



THE GIFT OF EMPATHY

Walking with people of all ages who have experienced loss
(bereavement, health, jobs etc.),

how can we empathise without getting drawn in too deeply?

What are good/healthy boundaries in pastoral practice?



SESSION OUTLINE

1. Definition of empathy
2. The nature of loss
3. Theology
4. Self-awareness and healthy boundaries
5. Our use of power
6. Breakout room questions

Empathy: the ability to understand and share another person's feelings or experiences.

em: within or inside

pathy - 'pathos' feeling or suffering

Opposite of empathy is apathy.....

an absence of concern, interest, or enthusiasm.

Empathy_____Apathy

A spectrum of understanding, misunderstanding and indifference.

**Interpersonal empathy
and
Social empathy**



MULTIPLE LOSS

Impact of Covid 19 in the UK

Human life

Rise of mental ill health

Increase of domestic abuse

Increase in poverty

Unemployment

Revealed deep inequalities

Impact of local communities

Loss of the High Street

Impact on city centre's

Charities loss of income

Church

Multiple nature of loss

Bereavement.

illness with life-long impact

Loss of relationships

Loss of schooling/university experience

Financial security

Sense of role and social status

Physical ability

Mental ill health

Loss of control

Loss of self-esteem,

Loss of identity

Hope for the future, trust



WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT HUMAN BEINGS

All people are created in the image of God

Every person has intrinsic value and dignity

Every person is equally precious to God

We are created to be in relationship

In God we are all fully known



WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE CHURCH

(METHODIST CHURCH SAFEGUARDING POLICY)


A place where everyone may find healing and wholeness.

It is communication of shalom; that is, of justice, healing, and peace for the whole of the individual, as well as for the community.

Justice is part of the outworking of love. The Church must hold in tension concerns for both justice and compassion.

The Church seeks to encourage ministry, service and leadership in ways that promote discernment of one's **boundaries** and **limitations**, reliance on God and our brothers and sisters in Christ, thus developing compassionate, collaborative and enabling ministries which value careful listening to all.





**And you shall love the Lord
your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all
your mind, and with all your
strength.'**

**This is the first
commandment. And the
second, like it, is this:**

**'You shall love your
neighbour as yourself.' There
is no other commandment
greater than these.**

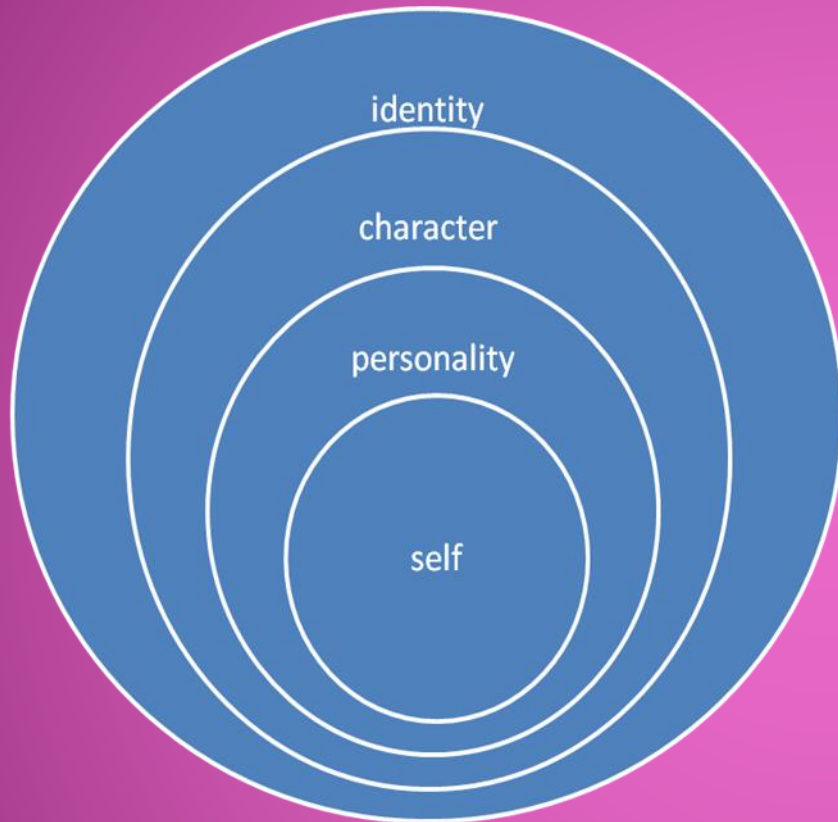
Mark 12 v 30-31

**Truth makes love possible
Love makes truth bearable**

Rowan Williams

**Without the will to embrace
the other there will be no truth
between people and without
truth between people
there will be no peace.**

Miroslav Volf, Exclusion and Embrace (Abingdon Press, 1996)



