'CARITATIVE WISDOM':
THE SACRAMENTAL PRESENCE OF THE NURSE.

A metaphorical tapestry capturing the spirit embodied in practice - an ontology of nurses' meaningful experiences.

by

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study describes the lived experience of nurses' meaningful experiences in practice for the purpose of capturing the spirit embodied in nursing practice. The study is informed by phenomenology, both in terms of premises and orientation, and in its research design and method.

The participants in the study comprise of twenty-two Registered Nurses and two students in their final year of the Bachelor of Nursing programme. These participants describe stories that for them are saturated with a depth dimension of experience and are presented via four existential descriptions of: Temporality, Spatiality, Corporeality and Relationality. Through the process of hermeneutic interpretation four themes are identified within each existential description. A total of twelve themes emerge from the participants' narratives.

Further analysis of the themes within each of the four existential descriptions reveal an underlying motifs of:

1. Professional Intimacy from the existential description of Temporality;
2. Applied Contemplation from the existential description of Spatiality;
3. Humbled Sensitivity from the existential description of Corporeality; and
4. Occupational Metanota from the existential description of Relationality.

These motifs are explored from a historical, ecclesiastical and theological perspective.

The nurses' stories go beyond the normal constraints of 'scientific problematizing', to become transcending and ultimately transforming, yielding a kind of knowledge and truth that perhaps cannot be substantiated, but nevertheless is confirmed as it
illuminates our lives. 'Caritative Wisdom': the sacramental presence of the nurse emerges as a metaphorical description to capture the spirit embodied in practice. The origins of the metaphorical constructs are investigated.

'Weaving the tapestry' is used throughout the study to describe the unfolding process. The tapestry being the descriptively elusive and scientifically indefinable embodied spirit in nursing. Although the strands and the varying lengths of thread that form the colours, design and textures of the tapestry are not defined in any complete or clear way, they are, however, described and the process of discovering them shared.