

Caring Connections

An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling



Fed on the Journey: Diverse Ways We Gain Nourishment

The Purpose of Caring Connections

Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling is written primarily by and for Lutheran practitioners and educators in the fields of pastoral care, counseling, and education. Seeking to promote both breadth and depth of reflection on the theology and practice of ministry in the Lutheran tradition, *Caring Connections* intends to be academically informed, yet readable, solidly grounded in the practice of ministry, and theologically probing. *Caring Connections* seeks to reach a broad readership, including chaplains, pastoral counselors, seminary faculty and other teachers in academic settings, clinical educators, synod and district leaders, others in specialized ministries and concerned congregational pastors and laity.

Caring Connections also provides news and information about activities, events and opportunities of interest to diverse constituencies in specialized ministries.

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When the Inter Lutheran Coordinating Committee disbanded a few years ago, the money from the “Give Something Back” Scholarship Fund was divided between the ELCA and the LCMS. The ELCA has retained the name “Give Something Back” for their fund, and the LCMS calls theirs “The SPM Scholarship Endowment Fund.” These endowments make a limited number of financial awards available to individuals seeking ecclesiastical endorsement and certification/credentialing in ministries of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and clinical education.

Applicants must:

- have completed one [1] unit of CPE.
- be rostered or eligible for active roster status in the ELCA or the LCMS.
- not already be receiving funds from either the ELCA or LCMS national offices.
- submit an application, including costs of the program, for committee review.

Applicants must complete the Scholarship Application forms that are available from Christopher Otten [ELCA] or Bob Zagore [LCMS]. Consideration is given to scholarship requests after each application deadline. LCMS deadlines are April 1, July 1 and November 1, with awards generally made by the end of the month. ELCA deadline is December 31. Email items to Christopher Otten at christopher.otten@elca.org and to David Ficken ESC@lcms.org.

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Call for Articles

Caring Connections seeks to provide Lutheran Pastoral Care Providers the opportunity to share expertise and insight within the wider Lutheran community. We want to invite any Lutherans interested in writing an article or any readers responding to one to please contact one of the co-editors, Diane Greve at dkgreve@gmail.com or Bruce Hartung at hartungb@csl.edu. Please consider writing an article for us. We sincerely want to hear from you!

And, as always, if you haven't already done so, we hope you will subscribe online to *Caring Connections*. Remember, a subscription is free! By subscribing, you are assured that you will receive prompt notification when each issue of the journal appears on the *Caring Connections* website. This also helps the editors and the editorial board to get a sense of how much interest is being generated by each issue. We are delighted that our numbers are increasing. Please visit lutheranservices.org/caring-connections-archive and click on "Subscribe to our newsletter" to receive automatic notification of new issues.

In 2022 we plan to focus on:

2022.4 Changing Face of Ethics in Healthcare Ministry (Deadline for articles November 15, 2022)
More details on page 3!

Editorial

Bruce Hartung

I FIRST RETURNED TO SAINT LOUIS as the LCMS' first Director of Ministerial Health/Health and Healing Ministries in 1991. The position was developed to foster health and well-being among church workers, their families, and their congregations. The LCMS must have thought that my pastoral counseling background would be an asset in this vision. In many ways it was. But ...

On my desk one day (and I do not to this day know who did the deed) appeared two books, one of which was *The Addictive Organization*.

This set up a whole new understanding for me of my task which now included the dance between the organization and its salaried workers, including its called ministers of all kinds. One of the themes: organizations tend to use people to, from a systemic premise, fulfill their own vision, mission and needs, much like an alcoholic uses her/his alcohol. This organic tension between the concern for the health and well-being of the church's workers and the church organization's need for membership and organizational survival set up the tension that occupied a good amount of my work. It culminated, in a way, in the publication of my book (long after I left the LCMS' headquarters and was then on the faculty at Concordia Seminary) *Holding Up the Prophet's Hand* (CPH, 2011). The target audience of that book was church lay leadership, as they set policies and examined organizational norms and expectations that would begin to develop healthy organizational strategies. Simple things like continuing education time and funding, time off, reasonable working hours, and attention to marriage and family needs turned out not to be so simple. It was not enough for our health plans and denominational executives to simply encourage their workers toward good health habits; it was and is necessary for a congregation to support and advocate for those habits and, concurrently, abandon attitudes and policies that foster ill-health and disease.

This was a similar tension that I met when I joined the faculty at Concordia Seminary. How would we help student foster healthy habits when some of our policies and attitudes fostered disease? Working with congregations as well to develop healthy habits so that our students would be placed into healthy workplaces became an aim, with very mixed results.

As my attention returned to the non-parish ministerial world, including that of what has been called specialized pastoral ministry, I have paid rather close attention to the same dynamic. Our chaplains, for instance, are in organizations that may,

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themselves, tilt more toward attention-to-the-health-and-wellbeing-of-the-worker or tilt away from such a concern. Ditto for church denominational structures. This is the ongoing balance between organization and worker need.

This issue focuses on both aspects. In some articles our writers tell very personal stories of how their church organizations have supported their health or fostered their disease. They tell us of what fed them along the journey as well as what offered scarcity and famine. We also have articles that speak of the history and point to the future of support, encouragement and feeding well of our specialized ministerial care workers. I, as one of the editors of this journal, am deeply indebted and grateful to them for writing in such a personal and transparent way. In direct or indirect ways this issue is in response to [Christopher Otten's previous article \(2021.4\)](#) and [John Schumacher's invitation \(2022.1\)](#)

We begin with a news item. My co-editor, Diane Greve, was presented with the Christus in Mundo Award that reflects her magnificent service to people and to the Church. Congratulations, Diane! It is a great joy for me to serve with you in editing *Caring Connections*.

Next come two articles that take a broader look at our ministers being fed for and on the journey. Don Stiger brings to the table his experiences in specialized pastoral care ministry and especially his work at the ELCA headquarters as the SPM staff person. Cory Wielert brings his experience as the current Corporate Director of Spiritual Care for Lutheran Life Ministries. Both contributors bring insight and perspective and offer challenges and opportunities.

Dave Ficken and Phil Tonnensen speak of what the LCMS and the ELCA North Carolina Synod respectively, are doing currently relative to chaplaincy and pastoral counselor support.

Phil Kuehnert, Chelsea Achterberg, Jake Wampfler and Cory Wielert bring their deeply touching and personal stories forward and bless us all in their telling. Each speak directly about how they have been fed on their journeys and how they have experienced famine. There is no way to repay folks like these colleagues for their coming forward with their stories, except to offer my thanks and recognize that many will be blessed by reading them.

On more of a "business" note. This journal is practically self-funded now. Consider a contribution to keep it rolling. And there is a special invitation coming next inviting colleagues to write for the next issue or two focusing on ethical challenges in our ministries. We are looking for new authors – so think about writing; We are looking not for the academic ethical discourse but about the real experiential challenges that are faced and how and in what ways they are addressed.



Next Issue: **Ethics**

Are you struggling with an ethical issue in your ministry or at your ministry location? Or maybe you have been serving on an ethics committee and had to sort out priorities during the pandemic. Have you been expected to perform in ways that don't fit your values or that undermine your integrity?

We want to hear from you! The next issue of *Caring Connections* will be addressing ethical concerns and experiences that our readers have encountered. If you have a situation, experience or dilemma in mind, email Diane Greve at dkgreve@gmail.com and she will send you more directions. We would love to hear from some new voices.

Rev. Deaconess Diane Greve Receives the Christus In Mundo Award



ON JULY 21, 2022, Lutheran chaplains from the Minneapolis-St Paul area gathered for breakfast and to witness the presentation of the Christus in Mundo Award (“Christ in the World”) to Rev. Deaconess Diane Greve. This award is presented by the Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee as the Lutheran church’s highest honor for service in ministries of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and clinical education. Rev. Greve of the Minneapolis Area Synod of the ELCA was scheduled to originally receive this award in 2019, however, the cancellation of the Zion Conference and a pandemic delayed this event until now. Rev. John Schumacher was in attendance to present this award.

Diane’s many titles are impressive, which include Pastor, Deaconess, Director of Diaconal Services for the LDA Deaconess Community, ACPE Educator, Manager of CPE, Social Worker, Mother, Leader, Editor, Regional Representative for MCPCCE, Synod Council Representative for Chaplaincy for the Minneapolis Area Synod, and Chaplain. She has served in each vocation with a full measure of compassion, commitment, and grace, yet unassuming and unapologetic about using the power earned in each calling.

Diane’s principled can-do spirit has taken her far and wide: on international conferences with her beloved Deaconess community, or teaching pastoral care seminars in Myanmar. Diane is also adventurous as she now continues to co-lead the editorial board and serve as the co-editor for *Caring Connections*.

(Pictured, along with Diane Greve are, left to right, author of this news report Nancy Wigdahl, John Schumacher, and Bruce Peterson)

Kneading Bread for the Journey Ahead: Some Hopes and Possibilities

Don Stiger

“Love doesn’t just sit there, like a stone. Like bread, it has to be made and remade all the time...made new.” — Ursula K. Le Guin

WHEN IT APPEARED in an issue of *Caring Connections* (CC) last year, I read with great interest and some trepidation Christopher Otten’s article, “A Thousand Foot View”, particularly noting several of the concerns he identified for those serving in Ministries in Chaplaincy, Pastoral Counseling and Clinical Education (MCPCC), among them: isolation, insulation, fatigue, and needs for both supportive relationships and financing. With the same interest and concern, I subsequently read the follow-up piece from John Schumacher, reiterating some of those same needs and concerns and inviting input from readers regarding “Bread for the Journey” ahead. Indeed, I appreciate the invitation from the CC Board and Bruce Hartung to participate in this important conversation.

