

The background features abstract, overlapping green geometric shapes in various shades, creating a modern and dynamic feel. The shapes are primarily triangles and polygons, some semi-transparent, layered against a white background.

Dr. Kjell Nordstokke: Church and Health

Presentation at 43rd Kaiserswerth General Assembly
Bielefeld, 15 June 2018

Church and Health - an outline of my presentation:

1. Introduction: Why this issue matters, in particular for diaconal actors?
2. Modernity: Church and Health drifting apart
3. Post-secular society: New challenges and opportunities
4. What do we mean by health?
5. Health and healing in a biblical perspective
6. The healing / health ministry of the Church
7. Diakonia as congregational and institutional expressions of the Church's health ministry
8. Concerns and priorities in the Church's health ministry

Church and Health

- ▶ **Why** should the church engage in health work?
- ▶ Considering the “health market”: Should the church seek a role? - The socio-political question
- ▶ Does the health ministry belong to the very nature of being church? - The theological / ecclesiological question

Church of Norway: Document on Church and health

Received by Church of Norway General Synod 2015.

It explores the Church's health-related services from a broad perspective:

as health promotion,
as help in coping with life,
as medical treatment,
as care for the sick.



Modernity: Church and health - drifting apart

- ▶ Pre-modern concept
 - ▶ Salus - health and salvation
 - ▶ Christus medicus
- ▶ The modern concept of health and illness - without religious reference
- ▶ The challenge of secularization: the withdrawal of the church from the public to the religious arena
- ▶ Diaconal actors and health services:
 - ▶ Do they affirm the drifting apart?
 - ▶ Do they resist and act as go-between?

What do we mean by health?

- ▶ The narrow understanding of health
 - ▶ Health as bio-medical normality
 - ▶ Medicalizations - high expectations for medicine and health systems
- ▶ The wider understanding of health
 - ▶ The subjective experience of health - well-being, surplus, mastery
 - ▶ The relational dimension - wholeness and meaning
- ▶ Populist concepts of health
 - ▶ The role of media - promoting fear and easy solutions
 - ▶ The medical industry and marketed
 - ▶ Alternative medicine

Moving from secular to post-secular society - 1

- ▶ Reconsidering the concept of health - including the social and spiritual dimension
- ▶ The World Health Organization (WHO): *Health, which is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, is a fundamental human right...*
- ▶ SDG 3: *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all and all ages*
- ▶ World Council of Churches: *Health is a dynamic state of wellbeing of the individual and the society; of physical, mental, spiritual, economic, political and social wellbeing; of being in harmony with each other, with the material environment and with God*
- ▶ Faith: a resource in coping with health challenges

Moving from secular to post-secular society - 2

- ▶ The return of religion in society
- ▶ Civil society open for faith based actors, inclusive related to health and social work
- ▶ Distinctive role - core values, distinct assets
- ▶ New experiences: Working with HIV and Aids, Ebola etc.
- ▶ Public recognition and expectations that churches will assume a role in health work

Health in a biblical perspective

- ▶ Shalom - well-being / health
- ▶ Gen 43:27: *He inquired about their welfare, and said, “Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?”*
- ▶ Num 6:26: ... *and give you peace* (The Priestly Benediction)
- ▶ Isa 54:10: *For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you*

Illness / plagues and healing

- ▶ Ex 15:26 - *If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord who heals you*
- ▶ Illness / plagues as punishment
- ▶ God cares and heals
- ▶ Luther: ... *ich bin der HERR, dein Arzt*
- ▶ *Rafa* (86x) - mend, repair, make whole

Health in the Old Testament

- ▶ The term 'health' is unknown
- ▶ Wholeness and wellbeing
- ▶ Right and dynamic relations
- ▶ Regulations that prevent illness (impurity) and promote health, lifestyle matters
- ▶ Prov 3:7-8: ... *fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body*
- ▶ God is the giver of life, the source of wellbeing and joy

Health and healing in the New Testament - the healing ministry of Jesus

- ▶ The gospels present Jesus as a popular healer
- ▶ *Mt 9:35: Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness*
- ▶ Care for the sick and healing - an integral part of the Messianic sending
- ▶ Moving around
- ▶ Sensibility
- ▶ Holistic approach - proclamation and healing

