

# Greenspace Pastoring: Integrating Nature-Based Therapy & Pastoral Care

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## Abstract

The global pandemic's impact on the church in Australia was felt in many areas. Clergy faced numerous challenges, including providing pastoral care and support amidst social distancing and isolation. The need to innovate saw an increase in the use of technology such as hybrid services. However, there has not been much in the way of new pastoral care methods and models reported during these challenging times. What started as a personal journey for this author several years ago found traction during the Pandemic. This paper argues that pastoral care can borrow the concept of “greenspacing” from urban ecology and apply it to the diverse practices of eco-spirituality. While the potential expressions of this are endless, this paper explores a method for engaging in pastoral care and counselling through walking and talking. The empirically powerful modality of walk-and-talk therapy has been borrowed from psychotherapeutic tradition and infused with elements of eco-spirituality. While the walk is the focus, pastors are encouraged to integrate practices from various spiritual traditions to complement these greenspace encounters.

**Keywords:** Eco-therapy, eco-spirituality, pastoral care, counselling

## Introduction

Physical church attendance appears to have returned to pre-pandemic levels as Australia approaches the fourth year of Covid-19, and for some churches attendance has increased (NCLS, 2021). Additionally, McCrindle Research (2021) contends that many Australians have engaged in a new spiritual search because of the pandemic. It's unclear what this implies for the church in the next years. Only time will tell if the pandemic's catchphrase, "the new normal" will stop being used when society returns to "business as usual".

Reflecting on these unprecedented times, pastors needed to adapt in the hope it would save their congregations. Many embraced new ways to care for and lead their congregations in response to closures, restrictions and subsequent decline in physical attendance. While not a topic of scholarly discussion in Australia, innovation and resiliency were identified as important features for churches during the pandemic (Covarrubias, Dunaetz & McGehee, 2021; Pillay, 2020; Thumma, 2021). The most visible of these innovations was the increasing use of technology. While there was increased technological use in religious life before the pandemic, for many church leaders this was a completely new way of connecting. During the pandemic it became a way to maintain "genuine, authentic connection with people" (McCrindle Research, 2021, p.30), when traditional pastoral care methods were severely hampered.

This article examines how pastoral care might be revitalised by building on the lessons learnt through Covid-19 and offering new opportunities in the spirit of further organisational innovation. Pastoral care ministry was a prominent area of disruption during Covid-19, even though there is little information on the actual experiences of pastoral carers and congregations (Abraham et al., 2021; Johnston et al., 2022); a finding that is consistent with reports of pastoral care in non-congregational settings, such as hospital chaplaincies and prison teams that had to navigate lengthy lockdowns and other Covid-imposed restrictions (Drummond & Carey, 2020; Zammit, 2021). Despite this acknowledgment, the research outside of media platforms offers few recommendations for enhancing pastoral effectiveness.

One noteworthy exception is a study from Indonesia that suggests a shift to small community groups and family altars (Abraham et al., 2021). The article aims to broaden clergy members' perspectives on the pastoral experience. Rather than relying on increased use of technology and the return of large public gatherings, there is an

opportunity to step outdoors into the greenspaces. I contend that congregations may benefit from a greenspacing of pastoral care as both a tangible expression of eco-spirituality and a legitimate response to the current context. In urban ecology, “greenspaces” refer simply to an open piece of undeveloped land accessible to the public. Open spaces are important because they provide recreational areas for residents and enhance the beauty and environmental quality of neighbourhoods (US Environmental Protection Agency, 2017). For churches during Covid, these under-utilised greenspaces are accessible for various corporate and individual spiritual encounters, including pastoral care.

Whether the pandemic has changed how people have interacted with greenspaces like parks and backyards is not just a question for urban ecologists (Lopez, Kennedy & McPherson, 2020). I, too, wonder how many churches used greenspaces for pastoral care during the pandemic. I suspect very few. But just as churches have embraced hybrid services, there is an opportunity to champion an innovative, contemporary and ecologically informed pastoral care and counselling method. While eco-spirituality is not a new concept, the pandemic has provided a unique opportunity for people to explore the greenspaces in their neighbourhoods or even in their backyards.

