

THE ROLE OF THE *FAIFEAU* OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN
CHURCH SAMOA, IN THE PROCESS OF HEALING FOR THE BEREAVED
FOLLOWING A SUDDEN DEATH

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ABSTRACT

Today within the context of the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS), many members are struggling and confused as to how to deal with issues that may cause them to question their Christian faith. One such issue is the pain and grief caused by the loss of a loved one through sudden death. It becomes one of the many responsibilities of the Pastor/Minister (*Faifeau*) to assist members of his parish, in order to cope with their pain and loss at such a time. Indeed a time of great soul-searching and questioning by members of the grieving family, while simultaneously meeting the many demands of the funeral arrangements. It is at this time that the *faifeau* must play an active and pastoral role, not only as a healer and spiritual guide for the bereaved, but the *faifeau* must also be physically present with the bereaved family. This paper will research the impacts of sudden death within the community of the CCCS, as well as the role the *faifeau* must play as healer and spiritual guide to help grieving families deal with their pain and loss. The aim is to provide insights that will assist troubled persons in dealing with the onset of sudden death in their immediate lives, as well as providing guidelines for the *faifeau* of the CCCS to administer effective and appropriate pastoral care at such a vulnerable time for the bereaved.

DEDICATION

This research paper is dedicated to my beloved son Tui'i Lauvi Fiti who suddenly passed away at the age of one, a week before we began studies at Malua Theological College. I would also like to dedicate this work to my father, the late Lauvi Fiti; to my late brother Olo Fiti; to my father-in-law, the late Lalau Nuusavili; to my late uncle Olo Lauvi; and to my parish *faiifeau* the late Rev Saniva Nga Shiu, who all passed away suddenly and unexpectedly during my four years of study at Malua.

The memories and love of all of the above-mentioned will forever be cherished in the hearts of my family and myself. The memory of each one has inspired me to write and complete this paper, for the benefit of those who have suffered a similar kind of pain and loss. May this research paper help *faiifeau* in their roles within the CCCS, as healers and spiritual guides for the betterment of our Samoan people.

May God bless you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Dedication	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Acknowledgements	vi
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: The Church Minister of the Twenty-First Century in the World Today	3
1.1 Christian Ministry in a Changing Society.....	3
1.2 Biblical Grounding for Pastoral Ministry	5
1.3 The Contemporary Church Minister: Equipped for God’s Ministry in the Twenty-First Century	7
1.4 Nurturing The Shalom of God to Grieving Individuals and Families	12
1.5 Pastoral Approaches to Sudden Death.....	14
Chapter 2: The Views of the Samoan Christian within the CCCS Towards Sudden Death	16
2.1 A Pre-Christian Samoa and their <i>Tapuaiga</i> or Worship	16
2.2 The Arrival of Christianity into Samoa	19
2.3 A Social-Cultural Interpretation of Family Systems from a Samoan CCCS Cultural Perspective	21
2.4 The Formation of the CCCS <i>Faifeau</i>	22
2.5 Reflections from Bereaved Members of the CCCS about Dealing with The Sudden Death of a Loved One	24

Chapter 3: The CCCS <i>Faifeau</i> as a Healer for Bereaved Families	27
3.1 The Impacts of Sudden Death.....	27
3.2 Guidelines and Recommendations for the <i>Faifeau</i> in Today’s Ministry.....	28
3.3 During the Early Hours Since the Death has Occurred	30
3.4 Prior to the Funeral Service	31
3.5 Planning of the Funeral Service	32
3.6 After the Funeral	34
3.7 CCCS Ministry as a Healing Community.....	34
 Conclusion	 36
 Appendix	 38
 Bibliography	 39
 Glossary	 42

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Faafetai tele,

May God bless you all.

INTRODUCTION

In the world that we live today, the Christian ministries that the Gospel of Christ works, is always changing. It does not become static or stationary but dynamic from time to time, spanning across cultures and various contexts. The challenges faced by Church Ministers are in line with the many changes as found in different societies and contexts. Likewise, the Church-goers themselves are subjected to similar challenges as faced by the clergy. Church Ministers become one of the possible sources of healing for bereaved persons in the church, as suggested by Clinebell:

“Through the centuries the Pastor has been the primary person responsible for dealing with the bereaved...Whether or not the Pastor has accepted these responsibilities, carried them out with skill and wisdom or even appreciated the weight of the expectations placed upon him or her, nevertheless the Pastor is the one to whom people still look for the care of the bereaved.”¹

This refers to the role of the Pastor/Church Minister or *faiifeau* in regards to the care of the bereaved. This is an important aspect of the role of the *faiifeau* in looking after his parish. Death is a part of the reality of everyday life, and the *faiifeau* needs to be prepared to fulfil his duty and role as Pastoral care-giver within his parish, in times of bereavement due to a sudden death of a loved one.

This research paper will investigate the impacts of sudden death and the healing role of the *faiifeau* within the context of the Samoan family and the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS) here in Samoa and abroad. The focus of this study is identify insights useful in the healing process for both the *faiifeau* and the church member, who are faced with the reality of trying to cope with the loss of a loved one through sudden death. The challenge arises from primarily drawing upon new findings in modern secular research, and less towards the real

¹ Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling: Resources for the Ministry of Healing and Growth* (London: Abingdon Press, 1999), 218.

source of healing that is grounded in Christian Theology. Clinebell stresses the significance of a theological basis for healing, in that the foundation for healing and wholeness finds its source with God, but not in human wisdom or effort.² While we aim as humans to maximise functioning as much as possible within the confines of our existence, healing is not primarily about functional wholeness but the wholeness that comes with renewed relation with God.

This research paper is divided into three chapters: the first chapter is a general literature review relating to death and its effects upon families and communities in general. The second chapter will analyse the role of the Pastor – or *Faifeau* - as a healing agent for families within the CCCS suffering from the sudden death of a loved one. The final chapter provides insights that will assist troubled persons in dealing with the onset of sudden death in their immediate lives, as well as providing guidelines for the *faifeau* of the CCCS to administer effective and appropriate pastoral care at such a vulnerable time for the bereaved.

² Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 218.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CHURCH MINISTER OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY IN THE WORLD TODAY

In this chapter, I will begin by briefly outlining some of the forces behind the rapidly changing contemporary world, and its effects upon the Christian ministry. Secondly, I will consider a biblical grounding for Pastoral ministry. Thirdly, I will investigate the necessary tools and skills that will assist the contemporary Church Minister in the changing world that we live. One question that comes to mind as a point of focus for the investigations herein: how can a Church Minister effectively fulfill wholeness to grieving families affected by the loss of a loved one? With this question in mind, I shall investigate the significance of promoting healing to grieving families within the Pastoral ministry. Finally, I will identify some significant Pastoral approaches in dealing with sudden death.

1.1 Christian Ministry in a Changing Society

Henri Nouwen presents a question: “*what does it mean to be a Minister in our contemporary society?*”³ In an evolving world this question is open for renewed interpretation and reflection from time to time. Within the context of Nouwen’s thought patterns, the question draws the attention of the reader to the uncertainties faced by the Ministers of contemporary society in regards to their calling. In the midst of what he calls a ‘dislocated world,’⁴ the Ministers of his time had increasing doubts about their own ‘*relevance and effectiveness*’⁵ in God’s ministry.

³ Henry Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), xv.

⁴ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, 1.

⁵ Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, xvi.

Paul Tillich during the mid 20th century followed along the same line, and provides a statement concerning the Church as losing its significance as a faith community in many parts of the world. Tillich writes:

*“History shuts and opens doors. It is history which has created the problem of the irrelevance of the Minister and not the inevitable deficiencies and failures of Ministers, Theologians and Church Authorities. And it is history, which gives the Churches opportunities to restore the relevance of the Ministry.”*⁶

Despite the concerns of Nouwen and Tillich, my task in this project is not to dwell on these perspectives’ concerning the shortcomings of the ministry, though I wish to re-iterate two things. Firstly, Nouwen’s question and Tillich’s statement open doors for interpretation and reflection for the contemporary Minister. In my case, as a reader and interpreter, I am free to formulate my own subjective presuppositions to the issue at hand. Secondly, in spite of their perspectives forwarded within different contexts and time frames, both Nouwen and Tillich see clear channels to positive changes and improvement in the Christian ministry. Seemingly, in other words, they claim that the Christian ministry should not dwell on past failures and present anxieties but look ahead to future progress. The question of value is: where do we go from here?

It is important to note that about three decades after Nouwen’s question first appeared, the world has changed drastically. The so-called dislocated world Nouwen witnessed in the 1970’s is not the same as today in the Twenty-first Century. In the context of the global Christian ministry, many signs of the distorted world are still evident. To name a few, terrorism and violence and the growing polarism of the gap between rich and poor is still evident. Nouwen’s contemporary world of the 1970’s cannot be compared to the forces of the modern era.⁷ This is due largely to the inescapable forces of globalisation and media-culture.⁸

⁶ Cf Paul Tillich, “The Relevance of the Ministry in our time and its Theological Formulation, ” in *Making the Ministry Relevant* (ed. Hans Hoefman; New York: Charles Scribners and Sons, 1960), 19-26.

