

# **DIACRESIS and SEVEN CORE NEEDS:**

## **A Model of Spiritual Assessment**

**by**



***Rev. Susan E. Lyon***

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Compiled and edited by  
*The Rev. Dr. Martin G. Montonye*

## *FOREWORD*

Among the many teachers who have helped me over the years, I consider Susan Lyon as *primus inter pares* – first among equals. In the early 1990's, as I was training to become a Supervisor in the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education, Susan was instrumental in contributing to my appreciation of the art of teaching and my concern and respect of students.

As a student, I attended many of her courses and seminars on the spiritual assessment of core needs. Each time she presented her theory she would expand her framework by adding a new detail or dimension. This monograph is a compilation of lecture notes and conversations we had over the three years we were together. It was incumbent upon me throughout my writing to present the essential data rather than to induce the reader to interpret them by my own standards.

Since her untimely death, numerous colleagues have inquired about Susan's spiritual assessment model. It is with pride that I recommend the following monograph to my colleagues. It will help you to reflect on your own core needs and help you to relate to the fundamental core needs that exist in the heart and spirit of each one of us.

I am very appreciative to Marty Durey, Administrative Assistant, Pastoral Services Department, Hartford Hospital, for the generous gift of her time in editing and preparing this monograph.

Martin G. Montonye  
Hartford Hospital  
2002

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## **A Model of Spiritual Assessment**

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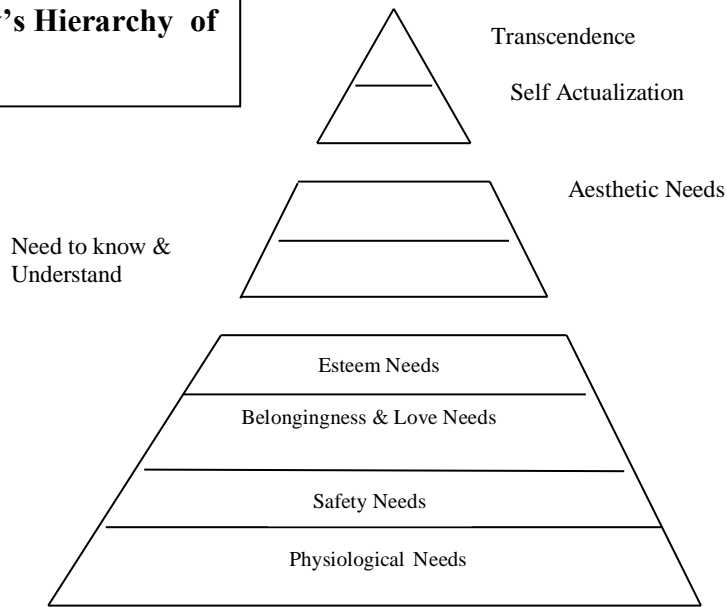
*“Our task is to assess the unbalanced core need, describe it theologically, and bring the spiritual resources that will best serve that particular core need.”*

### **I. Introduction**

Diacresis is the ability to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy spirits. Throughout history, religious and spiritual groups have appointed people and established guidelines to discern the nature and cure of illness and distress. The art of Diacresis depends on making clear judgments about people, their behavior and motivations. For our purposes, Diacresis helps professionals make accurate assessments and spiritual plans of care. Diacresis is listed as one of the spiritual gifts in 1st Corinthians 12 for Christians.

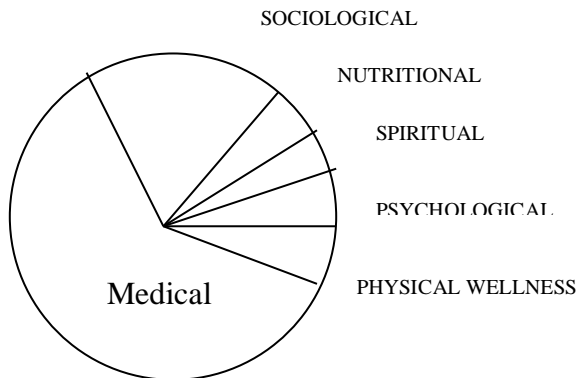
Conventional wisdom tells us that human beings have a wide variety of needs. Abraham Maslow’s basic position was that individuals have a hierarchy of needs.

**Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**



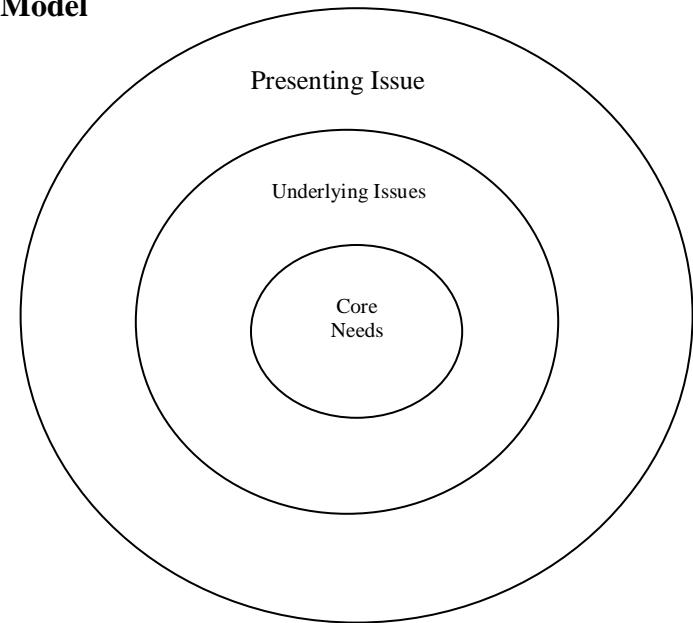
Today, human needs are recognized and addressed through many professionals. For example, when an individual becomes ill, professionals or specialized groups with a different expertise addresses each need separately.

**Health Care Model**



The Diacresis Model holds that human beings have certain basic and universal core needs that can be served in many ways by various professions or a combination of professionals. Below the surface of presenting problems are often underlying issues related to core needs being out-of-balance. These human core needs can be addressed by any professional.

**Diacresis Model**



**II. Seven Core Needs**

There are seven basic human core needs: dignity, power, freedom, love, meaning, celebration and rest. It is helpful to remember that all needs are human and not necessarily spiritual. The language of spirituality translates human needs in to spiritual needs. For centuries, organized religion has addressed our human core needs human though the rituals of the sacraments.

**Dignity:** The basic human need for acceptance based on nothing more than his or her worth as a person. This acceptance must not be contingent on any work that a person has done or potential for the future. It is simply the dignity that comes from being valued as a part of God's Creation. Sacramentally, the ritual of baptism best symbolizes this core need.

**Power:** The basic human need to be part of the workings of one's immediate world. This is the person's need to know that his or her decisions have an impact on even the smallest part of Creation or Community. Bound up in this core need is the part of human growth that only comes when a person takes on the rights and responsibilities of living in the world. Sacramentally, the ritual of confirmation best symbolizes this core need.

**Freedom:** The basic human need to be loosed from bondage to precious mistakes or current enslavement to bad habits, regrets etc-. It is the core need to be able to learn new ways of being from those things that a person regrets having done without being forever in bondage to that regret or guilt. Sacramentally this need is best served through the ritual of confession and absolution.

**Love:** The basic human need to give and receive love in relation to another or others in community. This need can be met in many ways other than romantic or marital love. Rather, it is the part of human growth that only takes place in the self-sacrifice, oneness, commitment and acceptance of care, which all take place in loving relationships of all kinds. Sacramentally, the ritual of marriage best symbolizes this core need.

**Meaning:** The basic human need for a sense of purpose in living. Commitment to a career is only one of many ways in which a person finds meaning in his or her life. Vocation is the deeply felt need for a meaningful role or direction of life. Sacramentally the ritual of ordination best symbolizes this core need.

**Celebration:** The basic human need to affirm the awe and wonder of their own life and person. "For behold, you have made me and your

works are fearful and wonderful..." Psalm 139. True celebration asks that a person look in awe upon the panorama of his or her life and self and recognize God's hand at work. Celebration acknowledges the Divine in the most mundane of daily events; and asks nothing more. Sacramentally, the ritual of communion or Eucharist best symbolizes this core need.

