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# CONCEPT PAPER: THE FAITH OF A SEAMSTRESS

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### Abstract

While the work of a seamstress might be considered an undertaking of marginal labor, careful examination reveals how it metaphorically manifests strengthening of faith, restoration of human dignity, and the embodiment of mending brokenness to occasion healing and birth social transformation. It is a depiction of practical theology through which people embody their faith using lived experiences. The concept “Faith of a Seamstress” is grounded on the belief that sewing is the art of creating something beautiful from chaos. Just like a seamstress takes a plain fabric and transforms it into a functional garment, faith equally mends the torn and broken hearts back to wholeness where it restores hope and purpose.

In principle and practice, this concept paper presents an overriding conviction that faith in the sense of practical theology is not an institutional performance where the church seeks to inculcate doctrines. Instead, it arises from the manifestation of God’s grace in the daily lives of people as they navigate the tumultuous challenges that come their way. This paper focuses on how a narrative approach can be applied to enhance the journey of personal reflection geared towards building theoretical knowledge. It emphasizes that community is an essential theological component considering that human beings do not live in isolation. As such, it advocates for a ministerial identity that treats humans as social beings that are worthy of love, care, restoration, and belonging despite the extent to which life breaks them.

Drawing from the practicality of sewing, Faith of a Seamstress treats brokenness not as an end, but a starting point and a marker of resilience. As such, it argues that human life is not only defined, but also strengthened by the traumas and challenges of loss, grief, poverty, and discrimination among others. In this regard, therefore, faith that is indifferent to these realities of life, cannot carry people through the challenging waves of suffering. Just like the seams remain visible after sewing,

restoration through faith does not necessarily erase the damage, but gives meaning to the suffering and enhances one's resilience to face the future. In a nutshell, therefore, this paper provides comprehensive understanding regarding faith as an embodied practice, the role of community, human dignity, and the power of restoration from brokenness among others.

## **1.0 Introduction: Faith from Lived Experiences**

Reflective theology tends to precipitate towards frameworks that apply doctrinal ideals and formal leadership models to inform, build, nurture, and strengthen faith. In most instances, it ignores the critical contributions and implications of lived experiences in shaping faith among believers. Nonetheless, faith is majorly shaped and influenced by day to day encounters that sometimes test, discourage, or reinforce the connection between people and God. As such, faith is not an isolated aspect in human life, but an important component that influences how people live and one that is equally impacted by the events of life. For the majority of believers, therefore, faith is not primarily shaped within the institutional systems or academic conceptualizations; instead, it relies on the daily activities that may look ordinary and systematically repetitive without much impact. This concept paper emerges from this context that seeks to apply human encounters as the foundation of theology as opposed to abstract theoretical concepts.

It applies the functions, spirit, attitudes, and challenges of a seamstress as the metaphorical framework to organize this concept of practical theology. The act of sewing is usually slow, clear about the final objective, attentive to brokenness, and reflective. Sewing does not seek to erase the realities of the damage, but primarily focuses on the need for repair which in the context of faith represents restoration. Faith often comes out as a core component of human lives not only as a lived process, but one that privileges repair, resilience, and hope for a better future regardless of the brokenness, despair, and suffering. Importantly, it focuses on the marginalized activities that are often dismissed and treated as lowly and insignificant practices of mere survival. Apart from articulating how faith is imprinted in the practical realities of life, brokenness is depicted as a site where theological insights are generated. It, further, discussed how the sense of belonging acts as the central component of theological practice for believers. Lastly, the reflective process is

discussed as a dialogue partner where people evaluate their thoughts, experiences, and actions in the context of God's will to forge their path of faith going forward.

