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'Jill's House is our lifeline': the impact of respite and the call for accessible rest

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Jill's House – a Christian nonprofit organization that offers overnight respite for families with children with intellectual and developmental disabilities – as a contemporary example of the theological practice of providing rest. Drawing from our larger mixed-method study involving more than 200 parents participating in programs across several US locations, we highlight the profound and holistic impact of respite care on a family's wellbeing. By exploring how rest is made tangible in the everyday care practices of Jill's House, we address how this experience has reshaped the perspectives of service providers, prompting their renewed awareness of the universal need for respite. Through dialogue with families, our findings enrich understanding of respite as a vital, life-giving resource and underscore the critical role of churches in cultivating inclusive, compassionate spaces marked by access to God's restorative rest.

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As you enter this warm sanctuary of respite, you are instantly immersed in the rustic charm and grandeur of the lodge, affectionately known as Jill's House. The soaring, double-sided fireplace, set beneath a cathedral ceiling and majestic wood trusses, creates a serene refuge that invites visitors to sink into one of the chocolate leather couches and stay awhile. Located in Northern Virginia outside of Washington, D.C., this 42,000 square-foot resort exists to celebrate the intrinsic worth of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). As President and CEO Joel Dillon describes, Jill's House aims to cultivate a community centered on Christ's love and fellowship, where 'The last will be first, and the first will be last … flipping the world's expectations on its head.' Here, children and youth ages 6 to 22 with IDD enjoy a memorable overnight experience of adventure, arts and crafts, talent shows, indoor swimming, chapel time, and meaningful bonds with peers and staff that often spans years. Modeled after the Shalva (Hebrew for 'peace') facility in Jerusalem, Jill's House seeks to continue that same spirit of inclusion and compassionate care.

Beyond the glass windows that line the back of this great room, a vibrant recreation area in blues and reds unfolds across the grounds. A young boy outside happily pedals his three-wheeled bike back and forth, erupting in laughter each time he playfully collides

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with one of the doors. In that moment, Jill's House's mission is vividly realized, aptly portrayed by Kate, a 16-year-old with IDD, who, when asked what she loves about Jill's House, said, 'It is good for me.'

Respite derives from the Latin word *respicere*, meaning to 'turn around to look at' or 'to regard'. This notion of rest is often misunderstood. A persistent misunderstanding is the notion that unceasing service and self-sacrifice have greater spiritual value than practices of self-care. Respite is often viewed as a short-term break, rather than recognizing it as essential, life-giving support that must be woven into the regular rhythms of daily life (Abrahams and Kleintjes 2023). Furthermore, ministers and laypeople may not fully grasp the challenges encountered by families in their congregations who experience disability, which can result in a lack of accessible resources within churches (Carter et al. 2016). By understanding respite in its original sense – as an opportunity to turn toward the needs of others such as caregivers and their families – communities can increase appreciation of its critical role. This shift in perspective allows for the expansion of supportive settings that advance the wellbeing of all members, cultivating a flourishing congregational life.

Respite care, in its intended purpose, offers caregivers dedicated time for rest and renewal. During this period, they can entrust their loved ones to a nurturing and uplifting environment where God's love becomes tangible, fostering restoration for the whole family. For parents of children with disabilities, daily responsibilities require constant attentiveness and an unwavering capacity to meet their child's unique needs in a world that often undervalues persons with disabilities. Respite can take various forms, from a few hours of relief to extended overnight stays (Kirk and Summers 2020), yet its significance remains profound. More than just a break, it serves as a crucial lifeline, offering hope and empowering caregivers to maintain the emotional and physical resilience needed to provide the best care for their child (e.g. Murphy et al. 2022; Whitmore 2016).

