

Caring Connections

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



Daily Bread for the Journey

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.

Help Support Caring Connections

Funding is an ongoing challenge, even for a small professional electronic journal like *Caring Connections*. Denominational (ELCA and LCMS) financial support continues to be reduced. No board member or either of the co-editors receives any financial recompense. Lutheran Services in America, our host site, receives no financial compensation for hosting. Our only expense is for the layout of the issue itself.

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Scholarships

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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News, Announcements, Events: E-mail items to Christopher Otten at christopher.otten@elca.org or 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 lutherservices.org/newsletters#cc and click on "Click here to subscribe to the *Caring Connections Journal*" to receive automatic notification of new issues.

In 2022 we plan to focus on:

2022.1 Uses of technology in our ministries (Deadline for articles February 15, 2022)

2022.2 Grief, Mourning and Funeral Practices (Deadline for articles May 15, 2022)

Editorial

Diane Greve

I CAN'T HELP WONDERING how we have been taken hostage by this virus. First, in March, 2020, I imagined this would only last a few days, 2-3 weeks at the most. Then in May we had birthday gatherings on my deck keeping distances and masking. I made a homemade mask and felt self-conscious wearing it. The stock market declined. I started to eat food I had pushed to the back of the cupboard so I did not have to go out to the grocery store. Slowly, I grew familiar with Zoom and attending worship online.

Then I became resigned to this going on for months...until we could get the much-promised vaccine. The vaccine would be our rescuer. When it became available, some scrambled to find a way to get it, even driving for hours to an appointment. And now the pandemic has become the chronic state of affairs. We have, to some degree, made friends with our captor, the virus. I have returned to restaurants, worship, shopping, even hugging some people. I have my 3rd shot and wear masks in public. I even traveled to Europe this fall. All the while, I know of people getting very sick and dying from this virus. Some had chosen not to be vaccinated, others contracted the virus anyway. When will I be infected? Will it be my turn soon? "Life must go on," we hear, but at what cost to all of us? How do we find spiritual solace in the midst of stress and uncertainty? Chaplains and pastoral counselors minister to those who are in the same boat as they are. How long can this go on? What started as a sprint has become a marathon with no finish line in sight. Today, in Minnesota, where I live, we have the highest infection rate for Covid-19 infections within the US.

One year ago, I was the co-editor of *Caring Connections Vol 17, Issue 4*. I began then with the lament in Ps 13, "How long, O God; How long?" Some wrote in that issue of what they had learned about themselves, technology, and the *banes and the blessings* of the pandemic. Others wrote of the challenges. Now, one year later, I still ask, "How long, O God?" I am like a child on a road trip asking, "Are we there yet?" But the experts say they don't think we are there yet and don't know when we will be or exactly what the destination might look like.

So how do we sustain ourselves on this long, endless road? How will we know when we are there? And, there are other life stresses that burden us as well, not just the pandemic. Just the usual daily ministry of a chaplain can wear down one's reserves. And we have political strife along with the ups and downs of our personal lives. How have you learned to cope in the past months? How are you getting through these days? How might we thrive, even in the midst of such anxiety, stress and uncertainty? And is "thrive" overstating the goal? Maybe "staying alive" is the goal.

I am grateful to the writers who have contributed to this issue. Their articles are personal and also inspiring. Thoughtfully, your colleagues have named some faith filled and creative ways they have embraced to stay spiritually and physically balanced during this time.

Several members of the editorial board for *Caring Connections* have offered brief reflections on the theme. We will begin with those, followed by:

- **Sara Scungio** shares some of her own angst due to the pressures of ministering among very stressed staff and how she gains strength from her faith.
- **Erik Neider** draws on the work of Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross to make sense of the losses and transitions in his life as a military chaplain.
- **Dana Schroeder** has found solace and renewal in God's creation as he regularly visits the Arboretum in Lisle, Illinois.
- **John Schumacher** describes his love of his Miata and the community of other Miata lovers that have provided bread for the journey in his ministry and added joy to his personal life.
- **Tammy Devine** reflected on the red, yellow and green traffic signals as she drove and pondered their symbolism for our own lives.
- **Linqing Chu** draws from prayerful reflections and daily life to find the sustenance for her ministry as she begins serving in her new call as a long-term care chaplain.
- **Cory Weilert** reminds us to return to the basics of our faith during these challenging days.
- **Dave Ficken** writes of his experience at an emergency services chaplain and the way his congregation supports him in this role.
- **Christopher Otten** offers three initial observations as the ELCA endorser after sitting in the "cockpit" for only a short time, followed by a suggested course of action.

I hope these articles may help you to remember and rediscover activities and opportunities that sustain you. May the following hymn be our prayer on this journey of faith and ministry. It has become one of my favorites. Blessings on your way.

BREAD FOR THE JOURNEY

Give us bread for the journey. Give us bread.
Give us bread for the journey. Give us bread.
When our legs are getting heavy
And we're hanging down our heads,
Give us bread for the journey. Give us bread.

Guide our way as we travel. Guide our way.
Guide our way as we travel. Guide our way.
With so many roads before us,
where to go is hard to say.
Guide our way as we travel. Guide our way.
Make us one with each other. Make us one.
Make us one with each other. Make us one.
All the walls we've built around us
May we learn to tear them down.
Make us one with each other. Make us one.
Lead us home to the garden. Lead us home.
Lead us home to the garden. Lead us home.
Where we'll live with all creation,
Find our place and never roam.
Lead us home to the garden. Lead us home.

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With Gratitude: This issue is sponsored by St Luke's Lutheran Church in Park Ridge, Illinois, through a generous gift of \$350. If you or your church might be open to such a gift, you may go to lutheranservices.org DONATE and dedicate your contribution to "Caring Connections."

Reflections on this Journey

As co-editor for this issue, I, Diane Greve, invited our Caring Connections Editorial Board members to consider how they are sustained, how they are able to thrive, where they see stresses in others, and how where find their “Bread for the Journey” during these stressful times in life and ministry. We all prefer a different flavor of “bread” to navigate the journey. We all see different stressors. Some wrote full articles and others were willing to offer a brief reflection. Here are five reflections. They set the tone for this issue.

Bread for the Road

David Wurster

YEARS AGO, CARL WHITAKER M.D. TOLD US in his paradoxical way that, when you get married, get ready to be lonely. He then said that you really cannot do marriage and family therapy without a cuddle group—meaning a support group. So it is with ministry. When you become a leader get ready to be lonely, but if you try to handle the loneliness alone you may well suffer depression or act out in self destructive ways. For 50 years I have been blessed with some shape of a support group. For brevity I’ll just list some.

- St. Louis pastors and wives social/support group when we were new, green, and naive—older people who were real life savers.
- Professional group supervision as a member and supervisor for almost 50 years—a benefit of my training and position.
- Pastors and wives’ network beyond the denomination—pure denominational groups can get closed and stuffy at times.
- Civic and professional groups for me and my wife resulting social connections with other couples and people in the community.
- The Zion Conferences for a number of years, especially when the spouses were along.
- Annual study retreats when a half dozen of us from around the country gathered at a camp for study, talk, support in life crises (all of us had one during these years), hiking and cooking.
- Lots of travel and visiting over the years.
- Thirty years of deer hunting camp in the mountains.
- Both my wife and I going through retirement with other people. At a dinner one night a woman across the table said, “You did it!” I said, “I did what?” She responded, “You retired; you did it.

