

Resilience: The “Secret Sauce” of Health and Holiness

Religious Formation Conference -- Congress 2025

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This handout is designed with two goals in mind. First, it offers you an opportunity to interact with the material prior to our gathering. Secondly, it provides you with an array of articles, websites, and videos for reflection and use after the RFC Congress. Each participant knows best the time and attention they can give to this handout, considering other personal, communal, and ministerial responsibilities.

1. Introduction

Resilience, the capacity to engage life's challenges and not be crushed by them, may just well be the “secret sauce” of health and holiness! Current explorations in the fields of psychology and spirituality highlight the essential role resilience plays throughout our entire life journey. In times past, resilience was often understood as a given; you either had an ample supply...or perhaps not. Today, resilience is known to be both a human capacity and a grace that can be cultivated and strengthened throughout our life course.¹



This pre-Congress seminar is designed for vocation and formation ministers, life-long formation ministers, and congregational leaders. We will explore resilience from both a psychological and spiritual perspective. Specifically, we will consider how resilience, the *secret sauce* of health and holiness, may be identified, nurtured, and strengthened during vocation discernment and the formative journey (which, in reality, lasts a lifetime!).

2. As we begin...

Your exploration of this topic will be enhanced if you keep in mind the following:

C⁴: Culture(s), Charism, Creativity, & Connection

- ❖ The **CULTURE(s)** of those you accompany in vocation discernment through perpetual profession.
- ❖ The **CHARISM** of your congregation.
- ❖ Your own **CREATIVITY** and experience.
- ❖ The **CONNECTIONS** you make with previous seminars, videos, podcasts, articles, and perhaps vocation/formation team conversations.



¹ Although this seminar explores resiliency with regards to individuals, resiliency is also essential for all living beings and our common home itself. See *Laudato Si'* and *a Spirituality of Resiliency* by Robert Brancatelli. In the *Journal of Management and Global Sustainability*, V4, Issue 1, 2016, p. 1-14.

<https://archium.ateneo.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1048&context=jmgs>

Following this seminar you may wish to explore the following questions with your vocation / formation team, ongoing formation minister, and leadership.

- What from today's seminar fits our reality, our processes of vocation discernment and formation, our ongoing formation ventures,² our work as a leadership team?
- What modifications would make this material more applicable to the culture(s) of those we accompany, our ongoing formation ventures, our ministry of leadership?
- What might we wish to delve into more deeply as vocation and formation ministers, ongoing formation ministers, as leadership?

"Listen with the ear of your heart!"

St. Benedict (c. 480 – c. 547) urged his original community to "listen with the ear of the heart" to all of life.³ Today, consider listening not only to the *content* of the pre-Congress seminar, but also to yourself! That is, listen to your *shimmers*, those fleeting insights that may arise as we explore resilience. And remember, our *shimmers* come in varied forms, from thoughts and emotions to memories, questions, and even hints of resistance.⁴



Theology, Spirituality, and Psychology: Partners and Allies

Resilience: The "Secret Sauce" of Health and Holiness is built upon the conviction that **theology** / **spirituality** (our growing experience of God and all that is of God), and **psychology** (our growing experience of our humanity) are partners and allies in the formative process, as well as throughout our entire life journey as religious.⁵

² The term "ongoing formation" at times elicits resistance. In my work with congregations I use the term "continuing transformation," others use the term "life-long formation."

³ *Rule of Saint Benedict*, Prologue. Of interest may be the video "The Rule of St. Benedict 'Prologue'" (20 min.) with Sr. Lucy Wynkoop, OSB <https://stplacid.org/sister-lucy-on-the-rule-of-benedict/>. Also the article "The Rule of St. Benedict" by Sr. Jane Michele McClure, OSB <https://www.thedome.org/about/our-way-of-life/rule-st-benedict/>

⁴ Resistance has a right to exist! Actually, when we encounter resistance in ourselves (or others!) it usually means we have "struck gold" – touched something that is **important/sacred/valuable**! The key is to *be-friend* the resistance, listening for the *message* and *meaning* contained within, the treasure of great price. Make sure you are taking a multi-vitamin! Unearthing gold is hard, *hard* work! 😊