The model of green-spaced pastoral care suggested in this paper is informed and infused by nature-based therapies to promote healthy eco-centric spirituality. How I go about this is twofold. Firstly, I will review some key ideas in contemporary eco-spirituality for those unfamiliar with or suspicious of this term. Secondly, I will discuss the potential benefits of utilising the therapeutic modality of “walk and talk therapy” (WTT) as an exemplar for using greenspaces to promote pastoral care and counselling conversations.

Towards this goal, I will present my theological reflections on this emerging model, highlighting several key benefits. In this way, it is a combination of eco-spirituality and ecotherapy practices. For this to happen, my approach goes beyond just the walking therapy that draws lightly upon eco-psychological principles. At the time of writing, four years into the Covid-19 pandemic, its impact on Christian churches is becoming better understood. There is a small but growing body of scholarly literature focussing on a range of issues, including the restoration of worship attendance post-Covid (Martyr, 2022), but scant literature on pastoral care methods. This paper is a contribution to this ongoing conversation.

During the pandemic churches experienced unprecedented disruption to their services and activities, impacting attendance patterns (NCLS, 2021). While it is too early to tell what the future will hold, I have heard numerous reports from clergy stating that, because of Covid, many church members do not want to return to regular church life. While the overall attendance levels have, in some circles, returned to pre-pandemic levels, the patterns have changed, such as increased online attendance over face-to-face attendance (NCLS, 2021). However, even amongst those faithful ones returning to weekly church attendance, some will ask, “What is the new normal?” Behind this question is what they can now expect from their pastoral leaders. I have been privy to the rising frustration from some clergy and their often-mixed feelings about the need to justify what they have been doing during Covid while not running services. Some ask what pastoral care will look like and what the impact will be of increasing online attendance. While researchers such as McCrindle (2021) report a silver lining during the pandemic and a renewed spiritual search, the rate of loneliness, isolation and impact during this period increased significantly (AIHW, 2021). While it is too early to tell how churches have responded, I argue that a proactive pastoral care response is warranted.

### **Caring and Connection**

There are many valuable lessons that people report having learned through the pandemic. A prevalent theme across many media is the need for the community to care for one another. So, what if we re-imagined a pastoral care and counselling method built upon this renewed desire for caring, a method that involved not only caring for each other and the earth but also receiving care from Mother Earth through theologically driven experiential encounters informed by eco-psychological principles and eco-spiritualities. Stephanie Dowrick (2021) eloquently captures our interconnection to each other and the ground:

If the pandemic that began and engulfed the world in 2020 taught us anything at all it is that we are utterly and inevitably interconnected—and not only with each other, but also with this earth on which we wholly depend in all its brilliance, beauty, fearsomeness, and biodiversity. Yet this was also the time in which we witnessed and felt first-hand the agonies of isolation and

loneliness, the need we have for one another, the need each of us has to be cared for—and to be caring.

The need to care for each other is not a unique societal response to the pandemic in Australia. There have been multiple natural disasters in Australia over the past decade. However, what was noticeably different during the pandemic was an observable absence of local leadership (Canberra Times, 2021). Throughout the pandemic, epidemiologists, health ministers and the National Cabinet were just a few of the political, scientific and medical figures that constantly weighed in on social media with their thoughts and directives. In contrast, the natural disasters of the last two decades, such as the 2011 floods, saw the emergence of community leaders who did not just issue media releases but got involved physically in the disaster. These leaders emerged before, during and after the crisis and took action to help themselves and others (Moreton, 2018).