You really cannot do marriage and family therapy without a cuddle group.

Hungering for Purpose

Eric Wester

BREAD FOR THE JOURNEY ADDRESSES HUNGER. I find, at this stage of my ministry, it is connecting with seminary students and recently ordained ministers that satisfies my own hunger for purpose. Right now, supply preaching, being a part-time VA hospital chaplain, and for the last ten years, teaching about chaplaincy as an adjunct for one of our Lutheran seminaries all combine to feed my longing for personal and professional engagement. As a tasty nibble along the way in chaplaincy, I find writing a book review brings refreshment, as well. God is good, in the midst of these familiar activities.

Sustainability

Nancy Ruth Wigdahl

THE GIFT OF TECHNOLOGY gives me occasion to speak with chaplains and ACPE educators across the country through my volunteer work with ACPE. Recently, I was speaking with a chaplain who came to the virtual meeting clearly in a hurry and doing his best to become calm before he began speaking. I asked him about his day. He sighed and said that the emergency room was just exploding with activity that afternoon. I paused and waited for him to say more. He quietly began to focus on getting things in order for the meeting. I said, “I’m sorry. All of you on the front line are really getting hammered these past few months.” His response and reframe was, “It makes the day go faster.” He is an acquaintance, not familiar to me, so maybe he was reluctant to say more. I tried to open the door for him to say more. He shrugged and repeated, “It’s been wild, and it makes the day go faster.” I hoped that he felt heard but I felt helpless, assuming that my empathy probably doesn’t travel the best over virtual communication. I did all I could at the moment.

Yesterday, I was speaking with an ACPE educator about the volunteer work of ACPE. We were on the phone so there was no visual. I feebly mentioned that I have a great deal of empathy for her and so many who have been pouring forth compassion with little return for over eighteen months, besides continuing to manage their regular load of responsibilities. She named burn-out, exhaustion, and frustration of multiple demands very little time to recharge. Then she immediately went on with the business at hand.

She named burn-out, exhaustion, and frustration of multiple demands very little time to recharge. Then she immediately went on with the business at hand.

Chaplains learn all too well how to juggle self needs in the face of often emotionally laden circumstances. I see and feel the expenditure of emotional, spiritual and physical energy of this pandemic. Reserves of compassion are running low and yet chaplains continue to care for the sick and dying patients, the grief-shocked loved ones, and the caregivers running on empty.

I listen and watch helplessly, say prayers for all, and know that there may well be no end in sight. Not yet. If the current state is the new normal, we must train professional chaplains to consistently excel on the margins. Athletes push themselves to make the upper margins of their abilities a normal so that they may excel at their performance. The pandemic has pushed chaplains to a normal state of high performance. The sustainability of high-performance chaplains is yet to be determined.

Filling my Cup

Anna Rudberg Speiser

FOR ME, THE MOST IMPORTANT WAY to maintain peace, energy, and heartfelt concentration through the work day is to intentionally recenter and refocus between visits. I do this for my own sake, so that I can pause and refresh. I also do this for the sake of those I am visiting, so I don't bring the emotions and energy from the previous visit into my next encounter. In the hospital, where the rooms are physically close together, there is often only a minute, or perhaps only several seconds between when I leave one room and enter the next. I have found, however, that I can still use that time in an intentional way by taking a deep breath, doing a quick recentering in my body (feeling my feet solid on the floor, my legs centered above my feet, my torso centered above my legs, my head centered on my torso; my shoulders, hands, and chest lowered and relaxed). I have also found that small, repeated actions can be a good time for recentering. For example, I have often used the momentary pause of taking the foaming hand cleanser or putting on any necessary PPE, to be a moment to pause, clear my mind, perhaps say a simple one sentence prayer for loving kindness and peaceful wisdom for all I will hear and say, and then to enter with that intention. In hospice visits, there is often a significant drive between houses or care center visits, so I try to use that drive time intentionally to reflect on and release the previous visit, and then prepare for the coming visit. Sometimes I use a simple visualization to bless and release the energy of the previous visit so that I can enter the next visit (or arrive home) with a centered and calm heart.

I have also found that small, repeated actions can be a good time for recentering.

On days off from work, activities that “fill my cup” are quiet reading (I am big fan of plains literature— Willa Cather, Louise Erdrich, Kent Haruf), practicing the piano, riding horses, or caring for my beehives. The mixture of concentration and creativity of these activities, the joy of being outdoors, and both the bees and horses sensitivity to my spiritual energy, all help me recenter, renew, and relax.

Grandma Gamer

Lorinda Schwarz

SO WHERE DO I GATHER HOPE AND JOY to face daily living in a prison system as a state Chaplain? One of my main sources of renewal is my grandchildren. I have 14 grandchildren ranging in age from newborn, to almost 30, to awaiting us in eternal life. And I have 3 great grandsons. They are a constant source of renewal and joy to me, whether thinking about them, writing to them, talking on the phone or playing video games together. We enjoy one another immensely. Regular contact with my children and these grandchildren keeps me going.

A source of joy for me is being a Grandma Gamer — which my kids and grandkids get a real kick out of.

Yes, I did mention video gaming with them. A source of joy for me is being a Grandma Gamer — which my kids and grandkids get a real kick out of. Not everyone can buy their 65+ mother or grandmother points on Nintendo or a new addition to Animal Crossing to bring her joy, but it does for me. Gaming keeps me young, in touch with the younger folks, and whether it is one of my multiple systems at home or a trip to the arcade, it lets me just enjoy the moment and not dwell on the stories of the day. It also often serves as a connecting point with those younger than me in ministry, when I can talk to them about their favorite video world and intertwine into what is happening with them today. Joy to sustain the journey in ministry can be found in many different arenas and venues, Grandchildren just happen to be one of God’s greatest gifts to the aging and they do bring joy to the journey!

Pointing to Christ in the Pandemic

Sara Scungio

COVID-19.

Did you just have an adverse reaction, even to some degree, when you read just that one little word and number: *COVID-19*? If you answered yes, you're not alone. Not only have we all felt the effects of pandemic stress and enduring constant changes in our work, home, and overall life environments, but we also see the extra demands it puts on others. In our various institutional settings, we see staff who still haven't fully processed the first surges of variants of this virus, and they've had no time to rest. I've seen several staff quit to maintain their own mental health and sanity. On top of that, I see pandemic burnout has made hiring harder. And this leads to overworking the staff who remain, thus burning them out further, leading to a declining work ethic.

Many are left feeling burnt out, losing hope and heart for ministry and service. Many are seen giving up completely and leaving the job because they feel they have nothing left to give. We've even seen staff losing all hope in this world to the point where their suffering leads to suicide. The mental health crisis stemming from the COVID-19 crisis is becoming even more concerning than the virus itself. The burnout becomes unbearable after so long a time dealing with it day after day. After only being in the ministry for two and a half years, I myself am feeling the effects of burnout. We have all been in "crisis mode" for so long, much longer than the average person is meant to endure such a state of mind.

So, what do we do? How do we keep serving whole-heartedly with the mind of Christ when we feel so exhausted, overworn, and maybe even a little insane at times? How can we keep caring for others when we are struggling to hold it all together? The answer is simple to say, but not always so easy to do. The answer: Take care of yourself.