**Rest:** The basic human need to let go, let be. A person finds rest only by surrendering the burden of control. Rather than being an admission of powerlessness, the human need for rest is the ultimate ability to trust, to release hold on those things that are beyond his or her power, and to find peace in the letting go. Sacramentally, the ritual of anointing at death or Holy Unction best symbolizes this core need.

### III. Dis-ease: Unbalanced Core Needs

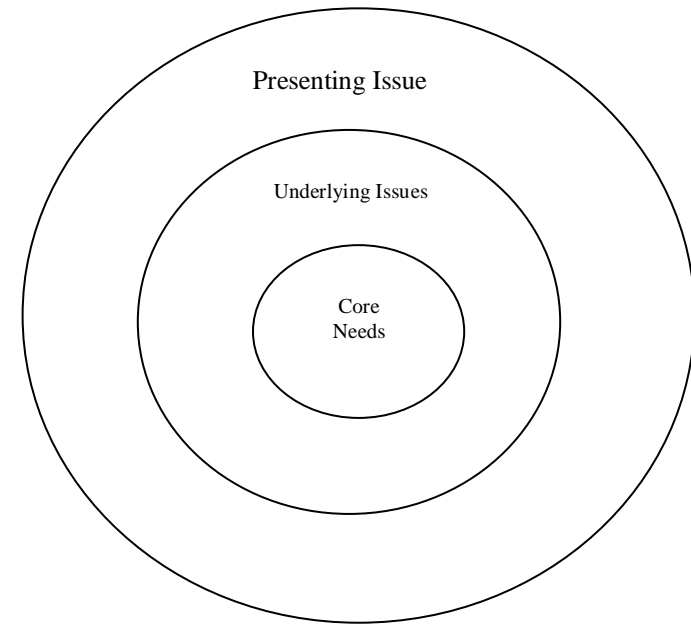
Throughout our lives, we struggle to keep these needs in balance. From time to time one core need becomes unbalanced. Most of us have one particular core need that is unstable. It is often possible, with a little creative investigation, to discover that a stressful incident or ongoing life situation has resulted in an unbalancing of the core needs of a person. This unbalance will usually result in some sort of dis-ease that may be physical, sociological, and psychological or any combination of these and other problems. At the center of almost all illness or dysfunction is an unbalanced core need.

Unbalanced -- or in some cases underdeveloped -- core needs can be identified through careful listening. Some indicators and responses to out-of-balance core needs are as follows:

| Core Need   | Symptoms Displayed                     | Typical Responses                                |
|-------------|--|--|
| Dignity     | Low self-esteem                        | Offer affirmation, acceptance                    |
| Power       | Helpless, lack of ability, dependency  | Allow them to make a difference to you           |
| Freedom     | Guilt, regret, blaming, anger          | Help person to claim responsibility, forgiveness |
| Love        | Lonely, needy, alienated, Sad          | Call person into relationship                    |
| Meaning     | Hopelessness, aimlessness, Uselessness | Help person to look for new meaning              |
| Celebration | Depression, seriousness, intensity     | Assist person in discovering amazingness of life |
| Rest        | Controlling, driven, anger             | Help person to learn to let go                   |

## IV. The Onion

### Diacresis Model



A metaphor that can be helpful when using the Diacresis Model is that of peeling an onion. Whenever a client/patient presents a problem, behind or underneath the presenting problem is an underlying issue that has triggered the presenting problem. Beneath the underlying issue is a core need that is out of balance. To move from the presenting problem to the unbalanced core need, the assessor must keep asking her/himself “Why?” as s/he peels back the outer layers to get to the core.

Example: A woman arrives at the emergency room with a broken leg (presenting problem). After a few moments, it becomes apparent that the woman’s boyfriend broke her leg. The assessor asks her/himself,

“Why is this woman staying in an abusive relationship?” (underlying issue). After asking questions related to core needs, the assessor identifies the woman’s unbalanced core need of dignity (core need). The assessor then proceeds with moving the client/patient through the corresponding sacramental pathway of Baptism, offering acceptance, affirmation, etc.