During this pandemic, there is an opportunity for leaders across the broader community to contribute to strengthening social and community capital, with pastors and other religious leaders in a unique position to actively engage to help communities stay strong and connected. Rather than a limited response to an increased focus on technology, pastors could proactively utilise the many natural greenspaces to promote eco-spirituality and provide pastoral care.

## **Eco-spirituality**

Eco-spirituality as an umbrella term is rich and diverse, with expressions found across numerous world religions. Despite the widespread practices, it is neither systematised nor operationalised. In response, I have adopted the definition of eco-spirituality by Lincoln (2000). He describes eco-spirituality as “a manifestation of the spiritual connection between human beings and the environment incorporating an intuitive and embodied awareness of all of life and engaging a relational view of the person to planet, inner to outer land-scape, and soul to soil” (Lincoln, 2000, p. 227).

For many pastors within a conservative tradition, the understanding of this term is often subsumed under the broader term eco-theology and therefore, linked inexorably with sustainability—the focus being on the spiritual dimensions of our ecological crisis (Troster, 2013). Eco-spirituality has become a topic of considerable scholarly interest, particularly amongst Catholics, as seen no more clearly than in Pope Francis’

encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015). In other traditions, there may be less awareness of how people can connect emotionally and spiritually with and through nature, an innate desire in all people. This desire is known as the biophilia hypothesis which, according to Cordero (2021), can mean “both love for living creatures [*life*] and love for Nature [*Life*], understood as the set of living creatures plus the abiotic environment in which they thrive” (p. 287). Yet, despite the rich contemporary expressions of ecological theology, there appears to be a scarcity of models and methods in some traditions to integrate pastoral care theology into an eco-theology perspective. Here I am drawn to the definition of Christian spirituality by Patricia Gemmell (2017), who writes:

*Christian* spirituality has always been about the theory and practice of the Christian life, but both theory and practice constantly undergo change, not only in observable history but in the hidden transformations of our own lives. Our beliefs change and with them our spiritual practices. We are always searching. There is always something new to crack open our hearts a little wide.

Can pastoral care in greenspaces facilitate this? According to Bernau (2021), there have been several critical changes in the language of pastoral care in academic journals over the last 75 years. The first is a “linguistic shift from the universal to the particular as pastoral care professionals drop the language of human nature and morality for that of individual narratives”. Secondly, the overtly religious language since the 1950s has declined “in favour of a more ecumenical language of spirituality, hope, and presence” (p.362). Lastly, these trends have followed a push for “evidence-based” pastoral care (Bernau, p.362). The evidence for the effectiveness of ecotherapy is growing (Chaudhury & Banerjee, 2020; Suganthi, 2019; Townsend & Weerasuriya, 2010), and can accommodate expressions of eco-spiritualities that align with Bernau's linguistic shifts. For those less familiar with ecotherapy, the following is a brief overview.

## **Nature-based therapy**

Ecotherapy is a term first coined by pastoral counsellor Howard Clinebell (1996), positing a form of “ecological spirituality” that combines self-care, earth care, and soul care (p. 1). However, as an umbrella term, it commonly defines approaches to physical and psychological therapy that are nature-based (Laguaitte, 2021). The terms ecotherapy and nature-based therapy are interchangeable, which can be confusing.

Ecotherapies are a contemporary psychotherapy approach in Western cultures that acknowledges nature's vital role and addresses the human-nature relationship.

Ecotherapies originate from the frame of ecopsychology. According to Chaudhury & Banerjee (2020), they have “coalesced as a discrete endeavour in the form of explicit environmental or ecological initiatives in counselling and psychotherapy termed ‘ecotherapy’”.