## **2.0 Faith of a Seamstress: A Metaphor**

The central concept of the Faith of a Seamstress is to the effect that faith works like a seamstress in the sense that, just like the latter collects torn and discarded fabric and stitches it together to make a wholesome garment that protects the one wearing it, faith restores the broken hearts, and disenfranchised society into glory as well as prosperity. It argues that during sewing, nothing goes to waste as every thread has its purpose in the garment making process. In the same breath, faith does not exclude, ignore, or underplay any aspect of life including suffering, pain, or prosperity as it seeks to restore and heal those that are suffering. In the metaphoric sense, therefore, faith is not a perfectly static confession or an intellectual ideal, but rather a dynamic, active, and resilient act of patience. The seamstress rarely starts with a perfect garment to work on, but rather receives an imperfect, torn, and raw fabric to work with, often characterized by torn edges and pieces that are mismatched in nature. In a similar manner, faith seeks to engage life in a realistic manner as broken and unfinished as it is with the pain, brokenness, and suffering of the individual. In that context, God becomes a master seamstress engaging in careful stitching of the disenfranchised human life to restore self-esteem, grace, and prosperity. From that metaphoric angle, faith becomes the process through which restoration is achieved, rather than one that rejects brokenness. The scripture echoes the essence of restorative work as a predicate for building faith. For instance Isaiah alludes to the fact that God is the one that "binds up the brokenhearted". Isaiah 61:1-2 says

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.”

The faith of a seamstress is further grounded on the idea that binding is not about erasing the torn parts but tending to them with care and compassion so that the repaired garment can continue serving the purpose for which it is intended. God, in the same way, does not seek to erase the suffering and painful experiences of human life, but to attend to those wounds so that one can continue bringing up their family and continue with the work that they have been created to do. In Psalms 147:3-7, this has been depicted clearly indicating,

*“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit. The LORD sustains the humble but casts the wicked to the ground. Sing to the LORD with grateful praise; make music to our God on the harp.”*

The scripture identifies God as the healer of the brokenhearted in a way that seeks to bind up the wounds to eliminate suffering. It is also clear that he knows all the stars by name and understands them without limit. This talks to the attentiveness of the Lord to all people including the suffering ones just like a seamstress understands the garments and pays attention to all its limitations that need addressing. The seamstress metaphor further counteracts the triumphalist ideals that conceptualize instant remedy as it privileges patience, gradual improvement, and repetitive tasks before the final remedy is realized. In regard to this, Ecclesiastes 3:7 talks of a “a time to tear and

a time to mend". This implies that Faith, just like a seamstress does allows the opportunity for tearing without necessarily leading to loss of hope and despair on the part of the affected person.

The metaphor further acknowledges the fundamental need for human involvement in the process of achieving divine restoration of others. While God takes control as the ultimate healer, the community and the society is invited to participate in the process of mending others and themselves too. In Ephesians 2:10, Paul deliberately describes believers as "God's Workmanship" to depict both the essence of intention as well as process. It means human beings, having been created in the image of God, are as a result of long term craft rather than mass produced products. Considering that a seamstress hardly rushes, but stitches carefully and patiently, faith equally needs attention to oneself as well as others. In a nutshell, by framing faith from the lens of sewing, the concept depicts a theology founded on humility, patience, as well as hope as the guiding tenets

### **3.0 Brokenness as the Genesis of Calling and Vocation**

The Faith of a Seamstress does not consider brokenness as a depiction of failure that requires judging, but a fertile ground that can be redirected towards productive endeavors of calling, vocation, and service. The author's life story of rejection, shame, and vocational confusion is an embodiment of how social shortcomings can be used as a stepping stone to healing and healing others. In the same way fabric is torn before repairing, the human soul is vulnerable to occasional breakage that a person must confront before discovering one's purpose.

The scripture affirms this reality in many instances where it declares that the Lord is distant from those who are broken but closer to them. It asserts that pain and suffering tend to attract the divine presence of God as opposed to repelling it. Paul deepens this scriptural truth in 2 Corinthians 12:9, saying, "My power is made perfect in weakness" meaning that in God's economy, imperfection is

a stage for rebirth and graceful comeback. The encounter of Joseph in the hands of his brothers showcases the redemptive arc in which betrayal becomes the opportunity to reconstruct himself through pain and suffering in a foreign land, coming back triumphant. Genesis 50:18-22 narrates the triumph of Joseph in such a plight,

*“His brothers also came and threw themselves down before him and said, ‘We are your slaves.’*

*But Joseph said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you...’*

Even after tumultuous events he was taken through by his brothers, it is evident that Joseph did not find in himself the urge to revenge. This is based on the fact that brokenness cultivates and nurtures empathy in the sense that those who have encountered pain find it easy to notice and recognize those who are undergoing a similar ordeal. This is why the concept of Faith of a Seamstress argues that the healed people heal others. Understandably, a mended garment or fabric contains visible seams occasioned by repair, encouraging people to avoid trying to hide their scars, but instead embrace those fractures, offer them to the Lord, to ensure that he assembles them back into purposive livelihood.