Last summer my wife, Chris, and I moved to a residential area just west of Fort Worth, TX, so that we could retire closer to family. Like so many others these days, we now rely on FaceTime and ZOOM to stay in touch with friends, family, and colleagues around the country. Though not foreseen when I started shaping this article, I begin by sharing the story of one of those FaceTime calls, a very recent one I had with a longstanding friend and colleague.

While no longer active in any faith community, “Dan” (pseudonym) is a seasoned healthcare professional dedicated to faith-and-values-based, whole-person care. We hadn’t connected for a while and, knowing Dan had been struggling with some health challenges, I scheduled a call with him to catch up and see how he was doing. Not far into the call, Dan shared that, just a few weeks ago, he had been discharged home following a nine-day hospitalization for major depression. As we processed how he was doing and what all of this had been like for him, I particularly noted how important it was for Dan to share with me his great disappointment over the unavailability of any form of professional spiritual care throughout his hospitalization. He lamented that pastoral/spiritual care “had not even been offered”, whether through a chaplain or through any of the program’s therapy groups. Dan repeatedly emphasized how “some kind of spiritual care” had been what he most needed and “longed for” when in the depths of “spiritual anguish and hopelessness.”

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After we further reflected together, shared a prayer, and concluded our conversation, I was immediately reminded of a recent article by Tray Hawthorne that appeared in the July ACPE newsletter. It was simply titled “Spirituality Matters”. After talking with Dan, straightaway my mind and heart were filled with the obvious corollary to Tray’s stirring claim: that “Spiritual Care Matters.” In that piece, Tray drew attention to a significant study recently conducted at Harvard University’s School of Public Health and published in *JAMA* (*Journal of the American Medical Association*). It’s entitled “Spirituality in Serious Illness and Health” (visit Harvard Chan School website). Drawing upon extensive, evidence-based research, the study and report overwhelmingly reconfirm to us, the wider church, and the public we serve the vital need and significance of spirituality being incorporated into care for both serious illness and health. That, of course, directly translates into the continuing need for clinically trained, credentialed persons serving in diverse ministries of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and clinical education – indeed, including those of us who represent the brand “Lutheran.”

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I recount this recent experience here as yeast, with the hope that it might serve to suffuse within and among us the core “why” that grounds and motivates the mission and foremost purpose of these indispensable ministries. I urge all to read and reflect on the Harvard study, for it is so important for us and the church to be regularly reminded that MCPCCCE¹ *is vitally needed and really does make a difference out there*. After all, like my friend Dan, more than 8 in 10 people in this society still consider themselves spiritual in some way, with most of us aspiring to become *more* spiritual or religious in our lives (See: “What Does Spirituality Mean to Us?”, Fetzer Institute). Spirituality really *does matter* and, yes, spiritual care, counseling and education really *do matter* – especially as we find ourselves in the midst of a prolonged pandemic, unprecedented mental health crisis, and the scores of stressors and ordeals commonplace to all. Even more importantly, I stake this claim at the outset for the sake of people like Dan and countless others like him, hungering for competent, compassionate spiritual care - those who often find it either of poor quality or, as Dan unfortunately experienced, altogether inaccessible.

In her book, *Fresh Bread and Other Spiritual Nourishment*, Joyce Rupp coined the phrase “clumps of dough” in referring to “those who trust enough to be kneaded ...so that faith can rise in hearts.” Staying with the metaphor of bread, following are five “clumps of dough” I offer to this important conversation. They are presented in no particular order.

1 MCPCCCE refers to “Ministries in Chaplaincy, Pastoral Counseling and Clinical Education”; in this article it is used as the inclusive reference officially adopted by both the ELCA and LCMS through the ILCC in 2001–2002.

I.

“We become neighbors when we are willing to cross the road for one another... We have our own people to go to and our own affairs to take care of. But if we could cross the road once in a while and pay attention to what is happening on the other side, we might indeed become neighbors.” — Henri J.M. Nouwen, Bread for the Journey

I suspect this initial one lands on some rather sensitive ground, particularly in terms of ongoing pan-Lutheran cooperation. It’s something about which several colleagues would tell you I’ve been pretty rigorously “kneading the dough” for quite some time, well before and after serving in the churchwide position (1997–2003). I suppose it can be referred to as “opening wide our parochial Lutheran MCPCE barn doors.”

When, over twenty years ago, a few of us launched *Caring Connections*, it was no coincidence that we chose as our first editor Dave McCurdy — a chaplain, CPE educator and college professor from the United Church of Christ. Unbeknownst to many, as Dave’s denominational affiliation became known, some vigorous pushback came our way — *not only* from LCMS leadership but within the ELCA as well. But we stayed our course, convinced of the inherent value in recruiting Dave for his many and diverse gifts — including his membership in a complementary denomination. Had we not, I seriously doubt that this treasured publication would exist today. Dave served as fresh bread for the journey ahead.

We need not fear compromising or somehow contaminating our rich Lutheran identity and integrity by more proactively and inclusively engaging in broader ecumenical/ interfaith partnering — opening up opportunities for expanding mutually-beneficial support and shared mission, more robust lifelong learning opportunities, and bolstering the kinds of resources multiple denominational partners bring to one another. Lutheran Services in America (LSA) and *Caring Connections* are superb vehicles for this more inclusive clump of dough to be kneaded. Again, I share this realizing that it likely touches some sensitive nerves. But that is how change and growth are kneaded. And it is how this very publication could be further leavened.

While I served at churchwide headquarters, I witnessed the ELCA becoming a kind of blessed fulcrum for this to happen, with the evolution of working covenants with six full communion partners. Yet, when it comes to MCPCE, for the most part these promising opportunities for shared mission and mutual support remain dormant and untapped. Bottom line: Like the story of Jesus sharing the loaves and fishes, the more partners, the more blessings, the more nourishment, the more shared resources, etc. We can no longer afford to isolate and insulate through our all-too-

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accustomed, safe parochial posturing. If we persist in doing so, I shudder to imagine where Lutheran MCPCCE will be in just five or ten years.

II.

Like bread itself, number two is a staple. That is, continued – hopefully, further restored – churchwide administrative infrastructure and support. This goes to the vital need for the kind of ongoing official, ecclesial sponsorship MCPCCE needs and requires in all faith communities – maintaining and strengthening officially designated structures and, when possible, synodical/district administrative structures and staff to oversee, guide and advocate for MCPCCE. Speaking out of my own personal experience, this clump of dough is both indispensable and irreplaceable. That includes maintaining fundamental essentials such as standards, organization, communication and consultation, cognate group/judicatory/seminary relationships, recruitment, financial aid, and, of course, the all-important endorsement process itself. When I served as director for the ELCA’s Office for MCPCCE, I soon came to a profound appreciation for how support and accountability accompanied one another as an inherent pastoral dynamic baked into the endorsement process.

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Realistically speaking, it’s self-deluding to expect that we might ever return to a pan-Lutheran resource as robust as the office for specialized ministries within the former LCUSA (Lutheran Council in the USA), with its copious resources for support and growth. Many, like me, were very blessed to be on the receiving end of the care and resources that flowed from that office. But why not at least re-envision a proximate kind of structure – with its central locus in and through LSA. It could also very well include oversight and support for other specialized expressions of ministry, such as faith community health and healing ministries.

If this essential ingredient in the bread is compromised any further, then greater reliance on professional associations and/or para-religious infrastructures would seem the only option. It would be so unfortunate to find ourselves needing to resort to such a strategy. Then again, as Julia McNair Wright once put it, “Half a loaf is better than no bread.”

III.

No doubt, the third clump of dough returns to some potentially sensitive ground. That is, restoring military and “civil” chaplaincies to fuller parity. What is meant by that? Well, at least in the ELCA, if one but surveys the last few decades of “Living Lutheran”, one can’t help but notice the blatantly disproportionate numbers of featured stories covering military-related ministry, let alone other forms of lopsided

churchwide attention and support. For whatever reason(s) – and I have my own hunches – it seems there has been steady depreciation in terms of striking more balanced parity among *all* expressions of MCPCCE. On the brighter side, I’m encouraged to see that Christopher Otten has now taken the helm in the ELCA, for he appears to be one who brings refreshing breadth and depth to the MCPCCE movement, including both military and (what I here refer to as) “civil” chaplaincies and contexts (in other words, the rest of us!). Indeed, we wish Christopher all the best in his new ministry.

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As part of this particular “clump of dough”, I would also offer an idea that might be nourishing for all expressions of MCPCCE in their many and diverse settings: that is, restore a Zion-like conference, *this time combining* military and civil specialized ministries and include invitations to the ELCA’s full communion partners. This would allow for greater numbers and diversity of participants, resources, workshopping, breakouts, supportive fellowship, etc. Further, convene the event every two years and reach out to Thrivent, Eli Lilly, and other church-connected sponsors for financial support. Finally, consider rotating ELCA, LCMS and other denominational seminaries to host such biennial gatherings, which in turn would serve to introduce seminary students and faculty to MCPCCE vocational opportunities.

IV.

Next.... venturing into new settings for regrowing MCPCCE is a must. In short (and as proclaimed in the quote at top), this means kneading and baking some new bread for the journey. We must reach out and expand MCPCCE to where the primary needs and opportunities beckon throughout contemporary society. Reaching back once again, a meaningful and gratifying memory for me was that of working hand-in-hand with Dorothy Prybylski (LCMS counterpart) and the ILCC (Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee for Specialized Pastoral Care) to more fully organize and actively promote police and fire chaplaincy. Also, the opportunity to work with my good friend and colleague Sally Simmel (who at the time served as ELCA Director for Ministry in Daily Life) to secure a grant allowing us to explore the exciting prospect of workplace/corporate chaplaincy, even to the extent of traveling throughout the U.K. to learn how and why it was thriving there under the sponsorship of the Anglican Church. Unfortunately, as we earnestly pitched this new, promising ministry to the ELCA bureaucracy, it was ultimately met up with only disappointing reticence and the unwillingness to take a risk and venture into a new form of much-needed ministry. Meanwhile, more conservative evangelical groups have clearly captured that fertile ground and opportunity for mission and ministry.