The healing ministry of Jesus - 2

- ▶ 26 accounts about persons being healed (48 par. incl.)
- ▶ 17 physical healings (6x in 3; 1x in 2; 10x in 1)
- ▶ 6 exorcism of demons (2x in 3; 3x in 2; 1x in 1)
- ▶ 3 raising the dead (1x in 3; 2x in 1)
- ▶ Verses about healing Mt 9%, Mk 20%, Lk 12%, Jn 13%
- ▶ Within the narratives (25%, 50%, 34%, 36%): Mt 40%, Mk 40%, Lk 35%, Jn 33%

The healing ministry of Jesus - 3

- ▶ Most accounts refer to conical illnesses
- ▶ Focus is the condition of the sick persons, the social and religious consequences - much less the diagnose
- ▶ Healing by word and by touching
- ▶ Affirming faith and human dignity
- ▶ Restoring social and religious relations
- ▶ Dimension of his prophetic ministry: denounce and announce

The healing ministry of Jesus - its uniqueness

- ▶ Healing in the power of Messianic authority
- ▶ Rejects that illness is a consequence of sin: Jn 9:3
- ▶ Connects healing and forgiveness: Mt 9:1-8
- ▶ Heals on the Sabbath: Jn 6:1-15
- ▶ The gifts of healing:
 - ▶ Liberation - setting free
 - ▶ Restoration of relations
 - ▶ Advocacy - defending human dignity
 - ▶ Inclusion
 - ▶ Empowerment
- ▶ Signs of the Kingdom

Healing as integral part of the disciples' mission

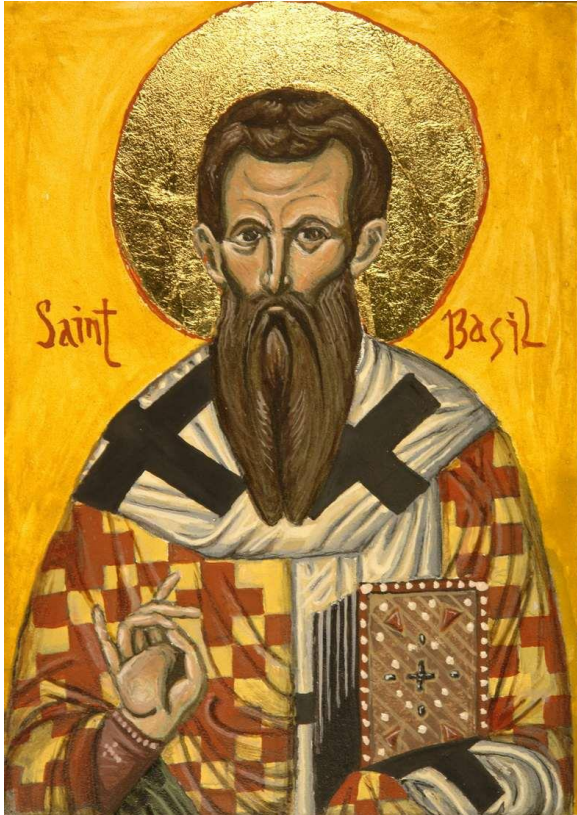
- ▶ *Mt 10:1.7-8: Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness ... As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment*
- ▶ *Acts 5:16: A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured*

The healing ministry in the Early Church

- ▶ *Jas 5:14-16: Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed*
- ▶ In continuity of the healing ministry of Jesus
- ▶ A leadership task
- ▶ Rites of healing

The healing ministry of the Church

Greek: *Diakonia* → Latin: *Ministerium* → English: *Ministry*



- ▶ Hospital (369 - St. Basil of Caesarea)
- ▶ Monasteries (1550 - 37.000 Benedictine monasteries caring for the sick)
- ▶ The modern diaconal movement (from the 1830's)
- ▶ The medical mission - mission hospitals



The Church's health assets

- ▶ Diaconal institutions and services
- ▶ Employees - professionals
- ▶ Volunteers
- ▶ Confidence
- ▶ Communion - meeting places
- ▶ Hospitality - visitation
- ▶ Rituals - ceremonies
- ▶ Counselling
- ▶ Intercession - blessing
- ▶ Music - singing