#### **4.0 The Sanctity of Ordinary and Marginal Skills**

The Faith of a Seamstress is concerned with the place of marginal skills in the social realms and the impact they have on the people practicing them. Whereas sewing is seen as a lowly activity meant for the people in the low-income bracket, the Faith of a Seamstress argues that it is a noble and impactful undertaking. It counteracts the famous socio-cultural ideals that place some professionals and talents above others, introducing the idea that faithfulness is more important than

status. In the eyes of God, the activities that people consider insignificant and menial are important frameworks of transformation. When Moses questioned his worth in Exodus 4:2, God was more concerned with what Moses had rather than what he lacked. God was aware that Moses had a weakness with his speech, yet he chose him to lead the people of Israel.

*“And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee. And the LORD said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod. And he said, Cast it on the ground. And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from before it.*

*And the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: That they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee.”*

Moses simply held a basic shepherding tool that did not seem to have a lot of importance or impact in the liberation process of the Israelites. However, God used this staff to provide a solution to the people of Israel. In the same way, the seamstress's needle and thread become tools of healing, problem-solving, and compassion once they are surrendered to God. Skills that people learn during suffering are not accidental or for the sake of it, but important tools of emancipation. Proverbs 18:16 is in record indicating that talents open the way for their wielders to undertake broader influence. It is necessary to notice that, in this regard, sewing is not an act of mere survival, but a sustainable undertaking of vocation that opens more opportunities for people to serve others, especially when it comes to marginalized people.

Jesus' own ministry happens to arise from this concept and actually seeks to enhance the ideology that professions that are often seen as menial are noble and impactful. Primarily, he was known as the carpenter's son in Matthew 13:55, whereby this was rooted in manual labor. Actually, in all his parables, Jesus gave the examples using everyday work such as baking, fishing, and farming, showcasing the nobility of these common practices and affirming that the impact of God's Kingdom is seen through such activities. As such, the Faith of a seamstress aligns with Jesus' elevation of ordinary labor. In adopting this approach as the overriding concept, it seems to emancipate the readers and believers from the idea that one needs prestige to showcase purpose. It proposes that undervalued talents, chores, and professions be reexamined, especially when it comes to the work that women do, because no skill is unworthy and every activity is an act of worship as God uses the ordinary to showcase the extraordinary capability of humanity.

## **5.0 Theology of Disability and Belonging**

The Faith of a Seamstress pays particular attention to the place of people with disabilities within society and also the communities of faith. Whereas disability has not been treated as a primary theological issue, it is a fundamental human reality that depicts the extent to which the church loves or fails to do so. In this case, the concept hereby challenges faith communities to go beyond charitable acts towards the disabled and ensure that such individuals genuinely belong. Looking at Jesus' ministry, he repeatedly emphasized taking care of the underprivileged and changed the way people looked at them. In one instance, the disciples asked who had sinned to occasion the blindness of the man in John 9:1-3, where a conversation takes place.

*"As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Neither this man nor his parents."*

Jesus reframed the perspective of the disciples from judgment towards divinity, where he demonstrated that disability is a platform through which God shows his presence. Paul's perspective of disability and the role that the church should play reinforces this ideal, where in 1 Corinthians 12, he terms the weaker body parts as being indispensable. He advances the idea that disability does not serve to diminish the essence of community, but works to actually build it by showing and rationalizing its interdependence. The ideology of interdependence is reflected in the Faith of a Seamstress in the sense that the reliability of the fabric and its integrity rely on each of the stitches used to make it. In the context of repairing, it is evident that the patches rely on other parts of the garment for it to belong to the entire garment. Yet, the garment cannot be worn without this patch because it serves to protect a key part of the wearer's body. This interdependence rationalizes the place of the disabled within the community. Importantly, the Faith of a Seamstress is grounded on the fact that the integrity of the garment is determined by how well the seamstress addresses the torn edges and the patches to make them part of the whole garment. In principle, the question of belonging is not reliant on the complicity of the individual to the extent that it becomes conditional, but it is framed as an essential necessity for human life so that people can comfortably live, worship, and serve the will of God together.