⁷ Cf Theo Witvliet, “Christian Identity in Cross-Cultural Perspective,” in *Christian Identity in a Cross-Cultural Perspective* (ed. Brinkman E. Martien & Keulen V. Dirk; Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Meinema, 2003), 171.

⁸ Emmanuel Clapsis, “The Challenge of a Global World,” in *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World: An Ecumenical Conversation* (ed. Emmanuel Clapsis; Geneva: WCC Publications, 2004), 47. Globalisation is a concept that summarises the growth of connections between people on a planetary scale. Through it people become more able physically, legally, culturally, and psychologically to engage with each other in one world. The effects of media culture on the everyday experiences of the people are phenomenal. Feelings, emotions and ideas are involved in the interaction between media and the audience.

Change in the contemporary world is rampant, and its consequences for identity felt more keenly than before. There are major, rapid and interconnected changes in information technology, work and employment practices, consumerism, family structures, all of which affect us deeply, ambivalently, and at every level.⁹ I could only imagine the increasing angst of the Ministers' of the mid to late 20th century if they were to face the challenges of today's world. If they were concerned so much about their irrelevance and ineffectiveness in the past, it would be inevitable that the globalised world would inevitably pose greater challenges. If space and time are considered key concepts in globalisation, whereas time and space are compressed because of modern technology, then the implications for the contemporary ministry would be immense.

In view of the rapid changes that have influenced the modern world, I would like to pose my own questions for the purpose of this paper: if the rapidly changing world affects everyone at different levels of their lives, how can the contemporary Church Minister and the Christian Church remain an authentic Christian witness in the 21st century? Are the classical formulas of healing appropriate in an increasingly distorted and dislocated world? How can a Church Minister fulfill wholeness? Would the Pastoral response today be any different from that from the past? Before I attempt to provide possible solutions to the above-given questions, I shall firstly consider a biblical grounding for Pastoral theology, and examine some key features concerning the role of the *faifeau* in God's ministry.

1.2 Biblical Grounding for Pastoral Ministry

Scripture exhausts the imagery which may be used to describe the tender love and care for God and humanity. But no figure is tender and true as that, which is likened to a shepherd and his flock.¹⁰ The relationship implies the ability to help, to be watchful, and to care. He cares for them, supplies their wants and they look to and follow him in entire dependence and submission.

⁹ Witvliet, "Christian Identity in Cross-Cultural Perspective," 173.

¹⁰ John Patton, *From Ministry to Theology: Pastoral Action and Reflection* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 65.

Such pictures of the intimate relationship between shepherd and sheep can provide us with the framework of thinking about the great shepherd texts of the bible.

The kings and governors of the ancient world were also symbolically given the title “shepherds.” Like a shepherd it was their responsibility as leaders to provide for and protect the flock, or God’s people. However, many failed to carry out this task. Ezekiel 34 is a story of God’s judgment against the leadership. The prophet Ezekiel therefore, was ordered to prophesy against rulers of Church and state —the Kings, the princes, the priests and Levites and the council of state because they failed to feed the flock.¹¹

These leaders sought their own fulfillment over the needs of the flock. They fed and enriched themselves to seek self-glory and make themselves great, seeking to increase their profits and even eliminated others who were a threat to their plans for selfish gain. As a consequence they avoided the needs of the poor and the weak. There was no effort to strengthen them, to heal them or bind them up. They are compared to the hired shepherds, who in the context of danger deserted their posts, left the sheep and fled. Eventually they lost the trust of the people and the flock were scattered.¹²

The prophet Ezekiel here delivers a message of hope to the people. In the failure of earthly kings and leaders, God does what a shepherd is supposed to do. Wherever the lost sheep are, the eye of God will find them out for his eyes run to and fro through the earth, in favour of them. As a Shepherd, he pursues His people and He will bring them to have the full enjoyment of His blessed presence. In God’s loving grace the fatherless finds mercy.¹³

According to Christian belief, Jesus assumes the role of the protector, the guardian who provides salvation or safe-haven to sheep who pass by. He is the agent of wholeness, of eternal

¹¹ National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, *Ezekiel 34: 1-16. NRSV* (Nashville: World Bible Publishers, 1997), 759.

¹² Leander E. Keck, “Ezekiel 34:1-10, Woe to the Shepherds of Israel,” (vol. VI – Ezekiel of *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*; ed. Leander E. Keck et al; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 1463.

¹³ Leander E. Keck, “Ezekiel 34:11-16, Yahweh, Israel’s Good Shepherd,” (vol. VI – Ezekiel of *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*; ed. Leander E. Keck et al; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 1466.

life, of secure pasture. But life comes at a costly price. To identify this cost, the focus once again has been shifted back to the motif of the shepherd; the designation is that of a good shepherd.¹⁴ The adjective *καλος*- “good” also meaning “model” or “true” here is used to describe the role of Jesus in the context of self-giving. The contrast is made between Jesus and the watchers of the sheep, or hired-hands, those who take care of the sheep merely in return for monetary compensation. *Καλος* takes on the implications of being authentic or genuine. It relates primarily to the readiness of the shepherd to lay down his life for the sheep.¹⁵ In opposition to the design of the thief, which is to kill and destroy. He came to put life into the flock, which had seemed rather like a valley full of dry bones than like a pasture covered over with flocks.

In much the same way, a Minister is called to lay his or her life for God’s Church and people. As a form of sacrificial service, the function of a contemporary Minister whether by ritual, hospitality, consolation or advice, is to attempt to make things whole; that is, to give integrity to lives, solidarity to groups, to mend broken relationships, and to heal, accept and restore.¹⁶

1.3 The Contemporary Church Minister: Equipped for God’s Ministry in the Twenty-First Century

Christian Theology is regarded as a form of theology that seeks to understand the world and human life in light of creation, reconciling and renewing purposes of God. Pastoral theology finds its grounding in this basic theological understanding, and is feasible through the process of theological reflection in which Pastoral experience serves as a context for critical development.¹⁷ The contemporary world presents the Christian ministry with many challenges. For Church Ministers to be authentic witnesses and for the global Church to proclaim its prophetic voice,

¹⁴ John 10: 11 NRSV, “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*”

¹⁵ Leander E Keck, et al, “John 10: 1-21, The Shepherd Discourse,” (vol. IX – Luke & John of *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 669.

¹⁶ Don S Browning, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 14.

¹⁷ J.R. Burck & Rodney J. Hunter, et al, “Pastoral Theology, Protestant,” in *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 867.

these challenges must be addressed. The three-way relationship, justified in the relationship between a Church Minister and his or her faith relationship with God in Christ, as well as the relationship with the faith community is vital in the integrity of a Church Minister.¹⁸

There are a multitude of paradigms and concepts proposed by scholars, the ordained clergy and laity in the modern era that designate the necessary tools or criteria prerequisite in the formation of a contemporary Minister. Due to the limited nature of this research I am unable to formulate an anthology of these collected works. However, the sources I have selected provide validity and relevancy to the focus of our research.

Clinebell suggests that for the modern ministry to stay relevant to the world, it must be open to the future.¹⁹ For growth to occur in the ministry, Pastoral care and counseling must be guided by an evolving vision. As an advocate of a Holistic Liberation-Growth Model of Pastoral Care and Counseling,²⁰ Clinebell proposes a theme that is integral to the vitality of the Christian ministry, the Unifying Goal is Wholeness. He states:

“In the language of the fourth gospel (John 10:10)²¹, human wholeness is described as ‘life...have it abundantly.’ The Church’s mission...is to be an abundant life centre, a place for liberating, nurturing, and empowering life in all its fullness, in individuals, in intimate relationships, and in society and its institutions.”²²

The role of the *Faifeau*, in regards to this issue of ‘wholeness’, is to assist people who have suffered from the loss of loved one, in whatever they can, to regain their confidence and to become whole again.

Philip Culbertson connects the idea of wholeness to ‘The Shalom of God.’ He quotes Peter Steinke who explains Shalom as “*a condition of well-being. It is a balance among God, human beings, and all created things. All parts are inter-related.*”²³ In other words, for

¹⁸ Wayne E Oates, *The Christian Pastor* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), 128.

¹⁹ Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 25.

²⁰ Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 25.

²¹ John 10:10 NRSV, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

²² Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 28.