But how are we supposed to do this? Anyone with a background in psychology will tell you that self-care involves several aspects: physical, emotional (mental), and spiritual. It's not as simple as indulging in that piece of chocolate cake, giving yourself an at-home spa treatment, or spending time reading your favorite book. These are certainly some suggestions on how to start physically treating yourself well, but our bodies and minds need so much more to function.

The physical demands of the body are simple: rest, eat, and move. Exercise is the word many people think of when it comes to moving your body. It's not a bad idea to

The mental health crisis stemming from the COVID-19 crisis is becoming even more concerning than the virus itself.

go to a gym, lift some weights, or train on an elliptical; however, moving isn't defined by strength training or muscle toning. Moving can be as simple as going for a walk around your neighborhood, soaking in some sunshine on a hike through a nature trail, or riding a bike through your favorite local park. As long as you move, you will physically feel good in the long term. Likewise, your body needs food to fuel itself for such movement, and it's easy to neglect your three meals a day during a highly stressful time. It's equally easy to put off getting enough sleep each night, let alone sleeping well. Taking care of yourself physically comes in many different forms, but one can't always find the peace to sleep well or the motivation for a walk or cooking a meal if one's mental health is failing.

In a rushed environment where you are overworked, covering duties for multiple teammates, and already feeling like giving up, how do you cope? How do you maintain the desire to serve?

This is where the emotional factors come into play. Much of this links to your quality of sleep and eating habits of course, but stress plays a significant role in this too. In a rushed environment where you are overworked, covering duties for multiple teammates, and already feeling like giving up, how do you cope? How do you maintain the desire to serve?

This is where I struggled for a long time throughout this pandemic. To be honest, I still struggle. There are days when I feel like I want to quit and stay in my bed all day hiding under the blankets in the dark. There are days when I want to run back home and enjoy the comfort of my family, dogs, and the familiarity of my hometown. There are days when all feels hopeless and lost. There are those days when I feel so burnt out, I have nothing left to give to comfort the residents and staff I serve. But these are the days that push me. These are the dark days that help me to see the Light even more—the Light of Christ that is.

I'll be honest. I'm still working on my mental and physical health factors quite a bit, and they definitely still need work. But I don't feel I can properly work on them without getting a handle on my spiritual health first. I mentioned earlier that I see staff, and even myself at times, losing all hope in this world. That's the problem. We're putting our hope in the wrong thing. This world is full of sin and evil. The news will tell you all about the latest murders, virus updates, and political scandals. The world is not the thing we should be placing our hope in. The world and all its evil are what we need to be saved from. And we are. We are saved from it by the very Savior who invites us to place our hope in him: Jesus Christ, our Messiah. He alone saved us from the captivity of sin, and He alone will come again to create a new heaven and a new earth. All of this, along with all evil, suffering, pain, tears, and tribulation, will pass away.

Seems like an obvious thing to say, especially for chaplains. We know this is most certainly true. However, it's an easy thing to forget when we find ourselves

absorbed in our work and worries of this world. It's easy to get lost in the drama, to lose our sense of right and wrong in a world so askew, and to be overcome by fear and anxiety. That is why we need to be constantly reminded of Whose we are and Who we place our hope in. We are God's precious children, and He shows us His love, mercy, protection, and promises every day whether we are aware of them or not.

I see His love through friends, family, and dogs. This might seem silly, but simply petting a dog with a friendly disposition and wagging tail brings me great joy, and that joy points to thanking God for such a beautiful creation. My family and home bring me joy, peace, and love, all of which point to Christ. When I feel lost or overwhelmed in this spiritual warfare, I turn to my fellow deaconess sisters or my pastor, my father confessor, to lead me back where I belong. They continually point me back to Christ. We all need someone we can turn to who never fails to guide us back to our Savior. Perhaps it's through private confession, a reading in Scripture, or a particular hymn that sticks out to us.

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The truth of the matter is that we are not alone, and we do not need to handle our burnout as if we are alone. We may have a tendency to feel discouraged when we feel we are failing because we are called to serve, and we've come to a point where we feel we can no longer do that. How easily we forget we are human! We are not perfect. We are placing too much hope on ourselves and on the world then. We have never done this alone nor can we ever, nor should we ever. We have Christ to turn to, and when we feel we can't do that on our own, we have brothers and sisters in Christ to turn to who remind us to rely on Christ for help, strength, and mercy.

I hope you have someone in your life who can be your "point person"—the person who points you to Christ. Maybe it's your pastor, a classmate, a dear friend, or a family member. But I pray that you have that person, or multiple "point people" who can redirect you during the days of discouragement, discomfort, and despair. We may not always realize it, but these are the people we need the most in our lives. These are the people we give thanks to God for. These are the people who often minister to us as we minister to others. Thanks be to God for His love, mercy, and grace which continually covers us daily and provides us all that we need to serve Him and His people. Thanks be to God that we have a God who never leaves us nor forsakes us, and who always calls us His own. May we always remember His promises.

*Grant then, O God, Your will be done,
That, when the church bells are ringing,
Many in saving faith may come
Where Christ His message is bringing:*

*“I know my own; My own know Me,
You, not the world, My face shall see,
My peace I leave with you. Amen.”*

—Built on the Rock v.5, LSB 645



Deaconess Sara Scungio serves as a member of the chaplaincy team at Concordia Lutheran Ministries, an LCMS Recognized Service Organization serving Western Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Florida. Sara earned her Deaconess certification with a BA in Theology and a minor in Psychology at Concordia University Chicago. Previously she has served as a youth and family ministry assistant at King of Glory Lutheran Church in Williamsburg, VA and as a student assistant to deaconess program director at CUC.

Sara enjoys spending her free time knitting while keeping up with friends near and far as well as spending time with her family and two dogs, Minnie and Jericho.

Thriving as a Military Chaplain

Erik Neider

I STARTED MY PROFESSIONAL LIFE IN THE MILITARY as a submarine officer. Over the 6 years before I entered seminary, I became accustomed to moving every two to three years, the constant flow of friends in and out of my life, and the shifting availability of wellness resources. “The plan is the plan...until it changes.” You get used to it, but it takes a toll. Military life can become a series of grief cycles overlaid with myriad celebrations. Sometimes the more you thrive in one assignment, the harder it becomes to thrive in the next, especially if you don’t take time to acknowledge the losses.

As a chaplain I seek to help others serve our nation with honor and faith and prepare for the next step of their journey. I have come to rely heavily on the work of Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. I look at much of life through the lens of grief and loss. Thriving depends on how well I am incorporating the most recent experiences of loss. Am I looking forward to see the promise of experiences yet to come? Am I looking around at all the people and things that have be done today? Am I looking backward to all that I thought was waiting for me yesterday? My work as a military chaplain invites me to help others integrate their experiences of loss in an institution that encourages anxiety fueled action with little promotion of the kinds of reflective self-care that I think of when I am invited to thrive. But that’s my job.

My first assignment as a Navy chaplain was with the 11th Coast Guard District in Alameda, CA. (In addition to assignments with Navy units, Navy chaplains may be sent to serve with the Marine Corps, Coast Guard (USCG), and Merchant Marine.) My duties included spiritual, moral, and ethical support of Coasties and their families spread across Northern California. From Monterey to the Oregon border, from the Pacific Coast Highway to Lake Tahoe, for three years I drove from the Bay Area to wherever and whenever the USCG was serving. I got paid to travel some of the most beautiful byways in America and be available to walk with hurting people through difficult places. There were the days when the USCG had to notify a civilian family that the search for their loved had ended tragically. There were days when I supported Coasties and their families in their own struggles. After three years I was tired, but the ministry I offered to and with the USCG validated my decision to leave parish ministry and begin military chaplaincy.