Sometimes, the connection to ancient cultural practices and worldview is explicit and other times implicit. At its best, ecotherapies consider “the latest scientific understandings of a universe and the deepest Indigenous wisdom” (Buzzell, 2014, p. 570). As a clergyperson and psychotherapist, I have practiced ecotherapy over the past two decades, specifically adventure-based approaches. Nature-based therapy builds on the idea that people are connected and impacted by the natural environment. According to Oh, Shin, Khil and Kim (2020), nature has a recovery effect. Research worldwide suggests that ecosystems and human ecosystem interaction as therapeutic devices for various physical, mental and developmental health issues are not only cost-effective but also therapeutically effective (Bloomfield, 2017). Townsend and Weerasuriya's (2010) literature review examined seven prevailing theories linking well-being and contact with nature. These authors recognised “that our need for nature is connected not just to material exploitation of the natural environment, but also to human emotional, cognitive, aesthetic and spiritual growth” (p. 10).

While pastoral care is more than improving a person's emotional, cognitive and behavioural functions, these can link to matters of the soul. Therefore, what if I could blend some of the eco-psychological principles with spiritual practices to be more holistic and, at the same time, more widely accepted across different traditions? This practice is congruent with Clinebell's (1996) second experiential dimension —“spirituality in nature”—where he affirms that many people can experience God while being intimate in nature (p. 9).

While challenging in the context of Covid, there appears to be an opportunity to explore this possibility. I suspect that there is a more profound yearning for a community that not only wants to care for one another and the earth but is open to allowing the environment to care for them. In practice, this means more than promoting an eco-friendly lifestyle or conducting my pastoral care visits out in the park, but intentionally modelling the inter-relationships between all living beings on earth and recognising their interdependency while appreciating their value for maintaining eco-balance. While this will take leadership, I am optimistic that the small steps I have chosen to blend eco-spirituality and pastoral care will gather momentum, not only because of their theoretical commonalities but because eco-spirituality may



resonate strongly with younger Christians seeking to reconcile their concern with the environment. In the search for an eco-therapeutic model, I have chosen Walk and Talk Therapy (WTT) due to its growing popularity and potential for integration.

## **Walk & Talk Therapy**

WTT is an activity that resides within counselling practice and seeks to combine physical movement, nature and therapy for the client's benefit. Believed to have developed from running therapy, WTT emerged in the 1970s and is founded on the belief that by walking through nature, a client will grow in relaxation, as walking encourages present movement awareness (Revell & McLeod, 2015, p. 35). Due to the mind-body connection, the belief that mind and body are connected, it is believed that WTT is an effective form of therapy. While the evidence base for the efficacy of walking therapies is still emerging (van den Berg & Beute, 2021; Weir, 2011), the three reasons that Kate Hays (2003) gives for incorporating exercise with psychotherapy correlate with the author's own experience. These include (1) encouraging physical activity, which in turn promotes mental well-being (Queensland Government, 2020), (2) the belief that exercise can help a client move through the sense of being struck or depressed (Malhi et al., 2021), and (3) the belief it also inspires creativity leading to more profound ways of thinking (Steinberg, 1997). Many medical and allied health professionals encourage exercise, but I recognise that not everyone is physically capable or willing to walk, highlighting a limit to this approach.

The human-nature relationship is a topic of increasing research in various fields, such as theology and evolutionary psychology. According to Seymour (2016), humans are linked with the natural environment, as demonstrated by their preference for scenes dominated by natural elements, the sustainability of natural resources, and the health benefits of engaging in nature. Nature-therapy is linked to Owen Wilson's biophilia hypothesis that is based on evolutionary theory and suggests that humans have an "innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes" (Wilson, 1984, p1). The hypothesis has been critiqued by numerous scholars (Joye & De Block, 2011) and remains a subject of increasing investigation. In spite of the challenges to the concept, it is still widely applied in the mental health field.

Further, despite numerous gaps in current knowledge, a Christian worldview supports the idea that human beings are contained in and interact with God's creation.