As but one example of the many MCPCCE opportunities currently before us: With the advent of the new 988 phone number for mental health crisis (July 16, 2022) comes the deployment of federally mandated *Crisis Stabilization Units* around the country. These emerging healthcare units are to be minimally staffed by nurses, social workers, and mental health peers. It's hard to imagine a more vital, appropriate ministry than adding endorsed and certified professional chaplains to those teams. Given the gravity of our current mental health crisis, the church and its rostered leaders need to be at the forefront of prophetically declaring that we're sick and tired of the fact that people with mental illnesses are now 16 times more likely to be shot by police than anybody else. In kneading this new bread for the journey, we are saying on behalf of the wider church that mental health care IS whole-person health care.

V.

"The bread that sustains us is the presence of the Spirit and of the others who travel with us, and the stories of God's journey with the faithful throughout time." —Ruth C. Duck, Bread for the Journey

Finally, going forward I would lift up the essential role of those serving MCPCCE as integral and invaluable theologians-in-residence for the life of the future church and its mission of reflecting the love of God in Jesus Christ for the sake of the world. Indeed, such contextually-based theological reflection makes for distinctive, nourishing bread for all. MCPCCE and those who serve in such ministries are by nature fully immersed in unique contexts for doing evidence-based, contextual theology – right on the frontlines of mission – serving on-site in the major, pulsating institutional highways and byways of God's world – ideally situated to address such ethically-laden issues as science and religion, artificial intelligence, climate change, death and dying, the commodification of healthcare, national defense, mental health, genomics, biomedical ethics, etc. Indeed, I would even go to the extent of claiming that such contextually-based theological reflection offers the church a unique 'means of grace'. In citing this final "clump of dough", I circle back to the future of this very publication. Indeed, in and of itself Caring Connections remains an indispensable form of nourishing bread for the journey. My hope and prayer is that it not only continues to thrive but grows in its special mission to church and society. Like a loaf of fresh, warm bread, it certainly continues to enrich my life and vocational journey.



Prior to retirement in 2016, Don Stiger served as Senior Vice President for Mission and Spiritual Care at NYU Lutheran Medical Center, Brooklyn, NY. He is an ordained pastor in the ELCA, board certified chaplain in the Association of Professional Chaplains, and certified educator in the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education. Don served for six years as Director for Ministries in Chaplaincy, Pastoral Counseling and Clinical Education at the ELCA Churchwide Office and is both a co-founder and past co-editor of Caring Connections.

May the Flag Still Wave

Cory Wielert

A FLAG WAVED in the slight distance from where I was parked waiting for my older boys to come out of the school. As the wind playfully caused the flag to dance, I thought about how dependent the flag was — upon the wind, sure, but also the pole and the rope as well. The pole helped the flag to be seen, the rope tethering it — anchoring it so it would not fly away, and the wind giving it life — movement. To me, it was the image of chaplaincy.

Chaplains are seen — called to be visible, moved by their experiences and history and undeniably tethered — tethered to their faith in Christ. At least one would hope, especially given the long traditions built upon the legacy of St. Martin of Tours and beyond extending into the United States in 1775 with the Continental Congress. Then again, while the flag may be still visible, tethered and waving — how tattered has it become?

To answer this question, I will be blunt — the flag is tattered, but not deteriorated to the point to respectful disposal. Even with a completely worn-out flag — there is never a great willingness to take it down. Likewise, with the chaplain — one never desires to retire completely. At the same time, many Lutheran chaplains, both from the ELCA and LCMS, are worn out, tired and at times feeling as tattered as a well-used flag.

One could say it is a part of our new reality in this Covid conundrum, while still facing all the other realities of war, of child and family services, healthcare and beyond — not mention the many other social issues stirred up in the minds of those we serve. The hours poured into listening, being there and present — the sheer Gestalt — is causing many of our chaplains, including this one, to relish the day the flag is lowered and a new one put up in its place.

I have not always felt this way. In fact, I would say along the way those around me have molded me for situations such as these. The old guard, some of whom write for this very publication, have trained others and me up well to face the challenges before us. With that said, facing the challenges has not come without surprising storms with fierce winds — threatening the flag, the rope and the pole altogether.

Maybe here is a good spot to reflect on those very people — the ones who undoubtedly might point me to these words from the hymn, “My Hope is Built on Nothing Less,” which say, “When darkness veils His lovely face, I rest on His unchanging grace; in every high and stormy gale my anchor holds within the veil...” For you see, those who have

The hours poured into listening, being there and present . . . is causing many of our chaplains, including this one, to relish the day the flag is lowered and a new one put up in its place.

trained me — fed me — supported me — at times held the rope to ensure my security — they always directed me back to and directed me from the shadow of the cross and God's grace.

Throughout the entirety of my education and beyond, I have been fed by some amazing individuals of a variety of denominations and walks of life. Some include Joel Hempel (LCMS) with whom I had one unit of CPE, the late Gene Reddel (LCMS) who facilitated two units and oversaw my residency, which included Phil Williams of the ELCA for a unit and a Presbyterian named Lonnie Long for two units as well. I also want to include Bruce Hartung who helped me process and manage life in a way that absorbs through compassion and proceeds with unwavering dignity. These, of course, are merely the ones who trained me to utilize all my other experiences to be effective in chaplaincy, which I have now been serving happily for sixteen years.

As different as we are, we can at least come to the table and see each other's points of view without wavering in our theology or faith.

How did they feed me? By giving me a slew of perspectives while teaching me to see things from varying points of view. Perhaps that is what makes a chaplain effective — being able to see varying points of view. I would contend that this is what allows chaplains in the ELCA and LCMS to find common ground. As different as we are, we can at least come to the table and see each other's points of view without wavering in our theology or faith. So long as we continue to have common ground — to use the metaphor — the need to have a flag raised to wave tethered on a pole — then we should have no trouble working together to ensure as the flags become tattered, there are new flags ready to go.

This is the challenge we are facing, as Rev. Christopher Otten so poignantly pointed out in 2021. New CPE requirements from varying entities, certifications, and other endorsements—while important on the one hand, on the other hand are often impeding willingness of seminary students to become chaplains. Then you mix in the low enrollment at some seminaries who are trying to help fill empty parishes, well what can I say — more of an uphill battle scenario than has been seen in the past thirty years. There is also a myriad of retiring pastors, not to mention chaplains — which means more difficulties facing the heeded call to serve. Pretty soon there will be very few flags, too many poles — and the rope that once held it altogether will be on its way out too.

In my years since seminary, these last five have been the toughest ones. It is not only Covid, but the sheer lack of candidates. Though you might find people who are chaplains outside of the Lutheran faith or those in fellowship with our varying churches, the quality is often subpar. In my case, I have been on many lists lately, which to me translates as being fewer and fewer candidates, let alone quality ones.

So, what needs to be done? Or how can we chaplains be fed in today's reality? And, meet the current needs?

I will own it and say I need support. Okay, WE need support. Chaplains are not the outcasts of the ministry, as some over the years have postured in their generalizations. In fact, in many cases the Church has been misguided into thinking chaplains were the ones who could not cut it as pastors. On the contrary, I would say some parish pastors could never cut it as chaplains — because of some of the rigorous environments in which we are called to serve, not to mention the extra requirements and educational processes. So, a way to support our chaplains in both church is to educate the people and eradicate any ignorance.

If CPE is still a route to be taken by the seminaries, then it should not be used in a way that is seen as a punishment of any kind.

If CPE is still a route to be taken by the seminaries, then it should not be used in a way that is seen as a punishment of any kind. CPE is a useful tool to enhance a person's repertoire and help the individual to have every tool within them at their disposal to approach ministry and all its surprises. With this said, if the ELCA and LCMS want to instill the future of chaplaincy, I would advocate a new program be established to train up chaplains. It could incorporate some of the guiding principles of CPE but be tailored in a way more fitting to the originality of what CPE was in its inception. Some of the endorsement standards focus on such elements.

The establishment of a clinical model within the curriculum at our seminaries is also another way to raise up the importance of chaplains. A clinical model could also feature practical tenets of military chaplaincy too. Given the fact that in general many of our parish pastors have trouble with their own feelings and emotions when caring for the souls, maybe this option would do all future ministers some good.

In fact, recently I had several random conversations with pastors at the LCMS Youth Gathering in Houston regarding ministry. Most, if not all, were surprised I was still in chaplaincy. When I unpacked what was behind their surprise, I discovered their history a bit more, as they said generally, "I wish I would have known more about palliative care, hospice, and how to handle some of the situations presented to me when I get into the parish — you know, the practical stuff." Most went on to say, "We are taught about things, but not how to do things — as in how to address certain things you chaplains face on a daily basis." A few even said, "The seminaries teach us theology and academia very well, but people are another thing and reaching them where they are is entirely different."

The history of chaplaincy that extends back to St. Martin of Tours is predicated upon the notion of meeting people where they are — again, the Gestalt — being in the present moment. While CPE has been great at getting at this key feature, there is some caution. The caution comes in the watering down of CPE in general,

allowing supervisors from any religion to be a part, which though may expand one's experiences, may also, in my humble opinion, detract from the pastoral part of CPE's original intent. For the LCMS and ELCA, this should be concerning, which is why I propose looking at some of the key tenets of CPE and the key aspects of practical theology to design some sort of curriculum for all seminary pastors to have some instruction regarding the clinical setting, in part because the clinical setting is vastly extending to the everyday parish as well. Certainly, practical courses have been and are still taught, but little in the way of practice and reflection. I suggest putting the things you learn in class into action in class — like CPE. Test the methods out, do verbatims, have some group time and break down some of the walls our collective pastors seem to have so they may be more effective pastors when they are called.