Focus areas in the Church's health ministry

- ▶ Elderly people - care and dignity
- ▶ People living with chronic illnesses
- ▶ People living with disabilities
- ▶ People living with addiction
- ▶ Loneliness - network intervention
- ▶ Mental health
- ▶ Refugees / migrant - the multicultural society
- ▶ The right to practice faith with safe space for spiritual and existential issues

Summing up:

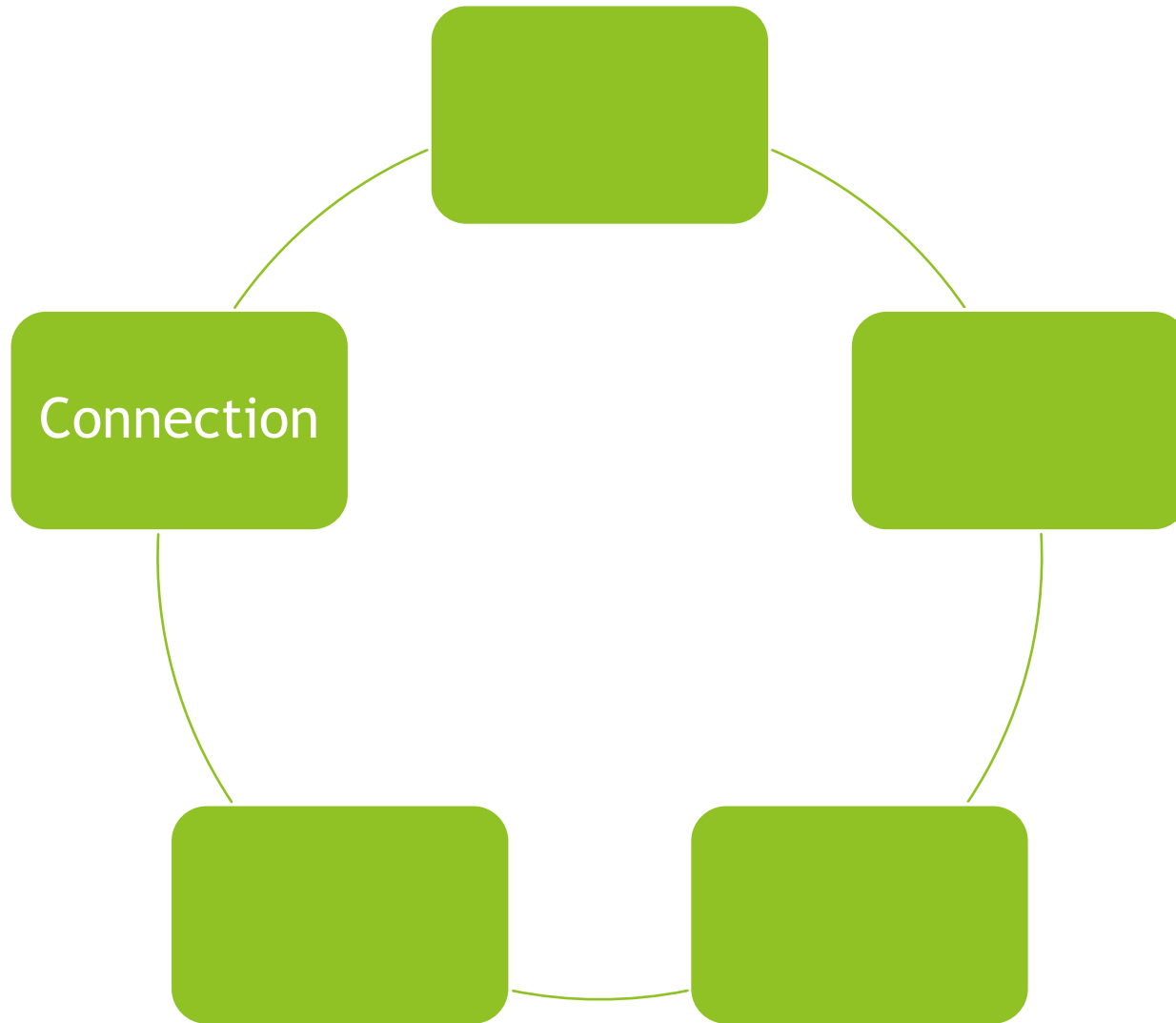
The health ministry of the Church

- ▶ Health - an integral dimension of the Church's mission
- ▶ A broad understanding of health
- ▶ A holistic understanding of being human
- ▶ Promote the importance of relations - strengthening networks
- ▶ Questions regarding popular concepts of health. The health can be good enough!
- ▶ Learning to cope with one's health situation
- ▶ Faith as an asset - and as a problem: issues of shame and guilt
- ▶ Suffering and death as natural elements in the course of life
- ▶ The Church as Sanctuary - retreat and space of blessing