According to Brown (2021), three primary Creation texts, Genesis 1, Psalm 104 and Job 38-41, each in their way “affirm the intrinsic worth of biodiversity, the expansiveness of life, and a God who values flourishing of all creation” (p. 1), depicting God as a “biophile” (p. 11). While, from a theological perspective, the human-nature relationship is conflictual, nature-based therapies provide opportunities for us to cultivate more adequate anthropologies and understanding of nature (Martin, 2015). Theology supports emotional evidence for fundamental theories regarding the human-nature connection (Gaekwad, Moslehian, Roös, & Walker, 2022).

The client can learn to interact with their broader connections through therapeutic walking. As a form of physical activity, WTT provides an opportunity to harness existing levels of awareness and, at the same time, support a more comprehensive public health agenda. Increased physical activity levels achieve this health agenda for clients, and the beneficial effects of spending time in outdoor environments enhance overall well-being (AIHW, 2018). When doing WTT, the client and therapist walk side-by-side, with the client setting the pace and choosing the location and direction. The sessions usually take approximately 50 minutes, with usual walking routes around local parks, lakes or other walking tracks. There are also multiple ways WTT can be used alongside typical counselling. For example, some sessions may begin with usual counselling and transition to WTT. Sometimes the whole session is conducted outdoors. The key is to offer the client the session in an informed, collaborative and planned manner. Hence, the importance of the client in the decision-making. Anything else utilised in the process of the WTT is done with the client's benefit in mind. While WTT does provide an alternative to traditional therapy, some approaches work better than others. For example, the external distraction of walking around could inhibit the psychodynamic work with the client's unconsciousness but, having had little scholarly attention, this is uncertain (Turp, 2007, p, 165). Alternatively, humanistic therapists may use WTT as a metaphor for resourcing and equipping the clients.

Other tools and techniques used in WTT derive from various therapeutic approaches, such as resonance, attunement and empathy. From a neuroscientific perspective, the external environment acts as a stimulus to neurochemicals that produce positive or negative emotions that influence one's behaviour (Basso & Suzuki, 2017). What the client may experience during the talking part of the therapy can be interpreted and reframed during the walk, resulting in psychological conditioning. WTT is a bio-psychosocial approach to therapy as it meets the biological needs of the client through

walking, the psychological needs of the therapy, and the social needs of the interaction with the therapist (Clark, 2019). Through walking in the natural environment, cognitive capacity, such as working memory and enhanced recall, is also boosted. Further, the physical act of walking one step after another also mirrors the inner journey occurring during therapy.

So, what does all this mean for my greenspaces approach to pastoral care? I am proposing to infuse the WTT model with authentic eco-spirituality. The challenge is how can I, as a pastoral carer, go even further than just using the walking to mirror the inner journey, beyond intrapsychic processes and general health benefits to a holistic model of pastoral care and counselling, combining soul and soil? Fortunately, elements from contemporary spiritual practices can be incorporated into the walk. I offer six as a starting point for our discussion.

## Theology of Walking

Before we examine these six practices, I am aware that some readers may wonder where theology begins, as the article describes itself as a piece of theological reflection. Those searching for a theology of walking will soon realise that it does not feature strongly in the literature. While there are extensive references to walking in popular Christian literature, these refer primarily to “walking in the ways of God” (e.g., Eph.2:10) rather than using walking as discipleship. The apparent exceptions are the Emmaus Walk, pilgrimage walks, and wilderness hiking (backpacking) as a spiritual practice (Lane, 2014) which has been growing in popularity in the last decade. Cronshaw and Parker's (2018) theology of running as an embodied spiritual practice is a noteworthy contribution to the academic literature. According to the authors, running “can foster physical and emotional health, appreciation for nature, life-giving relationships with others, awareness of breathing, space for prayer, and teach life-giving lessons about enjoying faith, life and play” (Cronshaw & Parker, p. 1).