⁵ Here one must differentiate between various psychological theories. Those characterized by (1) strong determinism (e.g., orthodox theories of psychoanalysis and various types of behaviorism); (2) psychological theories that hold that growth and development can proceed unhindered if only given the "right" environment (e.g., some humanistic theories); and (3) psychological theories that align with a Christian anthropology and take seriously a person's *capacity for freedom* while also acknowledging the frequent influences (both conscious and unconscious) arising from one's life-story. These *influences may limit a person's freedom*, growth, and development in ways not immediately evident to those discerning religious life or a vocation or formation minister. See Franco Imoda, SJ (1998). *Human Development: Psychology and Mystery*. Peeters Publishers; Franco Imoda, SJ (2019). Additionally, the podcast "New Frontiers in Theological Anthropology" by Daniel P. Horan, may be of interest. You can access this podcast on *Things Not Seen: Conversations about Culture and Faith*, <https://www.thingsnotseenradio.com/shows/1925-horan> (52 minutes).



“In pastoral care, sufficient use should be made, not only of *theological principles*, but also, especially the findings of the secular sciences, especially *psychology and sociology*: in this way, the faithful will be brought to a purer and more mature living of faith.”

-*Gaudium et Spes*, §62

“Sufficient time should be reserved for initial formation, understood as a process of development which passes through every stage of personal maturity – from the *psychological* and spiritual to the *theological* and pastoral.”

-*Vita Consecrata*, §65

“It is important to deepen the dialogue between the human sciences, especially *psychology and theology*, for an understanding of human experience that does not merely situate these approaches by side by side but integrates them into a more mature synthesis.”⁶

-*A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis*, §14h

3. Secret Sauce!⁷

The exact origin of the expression *secret sauce* is difficult to pinpoint, though during the 1940s and 1950s its usage grew in popularity. When used literally, *secret sauce* refers to a condiment whose ingredients are held in secret by companies such as Coca-Cola, McDonalds, and Kentucky Fried Chicken. When this expression is used figuratively as metaphor, it refers to a uniquely valuable quality or aspect of a group or individual. For example...

- ❖ “If leadership has a *secret sauce*, it may well be humility. A humble leader understands that there are things she doesn’t know.”

-*The Economist*

- ❖ The presenter’s *secret sauce* is his story-telling capacity.

In this seminar we will explore the *secret sauce* of resilience and its capacity to promote a healthy and holy living of religious life in today’s world.



⁶ *A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report* full text may be found at https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/synthesis/english/2023.10.28-ENG-Synthesis-Report_IMP.pdf . The final document of the synod *For A Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission* may be found at https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf . Regarding the process of formation see Part V – “So I Send You” Forming a People for Missionary Discipleship, §140-151.

⁷ Fast food secret sauces --- <https://www.allrecipes.com/best-fast-food-secret-sauce-taste-test-8692526> A video (10 min.) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=baQS0x0jOjI>

4. Resilience Self-Assessment: A Conversation Starter⁸

No self-assessment can adequately reveal our humanity; unique, unrepeatable, essentially mystery. Self-assessments are best used as “conversation starters” where the ensuing conversation is more revelatory than the assessment itself.

If you wish, complete the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) below. You will not be asked to share your responses, therefore try to avoid the common occurrence of social bias (i.e. choosing a response that is akin to putting your “best foot forward” instead of the response that more accurately captures your current lived-experience).

During this seminar we will use this self-assessment as a jumping off point for our exploration of resilience, the *secret sauce* of health and holiness.

Respond to each statement below by circling one answer per row.		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
BRS 1	I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.	1	2	3	4	5
BRS 2	I have a hard time making it through stressful events.	1	2	3	4	5
BRS 3	It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.	1	2	3	4	5
BRS 4	It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens.	1	2	3	4	5
BRS 5	I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.	1	2	3	4	5
BRS 6	I tend to take a long time to get over setbacks in my life.	1	2	3	4	5

Total Score: _____ / 6⁹
My Score: _____

BRS Score **Interpretation**

5. The Grace of Resilience

“Resilience can be understood as the human capacity to rally our psychological and spiritual resources so as to withstand crisis, weather repeated difficulties, and survive adversity.”¹⁰

Grace

❖ “...is nothing other than the gift of God’s own self [...], God’s own self-communication which permeates the world at its inmost roots.”¹¹

⁸ B. W. Smith, J. Dalen, K. Wiggins, E. Tooley, P. Christopher, J. Bernard (2008). The Brief Resilience Scale: Assessing the Ability to Bounce Back. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 15/3, 194-200.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18696313/>. Additional self-assessments regarding an individual’s capacity for resilience include the Nicholson McBride Resilience Questionnaire (NMRQ)

<https://www.nicholsonmcbridechange.com/insights/revisiting-resilience---a-free-offer/>! And the Resilience Self-Assessment developed by Andrew C. Weis, Ph.D. https://academicaffairs.du.edu/sites/default/files/2022-03/resilience_self_assessment.pdf.