## **6.0 Village Vision: Community as a Fabric**

In the true conceptualization of the "*Faith of a Seamstress*", people are not seen as a group of isolated individuals, but a woven fabric with different threads that are intertwined and interconnected with each other. The strength of a garment made of fabric is not found in the similarity of the threads, but the intentional interconnection between them that helps keep it together and functional. A woven garment draws its purpose and strength from the closeness of the threads and the idea of shared responsibility which cannot be achieved without all the parts

being present and in place. The Faith of a Seamstress, therefore, makes use of the African proverb titled “it takes a village” to encourage unity within communities and to counteract the retrogressive impacts of modern fragmentation occasioned by rampant capitalism and individualism. The scripture reinforces this idea in multiple occasions indicating the difficulty of breaking a conjoined cord. Ecclesiastes 4:12 affirms that interdependence is an important component in a community, pointing that it is a source of strength. The scripture says,

*“If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.”*

The scripture encourages people to live communally, as one can read out for help when they fall. If someone happens to incur pain alone, the scripture cautions that such a person might find no help. This rationalizes the need for people to stay close together in order to offer a helping hand whenever need arises, just like the threads support each other to build the whole garment. If a thread is left unattended alone, there is a high likelihood of it being misused or discarded as trash, yet when it is used to stitch a garment together, it becomes part of a purposive and functional item, to the extent that it cannot be destroyed because doing so would render the garment useless.

The seamstress metaphor alludes to the intentionality of building communities because, according to its core concept, garments do not form by chance, but through careful weaving. The seamstress has to select each thread according to its color, strength, and thickness to know where it should fit in the garment, depending on the purpose that it should play. As such, communities of faith must forge their relationships based on the personalities, culture, demographics, and interests, among

other aspects that need to be considered for the community to be functional. In that regard, the Faith of a Seamstress reframes how people view diversity in the sense that it should be seen as a source of beauty when woven and enjoined with love and empathy as opposed to being a predicate for division and chaos.

This ideology is particularly important to those people who feel segregated and disenfranchised within their community, considering that humans are naturally social beings who require relating with each other. Such people include those living with disabilities, excluded from the communities of faith, as well as those who have systematically been marginalized by poverty and financial exclusion. It poses a fundamental question echoed by many: “Where is my village?” This is a clarion call for communities to build their relationships around compassion, love, and empathy as opposed to simply focusing on systemic order that does not enhance interpersonal relations. In Ephesians 4: 1-4, believers are called to live this way, prioritizing peace, harmony, and humility among other virtues.

*“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called.”*

Here, Paul encourages the Ephesians to “bear with one another in love” in a manner that captures the ethics and ideals through which a village could be built. This implies that a village living in the essence of community has to live patiently, resiliently, and with deliberate interconnectedness. In the same way that a fabric is required to endure strain and wearing away, communities are required to deal with conflict that happens between people. The concept of the village idealized in

the Faith of a Seamstress could not only be relational, physical, or ideological in nature, but also theological because it essentially refers to the kingdom of God. This is a place where all people in the village feel seen, valued, and known by others in the community because no thread is disposable because the fabric requires it as part of the shared life.

## 7.0 Theoretical Framework

In essence, it is important to build a theoretical framework in which the concept of "Faith of a Seamstress" is anchored for it to have a strong conceptual backing from key theories of pastoral care, leadership, and theology.

### 7.1 Pastoral Theology of Presence

The core and overriding concept behind pastoral theology of presence is the fact that the effectiveness of leadership is not necessarily measured from the propensity or the ability to find solutions to problems, but partly determined by presence and accompaniment. The theology of presence discourages the feeling that, for one to be impactful, they need to control the outcomes and fix the problem at hand. It argues that one should prioritize the subtle aspects and encounters of the suffering person in order to give compassion, interpersonal attention, and empathy some prominence and priority. When it comes to the work of a seamstress, being present and staying is inevitable if at all the envisioned garment is to be made successfully. The seamstress has to carefully examine the fabric to understand its characteristics and limitations in relation to the final garment to be made even before responding to what needs fixing. In order to start mending, one needs proximity and patience because the process of repair does not entertain shortcuts or rushing to solutions without understanding the inputs and the process needed to achieve the goal. The attentiveness required of a seamstress is tantamount to pastoral presence that requires pastoral

leaders to accompany the suffering person during the pain. In instances where suffering does not have a remedy, such as disability or terminal illness, the theology of presence becomes very important. People undergoing such suffering require accompaniment, showcasing empathy, love, and care to help mitigate the pain and improve the quality of life.