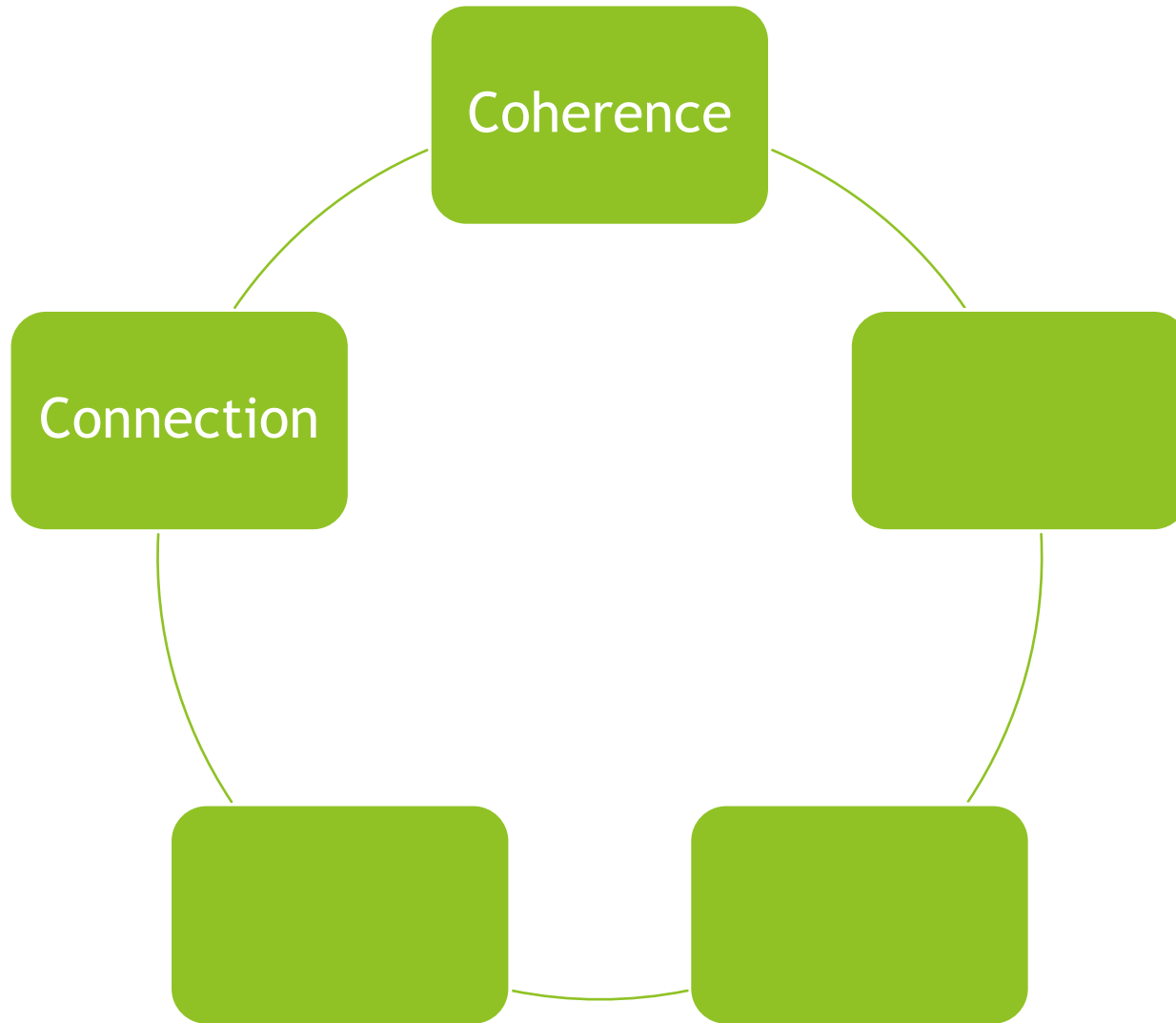
Promoting health

- ▶ To be subject in one's own life
- ▶ The importance of relations and social networks
- ▶ Life style
- ▶ Affirming human dignity - i all situations of life
- ▶ «Human flourishing» - through all phases of life
- ▶ «Leading causes of life» - matter more than causes of death