Amidst continual caregiving, respite also provides a sacred opening for a caregiver to reconnect with both self and God. This underscores the essence of mutual support in finding respite, resembling Paul's affirmation in 1 Corinthians 16:18 (New Revised Standard Version): 'For they refreshed my spirit as well as yours.' Paul suggests that the help he received from his companions in Corinth transcended practical assistance; it became a ministry that rejuvenated his spirit, offering encouragement and refreshment. This biblical truth – that the Christian life blossoms in community – reinforces that gifting rest to our neighbor is both a collective responsibility and a cherished practice, fundamental to the health of the body of Christ.

Material and context

Building on this theological premise, this article focuses on Jill's House as a contemporary exemplar of the principle of providing rest, highlighting the perspectives of parents, children, and service providers on the impact of respite care. Our purpose is to emphasize the often-overlooked connections between the concept of respite and the lived experiences of disability. We draw upon our recent mixed-method evaluation of Jill's House, which combined surveys of more than 200 parents with in-depth interviews of 26 families who participated in programs across several US locations (Carter et al. 2024). Our

exploration speaks to the profound impact of respite care and magnifies broader implications for understanding Sabbath and respite in practical terms. Engaging in dialogue with these families, in addition to the service providers who offer this care, deepens appreciation for respite care as an indispensable resource and focuses on the pressing need to cultivate communities of care where everyone can act upon the divine invitation to rest.

The building of Jill's House: 'our little heaven on Earth'

When asked about her experience at Jill's House, Tammy, the mother of six children, including a 22-year-old son with IDD, passionately expressed, 'We call it our little heaven on Earth. It's the one perfect thing of … any program that we've tried.' Her words capture the deep sense of peace and gratitude that Jill's House brings to so many families. The origins of this enduring impact date back to 1992, when Pastor Lon and Brenda Solomon of McLean Bible Church welcomed their daughter Jill, who was born with Dravet syndrome, a rare seizure condition. At the time, the Solomons did not anticipate that within just two decades their personal journey would impact the lives of hundreds of families across five states. The demands of caring for Jill's complex medical needs confirmed to the Solomons the profound necessity for rest. Their experience of informal respite care, intervals of regular caregiving support coordinated by a small network of fellow congregation members, beautifully exemplified the biblical ideal of community. Within the body of believers, Christians uphold one another in times of great need, embodying Christ's invitation: 'Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Mat 11:28).

This journey, however, was filled with sleepless nights and intense struggles. Brenda has recounted on various occasions her heartfelt plea to God during that pivotal time: 'Lord, I cannot go on any longer – I have nothing physically or emotionally left to give. You have to step in and do something … I just ask one thing. Please use Jill's life in a mighty way' (Doolittle 2012). This repeated prayer, along with the Solomon's experience of rest gifted by their church, where Lon was lead pastor, led to the conception of Jill's House.

Founded in 2010, the Solomon's vision came to life with the opening of a state-of-the-art facility – the only center of its kind in the United States – offering families a 'rhythm of respite' through quarterly overnight stays. They welcomed six children as their first overnight guests. Jill's House presently serves more than 250 families at their Virginia location and has launched weekend programming in five additional locations. Simultaneously, the Solomons witnessed exponential growth in their church membership with the introduction of their church's Access ministry, which provides persons with disabilities a pathway to be active, integral members of the church and discipleship of Christ.

The Solomon's commitment to providing rest to others is rooted in Jewish and Christian traditions. The blessing of the Sabbath (from the Hebrew *shabbat* meaning rest), when viewed today through a productivity-based perspective, is sometimes simplified to a ritual rather than an essential form of spiritual and communal support. In Genesis 2:3, God powerfully models rest following six days of creation: 'So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.' Abraham Joshua Heschel eloquently conveys the Sabbath as

> a day that ennobles the soul and makes the body wise. … It is one of life's highest rewards, a source of strength and inspiration to endure tribulation, to live nobly. … The Sabbath is the inspirer, the other days the inspired. (Heschel 1951, 21–22)

Jesus himself showed the importance of entering into God's rest. After the disciples returned from their mission, he summoned them, 'Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while' (Mk 6:31), recognizing the need for regular intervals of rest and renewal. This emphasis on rest is a reminder of the importance of observing the Sabbath – a biblical teaching to pause for the sake of one's physical and spiritual well-being. Writing about Sabbath justice and the difficulties many people face in observing it due to work demands and societal expectations, Norman Wirzba (2006) compellingly asserts, 'Sabbath teaching proclaims rest for the *entire* household' (38). He expands this understanding, arguing, 'The rest of one person should not be at the expense of another's exhaustion or toil. … It extends to the whole community of life' (39).