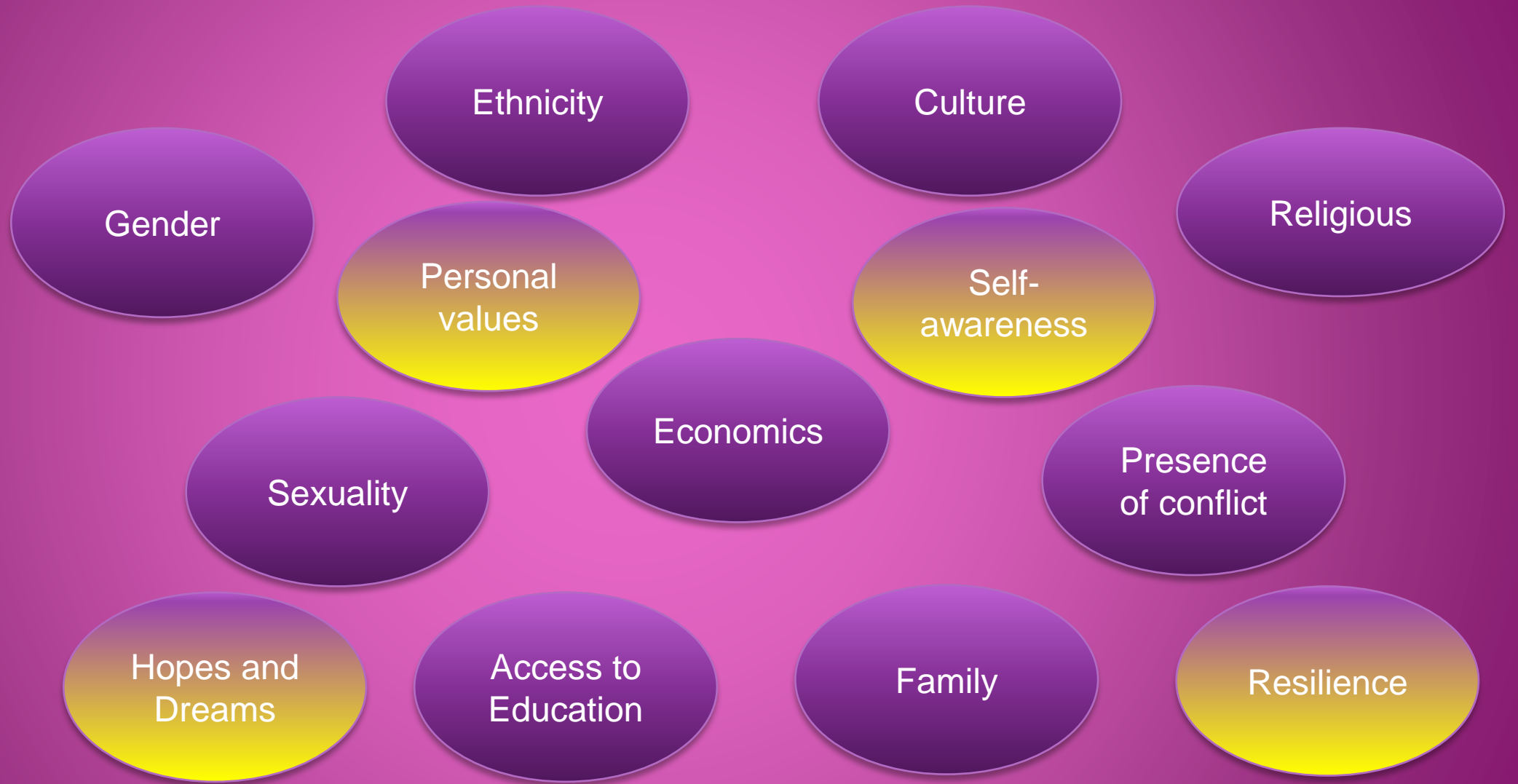
Who am I? Who are you?

- a. **What would I need to know about you, to understand you?**
- b. **What would you need to know, to understand me?**

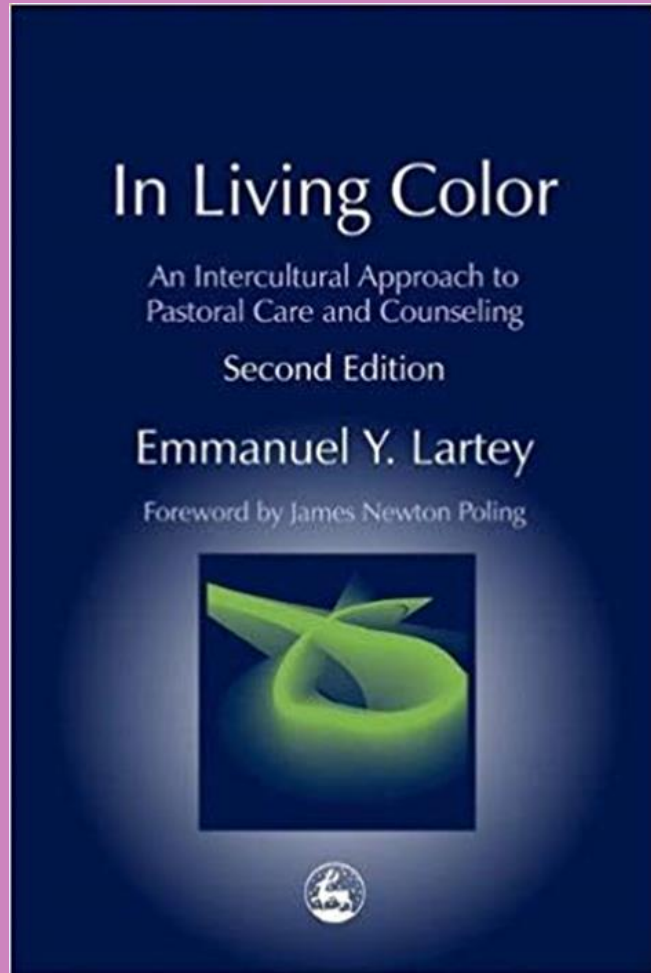
Instead of asking 'what's wrong with you' ask 'what happened to you?'