This theory challenges the models and concepts that privilege efficiency, instant problem solving, and provision of impulsive answers to the problem, arguing that they remain indifferent to the needs of those that face long-term suffering. It indicates that, even in an instance of vulnerability, this space of pain and suffering presents an opportunity to experience God's mercy and grace. This perspective corresponds to a key argument in this paper indicating that brokenness is not an end, but a starting point of faith.

Just like in sewing where repair is incremental and, sometimes, subtle it is necessary to remain actively engaged even when the results are uncertain. In the same light, pastoral presence does not necessarily lead to immediate changes, but it helps the suffering person maintain hope, agency, and dignity. This concept further redefines the idea of faithfulness redirecting it from focusing on success or control into rationalizing the need to stay present. From this perspective, therefore, accompaniment becomes an act of theology considering that the presence of caregivers and pastoral leaders especially in marginalized communities come at a great socio-economic cost. In dialogic correspondence with the Faith of a Seamstress, the theology of presence calls for the church and leaders to enhance their leadership by prioritizing proximity, attention, and empathy among other thoughtful interpersonal approaches that secure hope and connection.

## 7.2 Nouwen's Concept of the Wounded Healer

Nouwen's work was basically an advancement of Hiltner's theory of pastoral care. Hiltner indicated that pastoral care has three fundamental functions which include healing those in pain, sustaining them, and offering guidance (Correctional Service Canada, 1985). Hiltner sought to use psychological methods in the process of evaluating the experiences of pastor-parishioners in order to understand human actions and experiences. Being part of a larger American Pastoral Theology movement, the theorist applied psychological Frameworks to help in enhancing human well-being, heavily relying on application of empathy and interpersonal skills that create hope. However, Nouwen used the same framework developed by Hiltner especially when it comes to the three functions of pastoral care, but incorporated a fundamental idea of Christian spirituality in a more profound manner. The theorist made a profound contribution to the concept of a Wounded Healer which aligns with the work of a seamstress. When a seamstress repairs a garment, it provides warmth and comfort despite the damage it had undergone previously. In the same light, the seamstress just like pastoral leaders undergo pain and suffering even as they seek to help others heal and guide them to restoration. Nouwen argues that the sufferings and the struggles encountered by a pastoral leader can be used as a source of learning empathy and creating one's identity as they help others to deal with their situation (Miller, 2018). The shared stories of struggle and pain creates an authentic platform to help others heal in a more realistic and understanding manner.

### 7.3 Servant Leadership

Servant leadership provides a solid and profound framework that could be used in understanding the operationalization of pastoral care as conceived in the Faith of a Seamstress. Proposed for the very first time by Robert K. Greenleaf, servant leadership envisions a leadership approach that focuses on service to others as opposed to paying attention to authority and control (Baiser, 2020).

The theory encourages people to focus more on the willingness to serve others, especially the less privileged in society. This ideology resonates with the metaphor of a seamstress in the sense that their work incorporates patient, subtle, and often unnoticed labor that focuses on ensuring the well-being of those that use the garments made thereof ignoring the urge for power, control, or recognition by those that benefit from that work.

The model of servant leadership discourages people from adopting hierarchical structures of socialization where bureaucracy and power dynamics determine how people are treated (Matherne, 2023). It challenges the idea of prioritizing charisma, operational efficiency, and growth, and promotes the need for people to adopt responsible interpersonal relations, humility within the society, and honesty among others (Dierendonck & Patterson, 2025). The seamstress depicts and adopts this approach when dealing with brokenness and imperfections ensuring that the torn fabric is not addressed from a point of domination and judgement, but rather with empathy, love, and care. As a result, broken lives should be attended with compassion and care, rather than strategic examinations that seek to judge people based on their imperfections. This approach is particularly crucial when one is dealing with issues such as terminal illnesses and disabilities where constant caregiving is required and remedies are not forthcoming. Servant leadership, therefore, supports such forms of services that focus on the quality of care rather than social and institutional validation. In equal measure, the Faith of a Seamstress is focused on the small acts of compassion such as attentiveness, mending, and stitching, often without much recognition by the society despite the fundamental impact of their work. Service leadership further remodels power rather than seeking to eliminate it in the sense that it is transformed into the ability to nurture people, sustain their lives, and empower those that one comes across (Vincent, 2023). The idea is to become as much inclusive as possible rather than exclusionary. Just like the seamstress patches

torn garments, servant leadership encourages that vulnerabilities be supported and addressed with empathy rather than being punished and judged.

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