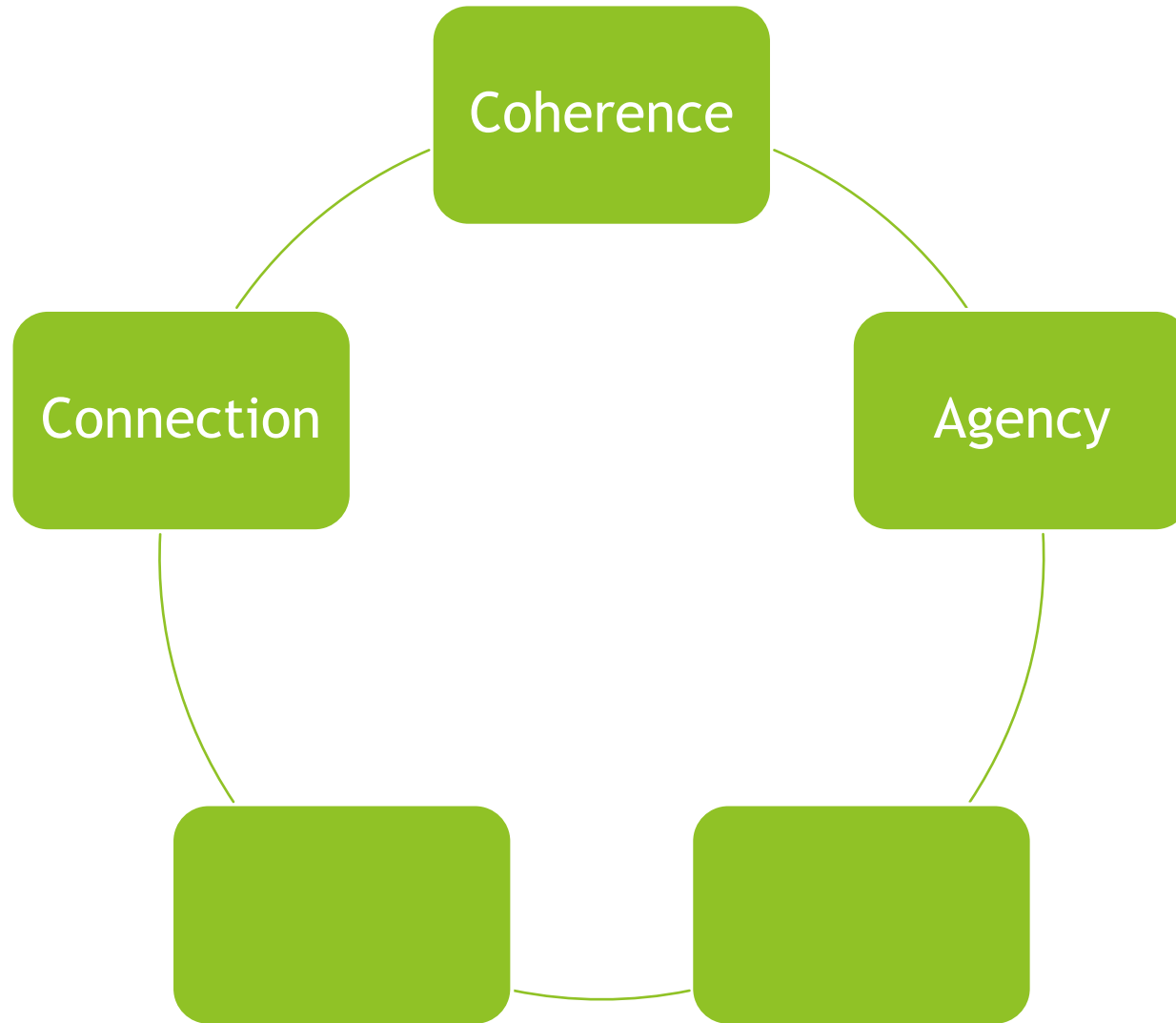
Causes of LIFE



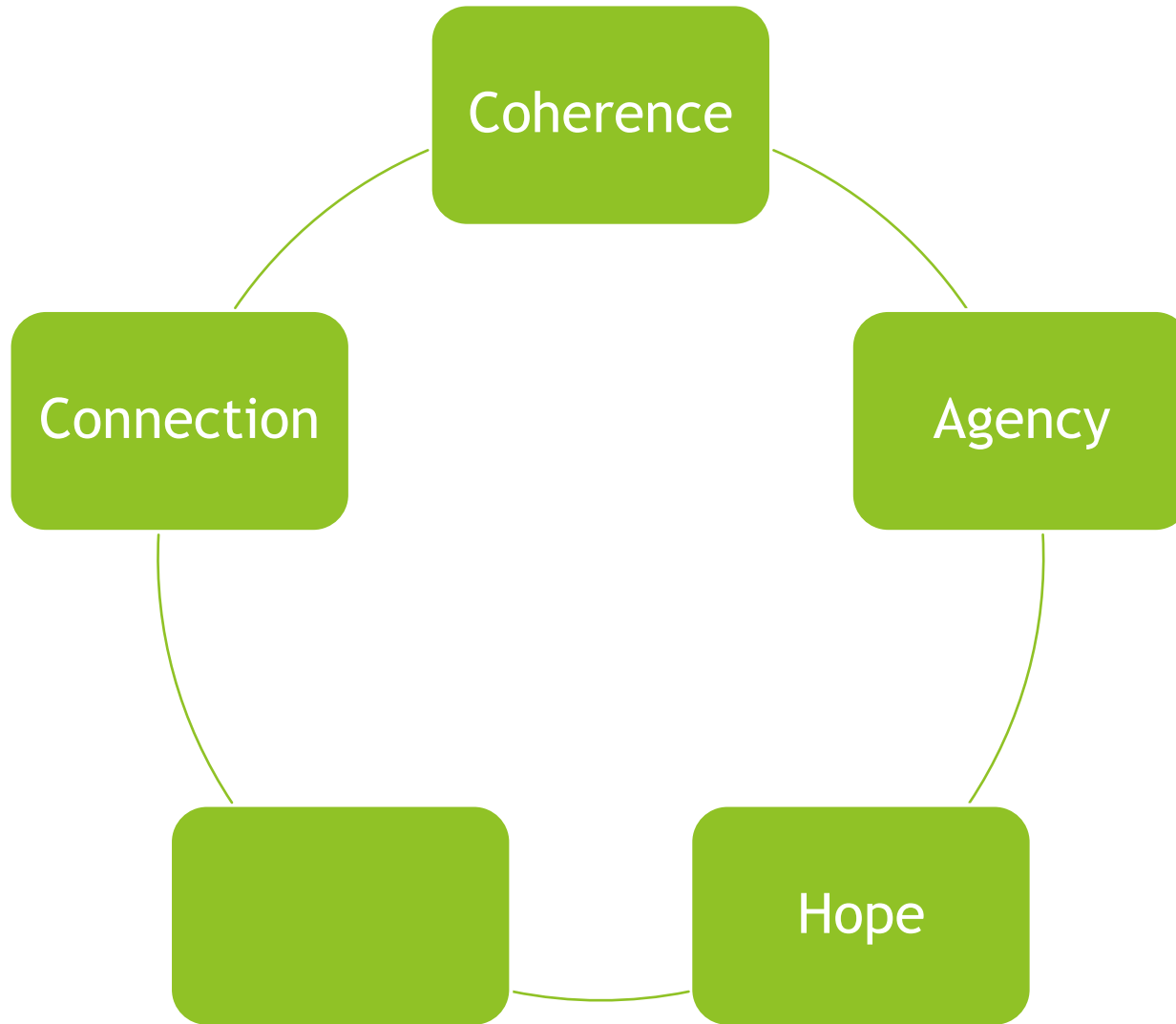