I had several wellness activities that kept me thriving:

1. Even though I spent many workdays in the car driving, I started and ended those days commuting between our home and my office on bike. This decision

Am I looking forward to see the promise of experiences yet to come? Am I looking around at all the people and things that have be done today?

guaranteed some exercise on most days and allowed me reflection time. Thriving meant being physically active each day thanking God for the gift of my body.

2. Even before the Navy, being on the water is in my blood. The home in which I lived the first eight years of my life is on a small lake in Northern Wisconsin. I have countless memories of boating and swimming in the summer and ice skating and skiing in the winter. In Alameda we lived one block from the shore of San Francisco Bay and within our neighborhood was a series of canals that were open to paddle sports. Over those 3 years I paddleboarded at least once each month. My travels took me to Lake Tahoe, which allowed me to ski with and without my family several times a year. Thriving meant being on the water in God's creation.
3. When our family moved to California, the children were 13, 11, and 6 years of age. We moved from a suburban community in which we had lived six and a half years. I had served as associate pastor of a church that averaged 630 people per week in worship at four services, the children had attended the church school, most of our friends and activities had connections to the church. We were moving to a community that we had only visited briefly. I had no responsibility to offer a weekly service, the children would attend a Roman Catholic school, and many of the local Lutheran churches were in decline. After six weeks of searching for a church, we visited a congregation led by a young immigrant pastor that became our church home. Over our three years in the Bay Area, I provided mentoring and supported the preaching and teaching duties, two of the children received first communions, and two of the children were confirmed. Our church experience gave us relationships with Christians who had immigrated from all over the world. Thriving meant connection to God's people in a local church.

What does *thriving* mean for you? . . . What fills you up so that you can pour yourself out when the plan changes?

What does *thriving* mean for you? I've had periods in my ministry when I was not thriving and barely surviving. I've been blessed to have helpful counselors and colleagues who have invited me to be intentional about identifying and planning experiences into my life to keep me connected to who God has made me to be irrespective of the context in which I happen to be serving. In my desire to pour myself out, God has provided people who make sure that I'm being filled up. What fills you up so that you can pour yourself out when the plan changes?

The first week of March 2020 I began what I thought I was my final month with the USCG before transferring to my next assignment aboard the USS AMERICA in Sasebo, Japan. I made my last road trip, sold my paddleboard, confirmed my final

preaching assignment, and was making plans to train the chaplain who was assigned to relieve me; I was honoring the gifts that God had provided for our wellness, saying goodbye, and preparing to learn how to thrive in my next ministry context. On March 14th that healthy process of closure seized as the first shelter-in-place orders hit California. As a chaplain I was considered an essential worker and allowed to go to the office each day. At first, I was able to deny that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic would impact my ministry. Within days it was agreed that the nature of my work made me a potential vector, and I posed too high a risk to continue my visits to outlying USCG work-centers. A large portion of my ministry of presence was gone. As the weeks wore on, I had to accept that I would be unable to say “goodbye” personally to many of the people with whom I had walked so intimately the previous three years.

I knew that it was times like these when we provide the most critical support to the most vulnerable, but it was hard to imagine innovative ways to make more meaningful connections to replace what was previously done in person.

In the face of my own reduction in functioning, I started bargaining, “It’ll be ok as long as I get to leave for my next assignment on time.” My relief was on his way and ordered to proceed as schedule. I’d soon be out of a job and able to continue to my next assignment. Surely, I’d be getting on with my life and on to my “new normal” sooner rather than later. Within a week the Department of Defense issued a stop movement order that included those proceeding to overseas assignments. I was to be stuck in the Bay Area, without a job, without a paddleboard, without a weekly in person service. Like many chaplains in the first weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was adrift and didn’t know where to turn to find thriving. I knew that it was times like these when we provide the most critical support to the most vulnerable, but it was hard to imagine innovative ways to make more meaningful connections to replace what was previously done in person.

Over the next three months, I grieved what was lost and helped others do the same, and God provided new paths to thriving. My transfer was not the only one affected. There was now a vacancy at a USCG training center 50 miles away. If I went there, I could make room in my office for my relief and ensure continuing care for the 1000 students and staff confined to the training center. Days when I worked from home, we went for walks and bike rides as a family. We spent more time on ZOOM calls reconnecting with friends from other parts of our journey. It was frustrating, and there was still no certainty about when I or my family would be allowed to complete our move to Japan. After 2 months, I was even able to find a friend of a friend who took me paddleboarding. It was hard to thrive in the first months of COVID because I was preparing for things to change in one direction, and they changed in another direction. But the God who led me to thrive for over three years didn’t abandon me for three months and won’t abandon me in future cycles of grief and loss.

Thriving as a Navy chaplain means regularly taking time to assess what's working and what's not. Thriving means resisting the desire for a "regular schedule" knowing that "regular" is a setting on the wash machine instead of a way of living with God and others. Thriving means apologizing to those you care about for not being around as much as you or they would like. Thriving means recognizing when a good thing is gone or is no longer good, being thankful for its presence, releasing it, and resisting the urge to fight to get it back. Thriving means taking what you get and making the best of it for as long as it helps you love God and serve others.



Chaplain Erik Neider was born and raised in the Midwest. He lived in the Northeast from 2000-2005 while he served in the Navy's Submarine Service. He attended Concordia Seminary St. Louis from 2005-2010, taking a one-year sabbatical in 2007 to deploy to Kuwait in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In the summer of 2010, Erik was called and ordained as Associate Pastor of Immanuel Ev. Lutheran Church and School in Crystal Lake, IL where he served 5 years. In the summer of 2015, Erik began service as a Chaplain in the Navy Reserve and began a yearlong residency as a hospital chaplain. In 2017 Erik returned to active service as a Navy Chaplain with the US Coast Guard in Northern California. Since July 2020 Erik and wife Joelle and their children Ben, Luke, and Ava have lived in Sasebo, Japan, where Erik serves as the Ship's Chaplain attending to the spiritual needs of Sailors and Marines aboard USS AMERICA LHA6.

The Peace of Wild Things: Forest Bathing in Lisle

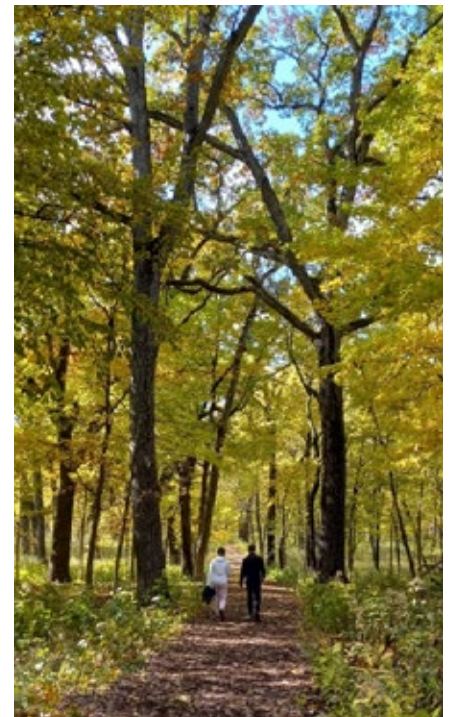
Dana CJ Schroeder

WE DECIDED TO JOIN the Morton Arboretum on an impulse, though we'd talked about it off and on for some time. My spouse Lynnette and I drive by it regularly in our comings and goings in the west suburbs of Chicago where we make our home. One weekend early this summer, we were driving home from the grocery store when Lynn said, "Sometime we ought to join the Arboretum." We were stopped at the light in front of the main entrance when she spoke. I smiled and turned on the right-hand turn signal. Half an hour later, we walked out of the visitor center, member numbers in hand, grinning and chuckling at our impulsive act.

