian community responds to suffering and from where it draws its strength and resources to cope in the circumstances. The experiences may also be used by the Holy Spirit to touch lives with the healing message of the gospel.

Tragedy in a school community can also have the impact of drawing the community together as the members of the community support those who are suffering. This also happens as people feel free to share their own suffering with others in the community. It may provide an opportunity to share faith testimonies and communal prayer.

It is important, too, in the Lutheran school community that people are sensitive to suffering which may be very personal and somewhat hidden in the community. People may be very reluctant to show that they are suffering and try to carry their situation themselves. It is important that members in the community listen carefully to what is happening without putting pressure on people to share what they are not yet ready to share with others. This is important with staff as well as with students. The effect of stress can be important to recognise in this context as well as situations of bullying or harassment.

6. **God is at work in the life of the Christian**

In spite of appearances to the contrary at times, God is at work in the Christian through the Holy Spirit. Theology of the cross recognises that God's work can be hidden behind experiences of failure, frustration, doubt, apathy, pride and hypocrisy. St Paul reminds us that our new life as a Christian is 'hidden with Christ in God' [Colossians 3:1-4]. The Holy Spirit is carrying out his work in the life of the Christian, helping the Christian to grow in faith and in the fruit of the spirit [Galatians 5:22-25]. Lutheran theology sees this as 'living in one's baptism' where there is the daily struggle between the 'old man/woman' and the 'new man/woman'. While Christians live in this struggle, they also know that Christ has already won the victory for them on the cross and that they will one day share in the new creation where sin and suffering is no more [Revelation 21:1-4].

Discussion questions

1. In the middle of human tragedy and suffering, where is God?
2. Is there any way in which we can reconcile suffering and evil with a loving, all powerful God?
3. How can the school provide support to those who are suffering misfortune or disaster?
4. How do Lutheran schools identify with suffering in the world and help students to identify with the weak, the vulnerable and the marginalised?
5. Can you identify examples of ways in which staff and/or students may suffer for their faith in the Lutheran school? What support can be provided for them?
6. In what ways can it help us to see our frustrations, disappointments, or failures in our ministry of teaching as 'carrying the cross' in our vocation?
7. Where do we see God in natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes or floods?
8. Does Lutheran theology stress too much the impact of sin in the lives of people and therefore not stress sufficiently living the 'victorious Christian life'?
9. What opportunities are presented in the Lutheran school to consider an appropriate response to issues of racism, war and refugees?
10. What examples of social evil are evident in Australian society and culture and how can the Lutheran school help to address these?

References and further reading

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LEA (2005). Key idea 3 A Christian worldview is shaped by the biblical teaching of sin and grace, *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework Theological Notes* (pp. 13-14, 43). Adelaide: LEA.

Veith, G. (1999) *The spirituality of the cross: the way of the first evangelicals* (pp. 55-69; 86-89). Concordia Publishing House: St Louis.

Purposes of the *Strength in suffering encounter*

The purposes of this encounter are for participants to:

- explore the questions of why people suffer and where God is in suffering
- consider how the school community can provide support for those who suffer
- consider where strength can be found in times of need

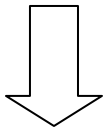
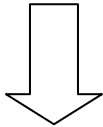
Plan for the *Strength in suffering encounter*

- welcome and introductions
- orientation to the encounter (*setting out*)
- exploring information, developing understandings (*gathering pace*)
- sharing perspectives, discussing questions, developing understandings (*multiple views*)
- reflecting on learning (*in a quiet place*)
- prayer and close

Facilitator encounter preparation checklist

- read *Facilitator theological notes*
- read *Workshop*, select and prepare handouts and resources needed
- have copies of handouts and resources participants may need on tables ready for them
- prepare a pre-recorded interview or invite staff for interview if using that *Setting out* option
- make adjustments to Slide 4 if necessary
- organise a place/places where participants can access internet
- have weblink live and ready, and be familiar with it
- find music to play during *In a quiet place* phase
- have available coloured highlighters, coloured textas, chart paper for *Gathering Pace* and *Multiple Views* options
- collect any materials and items needed for *Short Trails*