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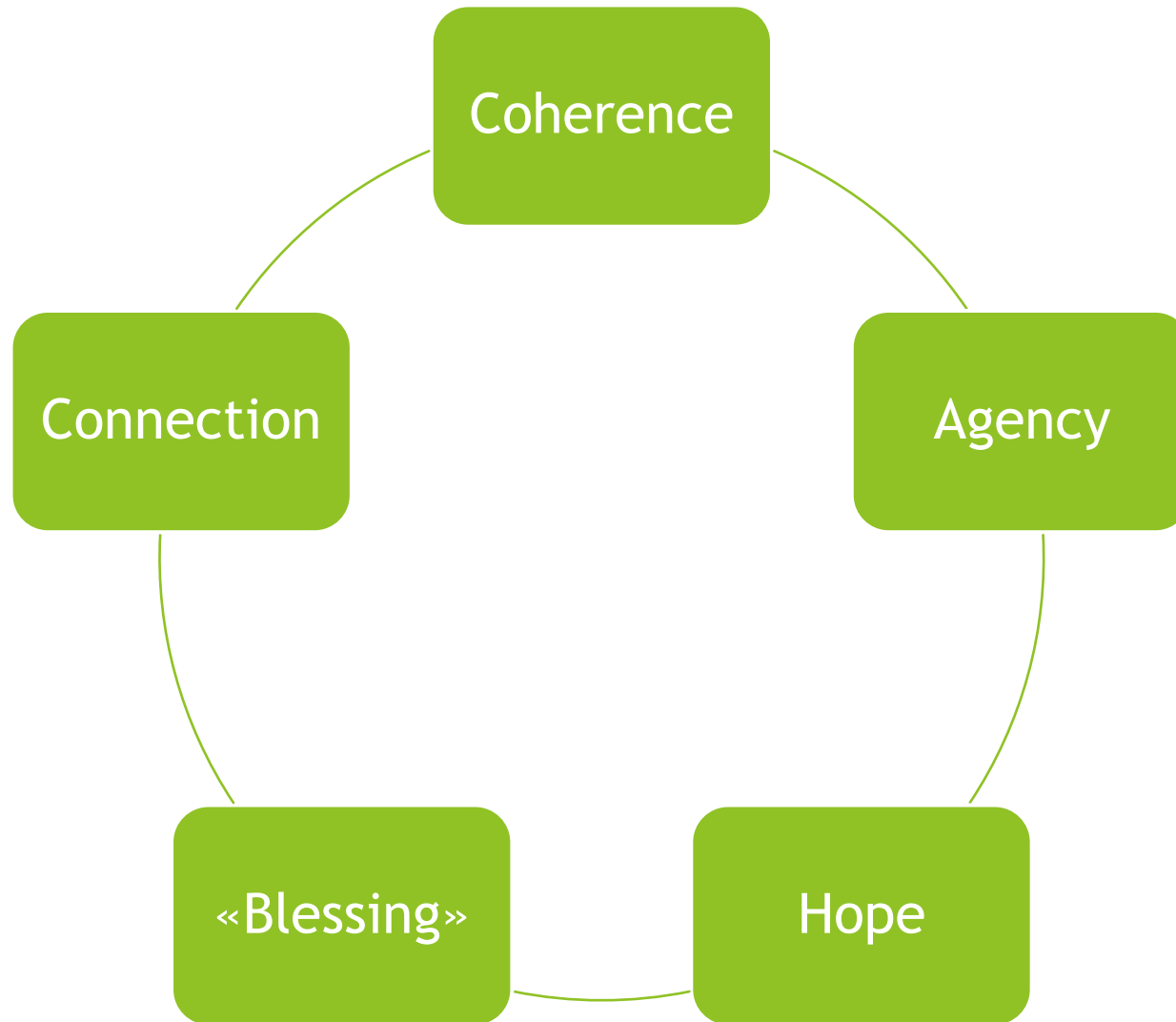