Jill's House stands as a beacon within the buzzing and busy commercial hub of Fairfax County by offering an invigorating retreat where true connections and contentment thrive. As Wirzba writes, a faithful community 'works actively to affirm and make room for others to become what God intends them to be' (53). It is where individuals 'learn to participate in the hospitality of God' (115) and live out the practice of being charitable, recognizing that God's loving care sustains all.

Methodological approach

With this introduction to Jill's House and the spiritual significance of respite in mind, we now provide a brief review of the approach we used to capture the impact of respite care on families. (See Carter et al. 2024 for a full description of the evaluation process and findings.) We began by inviting every parent whose child had participated in Jill's House over a six-month period to complete a survey addressing how respite care impacted their family, their reasons for seeking respite, the challenges they encountered in doing so, and their ongoing need for respite. More than 200 parents – representing more than half of all families – completed the survey.

We then invited 50 of these parents to participate in an in-depth interview based on their survey responses. We sought a diverse sample considering gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, household size, and community type. We ultimately interviewed 23 mothers and 8 fathers representing 26 different families. Although most (74%) were married, others were divorced or separated (13%), single (10%), or widowed (3%). Racial/ethnic diversity was 77% White, 10% Asian, 7% Black or African American, 7% Hispanic/Latino, and 3% American Indian or Alaska Native. Their children with IDD ranged in age from 10 to 23 years. Every child had an intellectual disability. However, most had additional disabilities such as autism, developmental delay, and/or speech language impairments. Nearly one third of children used alternative communication means such as pictures, communication devices, or gestures. Two thirds of children occasionally or often engaged in challenging behaviors.

Three couples completed their interviews together, the rest met with us individually. The interviews averaged 43 minutes in length and were audio recorded. Our interview protocol was semi-structured and probed key questions in five main areas: their reasons for pursuing respite, its availability, its impact, the other needs of their families,

and their recommendations for Jill's House. To further understand the approach and impact of Jill's House, we visited their main location twice and interviewed seven staff members to explore their experiences in providing respite care at Jill's House and its personal impact on them. Finally, because our project relied on interviews with parents, rather than children, we invited parents to also have their children write, draw, or audio record their feelings about being part of Jill's House. We used a team-based approach to analyze our data and capture major themes. All procedures were reviewed by the university's institutional review board.

The impact of respite care

We now turn toward the lived experiences of these 26 families and the impact of respite care. Their stories of struggle were contrasted with testimonies of hope, renewal, and belonging that emerged from their involvement with Jill's House. Gleaning insights from these narratives, which bring together the impact of respite care on parents, children, and service providers, we show how the church can play a decisive role in helping caregivers and persons with disabilities feel, as Ruby shared, 'loved and cared for and given the freedom to wholly be [themselves]'. In the following sections, we highlight selected findings from this project and address their theological implications for the Church. More detailed fundings are reported elsewhere.

'Jill's House is our lifeline': how respite care impacts parents

The deep and multifaceted impact of respite on families navigating the challenges of disability was pervasive and pronounced throughout the interviews. Parents identified 17 distinct areas in which respite benefitted their families. (See Carter et al. 2025 for detailed findings.) This section features some of the more prominent ways in which respite made a substantial difference for these families. Respite care offered 'priceless time' for couples to strengthen their relationships and spend meaningful time with their nondisabled children. More than half of parents addressed how 'these little breaks just lighten the load' (Brittany) and provide rare moments to sustain their marriage. From 'having coffee' and 'grownup conversation' to going on 'long walks' and being 'able to garden and go for a bike ride', spouses (like Melanie) spoke of this time as 'valuable for the peace of [her] home'.