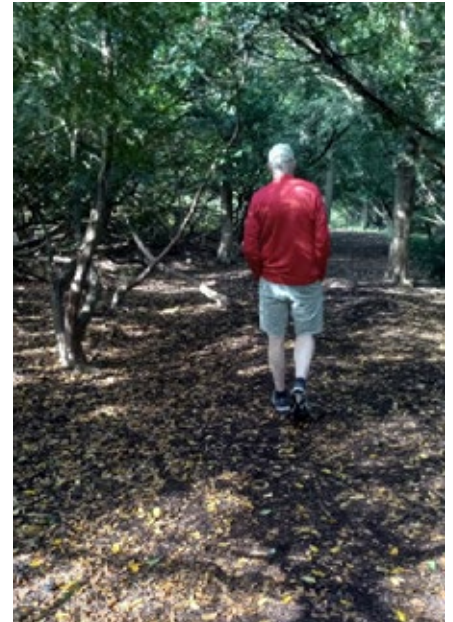
We live in an area characterized by freeways, shopping malls and now largely empty office buildings. The apartment we call home is comfortable enough, though there is always the sound of the city just outside our windows. Back in March of last year, when the world abruptly closed, and the freeways that surround our home became almost silent, we continued to walk most days in the large green space adjacent to our building. We've been walkers for some time, enjoying getting in some steps each day for exercise and mental health. We had no idea when we made the decision to join the Arboretum what a profound impact it would have on us, and how it would change our walking habits.

The Morton Arboretum in Lisle, Illinois, has hiking trails, roadways for driving and bicycling, a 4-acre interactive children's garden and a 1-acre maze and much more. But for us, the Morton Arboretum has become a place of refuge in the middle of the suburbs — it is a world apart.

A combination park and forest preserve, for us the Arboretum has been a place of weekly renewal as the pandemic has continued to impose its unique challenges. At least once, and sometimes twice each week, we make our way to the Arboretum. There we take one of the many roadways through the park to find that day's sanctuary. Indeed, one aptly named sculpture, "Basilica," has been a favorite place to begin. Depicting enormous tree/arms open wide in a gesture of welcome and embrace, the sculpture creates a connection between us and the environment. It is one piece in a larger outdoor installation scattered across the acreage, but is my favorite, serving as a point of entry into the larger forest, and into a time of restoration for body and soul.



There is a Japanese practice, *Shinrin-Yoku* or “forest bathing,” that has become a part of our weekly visits to the Morton. Though we are by no means true practitioners, we have been pleased to be able to give a name to the experience that has become so life-giving for us in recent months. To be surrounded, enveloped, indeed swallowed up by the forest, even for just a brief time, has proven to be a source of both delight and renewal. We do not hike. We are not trying to move fast. Ours is not an aerobic exercise. We meander, following whatever trail presents itself. We linger. We dawdle our way along, sometimes taking pictures, sometimes pausing to simply drink in the forest air. We speak. Sometimes we whisper.



We watch for wildlife, the occasional squirrel or fox. We have seen deer and rabbits. One particularly beautiful blue morning we spent the better part of an hour watching what appeared to be three red-tailed hawks — two adults and a youth — as they moved from tree to tree, soaring, circling, sometimes interacting with one another, sometimes harassed by smaller birds no doubt concerned about their presence in the area. Looking up through the canopy of trees, staring and speechless, the stresses and worries of the week seemed to be rinsed away.

One Sunday morning a few weeks back, we were literally “washed.” We had made our way to the trails early. It was a lovely fall dawn, though a bit humid. We were a good half a mile into the woods when we noticed that, in addition to the humidity, the wind had begun to pick up. Distant rumbles caused us to stop in our tracks. The smell of the forest changed in an instant, as the air pressure gave way and the scent of the earth — the smell that foretells rain — surrounded us. With another crack, the downpour began, coming in torrents, soaking us to the bone. It was breathtaking, chilling and glorious. Squeezing the rainwater from our clothes as we approached the car, laughing and in awe, we were two Lutherans remembering our baptisms — we were children of God — delighted, wet and truly refreshed!

As we have bathed in the forest’s sights, sounds and smells, there is always a sense of being washed — of being embraced, of finding rest. It is what the poet and naturalist Wendell Berry has called, “The Peace of Wild Things.”

The Peace of Wild Things by Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
And I wake in the night at the least sound
In fear of what my life and my children’s lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
Rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things
Who do not tax their lives with forethought
Of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
Waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Life during a pandemic, with its many changes and challenges, has made the natural world feel even more precious to me than it ever was before. Walking in the peace of wild things in Lisle, Illinois, has been an important part of how Lynn and I have found rest and renewal this year. We look forward, as the seasons change, to having ongoing forest baths there, and for the peace and rest that they will bring. May it be so.



Rev. Dana C. J. Schroeder, has been a Certified Educator and Staff Chaplain at Advocate Good Samaritan Hospital in Downers Grove, Illinois in the west suburbs of Chicago since the summer of 2015. He has been married to Lynnette since 1984 and they have two adult children, Christopher and Emily. Both Dana and Lynnette are ordained ELCA ministers of word and sacrament serving in ministries of chaplaincy. In their free time they explore Chicago and love the live music scene — especially jazz.

They also enjoy the outdoors, escaping to the country to hike and canoe whenever possible. And bathe in the Arboretum.

Bread for the Journey Comes with a Folding Soft Top

John Schumacher

WHEN MY SPOUSE AND I WERE YOUNG and newly married we had a brief affair with a Triumph Spitfire, a two-passenger British roadster. Though the car was fun to drive, it was notoriously unreliable. It broke our hearts and our wallets. So, after 10 months we sold it and found more reliable transportation to conclude my parish internship. However, we promised each other that someday — probably when we were middle-aged and middle-incomed — we would own another roadster.

That day came in May 1999. My spouse and I had moved to our “forever” home the previous year. We both had stable employment. My car was twelve years old, had seen 135,000 hard miles, and was in need of a long list of repairs and replacements. I was a hospice chaplain doing home visits and my work life was lived primarily in my car. In my mind it was time for the next roadster and in doing my research I learned the Mazda Miata is every bit as much fun as a British roadster and it is dependable. Even Consumer Reports gives it consistently high ratings.

My spouse was onboard with the purchase, and I had just about given myself permission to go car shopping when we received a phone call from my sister-in-law. My father was dying. It was time to return to the family home in Pennsylvania. In a period of two weeks my father died, I presided at his funeral, we returned home to Chicago, and we bought a 1996 Miata. My father’s death at a young 70 years old reminded me of that which I knew well from hospice, “Life is short. Eat dessert first.” The two-passenger, soft-top roadster became bread for the journey.