Test the methods out, do verbatims, have some group time and break down some of the walls our collective pastors seem to have so they may be more effective pastors when they are called.

For me, I was fed by the CPE model and the differing supervisors, but I also had reinforcement due to my own personal interests. Not all seminarians or pastors have the interest I did. For example, when I returned from vicarage, I knew for certain I wanted to be a chaplain, having just finished my residency in Pittsburgh at the VA. This set me up to take courses in Medical Ethics and another called "Faith, Health, and Pastoral Care," which helped me to build on the tenets I learned in CPE. The reality is though, because of fear, indifference, or ignorance, many seminarians and pastors run from such practical and important classes. It seems it is only when they are out and experiencing the parish that they wish they would have had some training as to how to meet these needs. This is why softly forcing some clinical courses or developing a model at the seminary would be highly conducive to our future pastors and may perhaps spawn some well-developed future chaplains.

Personally, I would also contend support through the continued collegiality we have established here and throughout Lutheran Chaplaincy — both ELCA and LCMS — should continue. The conversations and debates ought to thrive because we are all facing the same challenges in general. Unlike some parts of different expressions of Lutheranism, we should not ever let our differences stand in the way of conversation. Conversations lead often to progress and understanding. Sure, there may still be differences, but at the end of the day there is often common respect for each other and side. Not only that, but we are dealing with a lot of the same issues. Together, we can address more than we can apart without wavering on our theological stances. Sick is sick. Hurt is hurt. Depression is Depression. And so on. We, yes, we have an array of knowledge to combat some of our nation's current mental health issues through our theology and through our clinical approach to people with this theology.

If I have learned anything from being fed over the years by some of the great mentors I listed above, it is to be bold in your faith while having a willingness to meet

the person in front of you where he or she may be. That is what good chaplains do. It is our call. This is why it is so important we begin addressing the many issues we are facing, because there still is a great need for us to be visible, adhering to the history and experiences we have, and being undoubtedly tethered to Jesus Christ.

You might say it is time to play a resounding Reveille instead of a somber Taps, to let the wind move you and let your flag continue to wonderfully wave willingly, until the next generation of chaplains is called and raised up to meet the needs of the Church. Although they are young—perhaps it will be one of my boys...and maybe I can hold the rope for them.



Rev. Cory A. Wielert is a 2006 graduate of Concordia Seminary St. Louis and currently serves as the Corporate Director of Spiritual Care for Lutheran Life Communities, where he oversees pastoral care for five communities. He has written for Hope-Full Living and been published in other various publications such as the American Geriatrics Society annual. Rev. Wielert resides in Crown Point, Indiana with his wife Kristin and four boys, Liam, Silas, Tobias and Atticus, where they all enjoy a variety of sports the boys play.

LCMS Support of Specialized Pastoral Ministry (SPM Chaplaincy)

David Ficken

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" Romans 10:14–15

AS ONE OF THREE CONTRACT COORDINATORS in support of our LCMS SPM Chaplains and the endorsement process, I can say that we are all very thankful for the SPM organization (and all the support staff at the LCMS International Center) and those who have gone before us.

Currently, Don Sundene works to support and promote Prison Ministry. Derek Wolter supports our Institutional Chaplains and I work with our Emergency Services Chaplains and Disaster Response Chaplains. Derek and I help candidates who are interested in becoming endorsed by the LCMS. The three of us report to the Office of National Missions.

A big task is always promotion of SPM to our church body and the public. Just before Covid hit, Derek and I went to our Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne (CTSFW) to talk with seminary students about SPM. Currently with fewer and fewer people physically attending worship at church, the opportunities for clergy to interact with people in “religious” spaces are less. We know in life that people will unfortunately encounter tragedy and will need the spiritual support of a chaplain who brings the presence and love of Christ to them in their time of hurt.

For anyone, the chances are rather good that they will spend time in a hospital and even in a rehab facility or nursing home (at the end of this earthly life). These are the opportunities to witness to people outside of their parish. How often is it that we hear that a person is not “practicing” their faith. This is why we are thankful for the chaplains who volunteer or work with organizations such that they can visit people in places where pastors might have access but might not have regular access. And we cannot forget all the people that work the front lines including management at these institutions. For example, the NICU nurse and doctor are hurting too when there is a death of a child. The CEO of the institution might not be churched and yet still needs

We know in life that people will unfortunately encounter tragedy and will need the spiritual support of a chaplain who brings the presence and love of Christ to them in their time of hurt.

spiritual support, prayer, conversation, and a reminder of Christ's love for them. This is why we need chaplains who serve in a specialized location and ministry.

The endorsement process was created because some institutions require an additional level of pastoral competency on top of seminary training. A Pastor cannot hire on without additional Chaplaincy training. Some of the training required is CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education). LCMS has supported CPE training without agreeing to a shift in some of the liberal theological

positions that have at times accompanied the CPE experience. CPE as a pastoral care training exercise has been a blessing to the individual pastor and deaconess who wants to heighten his/her listening skills, ministry of presence and ability

to proclaim Christ to the person where they are at in their time of trial. One of the bigger lessons is learning to be present for the person in front of you without getting yourself in their way. This can be hard to do. For example, the Pastor/Chaplain may have had a negative experience in their life that the person they are ministering to is now having. There is so much more that can be said about this dynamic but suffice it to say that CPE helps the Chaplain keep their own experiences in perspective while still being able to have empathy and compassion. Other training required has to do with the specific ministry like law enforcement or fire. There are courses available that help the chaplain learn about the culture of police or fire departments so that they can best serve the officers. Another example of a required course is death notification. This is never an easy task, but it can go better when done well. And like our Lutheran Early Response Teams (LERT) training for laypeople, there are FEMA courses that are good to take for our Disaster Response Chaplains so they are prepared to work with the authorities at disaster scenes. The LCMS endorsement process was created to make sure our Chaplains have the necessary training of the type of ministry they will be doing (paid or volunteer).

Another big task is supporting our Chaplains in their various specialized locations. We had a virtual SPM conference last year and it was an effective way to start getting reconnected. We hope to have an in-person conference in the Spring of 2023. Getting together has always been hard because Chaplains must juggle their PTO time with vacation and other educational obligations. Unfortunately, SPM no longer offers travels scholarships for the conference. In the beginning of this year, a few of us offered our availability to help Chaplains with their peer reviews. Zoom is not the best, but it was great seeing faces and offering input on situations they are facing in ministry. Because of the nature of the SPM locations, Chaplains are exposed to a significant amount of trauma in peoples' lives. It is good to lean on one another, but we all have to be intentional about doing that.

One of the bigger lessons is learning to be present for the person in front of you without getting yourself in their way.

SPM also exists to support our deaconesses and Christian counselors who do not have calls from a local congregation. While our Synod obviously supports our congregation and parish pastors as well as other church workers, we are thankful that SPM exists to promote and support ministry outside the walls of the parish in very specialized situations and locations.

Future support: SPM is in the process of hiring a full time Manager. We will keep you posted. We are also looking at ways to support the chaplaincy in an ever increasingly hostile atmosphere to the Gospel. If organizations reject the use of Christian chaplains, we need to be there as a Synod to offer the Gospel. Thankfully, I have heard positive stories regarding the thankfulness of people in their setting for their chaplains. We know Christ will always sustain His bride the church but do not know what her future will look like in a society of “nones” and opposition to Biblical truth and Christ. We (every one of us) can cling to God’s promises and hope and share our Christ-centered confidence as God gives us the opportunity.

In closing I want to give thanks to God for these opportunities to share the Gospel. A prison chaplain recently shared the all-too-common feeling from one of the people he cared for. They stated that “God can never forgive me.” The Chaplain shared Christ’s words from the cross and His promise to the thief. The person broke down as the Gospel made its impact on him! Praise God!

For more detailed information about LCMS SPM, please visit our website:
lcms.org/how-we-serve/mercy/specialized-pastoral-ministry



Dave Ficken is a third career pastor with his first career as a Field Rep for GE Aircraft Engines and second career as a Financial Rep for Thrivent Financial. He went to Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, graduating in 2007 and has been a Pastor at Beautiful Savior LCMS in Plover, WI ever since. He is married and has three children and enjoys projects around their home and going to their children’s events.

One Synod's Example of Systems of Support

Phil Tonnesen

THE NORTH CAROLINA SYNOD OF THE ELCA is blessed to have more than 40 ministers serving in settings of Specialized Pastoral Care. These colleagues provide a ministry that walks with God's children during times of great joy and deep sorrow. They serve in settings such as retirement communities, hospitals, hospice houses, prisons, and clinical pastoral education settings across the state of North Carolina. The COVID-19 pandemic only heightened the need for such a ministry of presence. The following examples share some insights and offer a specific example into the ministry those individuals called to serve in specialized ministry.

****This is our mandate:*

Specialized Pastoral Care Ministry

Many in this group serve as full-time or part-time chaplains, pastoral counselors, and clinical educators who serve in a wide variety of settings. We support seminarians and others who are discerning a call into pastoral care ministry through counsel, fellowship, education, affirmation, and scholarships for clinical pastoral education.

The Specialized Pastoral Care Committee serves to support ministries in chaplaincy, pastoral counseling and clinical education (MCPCCE). The purpose of this committee shall be to assist the bishop and the synod in cooperation with other ELCA synods, churchwide units, synod committees, and ecumenical and accrediting organizations in matters regarding calls, expectations, support, program resourcing, advocacy, standards and relationships to rostered ministers who minister in specialized pastoral care.