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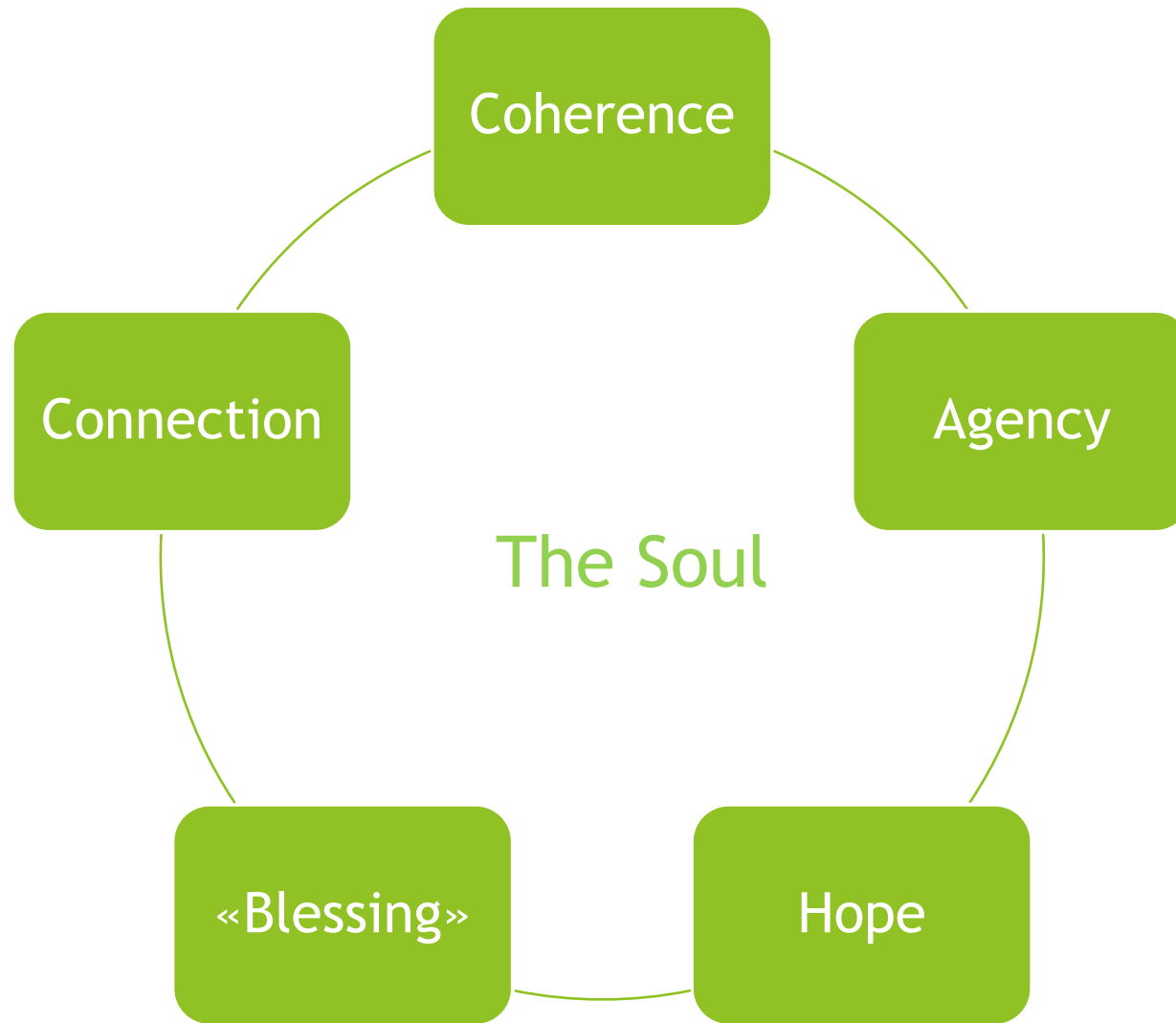
Causes of LIFE



Causes of LIFE



Causes of LIFE



A cheerful heart is a good medicine, but a downcast spirit dries up the bones

Proverbs 17:22