Several parents referenced the high divorce rate among parents of some disabled children. Frederick, the father of a teenage daughter who requires 24-hour support, remarked, '[Respite] helps us stay together' and allows us to 'focus on us'. For caregivers like Erika and her husband, who check on their 16-year-old daughter 'five times a night' due to her severe sleep apnea, respite means just 'sleeping through the night' together. Erika reflected, 'It is definitely challenging to have a child with special needs … My husband and I kind of give each other high-fives. "We're doing it. We're making it!"' Crystal commented on how critical respite is for her relationship with her spouse, William, allowing time to 'refuel and keep going' or have 'dinner without worrying about somebody that's going to spill over the water glass or grab food from our plates'. Susan, the mother of a 20-year-old disabled son, reflected on the ways she was able to solidify her union with her husband during respite, saying, 'There was no work, no phones, no emails answered … it was just 100% the two of us.'

Numerous parents described how respite care 'just strengthens the family bond', allowing for more balanced and intentional interactions with all their children, where each member is honored and cherished. Their insights prompt reflection on the family as a sacred institution that mirrors God's love and communal care. Speaking on the family as a sanctified entity in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* ('The Joy of the Gospel'), Pope Francis (2013) proclaimed, 'The family is the fundamental cell of society where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another' (§66). He echoed Paul's words that 'the love of Christ urges us on' (2 Cor 5:14), upholding the centrality of the family in fostering not only personal relationships but also an increased sense of belonging and mutual values within the wider community.

Respite created cherished moments of connection between parents and their other children – time that often felt out of reach amid the ongoing demands of caregiving. With their child with a disability engaged in enriching activities elsewhere, parents described a renewed ability to be present for their other children in intentional ways. Verónica reflected, 'My other kids – and my husband too – they get *their* time and then they're happier and so everyone's happier,' capturing how these moments reinforced each person's worth and place in the family. Families embraced this uninterrupted time in varied forms – from game nights and movie outings to simple everyday acts like 'helping [their son] with algebra'. Christopher, a single father, emphasized how critical it was to invest in his high school-aged son. 'I'm going to be losing him soon to probably college … So, it's a chance to just enjoy that time with him.' For Shelley, respite offered a long-awaited opportunity to experience what other parents often take for granted – being 'the parent who was in the stands who was getting to watch [her son's] games'.

Extending his earlier teachings on the family as a 'fundamental cell', Pope Francis (2020), in *Fratelli Tutti* ('All Brothers [and Sisters]'), called for the cultivation of a 'culture of encounter', where relationships are nurtured through solidarity and genuine bonds of friendship. Respite care embodies this ideal, serving as a practical expression that helps families further strengthen relationships with friends and fellow families, broadening social connections. This was expressed by several parents, notably Gregory, who said how delightful it was to finally be able to attend gatherings with his wife: 'Sometimes when we're invited to something, we just say no. Or one of us goes without the other.' But having respite care enabled 'times when we got to do things with other people, which was a benefit'. Several parents shared how receiving respite from the same organization facilitated ties with other parents of children with disabilities. In addition to rest, respite offered space for connection – an often-overlooked yet vital form of support for caregivers. Parents described how these moments opened the door to both practical exchange and emotional solidarity, from 'sharing of resources' to simply 'commiserating with each other' about their shared experiences of exhaustion and responsibility. As Diana put it, respite helped her move beyond isolation: 'It gives you the opportunity to be connected, to be part of a greater community than just feeling so isolated and alone in what you're experiencing.'