We welcome anyone who feels called to serve in these areas or wishes to discern if they might be called to pastoral care in some form. We normally have a retreat each spring and invite anyone interested in learning more about Specialized Pastoral Care to join us!

We welcome anyone who feels called to serve in these areas or wishes to discern if they might be called to pastoral care in some form.

****Here is our annual report, basically a description of our activities:*

Annual Report for 2020

[Specialized Pastoral Care Committee, North Carolina Synod of the ELCA](#)

This committee serves to support and activate 42 rostered and non-rostered Lutherans who have a commitment to pastoral care ministries. Many in this group serve as full-time or parttime chaplains, pastoral counselors, and clinical educators. Others receive support from the committee as they discern their call to specialized ministry and/or are participating in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE).

We were not able to meet for our 21st annual retreat in March 2020 as we had just realized we were in the midst of a pandemic and all activities were ceasing. Also, many of our group serve at facilities where travel was severely restricted due to COVID-19. While this retreat is normally an opportunity to meet, relax, and reflect on our pastoral care ministry, this year was not to be. The committee did meet via the first of several Zoom meetings to try and plan for some options to replace the retreat.

The fall committee meeting was held via Zoom in October 2020. We approved scholarships totaling \$3,600 to 6 seminarians for their CPE internships. That brings our total giving to over \$111,100 in support of those involved in specialized pastoral care over the last 20 years. Plans were also made for the spring 2021 retreat to be held at Camp Agape.

We are committed to serve and support anyone who may be involved with or discerning a role within specialized pastoral care. We intend to bear witness to them through counsel, fellowship, education, and affirmation. We have also agreed to extend the support of this committee and its retreat to Deacons as a way of fostering network, fellowship, and recognition of our mutual works of service. We have also had discussions and hopes of building relationships with other specialized ministry groups, both within the National ELCA Synod as well as our partners with whom we are in full communion.

Throughout this year, many members of this group served in hospital, long-term care, and other settings which experienced much loss due to the pandemic – both of residents/clients and of fellow staff members. It has been a difficult year to serve as a chaplain, but we are blessed to have a synod which supports us and this group to lean on.

2021 Committee Members: Ray Sipe, Dan Lehman, Claude Deal (Advisor), David Franzen (Advisor), Michael Bostain (Advisor), Phil Tonnesen (Assistant to the Bishop), Betsy Mitchell, and Donna Prunkl.

****This is an article that was previously published by the NC Synod, ELCA, in April 2021. It highlights one of the NC Synod's specialized pastoral care ministries. Its author is Pastor Matt Canniff-Kesecker. The prose of the article is below the links available to see the article in its original form:*

[Listening for the Unsaid](#)

[North Carolina Synod](#)

nclutheran.org/special_posts/listening-for-the-unsaid/

“...we get referrals for patients who say they don't believe in God at all, but they want to talk to a chaplain.”

“Whenever I talk about what a chaplain does, I always start out by saying that chaplains work with people of any religious background and no religious background, regardless of what they believe or don't believe,” says the Rev. Michael Bostian.

It has been a difficult year to serve as a chaplain, but we are blessed to have a synod which supports us and this group to lean on.

“Believe it or not, we get referrals for patients who say they don’t believe in God at all, but they want to talk to a chaplain.”

Mike is a pastor in the North Carolina Synod and Director of Pastoral Care at CarolinaEast Medical Center, a 350-bed hospital in New Bern, NC. This September he will mark 30 years in that role, and more pastoral conversations than he can count.

“We talk to patients about any concerns they have, but we’re always especially interested in the impact of their illness on their lives and their sources of inner strength, which include their faith and spirituality,” Mike says. “Ultimately, I’m interested in helping people understand and claim what they do believe about God and God’s faithfulness to them and God’s love for them.”

“Ultimately, I’m interested in helping people understand and claim what they do believe about God and God’s faithfulness to them and God’s love for them.”

There are currently 42 rostered ministers in the North Carolina Synod who serve as full or part-time chaplains, pastoral counselors, and clinical educators in a wide variety of settings. These leaders are supported by the synod’s Specialized Pastoral Care Committee which provides counsel, continuing education events, fellowship, and scholarships for those completing units of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE).

“We are very fortunate here in the North Carolina Synod because through the Specialized Pastoral Care Committee, we have a very strong support network and I really feel a part of our synod,” Mike says. “I suppose there are places where you could go into Specialized Pastoral Care and feel isolated. But I’ve never experienced that because I’ve never done this anywhere but North Carolina.”

Mike served 10 years in parish ministry before a CPE residency changed his ministry trajectory. In the parish, he learned to listen for what goes unsaid.

“One of the things I realized is that it was rare for a person to come see me and say, ‘Pastor, I’m having a faith crisis,’” he says. “What people did instead was talk about health problems, or their children, or parents. Then I would ask, ‘What happens when you pray about it?’ and we would get into the issues around their faith, which were often feelings of the absence of God. But people usually start somewhere else.”

That attentiveness to pastoral needs has only increased for Pastor Mike and his staff during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly among hospital staff. Early on when safety protocols were still being established, exposure to the virus was a risk and stress among hospital workers was high.

“We had some serious things where staff got sick because they were exposed to a patient who initially tested negative,” Mike says. “We had one employee who was exposed like that and died, and many of us knew her. So, this has significantly impacted our pastoral care with staff.”

Pastor Phil Tonnesen, assistant to the bishop, says, “During the global pandemic I have heard numerous stories of how those serving in Specialized Pastoral Care

calls have been the hands and feet of Christ to those affected by the virus. We are so blessed in the North Carolina Synod to have such gifted ministers serving in non-parish settings.”

After 30 years of helping others claim their inner strength, Mike says his own faith has never been stronger. “My work has certainly challenged my faith, but always in a good way,” he says. “When our faith is challenged, it’s a matter of claiming it and making it our own as opposed to something someone else has taught us. I think that working with people through so many different real-life challenges has helped me, over and over, to clarify my own faith. My faith has continued to grow stronger and more a part of every fiber of my being.”



Phil Tonnesen grew up at Grace, Raleigh, and met his wife, Deb, while attending Lenoir-Rhyne. Following his graduation from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in 1993, he served in a team ministry at Cross and Crown, Matthews. Phil and Deb live on Lake Hickory and have three adult children. Together they enjoy traveling, boating, and hiking. He is the Assistant to the Bishop of the North Carolina Synod.

Farmer, Pastor, Chaplain, Mentor, Documentarian, Friend: Chester Lee McCown

Phil Kuehnert

LEGEND HAS IT that someone asked Luther what he would do today if he knew that he would die tomorrow. The answer: “I would plant an apple tree.”¹

As far as I know, Chester did not plant any apple trees, but he planted hundreds of pecan trees.

It is our family of origin and our private lives that matter, the stuff of transference and countertransference that make our work as chaplains and pastoral counselors so interesting and rewarding. Unfortunately, all of that does not get much airtime with most of it consigned to the very narrow silo of family and a few close friends.

I am convinced that Chester is not alone as one of us who had an interesting and at times tragic life who used his “living human document” in such generous ways with his patients, clients, parishioners, his family and especially his friends.

He and Ollie’s home place in Miles, Texas for the past 35 years is within twenty-five miles of where he was born in San Angelo. He grew up in adjacent Runnels County on several tenant farms. Until he went to Concordia Junior College in Austin in 1981, his life was defined by farming and the public school in Miles. It was cotton, milo, cattle and dairy cows that provided the subsistence for Wilson and Viola and their four children – Chester being the oldest. The Miles school with its FFA (Future Farmers of America) program and athletics (six-man football, track) that defined his life until that August in 1961.

Chester and I met the first day of college. I came from Coryell County in Central Texas, the son of a rigid, fundamentalist pastor, but one who like Chester, knew the ways around farming and even pecans. For six years prior to that August, I had worked for farmers, pulling cotton, harvesting pecans, hauling hay. That August I had just completed my second summer working for a farmer/custom wheat harvester/water well driller/cattleman in Enid, Oklahoma. Chester and I had much in common, primarily in our willingness to work hard as demanded by life on the farm.

We were in that pipeline that produced thousands of LCMS pastors. Some might say that we entered the “system” at its very best. Chester and I were a small part of

It was cotton, milo, cattle and dairy cows that provided the subsistence for Wilson and Viola and their four children – Chester being the oldest.

1 I have often used this anecdote to illustrate Luther’s “down to earth theology.” (See Gerhard Forde’s *Where God Meets Man – Luther’s Down to Earth Approach to the Gospel*).

that pre ministerial freshman class that came without any languages. Determined to secure the required credits in German, Latin and Greek in two years before admission to Concordia Senior College (Fort Wayne) our small cohort submitted to six quarters of classes that ranged from 22 to 26 classroom hours.

After those eight years in the system years, we both got married and started our families. Chester went to his first parish in south Texas and me to my first parish in the lower 9th ward of New Orleans. Leaving our first

parishes, I did four quarters of CPE at GMHI in Atlanta, he at MD Anderson in Houston. He became a hospital chaplain; I combined parish ministry with training toward certification as a Pastoral

Counselor. He was there for me after I was shot in a holdup in 1972; I was there for him when his friend and chaplain colleague was killed instantly in a car accident that Chester survived. I was there for him through two cancers (melanoma and prostate), and he was there for me through major decisions about the future of my ministry.

I was there for him through two cancers (melanoma and prostate), and he was there for me through major decisions about the future of my ministry.

He loved his ministry as a hospital chaplain. Our conversations swirled around his experiences in the hospitals and mine in the consulting room. His specialty was the healing aspect of tears. He presented papers on the topic. For several years he was on the planning committee for the Zion Conferences, those at Oblate Retreat Center in San Antonio in the 90's.