In extreme forms, these walks are called wilderness sojourns (Redick, 2016). The goal of wilderness walks is to allow the discovery of God amidst the beauty and unexpected terrors of nature (Lane, 2014), and are connected to Christian pilgrimage walks which have increased in popularity in recent years (for example, the *Camino de Santiago*). While many pilgrimages cover considerable distances, some of the principles behind them inform our theology of walking. George (2016, p.19) suggests that pilgrimage is

“rooted in the soil of the human soul”, a practice for the Christian who seeks “to stretch their faith radically by discovering the God who invites us into sacred and risky intimacy”. While the physical challenge of a pastorally focussed WTT is modest, this does not mean that exposure to nature along with intentional pastoral conversations cannot elicit sacred moments. They can make up for their lack of physical exertion in their regularity.

The two critical features of a walking theology are the walk and the setting. The setting does matter in the Bible. The Bible references geographical features such as topology, terrains, rivers and seas, gardens, flora and fauna. What would Sunday School be like without the lesson on ten weird animal stories in the Bible? Without the setting, much is lost in interpreting numerous events, such as the Exodus, the Flood of Noah, and some prophetic speeches.

In other words, you cannot understand much of the Bible without appreciating the natural setting. Creation is central to revelation, redemption and restoration (Harris, 2013). Stewardship of creation should include exploring ways to connect with the Creator. In terms of the actual physical walking, an examination of Jesus' own life and ministry reveals that much of what he did involved walking and talking in various outdoor settings. For example, in the first chapters of Mark's gospel alone, we find Jesus on a journey to the wilderness where he endured his first temptation (1:9-11), strolling by the Sea of Galilee to call his first disciples (1:16-19), praying in a lonely place (1:35), and returning to another desolate place by the end of the chapter (1:45).

We now turn to the six spiritual practices that can be integrated into our emerging greenspace pastoral care framework and involve or complement walking and talking.

### ***The Emmaus Walk***

The first of these is the *Walk to Emmaus*. Within this 3-day journey, participants often encounter the unmerited love of God (Estep, 2011), accompaniment (Heubsch, 2017) and brokenness (Astley, 2020). During the global pandemic, there is much-reported stress and fear in people's lives. People have many questions and increasing uncertainty. Inviting people to join you in the greenspaces provides an opportunity to have deep spiritual conversations. By resisting the temptation to recreationalise the walk, pastors can stay attuned to the Spirit and keep the discussion focussed on spiritual growth.

### ***The spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude.***

Entering the greenspaces provides an unprecedented opportunity to escape the noise and commotion of modern life. Many people felt trapped in isolation throughout the pandemic, and a call to “silence and solitude” may sound counterintuitive. However, people's bad news bias and tendency to endlessly doomsday scroll have increased stress and anxiety. Walking in greenspaces allows the opportunity to stop, breathe and listen to nature. In my context, I walk along a water esplanade, often stopping and asking the client to sit in relative silence. The companion is sometimes left alone, with or without further instructions, except to breathe.

### ***Mindfulness and spiritually-based meditation***

Adapting mindfulness techniques and spiritually based meditation is another practice that someone can incorporate into greenspace encounters. There is growing evidence for using mindfulness in mental health treatment, and many writers are connecting mindfulness to the Christian tradition (Timbers and Hollenberger, 2022; Trammel & Trent, 2021). WTT is not all about walking; regular stopping to sit and reflect is critical. Christian accommodative mindfulness (Garzon, 2022) is one approach that may be helpful to those concerned about the cultural and philosophical origins of mindfulness practice (for example, Buddhism).

### ***Art as therapy***

The effectiveness of art therapy has been the subject of few empirical studies, despite its popularity among adult clients. These include cancer patients, clients coping with various medical conditions, mental health clients, clients dealing with trauma, prison inmates, the elderly, and clients who have not been diagnosed with specific issues but who face ongoing daily challenges (Regev, 2018). While the long-term efficacy of art therapy is unclear (McMillan et al., 2018), there is evidence that it has a moderately positive effect on depression and anxiety symptoms in specific populations. There is now a growing number of integrative nature-based approaches to expressive art, such as Atkins and Snyder (2017). Further, nature is the medium for art amongst our First Nations People. In Indigenous art, identity, culture, spirituality, and relationships to Country intertwine (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2022).