²³ Philip Culbertson, *Caring for God’s People* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2000), 4.

individual wholeness to occur, all components of the human being must be healthy. The wholeness wheel suggested by Culbertson consists of the various components, such as social, mental, emotional, physical, spiritual and volitional.²⁴ If one of these components fails to function wholly, then wholeness is not possible. The process according to Culbertson is relational.²⁵ He writes:

*“The bottom line of ministry is relationships - with God and with other people. To know how to foster relationships of healing and wholeness with God, ourselves, and others, those in ministry need a sophisticated understanding of who people are and how they work.”*²⁶

In our search for wholeness with God, the quality of our relationship with people is essential. To maximise relationships with people to its fullest effect, the contemporary Minister must have insights in other disciplines outside of the classical theology and orthodox teachings of the Christian faith. The views of Clinebell and Culbertson give us a holistic outlook of the ministry, and it is a viewpoint that states that the contemporary Minister must broaden his or her vision to the inter-relatedness between faith and the human sciences. Some of the disciplines which come to mind are sociology, anthropology, psychology, biology and philosophy. The integrating of the resources of faith and of the behavioural sciences in the Pastoral ministry can be a risky task, particularly if the Christian faith is compromised. However, even though it may be deemed a challenging endeavour, benefits can be drawn if the two domains have points of contact and many shared values.²⁷

²⁴ Culbertson, *Caring for God's people*, 5.

²⁵ Culbertson, *Caring for God's people*, 4.

²⁶ Culbertson, *Caring for God's people*, 8.

²⁷ Carl A. Jensen, “Toward Pastoral Counseling Integration: One Bowen Oriented Approach,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Vol. 57 No. 2 (2003): 128.

The benefits of drawing upon the resources of sociological and psychological analysis in Pastoral reflection and care would undoubtedly be valuable, especially when attending to grieving families. For example, the Social Ecology Model²⁸ which was proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner²⁹ is a framework to examine the multiple effects and interrelatedness of social elements in an environment. Social ecology is the study of people in an environment and the influences on one another. This theory does in fact vary from culture to culture due to the different levels of systems or different systems altogether. The study of psychology would provide the necessary tools for a Minister in understanding how the mind shapes personalities and behaviours.

Psycho-analysis³⁰ as an aid would help the counselor understand and deal with individuals who undergo a traumatic experience, or on a lesser gradient, grieving from the loss of

²⁸ This model holds that development reflects the influence of several environmental systems, and it identifies five environmental systems: The Microsystem is the understanding of the setting in which the individual lives. These contexts include the person's family, peers, school, and neighborhood. It is in the microsystem that the most direct interactions with social agents take place; with parents, peers, and teachers. The Mesosystem refers to relations between microsystems or connections between contexts. Examples are the relation of family experiences to school experiences, school experiences to Church experiences, and family experiences to peer experiences. The Exosystem involves links between a social setting in which the individual does not have an active role and the individual's immediate context. Experiences in a social setting in which an individual does not have an active role but will nevertheless influence experience in an immediate context. Example (a) a parent's job experiences will affect family life which, in turn, will affect children—travel requirements, job stress, amount of pay. The Macrosystem describes the culture in which individuals live. Cultural contexts include developing and industrialised countries, socioeconomic status, poverty, and ethnicity. Finally the Chronosystem relates to the patterning of environmental events and transitions over the life course, as well as socio-historical circumstances. For example divorce is one transition, death in a family is another.

²⁹ New World Encyclopedia: Organising knowledge for happiness, prosperity and world peace, *Bronfenbrenner Urie*, http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Urie_Bronfenbrenner. (Downloaded Tuesday 9th August 2011: 15:30 hrs). Urie Bronfenbrenner (April 29, 1917–September 25, 2005) was a renowned Russian-born American psychologist, known for his work in child development. Bronfenbrenner was one of the first psychologists to adopt a holistic perspective on human development, developing his Ecological Systems Theory which had a widespread influence on the way psychologists and other social scientists approach the study of human beings and their environments.

³⁰ William M. Lawbaugh, "Existential, Theological and Psychological Concepts of Death: A Personal Retrospective," *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Vol. 59 Nos. 1-2 (2005): 26. Sigmund Freud (1856—1939) was known as the founding father of Psychoanalysis. Freud's primary interest was in understanding how influential the mind may be in shaping our personalities and behaviours. Sigmund Freud took death and dying out of the realms of theology and philosophy. Upon the sudden death of his daughter Sophia and then his own eighteen-year struggle with cancer, Sigmund Freud is credited with "psychologising" death: psychology replaced religious counsel as a more appropriate response to death.

a loved one. The analysis is crucial for Pastoral reflection and appropriate practices in the healing process.³¹

According to Christian belief, God is the creator and sustainer of life. All life form was created in His image, which is signified by wholeness. In the beginning He created the heavens and the earth and all that was in it, and after each day, his creation was good.³² When His creation fell to sin, His Love and Grace for all creation became the foundation of His vision for reconciliation and salvation. This vision was manifested later in history through His Son Jesus Christ. Hence, the vision of God and ministry are dynamically related. As Hiltner states as quoted by Underwood :

*“Ministries that sustain in inspiring ways as they heal in meaningful ways witness to the grace of God. They give expression to an integral vision of the God who suffers with and for, and who gives life in this existence and beyond what we can here know.”*³³

This is a key distinction between the profession of a secularist and a Minister serving in God’s ministry. Hiltner further reflects on the uniqueness and dynamics of sustaining and healing in Pastoral ministry:

*“...the Christian hope is within history; its success or realisation is beyond history when any full healing is meant.”*³⁴

The Christian ministry is a ministry of compassion and a ministry of hope. With hope, pain and suffering in the present reality, this is transformed to transcendence manifested in the *Shalom of God*.

³¹ Perry N. Miller, Raymond J. Lawrence and Robert C. Powell, “Discrete Varieties of Care in the Clinical Pastoral Tradition: Continuing in the Dialogue,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Vol. 57 No. 2 (2003): 111.

As the modern Pastoral professional has evolved, three types of nurturant intervention have emerged: “Pastoral Care,” “Pastoral Counseling,” and “Pastoral Psychotherapy”. Each is characterised by a distinct complexity of involvement, depending on the needs of the suffering individual, and each requires differing skills and training. However, one type is not to be considered superior to the others.

³² Genesis 1: 1-31 NSRV gives an account of the first creation story.

³³ Ralph L. Underwood, “Enlarging Hope for Wholesome: Ministry With Persons in Pain,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Vol. 60 Nos.1-2 (2006): 11.

³⁴ Underwood, “Enlarging Hope for Wholesome,” 8.

1.4 Nurturing The Shalom of God to Grieving Individuals and Families

Due to the complexities of existence, nothing is more human than suffering.³⁵ Suffering affects us in many ways, and no human being is exempt from it. It may present itself in a physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual form, that affects us through our respective life journeys.

Pain does not take place “*in a physiological vacuum.*”³⁶ If healing in Pastoral ministry involves the search for wholeness, then pain also touches all aspects of human existence. Judith Viorst gives a detailed outlook on human existence as quoted Culbertson, viewing it as a gradual progress of maturation in stages that involves losses as well as gains.³⁷ Culbertson elaborates by saying that ‘*Mourning and grief, then, are natural processes by which we adjust to living with any significant loss in our life course.*’³⁸ Therefore, mourning should not only be associated with the death of a loved one, but is an emotion that naturally follows the loss of anything meaningful, such as failure in school examinations or a divorce. Different situations impact people at different levels and presents Ministers with some of the most difficult Pastoral challenges.

People respond in various ways to pain, and to an extent these meanings reflect fundamental beliefs about ones self, life and God.³⁹ In such a context, Ralph Underwood illuminates existentialist questions concerning theodicy:

*“How do these beliefs affect how persons handle their pain? How do beliefs alter their self-concept and their understanding of God? Where is God? And who is God?”*⁴⁰

Others would say; *God, Why Did This Happen to Me?*⁴¹ People wrestling with these questions try to make sense of them out of life, by finding some balance from questions of faith formed from their religious experiences, weaving these experiences into the web of interpretation

³⁵ Miller et al., “Discrete Varieties of Care in the Clinical Pastoral Tradition,” 111.

³⁶ Underwood, “Enlarging Hope for Wholesome,” 3.

³⁷ Culbertson, *Caring for God’s people*, 213.

³⁸ Culbertson, *Caring for God’s people*, 213.

³⁹ Underwood, “Enlarging Hope for Wholesome,” 4.

⁴⁰ Underwood, “Enlarging Hope for Wholesome,” 4.