We both struggled with retirement. He lost two chaplaincy positions due to corporate take overs of hospitals where he served, the second being in San Angelo. By then he and Ollie had purchased their home place in Miles where he had planted 50 + trees in a two-acre lot three blocks from their home. He took an associate pastor position at the congregation in San Angelo, the same congregation in which he was baptized, confirmed, and married. Following the retirement of the senior pastor, the congregation and Chester became the focus of a regressive putz to restore closed communion, end using women in any function of public ministry and the elimination of any form of contemporary worship. His final two years were extraordinarily difficult leading to his early retirement.

Some years before all that he and I began talking on a weekly basis by phone – he in Texas, me in Alaska. That continued until days before he died. Our last conversation was with him talking through a c-pap machine in the ICU of St Mary's in Milwaukee, WI.

One of his granddaughters called him a documentarian. He kept journals for each of his grandchildren, recording and commenting on every interaction he had with them. The result are bookshelves lined with those journals. His cameras were, aside from his pecan trees and his pet burros, his prized possessions. He always carried his camera. He made multiple trips to Alaska, many with volunteers from his congregation in San Angelo to do vacation bible schools in Shungnak, a village

north of the Arctic Circle. Those trips and other trips gave the two of us time to explore Alaska and for him to take photos.

His great love, avocation and passion

were pecans, the trees that yielded them and the pests and varmints that threatened both the trees and their pecans. He became a master grafter, in which native trees are grafted with improved varieties (paper shell and high yield). His commitment to the pecan went back 50 years to a failed orchard in south Texas that, unknown to him and Ollie when they purchased it, was in the flood plain of the Trinity River. Undaunted, he and his son began raising hundreds seedling trees in their back yard in Pasadena, Texas, grafting them at one year and selling them at two years, the proceeds putting his son through college. The fifty trees in his two-acre orchard came from that seedling. Now a 35-year-old mature orchard of beautiful pecan trees of several varieties, it is an orchard that I helped harvest for the past 12 years, (excluding 2020 because of COVID). Beginning in the Fall 2018 I came to Miles to help Chester and his brother Clayton for a week to two weeks, to harvest pecans for their customers. I continued those trips though this past November. Since our birthdays were 53 weeks apart in the middle of March – he the older – he and Ollie, in recent years often made the trip to Virginia to visit us.

His beautiful orchard will probably be sold to a next-door neighbor who Chester mentored into becoming a Grand Champion winner in the West Texas Pecan Growers competitions. The neighbor watched Chester care for his orchard the last 20 years, so the orchard will be in good hands.

Reality is this – Chester is dead. No more pecan harvests. No more phone calls. All that remains is for Chester to collect on his treasure in heaven....and it is much more than pecans. And for that reunion on that “*great getting up mornin.*”



Chester Lee McCown+
1943 – 2022



Philip Kuehnert is a retired pastor/pastoral counselor living on the “sunrise side” of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Nellysford, VA. Before retiring, his forty years of ministry included parishes in New Orleans, Atlanta and Fairbanks and clinical work at Care and Counseling in Atlanta and the Samaritan Counseling Center in Fairbanks. He is co-author with Jacob L Goodson and Brad Elliott Stone Building Beloved Community in a Wounded World. (Cascade, Summer 2021). For several years he has written a weekly “Monday Morning Encouragement” for Stephen Ministers and other care givers. He and his wife Judy have four children and seven grandchildren.

Individual Struggle to Communal Success

Chelsea Achtenberg

NOTHING IN MY PROCESS of becoming a parish pastor or an Army Reserve chaplain has been easy. It was a long process, far longer than it should have been, nearly eight years. I never wavered about being called to this work, only about if I thought I would actually get through the process. Still, I am happy to be here doing this work. There are plenty of moments in ministry where I smile to myself and think: I cannot believe this gets to be my job. It hasn't been easy, but nothing is wasted in God's economy. It has fortified me for the work of ministry and chaplaincy and for the work of making the path a little straighter and a little flatter for those who follow.

There are two stories that together sum up how long, drawn out, complicated, and often convoluted my process was for ordination. When I began a CPE residency, I did not intend to drag it out for nearly two years as I took time off to attend the Chaplain Basic Officer Leadership Course as an Army Reserve Chaplain Candidate and later the Basic Airborne Course. Changes at the hospital as our system merged with another led me to be asked if I would join a Certified Educator Candidate (CEC) cohort to further support the two CEC students we had already. I agreed after some discernment and conversation. I did not realize that not everyone understood the process for ordination in Lutheran bodies is primarily through parish ministry. That led to a confused conversation about why I was not planning to formally enter the CEC process. I remember saying, "because I am already 5 years into a 4-year process with at least one more still to come. I am not ready to start another 4–6-year process." While I appreciated my supervisor's affirmation of my ability to be a CPE supervisor, I could not imagine my candidacy committee or bishops would any more readily ordain me into CEC work than into military chaplaincy.

The biggest obstacle to chaplaincy in nearly all forms has got to be bureaucracy. From open disagreement about if we should or should not mandate parish ministry before Chaplaincy and the not-so-subtle push to ordain only into parish ministry, to the time I had to gently tell a candidacy committee I could not "come out" to the Army because the DOD did not care about that as much as they did. Systems, procedures, and protocols can be a huge asset to formation. When used well, systems can serve as safety nets for those discerning, encouraging them to try new things and risk failure for the sake of learning. Systems which prioritize "their way" are a hindrance to not only chaplaincy, but a threat to the diversity of people God calls to ministry in all its forms. The priority cannot be uniformity but preparing. We as Lutherans love to talk about the importance of "internal and external call," often in

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a tongue in cheek kind of way. We ought to take them seriously. A powerful sense of call is a bulwark for persevering amid hardship. When there are roadblocks, or even speedbumps, to a process, a firm conviction of “this is where God has called me, this is where I belong” may be the most important self-understanding one can possess.

The second story that sums up my experience stands out because it is a confluence of all the good and bad into one conversation. After serving in a congregation and with a supervisor who did not like my call to military chaplaincy, I completed a CPE residency and then a second internship. A month or two in I was notified a different Lutheran Seminary had failed to find an internship site for a seminarian who was a member of the congregation.

It had been asked if she could serve a portion of her internship at the same congregation while also serving as a staff chaplain at a nearby hospital. My seminary had already agreed there were no other good options and the two of us could be co-located with different supervisors. I called my contact person on the candidacy committee to make sure they were informed and everyone there would be agreeable. Her words were, “on a scale of one to second internship, what’s a second intern?” Her humor and grace were both what I needed to hear in that moment and a reminder that the best and worst parts of this work are often the people.

The open secret in chaplaincy is the constant work of convincing our non-chaplain colleagues that we really are doing equally valid and valued ministry. I have had several pastors be openly hostile to my military chaplaincy and seen it as being less legitimate ministry. Many of those were for the usual reason of not seeing it as a ministry that actually serves people, as many of you have likely experienced for years. I have also encountered some who for political or ideological reasons reject it and dismiss it as a ministry because they view it as simply promoting war, as a recent *Sojourners* article typifies. Oddly, on the other extreme I have had a fellow military chaplain undercut every statement of call to chaplaincy I made because I did not fit his idea of a chaplain. Ultimately, the two biggest factors for my remaining in chaplaincy were both that I am, even with all of the difficulties, called to this work and a massive support network to cheer me on. The people who saw this call in me and celebrated me were a lifeblood when the process dragged on without end and when everyone in power in the process seemed to have a critical word. The list of those people who showed up for me, encouraged me, formed me, cheerlead, and promised “we’ll find a way” would read like an Oscars acceptance speech. My wife, pastors and laypeople, chaplain colleagues and fellow soldiers, CPE supervisors and cohort members, sometimes just random people who saw my call and celebrated it with me. Those voices affirmed this is where I am called, even when other voices say otherwise. The significance of this support in the work of chaplaincy cannot be

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underestimated. There must be encouragement and words of affirmation when the systems, processes, and people are stumbling blocks.

Many systems I have been a part of were, and as best I can observe often still are, hostile towards specialized ministry and all forms, but especially for new pastors. Where I am currently has a much more open and excited view of what the spirit is doing and seeks to find a way to meet the need of the people in the need of the bureaucracy. That is not always the case. One word of advice I give to those discerning chaplaincy would be to find supportive systems whenever and wherever possible. Our Church suffers from no lack of the Holy Spirit's fire to raise up leaders, but we often do suffer from a lack of imagination about how to support and utilize those leaders. Things may be slowly changing in the ELCA but the journey to truly supporting and valuing chaplaincy as Lutherans is a long one. One thing working for us is our theology around call. The overlap of internal and external call is often in the validation of the work itself. Those I cared for, chaplains of other traditions, CPE/pastoral care—each of these successes forms a memory bank of protective factors for when the journey is lonely and long. While many specifics of chaplaincy have barriers to entry, one of the most important parts is simply to get started in something close and try it on, a spiritual practice equivalent to wearing a clerical collar in seminary.

So where do we go from here? We commit to create a different path, not just at the national level but at the human connection level. I volunteer to support, mentor, coach, encourage, preach, teach, really whatever is needed for those discerning chaplaincy to succeed. We Lutherans are often an extreme minority in chaplaincy. We say we bring gifts of theology and education that are valuable for the populations we serve. If we believe that, we cannot afford to undermine our own who are called to this ministry. We must also be willing to work to change attitudes, systems, and mindsets. This is not new work and not work I expect will ever be really completed but each of us must work to make the path of those behind us not easier, but always just and equitable. We must be willing to put in the work to be in the places that are stumbling blocks and create a better future. It has been my experience that that work, the work of creating a better tomorrow, has that same sense of validating and shoring up my calling as doing the ministry work itself.