Respite care emerged as a deep well of renewal in restoring caregivers' emotional and psychological well-being. Across interviews, parents spoke of the relief in powerfully expressive terms – describing it as 'uplifting', 'invaluable', and essential to their ability to keep going. For Andrew, the overnight stay brought a sense of unexpected calm. 'It felt like we had taken a week off,' he said, describing this internal shift as a 'real break'. For many, these overnight pauses in caregiving created space not just for rest, but for

release. Leslie, a single mother whose daughter requires significant support, shared, 'I would usually spend the first 24 hours basically sobbing and sleeping. It was the only time I could actually take care of me and let go.' Others echoed the sense that respite allowed them to re-center. Shelley reflected on how this space helped her 'be the best parent' she could be, while Emily described the impact in terms of deep renewal: 'It really gives us a recharge in our soul, and we just feel physically and mentally just better. … It's like, "Okay, we got this. We can do this."'

The benefits of respite care were not limited to physical rest; for many, they extended into the realm of spiritual replenishment. Rhonda shared how it allowed her to 'engage in Mass more prayerfully [and] spend more time in prayer', reclaiming time and focus for spiritual practices often pushed aside by constant caregiving. As Leslie noted, 'Being more rested helps me feel more spiritual.' Parents often struggled to find words to capture the magnitude of this return to spiritual grounding. Yet repeatedly, they conveyed just how essential respite had become by drawing upon words like 'life changing', 'life-giving', 'lifeline', and 'godsend'.

Diana equated it to the safety announcement made on planes, saying:

> *Put your mask on first before you put it on your child*. I feel like your whole life is making sure that that mask is on your child, and you don't realize [that], meanwhile, you're suffocating and you're about to stop breathing. And so, I think [respite] gives parents the space to recharge for the marathon that is their life.

Subsequently, a number of parents spoke of how the anticipation of forthcoming respite can fuel a certain hope. The rhythms of regular respite – whether monthly or quarterly – heightened optimism. Amidst any present challenges or exhaustion, parents could look ahead with confidence to a future 'breather'. Respite care not only provided relief in the moment – it gave families something to look forward to, a point of hope on the horizon. Susan captured this anticipation vividly: 'All month long, the respite is coming! And Spencer [her son] is driving you crazy and – whatever the case is – it's okay. Because we know that on that date, we're going to have respite.' That sense of looking ahead became a form of sustenance. 'It helps sustain you on the journey,' Shelley reflected, 'because when you actually know that you have this date coming up, it kind of almost gives you a lift to get to that weekend'. Even as one break ended, families drew strength from the promise of what was to come. As Emily reflected, 'There's light at the end of the tunnel for the next one.'

'Feeling like she has her own life': how respite impacts children

While much of the existing research on the impact of respite care emphasizes positive outcomes for parents (e.g. Murphy et al. 2022; Whitmore 2016), the significant impact on children with disabilities is often overlooked. This section features some of the major areas of child impact identified in the interviews, including how respite care supports the child's personal development by increasing independence, encouraging social connections, and sparking new interests. In addition to benefitting developmentally and socially, many children also experienced emotional reassurance and moments of spiritual connection. (See Escobar et al. 2025 for detailed findings.)

Parents were quick to note that their children, too, need a break from the routine of family life and everyday pressures. As Diana suggested, 'Being able to not be with your

parents might be respite in a different way.' This was artfully captured in a poem by a participant named Bridger, framed on a central wall in the lobby of the lodge. It reads in part:

'Jill's House'
Pizza parties
Place where kids play
No parents stay …
It has an elevator
It has a computer room with games
It has a gym
Happy!

Parents appreciated the chance for their children to explore different surroundings, build life skills transferable to other settings, and pursue pastimes like archery, music classes, and campfires – especially the joy of 'roast[ing] lots of marshmallows!' as 11-year-old Jennifer excitedly offered. Eric, the father of three children, praised Jill's House for furnishing 'a diverse set of activities' that supports his son's 'social engagement' and 'autonomy'. Parents also reflected on the importance of their children 'learning to operate without their primary caregivers, and … to trust others in an environment that is different from their home' (Emily). Similarly, Crystal observed how the staff become trusted figures in their children's lives, reinforcing their place within the community.