Many people become the victims of other people's unhealthy choices (violence, abuse, accidents etc.). Very often in such cases, the most vulnerable core need will be thrown out of balance by the mere stress of the situation.

## V. Assessment Questions

The benefit of using this model is it helps people to get in touch with their own resources and respects them – not like medical model looking for problem. The dis-eased person can make a choice about how he or she wants to have the dis-ease treated. At root, the physician, the pastor, the nutritionist, the psychiatrist and others are all treating the same core needs and can ask these or other questions to help others get in touch with their own resources to meet their core needs. Some sample assessment questions are:

| <b>Assessment Questions</b>   | <b>Underlying Core Need</b> |
|---|-----------------------------|
| How do you feel about yourself?   | <i>Dignity</i>              |
| How has this illness affected your self-image?                                  | <i>Dignity</i>              |
| In what ways do you see yourself created in God's image?                        | <i>Dignity</i>              |
| In which areas of your life do you feel you have the most control or influence? | <i>Power</i>                |
| How has your illness affected your own sense                                    |                             |

| <b>Assessment Questions (<i>con't.</i>)</b>   | <b>Underlying Core Need</b> |
|---|-----------------------------|
| of power in living your life?   | <i>Power</i>                |
| What strength does your faith give you in making choices for your life?                   | <i>Power</i>                |
| How are you feeling about the life you have lived up to now?                              | <i>Freedom</i>              |
| Are there places in your life where you feel bound by regret or guilt?                    | <i>Freedom</i>              |
| How has your illness affected the way you feel about previous mistakes you may have made? | <i>Freedom</i>              |
| In what ways does your faith help you make peace with your regrets or guilt?              | <i>Freedom</i>              |
| What relationships in your life are most important?                                       | <i>Love</i>                 |
| How has your illness changed your relationships?  | <i>Love</i>                 |
| How would you describe your own relationship with God?                                    | <i>Love</i>                 |
| Where do you see the meaning in your life?  | <i>Meaning</i>              |
| How has your illness changed your sense of meaning or direction?                          | <i>Meaning</i>              |
| To what purpose or direction do you feel called by God for the future?                    | <i>Meaning</i>              |
| Where do you find hope in your every-day life?  | <i>Celebration</i>          |

What wisdom or truth do you find in living with your illness?

*Celebration*

How do you experience God, or something transcendent in your own living?

*Celebration*

In what situations are you able to let go of things beyond your control?

*Rest*

Where have you found peace or rest in the midst of your illness?

*Rest*

What part does God take in helping you loose control of what is unmanageable?

*Rest*

## VI. Sacramental Pathways

Each core need, when out of balance, manifests itself in unique ways that we can learn to recognize and diagnose. Although over the long term, when one need has been out of balance for a while it can throw other needs into dis-ease, we can learn to assess and treat the primary need. Sacramental pathways were developed by organized religion to help return people to a relationship with the divine.

| <b>Core need</b> | <b>Sacrament</b>                   |
|------------------|------------------------------------|
| Dignity          | Baptism                            |
| Power            | Confirmation                       |
| Ordination       | Meaning                            |
| Celebration      | Eucharist                          |
| Freedom          | Confession and Absolution          |
| Love             | Marriage                           |
| Rest             | Anointing at Death or Holy Unction |

## EXAMPLE: Confessional Pathway

Once a core need has been identified, the assessor can use the corresponding sacramental process as an intervention to help a client/patient with their unbalanced core need. For example, the illustration below demonstrates the sacramental process of Confession.

**Symptoms Displayed:** Guilt, regret, blaming, anger

**Unbalanced Core Need:** Freedom

**Corresponding Sacrament:** Confession

### Intervention:

1. Acknowledge/identify guilt/regret is present by reflective listening.
2. Assist in helping client/patient to confess (say it). “What is it you are feeling?”
3. Assist in the asking for forgiveness: “Sounds like you would like some of these things off your slate?”
4. Use your authority to help client/patient to identify penance. Penance is an action or symbol of desire to live a new life.) “Call your sister and apologize.” “Go out and do what you need to do.”
5. Offer forgiveness: “I want to assure you that you are forgiven.” “I want you to know you have my support in starting a new life.”
6. Dialogue about commitment to new life: “How are you going to be a different person?”