⁹ You will have the chance to complete this section during the seminar.

¹⁰ James D. & Evelyn E. Whitehead (2016). *The Virtue of Resilience*. Orbis Books, p. xi.

¹¹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, CSJ (2007). *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*. Continuum International Publishing Group, p. 41.

- ❖ ...is another name for God's "effective love" alive and active in the here-and-now of our lives.
- ❖ ...is empowering, never controlling or manipulating, always available.
- ❖ ...awaits our consent so that God can "co-create" with us. We can accept or refuse God's offer of closeness, but the offer is never revoked.



Resilience

- ❖ ...is from Latin: *resiliens* -- to rise up or bounce back after having been stretched, stressed, or temporarily "bent out of shape" by a difficult or challenging experience.
- ❖ ..."the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. As much as resilience involves 'bouncing back' from these difficult experiences, it can also involve profound personal growth."¹²
- ❖ ...is part-and-parcel of our humanity; it can be cultivated and strengthened through the choices we make.
- ❖ ...is the ability to face, learn from, and not be defeated by challenges.
- ❖ ...is not merely "making it through" adversity but, at times, being transformed through adversity!
- ❖ ...is the ability to respond creatively to stress and anxiety-producing situations.

Spiritual Resilience

- ❖ "Spiritual resilience is not simply about recovering from adversity. It is about bouncing back in a way that deeper knowledge [a.k.a. experience] of both God and self may result."¹³
- ❖ "Spiritual resilience is the ability to sustain one's sense of self and purpose through a set of beliefs, principles or values while encountering adversity, stress, and trauma by using internal and external spiritual resources."¹⁴
- ❖ "Spiritual resources support resilience in the lives of many people. Here spirituality encompasses more than adherence to the beliefs and practices of a particular religion. Spirituality is 'an affective, cognitive, and experiential relationship with the powerful, gracious, life-giving Source of all being.'¹⁵
- ❖ "Ignatian resilience takes a more contemplative approach centered on Ignatius' idea of indifference: the trust that in God, all shall be well, whether in sickness or health, poverty or plenty. By releasing our tight grasp on specific outcomes, we gain freedom amidst the storm."¹⁶

¹² American Psychological Association (2020). Building Your Resilience: We all face trauma, adversity, and other stresses. Here's a roadmap for adapting to life-challenging situations, and emerging even stronger than before. <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience/building-your-resilience>. Although this article is insightful, be cautious of materials that offer easy solutions.

¹³ Robert J. Wicks (2015). *Spiritual Resilience: 30 Days to Refresh Your Soul*. Franciscan Media, p. xiii.

¹⁴ L. Manning, M. Ferris, C.N. Rosario, M. Prues, and L. Bouchard (2019). Spiritual Resilience: Understanding the protection and promotion of well-being in later life. *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging*, 31/2, p. 168-186.

¹⁵ Janet Ramsey, Rosemary Blieszner in *The Virtue of Resilience* by James D & Evelyn E. Whitehead. Orbis Books, p. 52.

¹⁶ Andy Otto (2024). Ignatian Resilience: Navigating the Tumult. *God In All Things* <https://godinallthings.com/2024/01/15/ignatian-resilience-navigating-the-tumult/>

6. Resilience: Early Development...Life-Long Influence

Ann S. Masten, Ph.D. of the University of Minnesota has dedicated her life to the study of risk and resilience. The goal of her years of research is to inform science, practice, and policy, seeking to understand and promote human adaptation and resilience.