> A program like Jill's House that provides overnight care is also a developmental opportunity … because they're also learning to trust others in an environment that is different from their home. … I'm not going to be here forever, so I need my girls to be able to trust and be able to work with other people, and I think this is a great stepping stone as they're aging.

Several parents noted a growing sense of empathy and initiative in their children, who had begun supporting and encouraging their peers. One parent reflected that this experience helped their child recognize both their own uniqueness and the value of others. '[It raised] their own awareness that they are special with their needs and to see others in that same light' (William).

Others emphasized how much their child anticipates their next stay. Brittany conveyed, '[My daughter] gets very excited … She sleeps with her bathing suit. She brings it into bed with her and she starts to get her stuff ready.' Tammy said her son 'marks the days off on a calendar' giving him 'hope and joy' that his time at Jill's House is coming soon. While most participants shared positive stories, such as their children coming back from the weekend with a 'love glow' or 'exploding inside to tell us nonverbally he had the best time ever', one parent stated that her son had difficulty spending the night alone and faced challenges readjusting after returning home.

A particular aspect that resonated across parents was the counter-cultural environment that focuses on being 'empowering and bolstering as opposed to … pitying' and '[bringing] out their strengths'. Nicole said,

> The kids feel welcome, feel celebrated, feel loved and cared for … Can you imagine every time you went somewhere someone said, 'Hey, girl, how are you doing?' Smiling at you; hugging you. [That must] make you feel so good … That's how Jill's House [is for my son] … It's the best feeling ever.

Consequently, many children, like Melanie's daughter, leave with a newfound independence, 'feeling like she has her own life'. Parents also cited their child's spiritual growth

as a beneficial outcome, attributing it to the nourishing atmosphere and option to take part in 'chapel time', where the children join in communal prayer, singing, and reading Bible stories. This holistic approach to respite allows the children to explore their own spirituality. As Crystal remarked, 'There is a spiritual component that is taken into consideration and used … for the benefit of [my children] and their well-being.' Equally, Erika appreciates the chance for her daughter to 'learn more about God and Christ' and actively participate in worship, which she says brings her child happiness and fulfillment. Shelley added, 'The beauty of it is that's an outreach to the community for Jill's House to expose people to faith. … I think it's done nothing but reinforce our core values [and] belief systems.' These experiences of faith have lasting effects that stretch far beyond the physical setting and duration of the children's stays, magnifying the unique Christian foundation that makes Jill's House a place of enriching spiritual encounters and companionship.

'Glimpsing the heart of Christ': how respite impacts service providers

Another key finding was the impact on service providers and volunteers who directly attested to the 'life-altering' power of Christian service – an area of community impact that warrants further exploration. Across all of our interviews with staff members and volunteers at Jill's House, they spoke with vivid emotion about the significant effect this ministry has had on their spiritual lives and their broader understanding of disability. Many depicted it as a sacred exchange, where the rewards and challenges of caregiving promote growth in virtues and a renewed sense of vocation. Courtney, a nurse employed at Jill's House for 10 years, said:

> A lot of people will say, 'Oh, you work [at Jill's House]. That must be so sad to see.' I'm like, 'What!?! This is such a joyful place!' … A lot of days the kids I work with are way more patient with me … I'm trying to understand them, and they're probably frustrated that I don't know, but they're giving me the patience of trying again. They've shown me that it goes both ways. … the kids here just bring me so much joy.

Likewise, Anita, a volunteer for 10 years, talked about how being with the children has enlarged her faith and understanding of God's unconditional love. She fondly recounted the connections made with nonverbal children through shared presence and laughter and experiencing 'breakthroughs' while humming hymns and acting out fairy tales like 'Snow White' together. She asserted, 'How gracious God is that our spiritual intelligence has nothing to do with our IQ.' Another volunteer, Danny, who recently retired and has served at Jill's House for one year, said accompanying the children has made him 'more outwardly focused'. He noted,

> You gain a lot more than you give. … just witnessing [the kids'] kindness towards me. [One of the participants] always wants to grab my arm or my hand and take me on a walk. … I think I get a glimpse every time I come here into the heart of Christ.