⁴¹ Anna Bradshaw & George Fitchett, “God, Why Did This Happen to Me? Three perspectives on Theodicy,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Vol. 57 No. 2 (2003): 178.

that they use to organise their religious understanding of the world.⁴² Wrestling with the questions of theodicy is all part of the faith journey of any believer. When faced with the realities of life, one's journey may be hindered and thus renewal of one's faith is needed to continue the faith journey. From the view of a Minister, sensitivity and compassion fosters hope and encouragement for persons dealing with the theodicy question. It is important for Pastoral caregivers to recognise and respect that people have their own theologies and moral wisdom. Of course Ministers are humans too, and have a life-long experience with relating their quests for meaning to their faith.⁴³

Death or dying is part of the natural process in human existence and occurs because of the changeless laws of nature that are part of God's creation.⁴⁴ In relation to this, Culbertson writes:

*"Death is a part of human life as is living. Christianity holds that part of our human task is to learn both to live well and to die well, and that both have significant potential meaning for the faithful."*⁴⁵

Adjusting to these changes, whether they are positive or negative circumstances is the challenge that one faces in life. These circumstances are not only experienced over and over again in life, but are renewed and continually renew one's perception about life. Now regardless of whether the loss leads to *anticipatory grief*⁴⁶ or *acute grief*,⁴⁷ these situations need Pastoral care, and the Church Minister or *faiifeau* is the one who must administer this Pastoral care.

⁴² Bradshaw, "God, Why Did This Happen to Me," 179.

⁴³ Underwood, "Enlarging Hope for Wholesome," 9.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey J Means, *Trauma and Evil: Healing the Wounded Soul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 174.

⁴⁵ Culbertson, *Caring for God's people*, 218.

⁴⁶ Culbertson, *Caring for God's people*, 219. Anticipatory grief follows the awareness of impending loss. It is a mourning of something which is yet to come.

⁴⁷ Culbertson, *Caring for God's people*, 220. Actue grief can be defined as the grief or pain that follows the sudden death of someone whom we love, or the sudden loss of something that was deeply valuable to us.

1.5 Pastoral Approaches to Sudden Death

According to Culbertson, Pastoral approaches to mourners and mourning must be built upon the contraction of two widely held myths;⁴⁸ firstly, the belief that there is only one healthy way to grieve, and secondly; the belief that Western ways of mourning are superior to those of other cultures. Thus in mourning, Pastoral reflection and praxis requires flexibility, time and effort to find the more appropriate methods for Pastoral care. It is not a case of 'one size fits all' scenario, but people in different cultures have to develop their own ways of coping with the situation that has presented itself.⁴⁹ Hence for effective Pastoral care for the bereaved, the Church Minister must take into account the unique demands and expectations of the mourner's culture.⁵⁰

In spite of the various cultural responses to grief, one universal approach to dealing with grief is the ecclesiological funeral ceremony. The manner by which we grieve and cope with the death of our loved ones, is reflected upon and influenced by the way in which we conduct the final funeral service for those we love. Kwon writes about the significance of the rite of the Christian funeral service in saying:

*"The Christian funeral service is based on resurrection faith. It focuses on Christ's victory over sin and death. So the funeral service is a corporate act of the people of God, where God is thanked for the life and the witness of the deceased. The basic premise is that the service commits the deceased person to God's keeping. Such committal points to Christian belief in the resurrection of the person."*⁵¹

Rituals and liturgy can be seen as powerful avenues for healing, reconciliation and for connecting persons to one another. It helps maintain an intimate connection to the community's hope in faith.⁵² In the belief of many religions including Christianity, rituals are necessary for the deceased to be sent off successfully to the next phase of his or her existence. These rituals allow the deceased to move on, but for many mourners they are unable to proceed with their own

⁴⁸ Culbertson, *Caring for God's people*, 221.

⁴⁹ Soo-Young Kwon, "Homecoming Rituals: Weaving Multicultural Funeral Narratives," *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Vol. 57 No. 4 (2003): 405.

⁵⁰ Culbertson, *Caring for God's people*, 222.

⁵¹ Kwon, "Homecoming Rituals," 407.

⁵² Means, *Trauma and Evil*, 174.

post-trauma recovery.⁵³ In almost all cultures, death is a transition to some other state of being or after-life. To ensure that this process of transition proceeds without hindrance, it is important for the bereaved to perform the culturally determined rituals. In every culture the primary rite is the funeral. Culbertson presents three primary benefits to the bereaved as achieved through the funeral service conducted for the deceased: it provides (i) a means to acknowledge the death; (ii) a way to honour the life of the deceased; and (iii) a means of support and comfort for the bereaved.⁵⁴

In concluding this chapter, Culbertson sums up the central element as a prerequisite in one's Pastoral response to the death of a loved one. Furthermore, Culbertson underlines the crucial role of the congregation in providing healing to grieving families. He writes:

*"Death and bereavement are times when people need people and the mere presence of another person who cares is important. When Pastoral care of the bereaved is done well, with genuine care and thoughtfulness and without religious or cultural imperialism, many doors to acceptance and respect by the wider community are opened, trust is built, and the encompassing love of God is made physically manifest."*⁵⁵

In addition, Pattison writes:

*"Pastoral is pragmatic...Pastoral care is a matter of doing not thinking."*⁵⁶

A 'good shepherd' during times of loss and grief, manifests through the administration of compassion and care a tangible sign of God's love. The *faiifeau* therefore is seen as God's agent in times of despair, who can bring about peace and comfort at a time of turmoil following the sudden death of a loved one. In our mission to the vulnerable and the weak, we are comforted by the promise of Christ: *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."*⁵⁷

⁵³ Culbertson, *Caring for God's people*, 222.

⁵⁴ Culbertson, *Caring for God's people*, 222.

⁵⁵ Culbertson, *Caring for God's people*, 223.

⁵⁶ Stephen Pattison, *A Critique of Pastoral Care* (London: SCM Press, 2000), 251.

⁵⁷ Matthew 5:4 NRSV.

CHAPTER TWO

THE VIEWS OF THE SAMOAN CHRISTIAN WITHIN THE CCCS TOWARDS SUDDEN DEATH

“Thinking and talking about death need not be morbid, they may be quite the opposite. Ignore and fear of death overshadow life, while knowing about and accepting death erases this shadow and makes life freer of fear and anxieties.”⁵⁸

The focus of this chapter will be hearing stories from bereaved members of the CCCS, who have experienced personal loss through sudden death. Firstly I need to lay the platform of the arrival and impact of Christianity into Samoa, a significant event in the history of Samoa that has shaped how we are as a people today. From this I shall briefly outline how the *faiifeau* in the CCCS is equipped to answer and deal with personal loss facing many people in times of sorrow, following a sudden death of a family member.

2.1 A Pre-Christian Samoa and their *Tapuaiga* or Worship

Before the arrival of Christianity, Samoan people believed that everyone who is born had his or her own personal god. When a child is about to be born, the names of all personal gods' are called out aloud outside of the dwelling place where the birth is about to take place. So whichever personal god is called out at the very instance when the child is born, this god becomes the personal god for that child. Various animate and inanimate subjects were made personal gods by the early Samoans – like insects, birds, fish, octopus, the sun or the moon to name a few. Samoans believed that all these were normal objects of nature, but once they were bestowed the title of being personal gods, a divine spirit incarnated in them to empower them

⁵⁸ Patten Bebe, *Give me back my soul* (New York: Patten Foundation, 1972), 3-4.

with divine powers. For those who had been assigned with these personal gods as their own, they must show respect and pay homage to their personal gods at all times. Failure to do so will result in being cursed by their personal god, and this can in very extreme cases lead to one's death.⁵⁹

The father was considered as the high priest of the family. He was the one responsible for conducting worship in homage to their family god, before the family evening meal. The aim was to seek protection and blessings from their god, to be safe from diseases, punishments, wars and also from death. The family will gather together in their *fale-tele* (main big house) to worship their god. Commonly a cup of *ava*⁶⁰ was poured inside the house as a confirmation of the presence of their god. Sometimes if the god wanted to talk to the family, it would incarnate into someone within the family (commonly the high priest of the family), and through this person the personal god will let his will and desires known to the family. These gods are called *atua-fale*, or family gods.⁶¹

Another type of god is called, *atua o aai* or the village god. Every village has their own god to be worshiped. Some villages have small worship-houses for the purpose of worship. If no such house is available, then they build a *fale-tele* and use this for worship. Other villages have special places in the forest to worship their village gods.⁶² This is because Samoan ancestors believe that, all matter, whether human, water, animal, plant and the biosphere are creations of *Tagaloalagi*, whom they believe to be the Creator of all things. They are divine creations and they all have spirits as well. So by worshiping the creations of *Tagaloalagi*, they are in fact worshiping the Creator himself.⁶³

In terms of diseases, there was also a healing process in Samoa. There were Samoan traditional healers called *taulasea*, who provided herbal medicines and remedies using leaves,

⁵⁹ Cf F R J Davies, *O Samoa Anamua* (London: Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd, 1884), 22-26.

⁶⁰ *Ava* is a plant of which its root, is used as the basis for what is arguably the most important ceremony in Samoan culture – the *ava* ceremony. This is a ceremony of thanksgiving or welcoming of special guests or for special ceremonies in which thanks is to be given to God, such as weddings, chiefly bestowal ceremonies and so forth. In pre-Christian times, the *ava* ceremony was used to worship the family or village gods.

⁶¹ Davies, *O Samoa anamua*, 27.