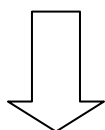
Workshop

<p>Welcome and introductions (5 minutes)</p>	<p>Welcome participants to the <i>Strength in suffering encounter</i>. Introduce any participants who may be new to the group. Ensure everyone has the material for the encounter.</p>
<p>Setting out (15 minutes)</p> 	<p>Show Slides 2 and 3 Share the purposes of the <i>Strength in suffering encounter</i> with participants and briefly outline how the workshop will run.</p> <p>Show Slide 4 Invite participants to choose from the following options:</p> <p>Option 1: Walk and talk Participants set off in pairs, taking turns to talk about something difficult they had to deal with that really tested their strength and/or endurance (see <i>Handouts: Walk and talk</i>). Facilitator note: in this encounter participants should only take this option if they feel comfortable with what they are being asked to share as it could trigger strong emotional responses.</p> <p>Option 2: Interviews Watch a pre-recorded interview with principal and/or staff members who reflect on the complexities involved in working with those in the school community who are in shock, despair, distress, grief, confusion, ... Invite principal and/or staff members to share thoughts on being there for those in the school community who are in shock, despair, distress, grief, confusion, ... with participants at the workshop.</p> <p>Option 3: Pair and share Participants read a real life scenario in <i>Participant theological notes</i>, then pair up and talk about similarities and differences with their own experiences.</p>
<p>Gathering pace (40 minutes)</p> 	<p>This phase has two parts. Show Slide 5</p> <p>Part 1: Reading and responding Provide participants with a copy of <i>Paradox and practice</i> (see <i>Handouts: Paradox and practice</i>).</p> <p>Refer participants to <i>Participant theological notes</i> and ask them to read</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A biblical insight</i> and • <i>Aspects of theology of the cross</i> <p>and then complete the <i>Paradox and practice</i> task.</p> <p>As participants finish, they find one other person with whom they compare and discuss their responses.</p> <p>Alternatively, <i>A biblical insight</i> could be encountered through this option: Joseph – video story http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1tT4o3fC8Q&feature=fww</p>

Workshop

(...cont)

Gathering pace ...cont



Part 2: Short Trails

Show Slide 6 and distribute *Short Trails* (see *Handouts: Short Trails*)
Invite participants to further explore *Strength in suffering* individually through anyone of the following *Short Trails* available online at www.lutheran.edu.au login to the member area and then select *Resources/publications* then *Pathways* then *TRIAL MATERIAL ONLY Pathways: theological focus*. If the facility is available bring the screen up to show participants the options as a whole group, or select and provide some that can be explored in hard copy (see *Resources: Short Trails*).



Art Short Trail: Two avenues for exploration are offered. Participants can study and analyse several artworks that depict different aspects of Joseph's story. Alternatively, they can study and analyse various artists' representations of the 'suffering servant'. They reflect on these and respond according to the guidelines.



Music Short Trail: In this trail participants select one of the options that gives opportunity to explore the biblical narrative or aspects of the theology of the *Strength in suffering encounter* through music, lyrics, and reflection.



SMS Short Trail: Summarise, More views, Synthesise

Participants work with any of the three options:

- quotes and responses
- significant statements
- questions



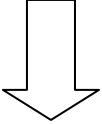
Reading Short Trail: Additional readings, from a range of sources, can be used by participants to expand, extend and challenge their thinking about the various theological concepts inherent in the *Strength in suffering encounter*.



Prayer Short Trail: Participants are invited to think about the relationship between suffering and prayer. What draws people into prayer? Why prayer? What do they pray for? Both readings and video are used to explore this dimension of *Strength in suffering*.

Workshop

(...cont)

<p>Multiple views (40 minutes)</p> 	<p>Participants gather, bringing their recorded responses up to this point, and any other material they have recorded or developed from their personal engagement with the <i>Short Trails</i>. Work with the discussion questions in the <i>Facilitator and Participant theological notes</i> and refer also to <i>Responding to issues relating to theology of the cross and suffering</i>.</p> <p>Option 1: Whole group approach Show slide 7</p> <p>The group agrees by consensus on a list of questions they wish to discuss, including questions that have arisen as a result of their reading and engagement with <i>Short Trails</i>.</p> <p>Use a discussion strategy such as <i>Whip</i>. Start with the first question:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • everyone takes a turn to contribute one idea or question • build on previous thoughts to add dimension to the thinking process <p>When the question has been fully explored, move on to the next.</p> <p>Refer to <i>Responding to issues relating to theology of the cross and suffering in Participant theological notes</i>.</p> <p>Option 2: Small group approach Show slide 8</p> <p>The whole group agrees by consensus on a priority order for the questions they wish to discuss. Participants then organise into smaller groups of four to six people.</p> <p>Use a discussion strategy such as <i>Whiteboard share</i>. Each small group works on the same question at the same time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discuss the question • generate as many ideas and responses as possible • decide on the best three responses generated • each group sends a representative to record their three responses on the whiteboard <p>Summary comments and statements can be made as each combination of responses is reviewed.</p> <p>Refer to <i>Responding to issues relating to theology of the cross and suffering in Participant theological notes</i> where or if necessary.</p> <p>Work through as many questions as possible in the time given. To bring this phase of the encounter to a close, restate the purposes for the encounter and the means by which you have achieved them (see slides 2 and 3 for purposes and plan).</p>
<p>In a quiet place (10 minutes)</p>	<p>Show slide 9 Distribute copies of <i>POWW</i> (see <i>Handouts: POWW</i>) Invite participants to find a quiet spot where they can be comfortable while using the prompts to reflect on their experience, their thinking and their learning.</p> <p>Play some restful, peaceful background music.</p> <p>Close with a prayer.</p>