## **VII. Resources for Teaching and Practice (see attached)**

### **A. Spiritual Assessment Summary**

This is a one page overview of the assessment model to be used with the didactic or worksheet.

### **B. Didactic: Self-Assessment**

Suggestion: After a brief introduction of the history of spiritual assessment, cut and distribute core needs to participants. Give one core need to each person. Invite participants to identify and read core needs. Next, ask participants share their answers/reflections out of their own experience. If the instructor knows the participants, give each participant the corresponding core need most likely to be or become unbalanced.

### **C. Spiritual Assessment Worksheet**

Worksheet to use when assessing core needs of clients/patients.

## **Diacresis and Seven Core Needs Spiritual Assessment Summary**

by  
*Susan E. Lyon*

1. Diacresis is the ability to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy spirits. It is listed as one of the spiritual gifts in 1st Corinthians 12. The art of Diacresis depends on an ability to make clear judgments about people, their behavior and motivations.
2. Diacresis is a function of spiritual assessment. Making such judgments is only for your benefit in designing a spiritual plan of care. These judgments will often not be shared in your responses to a person.
3. Most models hold that the human being has a wide variety of needs, each of which need to be addressed separately by a professional with a different expertise. The Diacresis model holds that human beings have certain basic core needs that can be served in many ways by various professions or a combination of professionals.
4. There are seven basic core needs: dignity, power, freedom, love, meaning, celebration and rest.
5. Throughout our lives, we struggle to keep these needs in balance. From time to time one core need becomes unbalanced. Most of us have one particular core need that is unstable.
6. It is often possible, with a little creative investigation, to discover that a stressful incident or ongoing life situation has resulted in an unbalancing of the core needs of a person. This unbalance will usually result in some sort of dis-ease that may be physical, sociological, and psychological or any

combination of these and other problems. At the center of almost all illness or dysfunction is an unbalanced core need.

7. Sometimes we become the victims of other people's unhealthy choices (violence, abuse, accidents etc.). Very often in such cases our most vulnerable core need will be thrown out of balance by the stress of the situation.
8. The dis-eased person can make a choice about how he or she wants to have the dis-ease treated. At root, the physician, the pastor, the nutritionist, the psychiatrist and others are all treating the same core needs.
9. Each core need, when out of balance, manifests itself in unique ways that we can learn to recognize and diagnose. Although over the long term, when one need has been out of balance for a while it can throw other needs into dis-ease, we can learn to assess and treat the primary need.
10. Our task is to assess the unbalanced core need, describe it theologically, and bring the spiritual resources that will best serve that particular core need.

## Didactic: Spiritual Self-Assessment

By  
*Susan E. Lyon*

The following definitions and questions are designed to help you assess your primary core need. By identifying your own need, you may then apply the model to your clients/patients.

---

### **DIGNITY**

The basic human need for acceptance based on nothing more than his or her worth as a person. This acceptance must not be contingent on any work that a person has done or potential for the future. It is simply the dignity that comes from being valued as a part of God's Creation.

How do you feel about yourself?  
In what ways do you see yourself created in God's image?

Tell a story from your own life which relates to this need.

---

### **POWER**

The basic human need to be part of the workings of one's immediate world. This is the person's need to know that his or her decisions have an impact on even the smallest part of Creation or Community. Bound up in this core need is the part of human growth that only comes when a person takes on the rights and responsibilities of living in the world.

In which areas of your life do you feel you have the most control or influence?

What strength does your faith give you in making choices for your life?

Tell a story from your own life which relates to this core need.

---

## **MEANING**

The basic human need for a sense of purpose in living. Commitment to a career is only one of many ways in which a person finds meaning in his or her life. Vocation is the deeply felt need for a meaningful role or direction of life.

Where do you see the meaning in your life?

To what purpose or direction do you feel called by God for the future?

Tell a story from your own life which relates to this need.