⁶² Davies, *O Samoa anamua*, 28.

⁶³ Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi, *Talanoaga na loma ma Gaopoa* (Apia: Pacific Printers and Publishers, 2000), 15.

roots and other parts of plants. There were also diseases associated with spirits, or *mai-aitu*. It was a common belief by many Samoans that most of the diseases were caused by evil spirits. For this reason, Samoans partook in a healing process that used *vai-Samoa* (Samoan herbal remedies), from the leaves and roots of plants to chase and rebuke the evil spirits that caused illnesses in many people.⁶⁴

Amaama Tofaeono's definition of the word *Tapua'iga* in short - *tapua'i*, which, in its sociological dimension, presents meanings such as "... to abstain from (certain activities such as) all work and sports; to sit waiting for success in war or in sickness; to give something to bring success; (and), to offer religious worship."⁶⁵ *Tapua'iga* also refers specifically to "certain villages which did not engage in war, but served as a refuge to those who fled on defeat. The act of remaining in peace and finding security are the anticipating goals of the religious act in this context.

One can generalise that this meaning is based on the religious experiences associated with traditional warfare, whereby the gods were called upon for victory and success. Yet those who participated in the *tapua'iga* also remained neutral. In other words, they mediated and offered security by fostering harmony between the two opposing parties. The goals were not only to seek and create peace, but also to heal and comfort the victimised, the broken and the defeated party, both spiritually and physically.⁶⁶

This is the same meaning that I have experienced during my young age in my village. For example, in times of sports, like the *Kirikiti faa-Samoa* (Samoan cricket) where one village challenges another village's team. There are special houses or places for the *Tapuaiga* from the two teams. This is where all the supporters of both teams wait and cheer on their respective teams, in silence. These supporters stay peacefully and very quiet, in these houses for *Tapuaiga*. It is like they are meditating themselves to God to help and give strength to their respective

⁶⁴ Davies, *O Samoa Anamua*, 29.

⁶⁵ Ama'amalele Tofaeono, *Eco-theology: Aiga – The Household of Life: A Perspective from Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa* (PhD Dissertation; Erlangen: Erlanger Verl. für Mission und Ökumene, 2000), 25.

⁶⁶ Tofaeono, *Eco-theology: Aiga*, 25.

teams in order to achieve success. Looking at these points, it seems that the word Tapuaiga simply means, *tatalo* (to pray), or *talotaloga* (prayers), or *talosiaga* of something in order to become successful.

2.2 The Arrival of Christianity into Samoa

The arrival of Christianity into Samoa in the 19th Century, marks a new era in the religion-cultural heritage of Samoa. Its arrival and reception is signified by the traditional concept *taeao*. *Taeao* can literally be translated as morning or tomorrow. The concept significantly refers to not only the opportune time but also the occasion and its religion-cultural relevance. *Taeao* not only refers to *aso* (day/s or time), but it also includes *le mea na tupu ai* (something that eventually happened), the *malae* (special area for chiefs' meetings), an affirmation by the decision of the *fono a matai* (chief meeting), and is sealed by the religious ceremony of *ava* drinking, as well as celebration through feasting.

The arrival of the mainline denominations: the London Missionary Society (LMS), the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Society (WMMS), and the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM), saw the acceptance of these new religious movements into the Samoan society, and consequently all were officially welcomed. Granting the *taeao* to the new *Lotu* (church) resembles not only the union of an event, time and place, but it has also found vital recognition in the Samoan way of life. Referring to these *taeao*, Samoans continuously recall the turning away from the time of *pouliuli* (age of darkness), towards the new era in Samoan history or *aso malamalama* (the age of enlightenment), that accompanied the arrival of Christianity into Samoa.⁶⁷

Christianity advocated another form of moral and spiritual order that was shaped by the convincing power of the Holy Spirit to convert minds and save souls. The process was spread by sequences of prayer meetings, revivals, Sunday worship services, catechistical teachings, and several other religious activities. Christian revivals, daily meditations, worship, and the constant

⁶⁷ Tofaeono, *Eco-theology: Aiga*, 28.

reading of the Scriptures as part of the spiritual discipline, all were introduced into the Samoan society.⁶⁸ Some people marked their conversion to Christianity, by absorbing or eating their gods such as fish, while others threw their personal and village gods into a fire as a sign of rebellion against their old gods and their old way of life.

Samoan people in the past, were very spiritual and deeply devoted to their gods. They were very faithful and honest to the gods whom they believed were the sources of their lives. They gave great honor and respect to what they believed to be their protectors. With the arrival of Christianity, Samoan people seemed to transfer this trust and honor, to the God of the Christians as acknowledged by the Missionaries. They believed that if the new God of the Missionaries is more powerful than their gods, then he would be able to provide more for them, than their old gods ever could before. They honored God so much, and served him to the best of their abilities in order to be protected and blessed.

This mentality of the Samoan Christian people carried forth from history for a very long time. However, within the last two or three decades, their honor and trust in God, has begun to decay away for various reasons. Globalisation and the change of life-style; migrations in and out of the country; the rising of new religious movements; these are some of the reasons for the recent decline in Samoan Christians honoring and trusting God.

Unfortunately, many people still suffer and face various difficulties in life, where God appears to have no answer. For the faithful Christian, this becomes rather disheartening, and some turn away from God and seek comfort and solace in modern technology and modern science. Some have even turned to the traditional healings and personal gods of old, to seek comfort and to find peace.

⁶⁸ Tofaeono, *Eco-theology: Aiga*, 28.

2.3 A Social-Cultural Interpretation of Family Systems from a Samoan CCCS Cultural Perspective

The CCCS approach to worship is a mixture of traditional Western modes of worship as dictated by the founding fathers of Christianity, and the London Missionary Society, and traditional Samoan culture also known as “*Faa-Samoa*”. “*Faa-Samoa*” is literally translated as the “Samoan way” and indicates the cultural beliefs and practices which dictate how Samoans interact with each other on a social and cultural level. It has also been defined as “the distinct way which describes the totality of the Samoans – their culture, customs and worldviews”.⁶⁹ Culture has been defined as “the sum total of the ways of living built up by a human community and transmitted from one generation to another.”⁷⁰ In the Samoan context, culture or “*Aganuu*” speaks to the spiritual nature and character of the Samoan community, and is highlighted in the Samoan villages or “*nuu*”. As such it is a reflection of the thinking process, philosophy and psychology of the Samoan community or “*nuu*”.⁷¹

According to Reverend Dr Faalepo Tuisuga, a Senior Lecturer and the Head of the Practical Theology department at Malua Theological College, “The Samoan conception of ‘individual personal life construct’ is somewhat complicated, as Samoans believe that there is no such thing as an individual ‘I – being’ in existence in its life world.”⁷² This means that the Samoan people in the past, and even today, still continue to live interrelated and interconnected lives. They work for each other and strongly support each other, where ever they may be.

Samoans generally have very strong bonds within our relationships, not only in our families but also located within the local and village communities. It is precisely these types of connections, which make our people miss each other when loved ones die suddenly and unexpectedly. Naturally, human beings want to maintain close relationships with one another, as demonstrated in our close bonds with our family members, our friends, and those whom we

⁶⁹ Rev Dr Faalepo Tuisuga, Lecture Notes 2011 PT 401, 13.

⁷⁰ Tofaeono, *Eco-theology: Aiga*, 28.

⁷¹ Tuisuga, *Lecture Notes 2011*, 13.

⁷² Faalepo Tuisuga, *O le tofa liliu a Samoa: A hermeneutical critical analysis of the cultural - theological praxis of the Samoan context* (PhD Dissertation; Melbourne: Melbourne College of Divinity, 2009) 118.

cherish. However, in the real world that we live, all things are finite, including the lives that we live. Life's next door is death. From this we understand that we all live the lives given to us by God, but one day this will come to an end. So therefore bereavement because of death is something that must be faced by us all, especially those around us when we move from this present existence through the door of death – it becomes a fact of life.⁷³ Death comes at any time, at any age, and in many different ways. We also understand that there are many types of bereavements due to different types of death. In this situation of unavailability and crisis, what type of help does the bereaved require and what help can be offered? To answer this, the formation of the CCCS *Faifeau* will be touched upon, disclosing the training undertaken to meet the needs of the bereaved in times of crisis.

2.4 The Formation of the CCCS *Faifeau*

For more than one hundred sixty seven years, Malua Theological College has provided training for the ministry for the Congregational Christian Church Samoa. Throughout these years, the College has adapted and developed itself to meet the many changes in the life of the Church and the Society it serves. However, it was recognised from the outset that the College would be required to develop and adapt to change in a rapidly changing world.⁷⁴

Society's view and definition of reality have changed and will continue to change as social expectations evolve and new social issues emerge. Traditional values keep on changing as the theoretical and empirical aspects of culture change. In the academic arena, practically all intellectual disciplines, including Theology, are constantly developing their methodological assumptions and methods of interpretation.⁷⁵

At the present time, students who attend the College need to undertake four years of training in order to complete the course and to graduated with either a Diploma of Theology, a

⁷³ Pincus Lily, *The importance of Mourning: Death and the Family* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1976), 249.