Chelsea Achterberg is an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament (Pastor) in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and as a Chaplain (Captain) in the Army Reserve. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from The Citadel, The Military College of South Carolina in Charleston and a Master of Divinity degree from Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary of Lenior-Rhyne University, Columbia, South Carolina. She also has completed five units of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)

at level I and II trauma centers.

Healing in the Desert: From the Parish to the Street

Jacob Wampfler

ON MONDAY MORNINGS, I wake to the sound of my alarms around 3:30 am. Most of the time, my eyes are already open when I begin to hear their artificially jovial sound. I groan as I feel around in the dark, trying not to disturb the slumber of my spouse. She won't begin her day for another couple hours, so I move slowly as I brush my teeth, shower, and dress. Most Mondays, I have only slept for 4 or 5 hours when I wake. Ever since I was a boy, I've never been a good sleeper. And the years have only made sleep more difficult it seems.

I put on a pair of faded tan jeans, a black Dickies pocket tee, and one of my primary identifiers to those who know me: a Green Bay Packers ball cap worn backwards. Items that I wore over a decade ago in the desert heat of Iraq go with me as well- desert tan tactical boots, sunglasses, and gloves. I carry a small backpack and travel light with only what I need. I will be in my car for an hour and a half before sunrise, and I will be in and out of work vehicles all day and all week.

I journey across Phoenix, AZ to prepare for my week. The 101 is desolate but traffic begins to pick up as I hit the 202 and the I-10. Most mornings, I listen to ESPN sports radio as I drive. It's an escape, a distraction, even though I am an avid fan of football and baseball especially. I used to listen to Rich Mullins, Jars of Clay, and music my mother and father taught me as a child. But I miss them, and I miss home and sometimes I cry because I wish my life had turned out differently.

This trek is an important part of my week. I work for the Phoenix Rescue Mission on the Street Outreach team, and we serve cities like Glendale, Avondale, Surprise, and Scottsdale across the entire Valley. The Phoenix Rescue Mission has been serving the Valley for 70 years and provides outreach and case management services to unhoused people, recovery programs for those seeking to overcome life controlling issues like addiction and chronic homelessness, and the Mission also serves hundreds of families experiencing food insecurity through the Hope for Hunger Food Bank daily. My specific role is focused on running a day labor program called Scottsdale Works for individuals experiencing homelessness. Monday mornings are crucial as I pick up meals for my clients that will last the entire week. When I hand them breakfast on Monday morning, some of my clients can't remember the last time they ate.

The Phoenix Rescue Mission exists in the now 5th largest city in the United States; a city that has seen a staggering increase in homelessness over the past decade

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and especially over the past two years related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Phoenix contains one of the largest homeless encampments in the nation called “The Zone,” an area outside a 500 bed shelter in the Valley where nearly 1,000 people camp in tents trying to receive help at the Human Services Campus. These numbers and this increase have affected Phoenix and nearly every outlying city in the Valley — including the slender, affluent city of Scottsdale that borders the East Valley.

The Mission has sought to respond to this great need by expanding the Street Outreach team and services offered by case managers and coordinators like me. We have two case managers dedicated to housing and two more dedicated to criminal justice diversion. There are two work programs like mine funded by the city of Glendale and more than a dozen case managers on the Street Outreach team dedicated to going out each day with water, socks, hygiene, snacks... and hope. We carry Jesus with us in ways both big and small because He has called us to serve the least of these in His name and with His love.

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The Mission has been a place of respite and safety for me over the past year. My co-workers on the Street Outreach team come from backgrounds of addiction and homelessness themselves. And they have given me a place to belong and share some of my own pain. My boss is a reformed meth dealer/addict/felon and a graduate of the Mission’s Transforming Lives Center men’s recovery program. One of our lead case managers is a recovering alcoholic and worked on Skid Row — the epicenter of homelessness and addiction in L.A. — before moving to Phoenix. Another lead is a former addict and graduate of the men’s program as well. He still rides his Harley to work every day and wears his “kutte” (biker vest) into the office and hangs it on the back of his desk chair.

Every day I hear stories of light being brought to darkness in the lives of my co-workers — stories of recovery, new life, and hope. Oftentimes, those stories are shared the first time you meet them. I remember driving with another case manager, hired around the same time as me last year. I asked her how she came to the Mission, simply expecting her to talk about how she came to apply for the position and get hired. She immediately shared her testimony — a heroin addict for 20 years along with her mother, she decided to seek recovery when her mother was arrested and imprisoned for her drug use. She held out her arms, showing me beautiful tattoos of roses, crosses, and intricate artwork. She said, “I got these to cover up my track marks from all my years of using heroin ... and to remind me where I came from and to whom I belong now.”

And yet despite the openness of co-workers and supervisors, my own words catch in my throat when I begin to speak them. It’s hard to talk about my pain because I often don’t feel that I’ve earned it or earned the right to speak of its existence. It’s

deep and layered and confusing. And I feel like it seems to follow me everywhere I turn. I'm a combat veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom — and I live with PTSD and moral injury related to my work with detainees while on deployment in 2009. I'm a trained pastor, but after seven years of serving congregations — one for six years and another for merely a year — I found myself jobless and alone with no idea what I was going to do next in 2021. My ministry at the first congregation ran its course when I realized that my desire to seek justice and serve the marginalized was not shared by the institution at large. And when I tried to provide leadership in the early and frenzied months of the global pandemic, I was met with criticism and even hatred from folks I had sought to serve and love for almost six years prior. I left hoping for a new start only to find more of the same. Yet the second time was somehow worse — I felt demeaned, belittled, and even abused during my ministry there.

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Over the past decade I've struggled on and off with drinking, depression, insomnia, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive behavior. I have not struggled with suicidal thoughts, but I have wondered at times if the world would be a better place without me. I can become frantic in large crowds or new places and my spouse knows that we sometimes will cancel our plans because I need to be in familiar surroundings again. In work environments, when I am attacked or singled out, I want to run and hide. I will barely speak or stand up for myself, but rather wait for the moment when I can leave and seek the safety of my spouse or a close friend. This is connected to my military experience, but also to the trauma I've experienced in ministry. And if I'm being completely honest with myself, this pain also finds its origin in being raised in a rural community where bullying was commonplace and mental health resources were non-existent. Attending a conference for the American Association of Pastoral Counselors in 2014, I heard a presenter say, "Most veterans have seen combat before they ever go to war." I was raised by dedicated and sacrificial parents, and I have two younger brothers whom I love with my entire being. Yet I joined the Army largely out of financial necessity, and I have worked incredibly hard already in my thirty-six years on this earth. I've been going bald for nearly a decade. Most days I feel exhausted, and I've begun to develop dark circles under my eyes especially when I'm not sleeping well. I have a hereditary heart condition in my aortic valve that may require open heart surgery as soon as my 40's. And I often understand the words of Bilbo to Gandalf in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, "I feel thin, sort of stretched, like butter scraped over too much bread."

Film has always been a balm for my woundedness, even as a child, and I remember seeing an astounding movie several years ago that made me feel seen and heard. *Leave No Trace* tells the story (based on actual events) of a father and veteran,

Will, raising his daughter, Tom, in the dense wilderness of Oregon. Discovered by a jogger, social services and park rangers apprehend them and seek to reintegrate them both into society. In an early scene, the father is shown taking a PTSD assessment akin to one I took a few years ago. As the questions are asked, he answers “true” or “false” to an electronic voice. Tears streamed down my face when the computer said, “I think about things that are too bad to talk about.”

In another scene, Will is working on a tree farm. In the film, the sound of saws and machinery — and specifically a helicopter — are pronounced to the point that they become deafening. Will crouches close to the ground amidst a grove of pine trees. He runs his work worn hand slowly over his thinning blonde hair. At the end of the film, my spouse and I sat together silently as the credits rolled. She said, “Jake, that was you.” It was a defining moment in our relationship, and it was a step in my journey that nudged me towards seeking help.

Running a work crew, I have an opportunity to model how meaningful work helps us heal.

I continue to serve my clients on the streets of Scottsdale to the best of my ability. Running a work crew, I have an opportunity to model how meaningful work helps us heal. Nearly all my clients are experiencing addiction and/or a serious mental illness (SMI) in addition to being on the street. They carry with them the physical and emotional scars that a life on the street entails. Though they have not been to war, they have certainly experienced combat. They are used to being chased off by supermarket and gas station employees and harassed by law enforcement. They feel shame and regret, but most often they feel invisible. Folks on the street lose their wallets, IDs, and vital records so frequently that I’ve heard more than a few clients say they feel like they don’t even exist according to worldly standards.

I was taking a client to get his birth certificate a few months ago, and I will never forget his elation when he held the physical copy in his hands for the first time in years. He proudly held the document up for me to see and said “Bro, I was born at 3 pm in the afternoon ... that’s so crazy man. I never knew that.”

It is in these quiet moments over the past year that I have been healing as I yearn to help others heal. In another film close to my heart called *The Overnights*, a pastor of a small Lutheran parish in North Dakota seeks to help the droves of transient workers arriving in Williston during the fracking oil boom of the early 2010’s. His constant refrain is one of love and compassion. He calls the people arriving in their community “gifts” and “a blessing” to be loved and cared for rather than ostracized. The pastor’s most enduring line from the film is one that I speak to myself when I am frustrated and angry, or when I’m losing hope: “To be human is to serve ... and to let the neighbor change your life.”

My Monday morning wake up calls continue, followed by the rest of the mornings of the week. Each day, I seek to go out with purpose and meaning even though my

back aches and my spirit is sometimes weak. Our clients, my co-workers and team, and even the work are giving me the chance to help others begin to heal even as I am being healed. And there is a profound joy in this simple life even though my pain still goes with me. Working, serving, and simply being have all helped me to learn that “[All ministry begins at the ragged edges of our own pain” (*Chasing Francis: A Pilgrim’s Tale* by Ian Morgan Cron). And so, it is in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi that I conclude with his Peace Prayer — a prayer I carry with me every day:

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.”