While art as a contemporary spiritual practice in non-Indigenous cultures is less understood and practised, I see enormous potential in its use for spiritual care. At a minimum, greenspaces can provide an outdoor studio for artistic expression such as drawing, sculpture, writing poetry, journaling or dancing to music and song. At its best, it can be an expression of spiritual care outside of its chaplaincy use in healthcare facilities (Ettun, Schukltz & Bar-Sela, 2014).

### ***Outdoor liturgy***

In recognition that in some parts of conservative Christianity, the liturgy has found renewed interest, there is enormous potential to ground Christian liturgy and prayer in nature. Internationally, two movements have taken worship outdoors. This is called the Wild Church in the US and the Forest Church in the UK. I have not seen the Bush church movement in Australia but recognise that a few congregations have moved outdoors in alignment with the Simple Church movement (Rainer & Geiger, 2011). Whether or not this practice will continue when things return to normal after the pandemic is unknown. Yet, in the model I am proposing in this article, clients can worship and pray in the walk.

### ***Indigenous spiritualities***

The eco-spiritual perspective of pastoral care suggested in this article can be sensitive to Indigenous perspectives and traditional forms of helping and healing. At a minimum, this acknowledges the traditional owners and cultural respect of where the healing occurs. Currently, I am walking on Qundamooka country of the Nunagal, Goenbal and Ngugi People. It is the land and sea surrounding Mulgumpin (Moreton Island), Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island), the Southern Moreton Bay Islands, and the mainland coast. In my walks these names are used, as are the names of common animals found—Yalingbila (Whale), Buangan (Dolphin), Garumun (Kangaroo), Dumbiripi (Koala) and Gurigun (Curlew).

These spiritual practices are by no means exhausted but have provided me with a starting point to integrate spirituality into the walk. In the end, this model of pastoral care seeks to maximise the benefits of eco-therapeutic processes and is infused with dynamic spiritual practices. Walking is one method of utilising the greenspaces to practise a form of eco-spirituality. By taking the modality of WTT and infusing it with

the elements of various spiritual disciplines, I have been able to pastorally care for people in a way that I had never thought possible. I suspect this is what Dr. Preston (2007, pp. 8-9) alluded to when he wrote more than a decade ago that, in attempting to give some content to eco-spirituality, we need caution. He wrote:

The movement giving birth to eco-spirituality will span several generations, disturb personal and institutional boundaries and is inevitably diverse, experimental and eclectic. Of necessity there will be a subjective element—different pathways will suit different people at different stages of their lives. Some might find a practice which is built around communal activity more suitable while others are nurtured by solitude, some might be enriched more by an innovative use of symbols while others respond to the challenges of inspirational writings, some might be awakened to a sense of connectedness to nature by getting down and dirty in their gardens while others might be awakened by illness in their body which helps them discover how they are connected (embodied) to all bodies.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the pandemic has provided an unprecedented opportunity to re-discover the greenspaces around us, not just for recreation purposes, but for a higher purpose—to receive care and grow spiritually. Innovative pastors who are searching for ways to connect differently with their church members can utilise approaches that tap into these spaces. In this article, I have argued that a walking theology can accommodate the empirically powerful modality of walk-and-talk therapy borrowed from psychotherapeutic tradition and infuse it with elements of eco-spirituality, and shown how a range of spiritual practices can be used in these greenspace encounters to complement or be part of walking. These are: (1) The Emmaus walk, (2) silence and solitude, (3) art as spiritual practice, (4) outdoor liturgy, (5) Indigenous spiritualities, and (6) Christian mindfulness and meditation. I hope pastors who utilised greenspaces during the pandemic will not withdraw from them now as few Covid-19 restrictions remain. For those who haven't yet discovered them, I implore you to do so.

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