Identity formed in and by.....plus many other factors



EMMANUEL LARTEY



Every human person
is in certain respects:

- ◎ Like all others
- ◎ Like some others
- ◎ Like no other



Healthy boundaries in relationships



Porous to love, grace and generosity

I know where I end, and you begin: I remain me and you remain you.



Healthy boundaries in relationships

Physical Space: Our bodies, use of touch and gesture, personal space, acceptable/unacceptable habits/customs

Emotional Space: Our use of words, including tone, volume and expressions. Healthy emotional intimacy and distance, enabling growth.

Spiritual Space: Use of prayer, the bible, theological ideas, rituals and practices.

Healthy Boundaries enable **SAFE SPACE** for ourselves and others.



Unhealthy boundaries in relationships

Telling all – oversharing

Talking intimately on a first encounter

Being overwhelmed by a person

Going against your personal values

Letting others direct or define your life

Expecting other people to meet your needs.

You never say no

You believe you have to hold everyone together

You ignore your own needs

You never complain

POWER AND BOUNDARIES.....



1. Positional power



2. Relational power



3. Resource power



4. Physical power



5. Personality



6. Knowledge power



7. Experiential power



8. Spiritual power



9. Celebrity power





Unbalanced
Power



Balanced
Power

There is a potential greater vulnerability for all children and adults when experiencing loss

The person holding the greater power has a greater responsibility not to misuse their power.

**Nothing about us, without us
is for us**

Poverty Truth Commission motto

LOSS AND BEREAVEMENT

**Continuing bonds
rather than letting go, moving on.**

**Loss does not end the relationship
it redefines it.**

Klass, K., *Continuing Bonds in Bereavement: New Directions for Research and Practice* (Routledge, 2018)

Some common myths to avoid

All people grieve in the same way
It takes 'x' amount of time to adjust
Intensity of grief shows how much you
loved the person.

Things you should never say....

I know how you feel
It was probably for the best.
You should be over this by now!
It was God's will, timing, purpose,
God only gives you what you can cope with
God needed them/wanted them

Things you might say.....

It is good to see you
I am sorry for your loss
I can't imagine the pain you are going
through
Talk about the 'loss'



RESPONDING TO A CHILD'S GRIEF

Questions

1. Did I cause the loss to happen?
2. Is it going to happen to me?
3. Who will take care of me

Responses

1. Honesty, reassurance
2. Don't say, 'you have to look after 'X' now
3. Don't say...be brave, don't cry instead give permission to explore feelings
4. Give attention to all the children.
5. Participate in the family's grief





Empathetic responses

Create a safe space

Be approachable and willing to learn

Listen, Listen, Listen

Don't make assumptions

Don't be judgemental

Don't rush to quick conclusions

Maintain healthy boundaries: physical, emotional and spiritual

Resist playing the roles of the Rescuer, the Fixer or the Hero



Empathy with by Richard Carter, *The City is my Monastery*
(Canterbury Press, 2019)

When you meet people face to face

And see their humanity

It becomes hard not to carry them with you

Holding within you their cry

And longing for their joy

To be with people means that you know that there is no fix or easy
solution

only this open wound

It is to know too that everyone has their own back story, which is never
entirely as they seem

And can be told in many different ways

To be with someone means to be with them as they are, not as you would
like them to be.



It is to acknowledge the deeper undisclosed narrative that you, and possibly even they, will never fully know or fully understand

It is to accept the mystery of a life and our ways of telling ourselves who we are and why we are here, and that has many layers

Prayer is not the diagnosis or the medication

It is the love of God for the person as they are

God above, God beside, God beneath

God with us in storm and in calm

For better or worse

In sickness and in health

It is this love that loves the person undefined by sickness or by wrong

It is this love that heals the soul not just now but for all eternity

Richard Carter, *The City is my Monastery* (Canterbury Press, 2019)



Questions for breakout rooms.

1. In your own experience of loss (bereavement and other forms of loss) how have people supported and helped you?
2. How might you empathise with and support the multiple losses within your local community?
3. What has helped you grow in 'empathy' and led to greater understanding of yourself and others?
4. What are the 'healthy boundaries' needed for empathetic relationships?