Masten developed a “short list” of basic adaptive systems that contribute to the growth of resilience during the developmental years.¹⁷



- ❖ effective parents and caregivers
- ❖ relationships with other competent and caring adults
- ❖ adequate problem-solving skills
- ❖ adequate self-regulation skills
- ❖ positive beliefs about the self
- ❖ beliefs that life has meaning
- ❖ spirituality, faith and religious affiliations
- ❖ socioeconomic advantages
- ❖ prosocial, competent peers and friends
- ❖ safe and effective communities

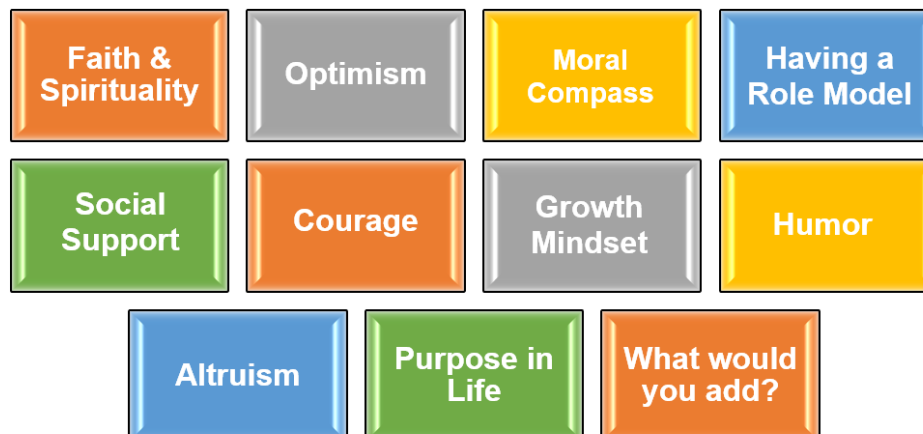
When accompanying those in vocation discernment and the formative journey, *when* and *where* might you observe some of the elements listed in the “short list” above?



7. Identifying Common Characteristics of Resilience

“Persistence and resilience only come from having been given the chance to work through difficult problems.”

-Gever Tulley



1

¹⁷ Ann S. Masten (2025). *Ordinary Magic: Resilience in Development* (2nd edition). The Guilford Press, Chapter 6.

Faith & Spirituality

- ❖ Many rely upon their faith and religious beliefs when faced with challenges.

Optimism

- ❖ Individuals who are optimistic (realistically so!) tend to be more resilient since they are more likely to remain hopeful about the future even when facing difficult circumstances.

Moral Compass

- ❖ Those with a strong moral compass or internalized beliefs about themselves, others, and life itself, often bounce back with less anguish.

Having a Role Model

- ❖ Individuals who have a role model can draw strength and encouragement from their desire to emulate this person.¹⁸

Social Support

- ❖ Unsurprisingly, social support is essential when considering a person's capacity for resilience. Individuals with strong social support networks (e.g., family, friends, community, etc.) are better equipped to bounce back from loss or disappointment.

Courage

- ❖ Those who are willing to move beyond their customary "comfort zone" and confront difficulties are more likely to engage challenging situations without being crushed.

Growth-Mindset

- ❖ While resilience may be somewhat permanent and unchangeable for some, those with a growth-mindset will be better positioned to look for opportunities to strengthen their resilience through sustained reflection on personal experience.

Humor

- ❖ Individuals with a healthy sense of humor are able to laugh at their own incongruities and are at an advantage when it comes to living through adversity in a healthy manner.¹⁹

Altruism

- ❖ Many times, it is the most resilient individuals who turn to helping others in need as a means of relieving their own stress while also strengthening their self-efficacy.

Purpose in Life

- ❖ It is not surprising that those who possess a specific purpose in life or have internalized a deep meaning for their existence are more likely to recover from crises and less likely to give up when encountering tragedy or loss.

¹⁸ One of the major advantages of having a role model is that they act as a constant source of inspiration. The work of Elizabeth A. Johnson, CSJ in her book *Friends of God and Prophets* is interesting on this point. In describing the role that the communion of saints plays in our lives she writes, "...memory releases energy for discipleship" (p. 66). Later she writes that the communion of saints offers us "...lessons of encouragement" (p. 234). Consider how the communion of saints acts as a role model for each of us. Pray to receive from them "the spirit to face the issues of our time with their depth of imagination and courage." Mary Celeste Rouleau, RSM. *The Communion of the Saints of Mercy. Mercy Association of Scripture and Theology (M.A.S.T.)*, vol. 8, no. 3 (1998), p. 49. <https://themastjournal.org/about-the-journal/>

¹⁹ In the past humor was known to be a *mature* defense mechanism. Presently, it is often referred to as an "involuntary coping mechanism" 😊 See George Vaillant (1993). *The Wisdom of the Ego*. Harvard University Press. Healthy humor rescues us as we stumble to understand the complexity, conflict, and incongruity in life. Humor is contagious, relieves tension, and promotes relaxation. It also builds cooperative bonds vital to family, parish, and community living (see James D. & Evelyn E. Whitehead (2016). *The Virtue of Resilience*. Orbis Books, p. 107-108).