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## **CELEBRATION**

The basic human need to affirm the awe and wonder of their own life and person. "For behold, you have made me and your works are fearful and wonderful..." Psalm 139. True celebration asks that a person look in awe upon the panorama of his or her life and self and recognize God's hand at work. Celebration acknowledges the Divine in the most mundane of daily events; and asks nothing more.

Where do you find hope in your every-day life?

How do you experience God, or something transcendent in your own living?

Tell a story from your own life which relates to this need.

## **FREEDOM**

The basic human need to be loosed from bondage to precious mistakes or current enslavement to bad habits, regrets etc-. It is the core need to be able to learn new ways of being from those things that a person regrets having done without being forever in bondage to that regret or guilt.

How are you feeling about the life you have lived up to now?

Are there places in your life where you feel bound by regret or guilt?

In what ways does your faith help you make peace with your regrets or guilt?

Tell a story from your own life which relates to this core need.

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## **LOVE**

The basic human need to give and receive love in relation to another or others in community. This need can be met in many ways other than romantic or marital love. Rather, it is the part of human growth that only takes place in the self-sacrifice, oneness, commitment and acceptance of care, which all take place in loving relationships of all kinds

What relationships in your life are most important?

How would you describe your own relationship with God?

Tell a story from your own life which relates to this core need.

## **REST**

The basic human need to let go, let be. A person finds rest only by surrendering the burden of control. Rather than being an admission of powerlessness, the human need for rest is the ultimate ability to trust, to release hold on those things that are beyond his or her power, and to find peace in the letting go.

In what situations are you able to let go of things beyond your control? What part does God take in helping you loose control of what is unmanageable?

Tell a story from your own life which relates to this need.

## **Spiritual Assessment Worksheet**

by  
*Susan E. Lyon*

The following definitions and questions are designed to help you in assessing a person's primary core need. They serve as a tool for Diacresis, helping you be aware of clues in a pastoral conversation. However, you may also use these questions in a more structured interview format with some patients. When used in such a manner they can aid both you and the patient in naming a specific area that needs care.

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### **Questions in the mind of the assessor:**

How do you feel about yourself?

How has this illness affected your self-image?

In what ways do you see yourself created in God's image?

## **POWER**

The basic human need to be part of the workings of one's immediate world. This is the person's need to know that his or her decisions have an impact on even the smallest part of Creation or Community. Bound up in this core need is the part of human growth that only comes when a person takes on the rights and responsibilities of living in the world.

Sacramentally, the ritual of confirmation best symbolizes this core need.

**Questions in the mind of the assessor:**

In which areas of your life do you feel you have the most control or influence?

How has your illness affected your own sense of power in living your life?

What strength does your faith give you in making choices for your life?

**MEANING**

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**Questions in the mind of the assessor:**

Where do you see the meaning in your life?

How has your illness changed your sense of meaning or direction?

To what purpose or direction do you feel called by God for the future?

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**Questions in the mind of the assessor:**

Where do you find hope in your every-day life?

What wisdom or truth do you find in living with your illness?

How do you experience God, or something transcendent in your own living?

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**Questions in the mind of the assessor:**

How are you feeling about the life you have lived up to now?

Are there places in your life where you feel bound by regret or guilt?

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How has your illness changed your relationships?  
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**Questions in the mind of the assessor:**

In what situations are you able to let go of things beyond your control?  
Where have you found peace or rest in the midst of your illness?  
What part does God take in helping you loose control of what is unmanageable?

Susan E. Lyon was born on November 19, 1957 in Newport, RI. She was one of four children of Mr. and Mrs. Mansfield A. Lyon. She died in West Hartford, CT on September 20, 1996 at the age of 38. As a young girl Susan was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and subsequently also lost her eyesight. Despite the pain, she persisted in learning, at times participating in school via a two-way radio at her bedside. She credited her father, who had polio himself as a child, with teaching her, by his words and example, that she need not be confined or defined by disability. Her parents honored Susan's sense of adventure, her love of travel, and her amazing ability to make use of all the elements and events of her life. As her father noted at her funeral, Susan consistently made lemonade out of the lemon s life had dealt her. Susan maintained close ties to her family, enjoying her parents, siblings, nieces and nephews. She also enjoyed her own house in Connecticut, her cat companions, and her many friends.