Many of the team members spoke about their intentionality in 'giving a little extra' and their 'desire to do what we do well, in the name of Christ'. Dana revealed the ministry's vast impact on the community when referencing a friend's remarks: 'If every Christian organization did what you guys do, I'd consider becoming a Christian.' Dana conveyed her aspiration for the church, saying,

> My hope is that the local church starts to understand what belonging really means and how to make people with disabilities feel not just accepted and included, but that they truly belong and that they're missed when they're not there.

Theological reflection

This project captured the multi-dimensional impact of respite care on families navigating the challenges of disability, highlighting how it strengthens family bonds and offers a vital opportunity for each member to attend to their physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs. Apart from the tangible impacts, this inquiry reveals how offering respite care can personify the very essence of Christian hospitality, compassion, and the Sabbath. Jill's House provides a foretaste of what it might mean to live in unity 'with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love' (Eph 4:2). Through the devoted care of the staff and volunteers, the families found 'a rare place where we feel we belong' (Emily) and 'a beautiful picture of how the body of Christ works, how God knows all of us individually' (Erika). In response, the staff and volunteers spoke of 'being loved back' (Courtney) and learning from the children 'to take in life and be joyful in the moment' (Dorothy). Their collective stories offer crucial insights for churches, practitioners, and community organizations working together to strengthen support systems for children and their caregivers, while also illuminating the promise of our shared humanity in Christ. These accounts expound upon the theological understanding of the body of Christ as a lived reality, where God desires for each member to be uniquely known, cared for, and deeply loved.

This call invites congregations to cultivate communities that reflect God's care, where every member experiences the renewal found in God's own rest – a rhythm of restoration intended for all. Faith communities are in a unique position to facilitate respite care in concrete ways through the active involvement and support of its congregants. Yet, research shows that less than 10 percent of churches extend such care to families who experience disability (Carter et al. 2016; Woolever and Bruce 2002). Despite this gap, congregations can initiate meaningful change by increasing awareness of the needs of families and the far-reaching benefits of respite, offering their facilities as a place of respite, coordinating a group of volunteers to provide occasional respite to families in their home to allow time for caregivers to complete errands or enjoy a meal out, hosting weekly or monthly caregiver support groups, holding events for children with disabilities and their siblings to enjoy learning and recreational activities without their parents present, providing stipends to help families cover the cost for a respite provider, and inviting persons with disabilities to serve as part of the respite program. The compassionate care demonstrated by the parents and staff at Jill's House radiantly illustrates how each person – whether giving or receiving care – contributes to the well-being of the whole. This corporeal sense of unity summons us to vigorously pursue our place within the divine community to which we are *all* called.

These findings elevate the wisdom of those pushed to the margins, uncovering universal truths about the human experience, the value of compassion, and just practices promoting rest for those who are overtasked, which might otherwise remain hidden. Their narratives testify to the Church's directive to actively listen to those both within and beyond our pews, stirring introspection on the biblical imperative to help carry others' burdens with Christ and the divine mandate to foster spaces where everyone 'feel[s] the love of God's people' through the gift of rest, as participants expressed.

This research invites critical reflection in the fields of Christian spirituality and practical theology urging theologians, ministers, and health care providers to consider how to

respond more faithfully to the vulnerable, honor the work of caregivers, and prioritize respite as necessary for holistic well-being and a practical embodiment of Sabbath. It challenges us in our various ministerial roles and settings to incarnate the Christian faith with greater authenticity and live in true solidarity with others, for 'From [Christ] the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love' (Eph 4:16). Sixteen-year-old Kate simply, but poignantly, articulated that respite 'is good for me' – a benefit that also brings comfort and renewal to her parents, Sarah and Sean. As evidenced by the lived experiences within the disability communities served by Jill's House, changes that enrich the life of one member are undeniably essential for the thriving of the entire body, all one in Christ.

Thank God for Jill's House. Really. (Leslie)

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