⁷⁴ Malua Theological College, *2011 Handbook* (Apia: Ricoh Samoa, 2011), 11.

⁷⁵ Malua Theological College, *2011 Handbook*, 12.

Bachelor of Theology, or a Bachelor of Divinity. Students are to undertake Biblical studies, Systematic Theology, Church History, Practical Theology and Field Work Education to complete the program with the competence and skills necessary to become effective Ministers of the Church in Samoa and abroad.

In the Practical Theology department and Field Work Education, it seems to be the combination of all the different courses as mentioned above. It becomes the application of all teachings, knowledge and understandings gained from the other disciplines, and putting them into action. Simply put, the praxis of one's faith and reflection, and the applying of theological understanding into our everyday lives.

Within the four years of study, Practical Theology courses introduce students to many key issues and concerns within the ministry, including training in bereavement counseling and management. Specifically in terms of the Pastoral Care and Counseling training, the College offers in its second year of study a course that addresses this area of training. Furthermore, a course is offered in the second year called the 'Pastoral Care and Family System Theory.' This course explores the relationship between the Individual Model approach and the Family Systems Theory approach in counseling and therapy. In the third year of study, a 'Religion, Trauma, and Coping course' is offered to students. This course aims to give students valuable knowledge and insights into the psychological, sociological, and theological aspects of individual and collective traumatisation, and the role that religion can play in coping with it. In the final year of study, there is a 'Ministry in a Changing Society' course that equips the *faiifeau* of tomorrow with skills and tools to combat the many issues in the changing Christian ministries of the world today.⁷⁶ It is the objective and aim of all the four years of training at Malua, that the *faiifeau* will be competent and well-equipped to deal with many facets of the ministry, including bereavement counseling as the result of sudden death.

⁷⁶ Malua Theological College 2011 Handbook, 11

2.5 Reflections from Bereaved Members of the CCCS about Dealing With the Sudden Death of a Loved One

Sudden means something that happens very quickly and unexpectedly.⁷⁷ Death refers to the loss of life.⁷⁸ Therefore, Sudden Death is a quick or an unexpected death of someone in the family or community. Sudden death can occur in various ways – such as by way of car accidents, serious injuries from work, people who drown in the sea or rivers, plane crashes, suicide, natural disasters, fighting and wars, and so forth. This includes the death of someone who was diagnosed with a common illness such as the flu or headache, but ends up dying suddenly without explanation or expectation.

According to some of the victims I have interviewed, they all have similar feelings in regards to the effect of sudden death upon someone whom they love. Upon receiving the news of the sudden death of their loved ones, the victims all stated that the news was a shock to their systems. It was news they did not expect, and as such, was very hard to accept and absorb.

According to Caroline Liu, the wife of the late Faaesea Liu,⁷⁹ when she was informed about the death of her husband for the first time, she could not believe it. Everything was upside-down in her mind, and as a result, she thought that the story about the death of her husband was just a dream. She said that for about half an hour, when she realised that the story was true, her mind understood the situation but deep inside her heart, she did not want to accept it. She treated the story as a dream. Caroline said that when she confirmed that her husband was dead, she started to ask God for a miracle. *If Jesus was resurrected from death, why could God not do the same for her husband?* Later, she complained to God *-why did God not give her husband a second chance to continue serving Him with the many talents he had? Why did this thing happen to them when they are already being selected to be a Faifeau? Where was God when His servant was murdered?* She also said that she hardly accepted any words of counseling from people

⁷⁷ G Morris, ed., *The complete Christian Dictionary for Home and School* (New York: All Nation Publisher, 1990), 161.

⁷⁸ Morris, *The complete Christian Dictionary for Home and School*, 687.

⁷⁹ A graduate from Malua Theological College, who was murdered at Vaoala, SAMOA in April 2011.

around her at that very moment. She was not even able to say a prayer, but tried to stop thinking of God.⁸⁰ For Caroline, as evident in many like people Caroline facing the sudden death of a loved one, the questioning of God becomes a normal behavior. Even for the devout and faithful Christian, this too happens quite often.

In the case of the sudden death of a son or a daughter, it is very hard for a parent to accept that their child is dead. Tuigamala Opetai Liu, the father of the late Faaesea Liu, said that he did not believe the news of his son's death. He said that, burying a son or a daughter was not something that he was prepared for. He said that normally in life, we prepare ourselves to bury our parents, and likewise, our children accept and expect that we will die before them due to the laws of nature. However, if any of our children die before us, it is very hard to accept. We are not ready to see our beloved children in their coffins and in their graves. Therefore, life seems to be unfair and upside-down to parents who experience this, including Tuigamala. He also asked similar questions as Carol did, to God. *Where was God when his son was murdered?* In past years Tuigamala had prayed to God to use any of his children as a servant or *Faifeau*, and God answered by accepting his son Faaesea to study at Malua Theological College. He was thankful to God because he believed that Faaesea was his family's living sacrifice and offering to God. However, the loss of his son had left him confused about life, and about God's role and purpose. His son is now gone during the early stages of his short and brief ministry, and to Tuigamala he reflected on the following question many times - *what does this all mean?* He even considered leaving the Church and forsaking his faith altogether, when he thought that God did nothing to save his son Faaesea.⁸¹

All the victims associate sudden death with pain, grief and loss. This pain and grief has called into question their faith as Christians. This is because the victims believe that as Christians they should not be affected by the trials and tribulations of life. As Christians, they believe they are protected by God. So when death comes visiting as displayed above, it puts a strain on the faith of even the most committed and devout Christian.

⁸⁰ Personal Interview with Caroline, the wife of late Faaesea Liu, on the 30th of April 2011, 9:30pm, by telephone.

⁸¹ Personal Interview with Tuigamala Opetai Liu, the father of the late Faaesea Liu, on the 30th of April 2011, 10:00pm by telephone.

From the view of these CCCS victims, it seems to me that all these people have the same attitude when they faced sudden death within their families. As a result of the shock and disbelief of the sudden death of a beloved family member, their entire lives were turned upside-down. They did not want to believe and accept the loss, but instead they treated it as a dream that was not real. However, when they came to the realisation that it was not a dream, they questioned God's love and protection upon his faithful servants.

The familiar questions asked by Christians in these situations are - *Why do these things happen to good people? Why did it not happen to those we consider as bad people?* Even though we are committed as Christians, and we are taught how to deal with life and life after death as a matter of faith, *how do we then face the difficulties as experienced with sudden death in our lives as people of faith?* The above questions seem to be unresolved.

People construct a framework from within their experiences and from their studies, to find answers for the loss of family members due to sudden death. Within the CCCS today, we now have a department of Counseling at the Ioane Viliamu Building, to deal with various problems and issues within the church. This does not mean that these counselors have all the answers to the people's problems. However, they are there to help those who have suffered loss and pain through different situations, in trying to cope with whatever their situations may be. This is one way in which the CCCS is trying to resolve some of the issues and problems facing many church-goers, in trying to look for solutions to help mend the troubled hearts of those who require counseling.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CCCS FAIFEAU AS A HEALER FOR BEREAVED FAMILIES

“Ministers are the only professional persons with training in counseling who have automatic entrée to the world of most sorrowing people. This gives clergy an unparalleled opportunity and responsibility to be effective guides and companions of the bereaved as they walk through the shadowed valley of loss.”⁸²

Clinebell states in the above quote that bereaved persons generally look towards the clergy, or the *faifeau* for counseling in times of sorrow, and in times of mourning, as they are considered as the ones who possess suitable solutions for their problems. This chapter will focus upon the impacts of sudden death on bereaved persons, and will include offering recommendations and guidelines for the *faifeau*, in his role as healer for bereaved families in the church today.

3.1 The Impacts of Sudden Death

It has been identified in literature regarding the occurrence of Sudden Death, that there are certain features⁸³ specific to Sudden Death which the *faifeau* must take into account, when trying to offer Pastoral Care and Counseling to the grieving family and friends of the deceased:

- i) Sudden Death leaves the grieving family with a sense of unreality and disbelief, almost like being in a dream-like state (cf Ch2.5);
- ii) It promotes a sense of guilt on the part of the grieving family members and friends due to unresolved issues with the deceased (cf Ch2.5);

⁸² Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 218.

⁸³ Cf L A Platt “Without Warning: The Impact of Sudden Death” in *Resources for Ministry in Death and Dying* edited by L A Platt and R G Branch (Broadman Press: Nashville, 1988), 279.