When and how might you introduce the topic of resilience to those you accompany (e.g., as a human capacity and spiritual gift, encouraging the identification past experiences of resilience, completing one of the many self-assessments, characteristics and posttraumatic growth, etc.)?

*How might you assist those you accompany link this *secret sauce* to their own formative journey encouraging them to stay attentive to this human capacity and grace in their life?*



8. **Transitioning: Resilience to Posttraumatic Growth (PTG)**

Resilience and posttraumatic growth (PTG) research have been instrumental in documenting the human capacity to adapt to adversity. Resilience refers to the ability to adapt successfully to adverse events while PTG describes enduring positive psychological changes experienced as a result of struggling with highly challenging life circumstances.²⁰

9. **Posttraumatic Growth: New Term, Ancient Reality**

The term posttraumatic growth was first coined by Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence G. Calhoun.²¹ Yet to be clear, “psychology invented the term, not the phenomena.”²² Ancient societies such as the Greeks, as well world religions -- Judaism, Christianity, and Islam -- have for millennia held the belief that growth and new life can emerge from experiences of profound suffering.²³



²⁰ Frank J. Infurna, Eranda Jayawickreme, Briana Woods-Jaeger, and Alyson K. Zalta (2024). Understanding Adaptive Responses to Adversity: Introduction to the Special Issue on Rethinking Resilience and Post-traumatic Growth. *American Psychologist*, American Psychological Association, 79/8, p. 989.

²¹ Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence G. Calhoun, *Trauma and Transformation: Growing in the Aftermath of Suffering* (Sage Publisher, 1995). Some may be interested in the podcast *Speaking of Psychology* featuring Richard G. Tedeschi as he explores *Transformation after Trauma* <https://www.apa.org/news/podcasts/speaking-of-psychology/transformation-trauma> (52 min.)

²² Mary Beth Werdel and Robert J. Wicks, *Primer on Posttraumatic Growth: An Introduction and Guide* (John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 29. Of interest may also be chapter 4 “Points of New Light Amid Darkness: Applying Themes from Posttraumatic Growth” in Wicks’ *Bounce*, 2nd ed., 85-101.

²³ Experiences of life that can generate profound suffering are legion! Death of a loved one, an unexpected health diagnoses, abuse, natural disasters, sudden loss of employment, betrayal, civil conflict, etc. A striking example is the story of Josephine Bakhita (ca. 1869 – 1947). Her life vividly reveals how profound suffering may lead to new life. Born in Sudan and kidnapped at age 7-8, she was sold into slavery, there experiencing hardship and torture. After more than thirteen years in bondage, Josephine gained her freedom and then discerned to enter the Canossian Sisters in 1893. Nearing the end of her life she was asked what she would do if she ever met her captors. Josephine replied she would thank them “for, if these things had not happened, I would not have been a Christian and a religious today.” In Maria Luisa Dagnino, *Bakhita: A Song of Freedom* (Figlie della Carità Canossiane, 2000), 113. Canonized in 2000, Josephine Bakhita is now a sign of hope for those who are

Psychologically speaking, posttraumatic growth is defined as, “positive psychological changes experienced as a result of the struggle with trauma or highly challenging situations.”²⁴ These psychological changes can usher in a fuller appreciation of a person’s understanding of self, relationships with others, and lead to a greater investment in living life to the fullest.

Researchers emphasize that posttraumatic growth does not eliminate serious psychological and health-related challenges, but it describes the experience of psychological growth unfolding *alongside* such struggles.²⁵ They also emphasize that in no way do they believe that experiencing trauma is good! “What we are saying is that despite these distressing experiences people often report positive transformations ... traumatic events set in motion attempts to cope and that *the struggle in the aftermath of the crisis, not the event itself*, produces the posttraumatic growth.”²⁶ In addition, research indicates that while growth following trauma is possible, it is not universal.

Before reading further, recall your own life-story and identify an unwanted painful event that, perhaps, has taken you to growthful places that would have never been possible *if you hadn’t* had that painful experience in the first place.
(You will not be asked to share your response.)



