

**“DISABLED IDENTITIES”: PASTORAL WORK WITH PEOPLE
WHO ARE MOBILITY IMPAIRED**

by

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SUMMARY

This thesis is about pastoral work with people who live with mobility impairment. The research address two main questions, namely “What are the implications of acquired mobility impairment for personal identity and collective identity?” and “How can we in Christian faith communities, through pastoral work, facilitate a sense of belonging and strengthen personal identity and collective identity for people who are mobility disadvantaged?”

This thesis therefore addresses the problem of identity. Thus, a theoretical analysis from literature sources is undertaken to explore theories about narrative identity in relation to personal identity and the importance of the metaphor “belonging” to bridge the gap of personal identity to collective identity. Consequently, religious identity is discussed in relation to the notion of multiple identities and the importance of collective identity to shaping personal identity.

The research questions are answered through a theoretical exploration of approaches to disability and qualitative, narrative empirical research is undertaken. A few people who are quadriplegic, a family member and an occupational therapist are interviewed and the recounting of their “stories” facilitated. The empirical research results in highlighting that the research participants’ “stories” discloses a link between bodily restrictions and social restrictions to mobility. This combination works together to make social interaction very difficult and clearly influenced the transition from pre-quadruplegia to post-quadruplegia. Analysing the “stories” told by the research participants allows for critical reflection on a preferred pastoral work praxis to people living with mobility impairment.

Narrative identity is linked with a theology of embrace and metaphors of “covenant” and “belonging” which expresses that faith communities should

imitate the embracing love and compassion of the Triune God who through the act of suffering included all humankind. It provides the foundation for a preferred pastoral work praxis of “embrace” which can be practised holistically and actively through integration with the other practices of faith communities to facilitate a sense of belonging to a collective identity.

KEY TERMS: People who are mobility impaired; identity; lack of social interaction; theology of embrace; narrative identity; holistic care; communal and contextual care; integrated practices; pastoral work praxis of embrace.

I declare that “DISABLED IDENTITIES”: PASTORAL WORK WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE MOBILITY IMPAIRED is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I dedicate this thesis to my family:

- To my mother **Alvina Antonia Jacobs** who died on the 6th August 2002 to go home to a well earned rest in a resurrected body.
- To my father **David Stefanus Jacobs** who died on the 23rd May 2001 to be with the Lord.
- To my three brothers and two sisters-in-law David, Frank and Cheryl, Clement and Michelle (Mickey).

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First and foremost I am grateful to God for giving me the strength and perseverance to complete this thesis. Proverbs 3:5 “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding...” encouraged me.

The completion of this thesis marks a time of personal academic growth. I am deeply grateful to a number of people who helped me in so many ways that encouraged me to keep persevering and in this time have contributed to my own inner growth and achievement. I would like to mention those who gave of their time for me.

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Finally, as a tribute to my research participants, who endured and shared in my efforts to complete this study, a poem is dedicated to them. It was written by a person who is not disabled, but a motivational speech given by a quadriplegic changed this person's direction in life.

Life is Worth Living By Felix Goshier 24/04/2004

When I feel like I'm in the worst shoes,
The world is on my shoulders and the right to be happy is refused.
Everything I long for, is beyond my reach,
This negativity, is robbing, like a ravenous leech.
I'm so unhappy with who I am, on this massive earth,
Why did I actually come out and breathe, at my birth.

I have everything essential for an able life.
Yet I feel like slitting wrists with a razor sharp knife.
But then I walked into a silent class one day,
And witnessed something awesome, I had no words to say.
A man with less than half my physical ability and form,
Sat there with a smile, happy to have been born.

Most of his able life, had been permanently lost,
Yet he lifted his spirit and discovered hope, despite the great physical
cost.

He has triumphed over all that has ever set to him back,
Listening to him, made me question if there really is, anything he
lacks.

For at the end of the day it's all about living,
This man has suffered reality, yet he's still always giving.

The special people who rise from the dark,
In a miserable being like me, inspire a spark.

For they are chosen from God above,
To live a life of strength and hope, on the wings of a dove.

And although they are 'different', they are one and the same,

They have feelings, emotions, and experience pain.

They are fighters and winners and Gladiators of Being,
Watching them succeed is inspirationally worth seeing.

To live the day to its fullest and appreciates its all,

Is to enjoy and honour, and answer God's call.

For if they, the special ones, can overcome strife,

I have no right to waste this precious thing, called life.

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