There is nothing in the world like driving an open car. The feel of sun and wind, the smells from road-side flowers and car exhaust and restaurants along the way, the change in temperature driving past a river or through a forest preserve and then back on to a sunbaked roadway — are so much more vivid in an open car. It created a space in which to decompress between patient visits. The fact our Miata was a standard transmission meant I couldn’t be distracted by pagers, cell phones, and other electronic leashes. The time between visits was time to focus on driving and what I needed. The soft-top roadster was bread for the journey.

The time between visits was time to focus on driving and what I needed. The soft-top roadster was bread for the journey.

The roadster was also bread for the agency I served. There was a sense of shared ownership. The first time the Miata was sitting in the office parking lot with its top down and the rain starting to fall, I heard an overhead page from a senior staff member whose window faced the lot. “John, it’s starting to rain, and your top is

down.” Not long after the Miata became my daily driver, I encountered the CEO as I returned from a day of visits. I was sun-burned and wind-blown, and she addressed me, with amusement and affection, as “our Malibu chaplain.” (She was also impressed that I was never once delayed in keeping a commitment because of car problems.)

The Miata was also, on occasion, bread for the journey with patients and families. One of my patients was a former Mazda employee who in the 1980’s participated in the development and execution of the concept which became the Miata.

As much as my curiosity about and passion for the car tempted me to make our visits about the car, I remained focused with him on his metastatic cancer, his approaching death, and his unresolved life issues. But then as a gift to us both, in one of our last visits before he was no longer able to communicate, he told me his story about the birth of the Miata. He offered me a unique insight into automotive history and at the same time celebrated his contribution to the history. Bread for the journey.

I was allowed an initial visit by a patient’s husband who wasn’t sure he wanted a chaplain visiting her. However, he was a “gear head” and when he saw the car I drove, he immediately went to his files of automotive memorabilia and pulled out the promotional materials distributed by Mazda at the 1990 Chicago Auto Show where the Miata was formally introduced to the world. I was now welcomed to visit his wife, the patient, but after I had completed my visit with her, he would invite me into the kitchen to drink coffee and talk cars — and then slowly, to begin to talk about his wife’s prolonged illness and impending death. The Miata gave us opportunity to share bread for the journey.

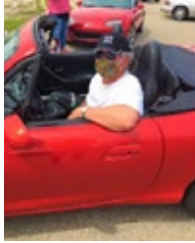
My spouse and I continue to enjoy our Miatas. For more than twenty years we have been active members of the local Miata owners’ club — one of the largest and most active in the United States. Post-retirement I served three years as the club president. The club and our car supply a sizable portion of our social life and offer a space in which my primary identity is not clergy person or hospice chaplain. The car club provides a community where people not only drive together, but they also gather for meals, service projects, holiday celebrations, weddings, and funerals. The club members share bread for the journey.

In March we bought our fourth — and probably final — Miata. It’s a Jet Black Pearl 2020 MX-5 GT with all the horsepower and safety features and confusing electronic accessories that you could possibly want. Yet, in many ways it is no different from our 1996. It offers the stress-reducing experience of an open car. It requires focus on the task on hand. It invites others to share vicariously in the experience, remembering roadsters they’ve owned or cars they dreamed about

The Miata was also, on occasion, bread for the journey with patients and families.

driving. It creates a community of car owners that begins with a shared passion for the car and grows to be a community of friends and fellow travelers on the road.

Sometimes, bread for the journey comes with a folding soft top.



John E. Schumacher, MDiv, BCC is happily retired, having served two parish calls and a call to Rainbow Hospice and Palliative Care, all in metropolitan Chicago. While at Rainbow, John created and managed a multi-disciplined Spiritual Care & Healing Arts staff. His reflections on hospice and end-of-life care have appeared in previous editions of this journal as well as in The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling, The Journal of Home Health Nursing, and Chicago Hospital News. In retirement he serves on the CPE Professional Advisory Group for Advocate Lutheran General Hospital and the Board of Directors for Bishop Anderson House at Rush University Medical Center and enjoys his Miata. Readers may contact him at jesjms@att.net

Yield, Stop, Go Forward

Tammy Devine

The following article was first published at <https://porticobenefits.org/livewell/yield-stop-go-forward> and is reprinted here. Copyright by Portico Benefit Services and republished with permission

For well over a year, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered the way we move through our days and, for some, paused our progress in life like a car stuck in traffic. As we continue cautiously forward, many of us may be looking for ways to strengthen ourselves financially, emotionally, or physically for the coming season and help to ease the pressure or expectation to return back to normal. During this in-between time, we have an opportunity to consider the patterns and behaviors we want to carry with us into the future and those we can leave behind.

This month's Small Step is a discernment tool brought to you by Deacon Tammy Devine: "It has been a year of yielding, stopping, and proceeding with caution. Waiting at a traffic light, I pondered its symbolism." Consider the following short reflection from Tammy.

YIELD

"As we approach a yellow light, we might be tempted to zip through and return to old behaviors, routines, and hectic schedules. Yet, the yellow light can become an opportunity to take inventory, to ponder what needs to stop, so you are prepared to re-engage when the light turns green."

"This yielding or pausing time allows us to review old ways of living. It invites us to live with intention. Consider those patterns, habits, or behaviors that may never have supported your well-being. Think about what you value, and review how life flows from those values. Do you make decisions based on your values? Where might your life be misaligned?"

STOP

"Now imagine the traffic light as it turns red. Name things that no longer serve you, the thoughts and behaviors that you desire to remove from your life. It might be hours sucked away by meetings or commutes that have robbed your forward movement. Name what is out of line, out of shape to the very core."

"Stepping forward to live a life that's better aligned emotionally, physically, and spiritually will require room to start a new pattern, habit, or behavior. For every new behavior, I have found it helpful and necessary to stop two others to make the room, energy, and time to dedicate and focus on a new green light behavior. Remember, change is difficult. Be gentle and patient with yourself as you let go of that which no longer serves you."

Now imagine the traffic light as it turns red. Name things that no longer serve you, the thoughts and behaviors that you desire to remove from your life.

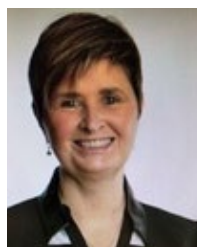
GO

“Here is what my yellow light time has illuminated for me: I need to stop eating or drinking after dinner. During the pandemic, I allowed myself to fall into and out of habits. Since our fitness room closed, my workout routine ceased. My evenings included a glass of wine, which led to a snack that resulted in weight gain and a weak, out of shape core.”

“Now I am back in the fitness room. My green-light practice is to reestablish Plank and Pray planking during my evening tv commercials. My red-light practice is to remove evening snacking, so, no eating and drinking after dinner.”

Small Step: Create Your Personal Traffic Light

Meditate on the image of a traffic light and identify where you're ready to yield, stop, and go forward in your life. First, use your yellow-light time to consider the many aspects of your well-being — including the financial, emotional, physical, and spiritual. Write down the red-light practices that you intend to stop. Then, write your new green-light practice down on a piece of paper and put it somewhere you'll be confronted with it as a daily reminder, like on your refrigerator, white board, or mirror. As the season changes and your light turns green, proceed forward, and welcome in the new behavior.



Deacon Tammy Devine serves as a coach, retreat facilitator and consultant through Devine Coaching. Devine collaborates with thought leaders to facilitate personal and communal growth toward living and leading well.