10. **Predispositions for Posttraumatic Growth: Personal and Environmental**

Not everyone who endures profound suffering / trauma will experience posttraumatic growth.²⁷ The occurrence of posttraumatic growth is significantly influenced by the presence of the following personal and environmental factors.²⁸

victims of human trafficking <https://africassnd.org/about-us/shalom/human-trafficking/saint-josephine-bakhita>. The Canadian artist Timothy Schmalz has created a stunning twenty-foot bronze sculpture of Josephine Bakhita entitled “Let the Oppressed Go Free.” It portrays Josephine freeing victims of human trafficking <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/arts-and-media/news/artist-hopes-new-sculpture-can-spotlight-sisters-work-fighting-human>.

²⁴ Richard G. Tedeschi, Jane Shakespeare-Finch, Kanako Taku, and Lawrence G. Calhoun, *Posttraumatic Growth: Theory, Research and Applications* (Routledge Publishers, 2018), 3.

²⁵ Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence G. Calhoun, “Posttraumatic Growth: Conceptual Foundations and Empirical Evidence” in P. Alex Linley and Stephen Joseph (eds). *Positive Psychology in Practice* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2004), 405-419 (emphasis added).

²⁶ Richard G. Tedeschi, Lawrence G. Calhoun, and Jessica M. Groleau, “Clinical Applications of Posttraumatic Growth” in Stephen Joseph (ed.), *Positive Psychology in Practice: Promoting Human Flourishing in Work, Health, Education, and Everyday Life*, second edition, (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2015), 506 (original emphasis).

²⁷ Impediments to experiencing posttraumatic growth are numerous. Some include not having adequately addressed the trauma, mental health conditions, lack of social support, substance abuse, alexithymia, loneliness, debilitating self-esteem, and self-confidence.

²⁸ This is not an exhaustive list. An interesting study of factors facilitating and hindering posttraumatic growth, H.S. Bryngeirsdottir, S. Halldorsdottir (September 26, 2021). The challenging journey from trauma to post-traumatic growth: Lived experiences of facilitating and hindering factors. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/scs.13037>

Personal factors

- ❖ self-confidence and efficacy
- ❖ self-compassion
- ❖ emotional regulation
- ❖ capacity for self-expression
- ❖ healthy coping strategies
- ❖ resilience
- ❖ adequate self-acceptance
- ❖ satisfactory health: physical, psychological, etc.
- ❖ history of past experiences
- ❖ capacity for meaning-making

Environmental factors

- ❖ supportive relationships
 - e.g., family, friends, colleagues, etc.
- ❖ a sense of belonging, participation in a faith community, neighborhood, etc.
- ❖ adequate financial resources

Pause for a moment and consider the unwanted painful event you reflected upon on page 9. What personal and environmental factors can you identify as having been present during the unwanted painful event in your own life?
(You will not be asked to share your response.)



11. Posttraumatic Growth: Vocation and Formation Ministers, Leaders

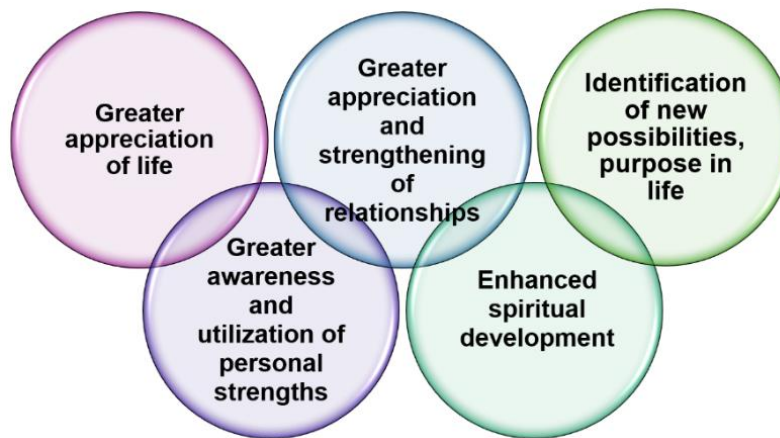
Only a mental health professional can diagnose if posttraumatic growth is unfolding within an individual. So why then is this an important topic for vocation, formation, ongoing formation ministers, and leaders today? Richard G. Tedeschi, the lead researcher of posttraumatic growth, encourages those outside the mental health profession to become “*expert companions* for others, encouraging introspection and curiosity, actively listening, and offering compassionate feedback.”²⁹ Being familiar with the process of posttraumatic growth increases the likelihood that vocation, formation, ongoing formation ministers, and leaders will be more attuned to this possibility in those they accompany. If evidence seems to indicate signs of posttraumatic growth, ministers and leaders can explore this possibility with the mental health provider they see for supervision.