- iii) When sudden death occurs, it leaves a strong need on the part of the grieving family members to blame someone (cf Ch2.5);
- iv) There is the involvement of legal and medical authorities in cases of sudden death which can interfere with special cultural and religious funeral rites;
- v) One effect of sudden death is the sense of helplessness and feeling of being lost/directionless in the light of the grief and trauma (cf Ch2.5);
- vi) Grieving family members and friends often exhibit high levels of agitation, due to the nature of loss as suffered due to sudden death. People can't eat, sleep properly, quick to anger or stay around places where the deceased lived, visited or frequented (cf Ch2.5);
- vii) Sudden death leaves the bereaved with regrets for the lost opportunity for closure in regards to things not said or not done with the deceased (cf Ch2.5);
- viii) There is also a need to try to understand why the sudden death has occurred. The questioning is a mixture of trying to make sense and finding a way out of the hole that is the grief at the loss of a beloved family member due to sudden death (cf Ch2.5).

This is not an exhaustive list of specific features that arise out of sudden death but just some that are common amongst grieving family members and friends.⁸⁴

3.2 Guidelines and Recommendations for the *Faifeau* in Today's Ministry

In the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 3, verses 1 to 10, tells the story of the Apostles Peter and John and the healing of the Crippled Beggar. The story speaks of a crippled beggar who was carried to the Beautiful Gate at the Temple every day to beg for alms. Every day people would pass the crippled beggar on the way into the Temple, including the Apostles and give him alms. Then one day Peter and John did not give the crippled beggar alms. Instead the Apostles stopped in front of the crippled beggar and Peter instructed the crippled beggar to look at them - "Look at us". The Greek word ἀσάτενι, from the word ατενίζω, means to stare intently or to stare at.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Platt et al, *Without Warning*, 279.

⁸⁵ William D Mounce, *The Reverse Interlinear for New Testament Word Studies* (Beijing: Library of Congress, 2005), 354.

Peter therefore was staring intently at the crippled beggar, sharing the same presence with the crippled beggar. Then Peter told the crippled beggar that “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk”. The crippled beggar then stood up and walked.⁸⁶

This story is an example of Pastoral Counseling and how the *faiifeau* should counsel their Church members in times of pain and loss. What was happening with the crippled beggar and the people that passed him by was that they were all caught in a cycle of giving the crippled beggar what he wanted. This placed every person who passed the crippled beggar together with the beggar himself, into a never-changing repetitive cycle in which no one really benefited. What Peter did was that he looked closely, stared intensely and engaged the crippled beggar until he saw what the crippled beggar needed, but not what he wanted.

This is exactly what *faiifeau* need to do, they need to study closely and engage with their Church members, so that in times of sudden death, when people are trying to deal with the pain and loss suffered as a result of sudden death, the *faiifeau* will give them the counseling they need and not the counseling they want. For example, in times of sudden death, some people will not want to face the fact that a beloved family member has died due to unforeseen circumstances. Instead these people will want to walk away or go somewhere where they do not have to face the reality of death. Others will instead deal with the death by turning to alcohol abuse and anti-social behavior to deal with the pain.⁸⁷ It is therefore the role of the *faiifeau* through his Pastoral Counseling, to deal with the pain the bereaved are feeling.

One way the *faiifeau* can deal with this inability to face reality by family members of the deceased, is to tell them what they need to hear and not what they want to hear. Their grief cannot be resolved by walking away from the cause of the pain. They need to face it with their family, as grief shared is often grief lessened especially in the context of Samoan society, which is communal by nature. As such this leads not only to grief lessened, but also to a faster healing process for the family members of the bereaved.

⁸⁶ Acts 3: 1-10 NRSV.

⁸⁷ Cf Platt, *Without Warning*, 187

There needs to be a way or process by which the *faifeau* can assist in reducing the pain and loss due to sudden death. At the time of death, the *faifeau* should be present at the family home as soon as possible. The *faifeau* is aware that his role at this time is to maintain a presence, and bring about peace and stability, at a time when upheaval and uncertainty is normally the case.

3.3 During the Early Hours Since the Death has Occurred

The *Faifeau* should be prepared to help deal with immediate problems and issues. In some cases, calling for medical assistance is to be done first. One valuable service is to help assemble an interpersonal support by notifying family members and friends through any means of communication available. The main focus at this crucial point in time, are the survivors. The survivors might seek guidance about what to do next, because many people have made no plans for dying and do not know what to do when it happens. The *faifeau* is never to abandon the survivors. He should be there regularly as a source of help and consolation. The *faifeau* is or certainly can be critically important members of the caring circle who offer special assistance.⁸⁸

Wherever the family is with the body of the newly deceased family member, this is where the *faifeau* should be. He will need to conduct a prayer service in the beginning, to reaffirm the presence of God at this time. This is in spite of the fact that the immediate and extended family members may not be in the right frame of mind to listen, due to the pain and loss suffered. Though they may not be ready for his words of comfort and support, the family members can see that the *faifeau* is present. There is a belief in the CCCS, that the *faifeau* should be present at all times during such an event. If the *faifeau* is not present during this initial grieving period, then the family will ask questions later as to why the *faifeau* was not there to provide the Pastoral care expected of him.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Cf Platt "Without Warning: 248

⁸⁹ Frank Wright, *Pastoral Care Revisited* (London: Canterbury Press, 2005), 118.

The role of the *faifeau* is to be with the grieving family at this time. He will not try to stop the grieving process but allow it to proceed. He is not there to take away the burden of pain due to the loss suffered, but is there to share the burden with them. The trauma of the loss by sudden death needs to be released, as it is like an injury which needs to be healed. The healing process of any death will take time, but in relation to sudden death, the healing process will take longer. This is due to the unexpected and sudden nature of the death. Sudden death does not allow time for proper farewell, or last and final words with the beloved. Not only are people unprepared emotionally for the sudden death of a loved one, but it also has a great effect on the spiritual wellbeing of people. This is compared to the death of a loved one, who has been diagnosed with cancer and is slowly dying. In this case, the family of the deceased are prepared emotionally, spiritually and physically for the death of this particular family member. The opportunity to say goodbye cannot be underestimated, as it allows people to say sorry for any wrongs that they may have done, or even to say 'thank you'. When a person dies of sudden death, all such chances for a final reconciliation are gone. This leaves the people in an emotional and spiritual void that is difficult to fill.⁹⁰

However, this becomes one of the main role of the *faifeau*, to help fill this void. The *faifeau* can also represent the deceased person. All the chances of reconciliation that could not have been shared between the deceased and his/her family before the sudden death, can now be shared by substituting the *faifeau* for the deceased. The *faifeau* acts as an intermediary between the family and the deceased, trying to ease the pain due to the sudden death.⁹¹

3.4 Prior to the Funeral Service

During the initial week of grieving, the *faifeau* must maintain a consistent and daily presence at the home of the grieving family. Not only must he be heard but more importantly, he must be seen as being the emotionally and spiritually support the family needs at such a crucial time. He can also give assistance in material ways, such as financial assistance, lending of vehicles or

⁹⁰ Wright, *Pastoral Care Revisited*, 118.

⁹¹ Wright, *Pastoral Care Revisited*, 119.

giving help in any way required. This spiritual and material assistance will help to ease the pain and loss, as the simple gesture of seeing the *faiifeau* and his presence, will help to lift the burden from the shoulders of the grieving family.⁹²

The *faiifeau* however needs to be careful in how he maintains his presence during this initial grieving period. He will need to balance his presence, with the need to allow the family to grieve on their own. He will also need to ensure that none of the grieving family members are left in a state of social isolation. In cases such as the loss of a beloved family member due to sudden death, it is common that due to the feelings of loss, grieving family members will want to stay isolated from others. They will not want to associate with others due to feelings of agitation, anger and resentment at the loss of their beloved family members – which culminates in anti-social behavior.⁹³

This is dangerous as this does not allow for a grieving process in which the grieving person can heal. The *faiifeau* will need to recognise this as the longer a person is outside the family unit, the more prone he or she is to feelings of depression and anger which can lead to self-harm or can result in lack of physical well-being. This lack of physical well-being can lead to accidents and injuries such as falling asleep at the wheel of the car due to exhaustion. In the context of Samoa, some people isolate themselves from the community or family by going fishing or to the plantations. As such they can be prone to injuries or even self-harm as there is no one there to support them or watch over them in their fragile state of mind.⁹⁴

3.5 Planning of the Funeral Service

Many families are amazingly unprepared to deal with a funeral. They simply do not know what steps to take, or they are so distressed with grief that they function poorly. So this is one of the most important roles of the *faiifeau*, to help the family in planning the funeral service. Most likely

⁹² Cf L A Platt, *Without Warning*, 279.

⁹³ Lily, *The Importance of Mourning*, 249.