Tammy is a strategic and systemic whole-person promoter of well-being, through education and inspiration. She works with individuals, small groups, and organizations who are seeking to live and lead a healthier life/culture. Walking together, Devine accompanies others to take steps toward greater health and healing. Devine also serves as the ELCA Coaching Coordinator for Stewardship and Discipleship with ELCA Coaching Ministry. She provides support, equips, and empowers leaders through coaching so they can be reenergized for their ministry.

Devine is a registered nurse, (BA, Augustana University, Sioux Falls), has a master's in leadership from Luther Seminary. Is a ELCA Deacon, a parish nurse/coordinator, has completed the Grace Institute for Spiritual Formation and Coach training through Auburn Theological Seminary. Devine is both a Life Coach and End of Life coach and is ICF credentialed.

Comfort Food, Laughter and Reflection

Linqing Chu

IT IS DEFINITELY AN UNDERSTATEMENT to say most people look forward to a new year, let alone enter a new decade, to achieve some of their personal goals and resolutions knowing all the good things that life has to offer. Little did we know a global pandemic would greet us in 2020 and new ways of life signaled a departure from how we used to live and socialize. As we head into the holiday season this year, we are reminded of how far we have come from the past two years. Covid-19 is persistent, but we must be just as persistent, by turning to God.

When I first started my chaplain position a few months ago with Presbyterian Homes in St Paul, Minnesota, I had my husband buy the book *Quiet Times with God Devotional: 365 Daily Inspirations*, by Joyce Meyer. It served two purposes for me. It allowed me to share the author's thoughts with my residents with positive encouragement on a daily basis. More importantly, it keeps me motivated knowing it's a simple way to keep God in my heart throughout the work day. Devotions don't have to be long or time consuming. A simple scripture from Meyer's book and a few minutes of quiet time can bring tranquility to my heart as I serve the people. Covid brought many challenges to the workplace dynamics. Many places are struggling to keep employees and the inability to hire more workers exacerbates the stress put on the remaining employees. I cannot stress enough the importance for me of maintaining devotional time to keep me grounded and focused. Another point I like to emphasize is the importance of taking breaks throughout the day. Work can be hard and hectic but by simply taking a few minutes break I can calm my emotions down and allow time to be refilled with God's strength.

At the start of the pandemic, I was working at M Health Fairview Southdale Hospital in Edina, Minnesota. The general feelings among employees and patients were mixed but most had a sense of uncertainty. I remember one patient who specifically asked me, "Do you think this is the end of the world?" This was very shocking, yet interesting for me, and I gave her the only response I knew best. The Bible does not mention the exact date of the end of times. However, it does talk about there being war between nations and kingdoms, and natural disasters of all sorts. These are the Biblical signs that are given to us and only the Father knows when the time will be, not even the Son. Thus, it is understandable why this patient asked what she did. I could only imagine what a person born in the early 20th century would think when they have lived through both world wars, the

Work can be hard and hectic but by simply taking a few minutes break I can calm my emotions down and allow time to be refilled with God's strength.

Spanish Flu, the Great Depression, and the subsequent nuclear scare during the Cold War. According to the Bible, these are all eerily realistic signs of the end of times.

With uncertainty came panic and frustration among other emotions. At the start of the quarantine, Fairview immediately scrambled to limit the number of visitors for those patients who were dying. Could you imagine having to decide who can be at the bedside and who has to pray and grieve separately during a time when family connection is most cherished? This puts a lot of pressure and stress on the chaplains because we were the ones assigned to escort the family into the rooms. Oftentimes they directed their frustration at us. I was very grateful to have worked with our fellow chaplains who helped share the work. The first few months of quarantine from March to May during the transition period were very stressful, as I would imagine many other workplaces were as well. Nonetheless while back at home, my husband, Bing, was able to stay home from work and his presence helped alleviate some of the stress.

Could you imagine having to decide who can be at the bedside and who has to pray and grieve separately during a time when family connection is most cherished?

Comfort food, as many like to call it, helped me cope with the complex challenges after a long work day. Because my husband spent most of his time at home, he was able to spend more time looking up delicious recipes of different sorts. Typically, I love a good sushi meal. One day I came home to a pleasant surprise. He had made us sushi pizza! Essentially it was all the ingredients you would find in a typical sushi roll, except it was laid out flat like a pizza on a bed of white rice. Food can be such a big mood changer and that is no exception for me. After a long day's work, it was very refreshing to eat something I love to end a hardworking day and to find joy knowing what God has provided for me.

From time to time, I also had to write various reflections and essays and I always had my husband do a last-minute touch-up the previous night. I tend to think my English isn't too bad, but my husband might disagree on that. Okay, he doesn't really think it's terrible, but I do often write sentences in "chinglish," or so-called Chinese English. For many, unless you understand both languages, it is hard to comprehend the point. However, I am thankful for all the good laughs we've had around this because laughter can be a natural treatment to uplift the workplace stress or any sort of stress. Working with my husband also serves as an avenue for me to become a better writer now that I write and preach a whole lot more sermons as a full-time chaplain.

During this challenging season, there are a lot of benefits from reaching out for the support of my colleagues and mentors. I could not imagine myself becoming who I am today without the wisdom I gained from and the prayers I shared with my mentors. From friends to my supervisors, they each walked with me through this challenging season. Never be afraid of reaching out for help when you feel overwhelmed.

Last, I want to end with a promise in Isaiah 43:1–7:

¹*But now, this is what the Lord says—*

he who created you, Jacob,

he who formed you, Israel:

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

²*When you pass through the waters,*

I will be with you;

and when you pass through the rivers,

they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through the fire,

you will not be burned;

the flames will not set you ablaze.

³*For I am the Lord your God,*

the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;

I give Egypt for your ransom,

Cush and Seba in your stead.

⁴*Since you are precious and honored in my sight,*

and because I love you,

I will give people in exchange for you,

nations in exchange for your life.

⁵*Do not be afraid, for I am with you;*

I will bring your children from the east

and gather you from the west.

⁶*I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’*

and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’

Bring my sons from afar

and my daughters from the ends of the earth—

⁷*everyone who is called by my name,*

whom I created for my glory,

whom I formed and made.”



Linqing Chu was born in China and grew up in an atheist family. She found her faith in college. She graduated Luther Seminary, St Paul in 2019 and now serves at Presbyterian Homes and Services in St Paul as their campus pastor. Linqing and her husband married in 2019, they both love to travel. One of their biggest goals is to photograph all 50 state welcome signs (as of this moment they have 23)! They also have a one-year-old miniature schnauzer, Gracie, who is an energy machine and likes to use her voice! Linqing was ordained for word and sacrament ministry in the ELCA in November, 2021.

Navigating the Unknown through Faith

Cory A. Wieler

EBBS AND FLOWS FORECAST MY LIFE even now, fifteen years since I graduated seminary. Some of what I experienced then is still vibrant now. Some things have dissipated and others have come back to give me pause. One such reoccurrence is something I never thought I would see again—a pandemic.

No—I have never, until these past few years, been in a true pandemic. Certainly, there have been some, but none on the same global scale as Covid-19 and its variant forms. Nope. The pandemic I faced was theoretical. You see, I was given the assignment in seminary prior to becoming a full-fledged institutional chaplain, to write a paper about how I would practically handle a pandemic, specifically one like H1N1—as a chaplain.