²⁹ Richard G. Tedeschi (July 2020). Growth and Trauma. *Harvard Business Review* (original emphasis) <https://hbr.org/2020/07/growth-after-trauma>. See also Robert W. McChesney, *The Soul Also Keeps the Score: A Trauma-Informed Companion to the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Liturgical Press, 2025), 103-104.

12. Posttraumatic Growth: Be On the Lookout for Signs of Growth

When mental health professionals and researchers explore whether and to what extent someone may be experiencing posttraumatic growth after significant stress, crisis, or trauma they look for adaptive and growth-filled responses in the following areas.³⁰



For example...

Greater Appreciation of Life

- ❖ recognizing the preciousness of each day...each moment
- ❖ realignment of priorities
- ❖ noticing things previously taken for granted³¹
- ❖ taking joy in simple activities and moments of beauty

Greater Appreciation and Strengthening of Relationships

- ❖ investing more deeply in relationships and drawing on these relationships during challenging times
- ❖ a greater sense of interdependence
- ❖ capacity for deeper intimacy³² and bonding with others
- ❖ a greater sense of compassion and altruism³³

Identification of New Possibilities, Purpose in Life

- ❖ more apt to explore new possibilities in life in both personal and professional arenas
- ❖ greater adaptivity in the face of life's challenges, life's twists-and-turns
- ❖ increased courage and enthusiasm to try something new

³⁰ Scott Barry Kaufman (April 20, 2020). Post-Traumatic Growth: Finding Meaning and Creativity in Adversity. *Scientific American*. <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/beautiful-minds/post-traumatic-growth-finding-meaning-and-creativity-in-adversity/>; also, Richard G. Tedeschi, Jane Shakespeare-Finch, Kanako Taku, and Lawrence G. Calhoun, *Posttraumatic Growth: Theory, Research, & Application* (Routledge Publishers, 2018).

³¹ See TED talk *The Three Secrets of Resilient People* (17 min.). Dr. Lucy Hone explores resilience both as a researcher and as a mother who endured the sudden passing of her young daughter https://www.ted.com/talks/lucy_hone_3_secrets_of_resilient_people

³² Of interest may be the varied expressions of intimacy in Howard J. Clinebell and Bridget Clare McKeever, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling: Resources for the Ministry of Healing and Growth* (Abingdon Press, 2011), 275.

³³ Richard G. Tedeschi, Lawrence G. Calhoun, and Jessica M. Groleau, "Clinical Applications of Posttraumatic Growth" in Stephen Joseph (ed.), *Positive Psychology in Practice: Promoting Human Flourishing in Work, Health, Education, and Everyday Life*, second edition, (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2015), 506.

Greater Awareness and Utilization of Personal Strengths

- ❖ increased confidence
- ❖ better equipped to manage unforeseen difficulties and struggles
- ❖ keener awareness of one's own integrity, knowledge, resilience,³⁴ and skills developed over a lifetime

Enhanced Spiritual Development

- ❖ re-evaluation of one's core beliefs in light of the crisis / traumatic experience
- ❖ increased religious coping³⁵
- ❖ greater religious openness, readiness to face existential questions

13. **Kintsugi: Beauty in Brokenness**³⁶

Some may be familiar with the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery known as *kintsugi*, or “golden joinery.” In Japan a valued piece of pottery becomes even more precious if broken, is repaired by using lacquer mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum.



金継ぎ

So, it may be for those who experience trauma / profound suffering. Through the hard work of therapy, and possessing an adequate supply of personal and environmental predispositions, individuals grow strong, and beautiful, through their own brokenness.

14. **Posttraumatic Growth and the Paschal Mystery**

Those who have suffered trauma and profound suffering may find solace in the words of theologian Elizabeth A. Johnson, CSJ who writes,

“Faith pivots on the belief that by the power of the Spirit Jesus died not into nothingness, into annihilation, but into the embrace of the living God. In solidarity with this victim, God encompassed him with loving power that ultimately transformed him into new life. We cannot imagine this, but the heart of faith breaks forth in the exclamation, “Christ is risen. Alleluia!” This is not a new chapter that erases what went before. As Metz declares, “Whoever hears the message of the resurrection of Christ in such a way that the cry of the crucified has become inaudible in it, here's not the Gospel but rather a myth.” The resurrection opens up a future for the crucified one. *Far from being good news about his personal destiny alone, this event pledges a future of life for all who go down into the darkness of death.*”³⁷

³⁴ James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *The Virtue of Resilience* (Orbis Books, 2016).