⁹⁴ Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 218.

some *faiifeau* do not know exactly all the proceedings required for the funeral service. The following is a simple checklist⁹⁵ of important points that the *faiifeau* must consider:

- i) Notify a funeral director;
- ii) Decide upon the day and the hour of the service, taking into consideration everyone expected to participate;
- iii) Where the service will be held;
- iv) Arrange all transportation;
- v) The Church Service;
- vi) Finding all the information about the life of the deceased;
- vii) Look for any investments and insurance of the deceased;
- viii) If the person is alone, look for debts and instalments.

These are some of the things to be checked first by the *faiifeau*, not only here in Samoa but also for members of the church abroad.

In terms of food inventory, some families are not prepared or equipped financially to meet all the requirements for the funeral process. The family of someone who has died from a long term illness is relatively prepared for the social and cultural requirements of a funeral. In the Samoan context, this means preparing fine mats, money, and food inventory for all the funeral and cultural proceedings associated with one's funeral service.⁹⁶

For most Samoan families, due to economic restraints and high costs, they need to seek money somewhere to cover all the funeral costs, including the purchase of cartons of corned beef, tinned fish, and monetary gifts for those who attend. This in itself can add to the heavy burden already being carried by the family. Feelings of shame and embarrassment will result if the family is unable to fulfil their cultural duties. This is because Samoans tend to evaluate or judge how well a funeral service went by the quantity and quality of fine mats given as gifts to the distinguished guests and *matai*, as well as how well they fed their guests. The *faiifeau* can share some of this burden, if possible and within his financial means. It does not necessarily

⁹⁵ Cf Platt, *Without Warning*, 287.

⁹⁶ Tuisuga, *Lecture Notes 2011*, 13.

require financial assistance at that very moment, but it can also include financial support or the donation of food items and the like, when the funeral process has concluded.

3.6 After the Funeral

The period of confrontation with the loss begins after a week or ten days since the funeral has finished. This is when the sorrow really hits home, when members of the extended family and friends have left, leaving the immediate family of the bereaved alone. The family will then realise that there is a person missing within the family.⁹⁷ During the preparation for the funeral, the family did not have the time or ability to properly grieve on their own. More often than not, the family home was inundated with members of the extended family and friends, present to assist and support with the funeral preparations and cultural proceedings. Once the family is alone, the reality of the loss becomes more evident. This is when the presence of the *faifeau* must be visible and frequent once again, to the grieving family. His presence will act as a comforting buffer to the family's pain at the loss of the bereaved, as they go through the painful stages of the grieving process.

3.7 CCCS Ministry as a Healing Community

Everything that has been mentioned so far to this point about the relationship within the Samoan family system, is very much applicable to the process within the Church. In the CCCS itself, as mentioned before, church practices work hand-in-hand with the Samoan cultural practices. This ensures that within the church, there are very strong relationships that bind church members together. So in times of suffering, these strong relationships ensure that church members look out for one another. The church not only functions as a community of faithful believers, but also more like a family.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Cf Platt, *Without Warning*, 256.

⁹⁸ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1990), 193.

Therefore, not only can the *faiifeau* do counseling himself, but the church members also can share in the process as well. As a family of Christ, we Christians need to share and take care of one another in whatever situations we may face in life. We need to share one's burden together, in order to lessen the weight that one may be carrying alone. We should love one another as we love ourselves, and more importantly, as we love God. The *faiifeau* may strengthen the family's support system, by encouraging church members to visit the family, to help with day-to-day activities and general chores, and simply, to listen to the burdens of the members of the bereaved family.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Cf Platt, *Without Warning*, 238.

CONCLUSION

In light of this research and in the context of Samoa, the belief that once we become Christians, we are protected from all difficulties in life, is very strong in many people of the church (CCCS) today. It is a belief that has been passed down from generation to generation. However, the reality of life is that we experience both joy, and also sorrow. In times of sorrow, people often ask *'Why and where is God? If He is such a powerful protector and sustainer of life, where is he in times of sorrow?'*

In cases of sudden death, it is difficult to accept as Christians the loss of a loved one as a result of sudden death. The unexpected nature of the loss, has deep and serious consequences to a Christian family's faith dimension. In some cases, people cannot handle the loss and grief, and the effect upon their faith is that they will leave the church, due to this crisis of faith. This is because they serve God wholeheartedly in order to be blessed, but the sudden death of a loved one, in their minds, is not a sign that God is good.

This is where the *faiifeau* steps into his role as a healer, counselor, mediator between the grieving family and God. His role is to ensure that the people understand that life is not only 'milk and honey', but there are also hardships that must be faced in this life - sudden death is just one test of faith. Death is not the end of all things in our Christian belief. As shown by Christ, there is life after death for all who believe in him, but we can only gain the everlasting life through hardships of this current and present life.

The main purpose for the *faiifeau* is to care for the survivors. In the case of sudden death, the *faiifeau* needs to be with the family during and after the funeral. The *faiifeau* should remember that for most of the people affected by the loss, they will turn to him for guidance. The *faiifeau* should have sufficient understanding, and be prepared to take on this role. He should also ensure

that he is available to the grieving family, during this vital period. The *faiifeau* to many members of the bereaved family, will be considered as the representative of God before them. For this, he must be prepared to take on any of the complaints the bereaved may have against God, and in faith and with God's spirit, he may be able to bring about peace for their many unresolved questions they may have about their sudden loss.

From this study, I have realised that the role of the *faiifeau* dealing with traumatic experiences that includes the process of healing following a sudden death, this is an area of the ministry today in the CCCS that needs urgent attention. It is evident that there are still people living with ongoing grief, as a result of the unresolved grief from the death of a loved one through sudden death. It is because they were inadequately counseled by their *faiifeau* in the past. This may be due to the fact that some *faiifeau* do not pay close attention to this area of their ministry, and yet many people in the church today are yearning and desperate to be healed from their psychological and spiritual wounds.

One way in which this can be dealt with, is to fully utilise and upgrade the recently established counseling centre for the CCCS and its *faiifeau*, at the Ioane Viliamu building in Apia. It should be staffed with people experienced and trained in dealing with such issues, especially *faiifeau* with vast experiences in dealing with traumatic issues such as sudden death. This is to ensure that our people will have an avenue to seek counseling within the CCCS, without going to other services.

Today at Malua Theological College, a programme has started dealing with counseling issues. This programme should be expanded to CCCS churches nationwide, to assist in teaching *faiifeau* and their church members in how to deal with issues such as sudden death. This will assist in maintaining the spiritual health of not only the church members but also the *faiifeau*, as it is the duty and role of the *faiifeau*, to act as guide and healer for God's children on earth.

APPENDIX

The following are the open-ended questions that guided the interviews conducted with some bereaved members of the CCCS [English translations of these questions are given in brackets].

1. *O le ā sou lagona i le uluai taimi na ta'uina atu ai ia te oe ua maliu Faaesea?*
[How did you feel when you first heard the news about Faaesea's death?]
2. *O ai nisi na faamafanafana atu ia te oe i le uluai taimi o ou mafatiaga?*
[Who comforted you during the early hours of your suffering?]
3. *Sa faigofie lā ia te oe ona e talia ia faamafanafanaga?*
[Was it easy for you to accept these condolences, and words of comfort?]
4. *Ina ua e iloa e moni lava le mea ua tupu, o le ā sou lagona i lou vā fesootea ma le Atua?*
[When you confirmed the truth of what had happened, what feelings did you have towards God?]
5. *Mai lava lā i lea taimi, na i ai se suiga o lou soifua faa-le-Agaga, poo lau auunaga foi i le Atua e ala i le ekalesia?*
[From that moment, did this affect your spiritual life, and your service to God through the church?]
6. *Ua ā mai lā oe i lenei taimi?*
[How are you feeling at this moment?]

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GLOSSARY

<i>Aganuu</i>	culture
<i>aso</i>	day/ time
<i>atua o aai</i>	village gods
<i>atua-fale</i>	family gods
<i>Ava</i>	kava/ drink made from grounded roots of kava plant
<i>Faa-Samoa</i>	Samoaan way of life
<i>Fale-tele</i>	main big house
<i>Faifeau</i>	Church Minister / Pastor / Reverend
<i>Fono a matai</i>	chiefs meeting
<i>Kirikiti faa-Samoa</i>	Samoaan cricket
<i>Lotu</i>	church
<i>mai-aitu</i>	illness caused by god-like spirits
<i>Malae</i>	special area for chief meetings
<i>Malamalama</i>	light/ enlightenment
<i>Matai</i>	chief/ one who is been bestowed with a chiefly title
<i>mea na tupu ai</i>	something that eventually happened
<i>Nu'u</i>	village
<i>Pouliuli</i>	darkness
<i>Taeao/ taeao</i>	morning/ tomorrow
<i>Tagaloalagi</i>	Samoa's god of creation
<i>Talotaloga/ talosiaga</i>	to pray/ prayers
<i>Tapua'i / tapuaiga</i>	worship
<i>Taulasea</i>	Samoaan traditional healers
<i>vai-Samoa</i>	traditional/ herbal medicines and remedies