Susan received her baccalaureate degree from Amherst College in 1979, and her Master of Divinity Degree from the Pacific School of Religion in 1983. During her undergraduate years, Susan studied in Greece and developed a lasting love of mythology and languages. She also wrote and published poetry in brail and learned the music of several cultures. After seminary Susan was ordained to Christian Ministry at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, in Ypsilanti, MI, in August of 1984. While serving in that congregation, Susan wrote hymns and taught herself and her Sunday School classes how to do origami. Some of her students, now adults of that church, remembering her with love, sent paper cranes to decorate the altar on the day of her memorial service.

Susan received her CPE and Supervisor CPE training in several regions, teaching and learning with many supervisors. Her first units of CPE were with David Wendleton in Reno, Nevada (9182) and Dennis Kenny in Ann Arbor, Michigan (1983-84). Her supervisory training began with Rodney Seeger at the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco (1986-87) and ended with Dennis Kenny at California Pacific Medical Center (1989). Wherever she trained and worked, she identified energizing possibilities and initiated connections/ She spoke fondly and joyously of her years in California – about her pastoral and educational work and colleagues, about her ministry with street people

and about the community she and her friends created in their tree high house.

In 1993, Susan joined the staff of Hartford Hospital as the Director of Clinical Pastoral Education, and subsequently as Co-Director of the Pastoral Services Department. While in the Eastern Region, Susan initiated semi-annual, region-wide, Seminars On Supervision for all those in supervisory training, participated in developing the annual Women Supervising Women conference, and was a major force in establishing the Clinical Pastoral Education program in Puerto Rico.

Susan was also active in her denomination, most recently serving as Covenant Minister in the Elmwood Community Church in West Hartford. She was a member of the Personnel Committee for the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ and was on the UCC National Committee on Persons with Disabilities. She was adjunct professor at Hartford Theological Seminary. In the words of Barbara Brown Zikman, former Pacific School of religion dean and president of Hartford Seminary, "Susan was a woman of enormous compassion and insight."

As a pastor, teacher and friend, Susan was known for her joy, her gentle weaving of honesty and laughter, her courage and faithfulness, She knew more about pain than most of us, remained in intimate and direct dialogue with God, and sustained a lively connection to the sacred. She was eager to live her life fully and productively. Most who knew her, from near or afar, were in awe of her spunky, happy, stimulating, attractive presence whenever we were with her. Her ability to appreciate what was positive in life, her way of intuiting the possible in the midst of the impossible, and her capacity to create out of the not-yet-but-maybe, were great gifts with which she nourished the souls of others. At regional and national conferences she was surrounded by friends and colleagues from around the country who wanted to connect again with her energy, humor, creativity and authenticity.

Whenever we gather, we continue to share stories of thanksgiving for Susan – for this woman who consecrated it all – her constant pain and apparent disabilities, the lives of all sorts who knew her as teacher and sage, the distress of some and delight of others touched by her companionable humor and outrageous antics, the lilt and

clarity of her truth-speaking. We share memories of seeing her trundling down a hospital corridor, blessing and binding from a pulpit, teaching us new songs in Spanish, and fashioning paper cranes with misshapen hands which wouldn't have worked at all except for her determination. We remember and imagine what Susan might have said about this or that situation and we miss her conviction that ways could always be discovered out of no way. Her life was fuller than many and there are so many of us who benefited from knowing, loving, learning, teaching, laughing and creating with her.

A student wrote of and to Susan, "You let God use your whole self, in your incredible mind and your broken, aching body. I have never known such a clear channel of grace. Nor have I witnessed as many miracles, transformations of lives, hearts and spirits as I saw happen through you. 'This cracked vessel holds water,' you told me, and you did!"

Just before her death, from a fall in her home, Susan had come through surgery for breast cancer. She was recovering with characteristic zest and determination. She had lived her life in the expectation that, due to the wear and tear of rheumatoid arthritis, she would not live to be old. She chose to fill her days with work and love and to live as she had written in the verses of a hymn "ablaze with compassion, amazed at creation, at peace with God's children, and alive in God's spirit."

Prepared by Peg Lewis and Martin Montonye – February 1999