Rev. Jacob Wampfler is a graduate of Concordia Seminary St. Louis and has served congregations in Minnesota, Kansas, and Arizona. He is an Army veteran and served a combat deployment to Iraq in 2009. He is also a practitioner of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, a former high school football coach, and a co-creator of the Faith and Film Festival at Concordia Seminary. He serves as a street outreach coordinator for the Phoenix Rescue Mission, working alongside people experiencing homelessness in Scottsdale, AZ and the Phoenix Valley area. He also serves as vacancy pastor for Lutheran Church of the Master in Phoenix, AZ.

Fed From the Womb to the Now to the Future

Cory Wielert

IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE we tend to have too many words to describe the same thing. This statement as you have just read, might give the notion of negativity, because the inference lies in the two words, “too many.” For me, the “too many” is a positive and the only negative comes from having to choose one word from time to time to describe something. In this case, I am finding it far too difficult to choose one to describe the influences and experiences, the mentors and teachers, and the books and articles which have been key to my ministerial development throughout my life and career. Why? There are too many upon which to elaborate. You might say there are a myriad, a plethora, a smorgasbord, an array, a vast amount, slew, multiple, multitude ... you get the point.

When I look at how I have been fed throughout my life and career, I liken it to diving into the Bible itself. There we discover sixty-six books — all pointing to Christ in some fashion. All of them tell the story, the history, the ups and downs, the good, bad, and ugly, the compassion, the sin, the redemption and about life —and all of them do so differently — even though we discover they do so with the same thread and focus pointing, again to Jesus.

In a similar vein, any good pastor and any great chaplain deep down hopefully realizes how every person and every experience in their lives has made them who they are in the now — the present. I say present because that is all we live in, operate in, and serve in. Certainly, we can look forward to the future in Christ and know to where we are headed through His grace. We may even look back in the past and see some of our regrets or how Christ’s love has covered a multitude of sins. But now is where we are. Now is where we live. Now is where we operate and serve.

With this said, I do fully know the implications and blessings of the past. I also know how much the past has prepared me for the present — so much so — that the broader scope and depths of my past reveal to me nuggets of wisdom still. To this day, because I have been able to, with the help of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), the help of great theologians, family, friends, and strangers — to look back and bless my past, I know also see the fruits of their labor which I realize “in the now” truly is a blessing and gift from God. It shows me He is still creating in my life, as much as He is for others.

In chaplaincy in particular, the feeding I have had has been enormously encouraging. The feeding has not been from one person or from one experience — one book or one article, but from a plethora. The danger I found as an adolescent

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was limiting my scope of vision. As I was learning about life, I did not want to learn one idea about it. I wanted to gain different perspectives and so I spent time visiting various family members — hearing of their joys and sorrows. I got to experience their professions and trades, and in turn learn various parts of those lifestyles and environments.

Church also was another part of my life I wanted to experience in a different way. I am happily seventh generation LCMS, and while I wholeheartedly hold to my convictions aligned with my ordination vows, I also know there are benefits

to seeing other perspectives. Understanding other points of view, even differing ones, is of benefit to serving others. This is where chaplains thrive in my opinion. A good chaplain knows his or her own theology. A great chaplain knows his or her own theology, but also understands the theologies of those other denominations and has a grasp on world religions as well. Experts? You do not have to be, as much as you do not have to be an expert in Greek or Hebrew to understand the Bible. A working understanding goes a long way to help provide the basics, to at least be able to converse, but more importantly — listen without wavering in your own theology.

In fact, I have family who are Roman Catholic, Assembly of God, Methodist, ELCA, non-denominational, agnostic and atheist. As a result, in my life I have spent time with all of them and even attended some of their churches or had deep conversations which have all fed me and helped to inform me well enough to have those nuggets of wisdom at the ready for ministry in the now.

One the nuggets surprisingly came from an old girlfriend who once said to me, “Question everything, but accept it at the same time.” This has stayed with me since 1998, because it has served to allow me the permission to question from a post-Modernesque mindset, but because of my convictions and faith to stay grounded in the process. The suggestion she also gave was that of acceptance. While I admittedly do not always accept others’ beliefs, I do accept the people who hold them. This has been an instrumental part of how I approach serving others and adheres to Jesus’ command “to love others.”

From this foundation of questioning, accepting and loving, I have been able to encounter other chaplains, CPE supervisors and pastors from other denominations without too many issues, and quite frankly — most issues that have arisen over the years rested with my own fears and reticence rather than with the others’ viewpoints or practical manners. This too is something I have had to learn and have done so by being fed by people mostly outside my own beloved LCMS. In fact, while theologically I believe I have been taught well in the LCMS, I have been left wanting at times when it has come to how to be practical.

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At the seminary, as most Lutheran ministers of both church bodies know very well, you are taught theology, history, languages, doctrines, and yes, the practical theologies — but mostly “about.” The preposition “about” is a dangerous preposition when it comes to the Gospel. In a class called “The Lutheran Mind,” students were taught the difference between explanation and proclamation when the subject was the Gospel. People have written volumes on the subject, so I will spare you the trouble and simply say there is a difference between describing the Gospel and what it does, versus proclaiming the Gospel and letting the Word of God through the Holy Spirit impart grace to the receiver.

The same could be said for practical theology in the sense that someone could tell you all day what practical theology is or practical ways by which you may do things as a pastor, but it is altogether different when you actually do those things. Putting the description into action changes the picture. Here is where CPE helps greatly, because it not only describes the practical, but puts the persons learning about the practical in a position to “DO” the practical and hone their skills in the process.

At the seminary, I found we were great at translating, practicing preaching, teaching history, etc., but when it came to the practical part of being a pastor — most of it was left to field work or vicarage, where at times not every student was given the opportunity to fully practice and if given the opportunity, was not always given equal opportunity to have constructive criticism. This possibly is why one may find some newly minted pastors struggling their first few to several years dealing with certain aspects of ministry — because a lot of ministry happens beyond the preaching, the teaching, the translating and histories and instead is discovered squarely in the realm of the “now” where life can be terribly messy.

Messy does not always translate to one church over another or one denomination over another. Here is why having a smorgasbord of influences with a solid grounding in Christ is vital to ministry in general and certainly to chaplains in particular. For me, I was blessed with great teachers from varying kinds of denominational backgrounds throughout my life, as well as a vast array of experiences that have served me well in seeking to understand others’ points of view and how I may best meet them where they are, not necessarily where I want them to be.

When I have not understood, I have sought to understand by asking questions. Listening also lends to a pastor’s skill set in ways some young pastors do not fully grasp at the onset of their ministries. A Presbyterian CPE supervisor I once had often said, “It’s all about love.” He said this ad nauseum, and while it got tiresome to hear, it put things in perspective for me. When I have talked with people outside the LCMS, people who are not Caucasian like me, not heterosexual like me, not Christian like

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me, not Lutheran like me, not married like me etc., his words hammer home what I as a chaplain — as a pastor and as a Christian am expected to put on display — love. Specifically, the love of God through Jesus Christ. Yes — people may be different and hold different views — even look different, but if God can look past my differences and love me, am I not also called to look past others' differences and love them?

Again, I have learned I can love a person and accept them without loving or accepting their point of view to the point of declaring agreement with them. In short — I may still at the end of the day disagree to the core of my being, but I am still called to love — as we all are. If we, “the multitude” can seek to love and lead with love, more may come to be fed and nourished by Him who died for not just the LCMS or the ELCA — not just for Lutherans, but for the world.

There is a world of ideas out there, a world of differing views and synopses, but there is only one Christ — to whom sixty-six books point to solidly in some fashion. May we, who have been fed by a myriad, or in most cases — the “cloud of witnesses” — aim to do the same. I know I am and will. How about you?



Ronald E. Gocken

1936–2022

People who knew Rev. Ron Gocken as a pastor knew that was not the kind of pastor who liked to sit in the office. He loved being “out with the people” and was known for ministering to the community at large. Perhaps it was that desire that led him to serve as a volunteer chaplain for the police and fire departments on Mercer Island, WA – a service that became well-known in the community. Along the way, Pr.

Gocken took Clinical Pastoral Education, was active in the Association of Professional Chaplains, and became a strong advocate for professional training in chaplaincy. He was married to Deaconess Dorothy Prybylski who, for a number of years, was the Director of Specialized Ministries at the LCMS headquarters and was known to many of our colleagues.

Chaplain Gocken’s service with LMSN meant that he ministered to people in most of the major medical centers in the Seattle area – including Harborview and Seattle Cancer Care Alliance. However, he is most noted for his service at Seattle Children’s which began in the 1980’s (known then as Children’s Orthopedic Hospital). Ministering to children and their families as they face hospitalization, illness, and crisis takes a special person. Chaplain Ron had what it takes and showed a big heart that overflowed with God’s love and a gentle spirit that expressed God’s grace and warmth. People who knew Ron and worked with him have said, “Ron’s presence was his ministry.” His presence and ministry gained the appreciation and respect of patients, families, and staff alike. The lives he touched over the years have been blessed with the “living hope” (1 Peter 1:3) that filled him and overflowed from his ministry in our midst.

Chaplain Gocken became Executive Director of LMSN in 1992, and his leadership brought our organization to new levels of professionalism and service – bringing on seven additional chaplains who served LMSN in hospitals, care centers, and jails / prisons. His faithfulness and leadership helped build our ministry so that it has a lasting impact still today. We give thanks to God for Chaplain Ron Gocken and his faithful example of ministry. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

Rev. Arthur Werzner serves as Senior Chaplain for Lutheran Ministry Services Northwest. He was called to LMSN in 2001 after completing M.Div. studies and a CPE residency at Laclede Groves in St. Louis, MO.