³⁵ Annick Shaw & Stephen Joseph, “Religion, Spirituality, and Posttraumatic Growth: A Systematic Review,” *Mental Health, Religion, and Culture*, 8/1, 2007, 1-11; also J. Kucharska (2020) Religiosity and the Psychological Outcomes of Trauma: A Systematic Review of Quantitative Studies. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 76(1), 40-58.

³⁶ Listen to Josh Groban's 2018 release of the song *River*. In the refrain you will hear “...it's not always as we planned it, we grow stronger where we break.” Not always, but posttraumatic growth indicates that this may be possible. Enjoy!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-uoKsEqFppo>. A short video from *CBS Sunday Morning*

<https://www.cbs.com/shows/video/ZFOIVnq0czH92h32JJAoeel6luH2WQSy/>.

³⁷ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), 59 (emphasis added).

Walking alongside those experiencing posttraumatic growth may be akin to walking beside the resurrected One. Still bearing the scars of the crucifixion, Jesus experienced new life after unspeakable suffering. May it be the same for those we accompany. Amen.



15. Formative Conversations: Learning to Notice Possible Growth

“The chief instrument of formation is *personal dialogue*, a practice of irreplaceable and commendable effectiveness which should take place *regularly* and with a certain *frequency*.”³⁸

“Since Vatican II the practice of one-to-one vocational accompaniment, as an important pedagogical method, has gradually come to the fore in the formation process. This is due, in part, to the need to personalize initial formation so that each person is enabled to move forward at her own pace...Accompaniment has come to be viewed as a help to ensure that *internalization and integration* of day-to-day choices and Christian values are taking place. This is important so that the formation years are not simply a “tunnel experience” lived at the level of *compliance* with what is required, while the person simultaneously avoids any responsibility for the accompanying struggle for conversion and transformation that is essential to growth.”³⁹



³⁸ *Vita Consecrata*, §66 (emphasis added).

³⁹Brenda Dolphin, RSM (2011). “The Gift of Accompaniment in Formation”, p. 2. Find this unpublished manuscript at https://www.google.com/search?q=%22The+Gift+of+Accompaniment+in+Formation%22+Dolphin&rlz=1C1GCEA_enUS1041US1041&oq=%22The+Gift+of+Accompaniment+in+Formation%22+Dolphin&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOTIHCAEQIRigATIHCAMQIRiPatlBCTk5MTVqMGoxNagCCLACAfEF2qdqRfIB7zE&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

One interesting point of this article focuses on the capacity of formation ministers to notice various degrees of motivation in those they accompany. Briefly put *compliance* is when we adopt a practice or opinion/attitude because of either reward or punishment. For adults reward and punishment is often very subtle. *Identification* is when we adopt a practice and/or opinion or attitude because we wish to be like another or identify with another (or a group). *Internalization*, the deepest expression of motivation is when we adopt a practice and/or opinion or attitude because it is of value and meaning for us. See the classic article by Harvard professor Herbert C. Kelman, “Compliance, Identification, Internalization: Three Processes of Attitude Change. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 1958; 2 (1), p. 51-60, <https://scholar.harvard.edu/hckelman/publications/compliance-identification-and-internalization-three-processes-attitude-change> . For a “lighter” take on this material see the Youtube clip “Three Persuasion Methods: Compliance, Identification, and Internalization” (19 min.) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=fPz2KDOFvrl> .

16. Gathering the Shimmers (a.k.a. Insights) and Graces

1. What **attracted me** today offering me energy and insight into my ministry?
2. What **challenged me** beyond my current understanding of myself...resilience... posttraumatic growth...and those I accompany?
3. What did I find myself **resisting**?⁴⁰ Any clues to why?
4. What will I **take-away** from this seminar and explore further on my own and/with my vocation and formation team and leaders?

Musings...

Ponderings...

Insights (I don't want to forget!)



⁴⁰ Resistance has a right to exist! When we encounter resistance in ourselves (or others) it usually indicates that we have “struck gold” – been touched by something that contradicts or challenges what I hold as **important/sacred/valuable**! The key is to be-friend the resistance, listening for the message and meaning it wishes to convey. Then, work to unearth the “gold” that has been touched! Make sure you are taking a multi-vitamin! Engaging resistance in ourselves and others is hard, *hard* work!