Looking back to 2006, the year I wrote the paper, I was able to see my thoughts reemerge in the present as I went head-on, like many other healthcare workers—into the unknown. Truthfully, a lot seems like it is still unknown, and that is okay. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord.” (Isaiah 55:8)

To understand the will of God is to look to Jesus, but in the middle of all the unrest we endured this past year or more, it seemed as if it was easier to deflect into the uncertainty. The unknown is how we flew by the seats of our pants—and somehow, here we are again. We are facing variants and unknowns. Even with masks and vaccines, with distancing and quarantining, we still have many unknowns—and with unknowns come uncertainties and with uncertainties comes grief.

This is what many of us are seeing, in our parishes, in our homes, our workplaces, and permeating even those potentially once peaceful sanctuaries of life. Grief. PTSD. Apathy in some cases. Frustration. Anger. Depleted resources and low energy. All of these realities factor into the inability for most individuals to seemingly be positive when looking forward. Sadly this is becoming the new normal.

This is why you and I are so integral to the Kingdom of God, because we have been entrusted to remind one another of the story rooted in certainty, in truth, and one that has a positive, victorious ending to calm our grief and give hope in the face of such realities.

I know though, as one who has been in the trenches with many healthcare essential workers, having had Covid-19 myself and being around many others who have been infected, that the task of carrying God’s Word in such challenging times is not

Even with masks and vaccines, with distancing and quarantining, we still have many unknowns—and with unknowns come uncertainties and with uncertainties comes grief.

easy. Still, I have a call, within reason of course, to carry the Word of God to the ends of the earth—to all nations.

For me, I kept that call in mind throughout these trying months knowing in all things we are not alone. For, in the call to go into all nations, we are also told Jesus will be with us always. Knowing He is always present has helped me be present and to have the presence of mind that His presence has served to be my “bread for the journey.” I firmly know He has not deserted us, nor has the Father or the Holy Spirit. But, it takes faith and trust to hold unto such beliefs. Sometimes it helps to recall historical ebbs and flows and to build upon, examples that give you caution as well as encouragement.

Take, for example, the story of Father Damien who was a priest serving a colony of lepers in Hawaii. He said to the lepers that he would be “one who will be a father to you, and who loves you so much that he does not hesitate to become one of you; to live and die with you.” He also said, and this is telling of our current situation, “...I make myself a leper with the lepers to gain all to Jesus Christ.”

Jesus healed lepers, he cast out demons, made the lame to walk, the blind to see—even raised the dead. This is the same Jesus who says to us, “Do not be afraid. Just believe.” He also says, “Take courage—it is I—don’t be afraid.” In fact, Jesus brings peace—not fear. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

So I continue, hopefully with you my fellow pastors, chaplains, and other ministers, proclaiming Jesus—even in the midst of continuing health threats. Yes, this is something about which to be concerned, but fear need not grip us when we have Jesus. What may harm the body will never take the soul when it belongs to Christ and rests in the victory He won for those who believe.

As some of you may know, Father Damien did end up contracting leprosy, but he did not give up. No—not at all—he continued to serve the people of Molokai and bring Christ to them, and in turn the peace of God. He washed them in the waters of baptism and indeed worked to “gain all to Christ.” Likewise, the Church continues to proclaim Jesus Christ crucified, baptizing in the name of Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and bringing peace to calm the fears of His people.

As the potential is there for more Covid-19 variants to occur, for seasonal influenza to return, along with a mild resurgence of tuberculosis, it is imperative for us to profess Christ. It is also important for us to listen to the many stories of those facing challenges of life from various directions, beyond Covid-19 and its variants. Sometimes, we may forget that listening to those in need can help much more than any other balm for the soul. Think about how much our Lord listens to us in our times of struggle.

Knowing He is always present has helped me be present and to have the presence of mind that His presence has served to be my “bread for the journey.”

Again—the ebbs and flows of life. Sometimes we are in just as much need as those we serve, which is why we must not forget we also have each other—brothers and sisters in Christ. As I look forward with you, with Christ, and with the experience of the last nearly two years—I know while there may be heartache, there is still a lot of joy—especially when we celebrate our Lord and His gifts to us.

In 2006, I closed the paper I had written with these words and I do so again now:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.” (2 Cor. 1:1-7)

May we find strength in the certainty of God’s Word as we endure the ebbs and flows of life in this Covid reality. God be with us all.



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Bread for the Journey

How a church supports its EMS Chaplain

David E. Ficken

LUKE 9 *When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, ² and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. ³ He told them: “Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. ⁴ Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. ⁵ If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” ⁶ So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.*

WHEN JESUS SENT THE TWELVE OUT, and then the Seventy-Two in Luke 10, He equipped them for ministry with the power and authority to cure and heal. He left their physical care in the hands of the receiving communities. They were not to take provisions as they were to rely on the hospitality and welcome of those benefitting from the care of God through them.

Writing for *Caring Connections*, a publication in support of chaplains, and writing on the heels of clergy appreciation month, the goal of this article is talk about what that support from the church community looks like and how parish-based EMS chaplains may receive bread for their journey.

Before I was sent out to my first call, the seminary had not only emphasized care for the flock but also the missional aspect of the church under Christ’s Great Commission. I heard what pastors and congregations were doing in church plants by going door to door and getting to know local business leaders in the community. When Peace Officer Ministries held a conference on campus, my eyes were opened to the needs of the emergency services community. That was it — I could do this outreach through the Pastoral Office as a chaplain and make those very important connections with the community in which God has placed our congregation.

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Shortly after arriving at Beautiful Savior in Plover, Wisconsin, I found that another LCMS pastor was already serving as a Police Chaplain. I was approached to see if I would be interested as well. I did a few ride alongs and appreciated the opportunity to be welcomed into this community to serve them. Beautiful Savior was very supportive of this chaplaincy and they were happy to support their pastor in this role outside the four walls of the congregation. We didn’t

have any members in emergency services at the time but some worked in the medical field. They appreciated the desire to care for those serving the needy and sick in our community as well as tending to the emergency services personnel with all that they face on a daily basis.

Sharing the bread for the journey was and still is bringing an open, welcoming heart for the hurting. They knew, and still hold on to, the fact that the chaplain brings the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, to people who either need a reminder of His love and presence or to those who hunger but have not had the opportunity to encounter our Risen Savior.

The bread for the journey is the support from the congregation that makes my ministry possible. The prayers of the congregation are more focused on specific needs of the community. Their prayers are also focused on caring for the caregiver, making sure that their pastor is alright after tending to some very difficult situations (accidents, death, suicide, pastoral counseling). The congregation realizes that as their pastor/chaplain cares for the community in those situations, they are loving on and caring for their pastor/chaplain for the times when they will need the same care of Christ for those exact things they will face in life. The congregation knows that they are investing in their pastor who is the one sent by Christ to bring the Gospel to them and the world. Financial support of ministry makes sure the lights are turned on, the sound system works, live-streaming is broadcast, the lot is plowed, education materials are made available and there is gas in the tank to physically make the rounds that a pastor/chaplain does.

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The bread for the journey is quite literally the food and drink needed to physically sustain their chaplain during on calls. Often times, this care is extended as I “treat” someone I’m meeting to a coffee or a meal. It becomes an extension of the love of the congregation and is a blessing of fellowship in those moments. Thanking God for the congregation and His support through them is a reminder for them of how they are serving through their treasures, tithes and offerings.

Their support makes continuing education possible as well. In some cases, congregations allow their pastor the time needed for extended studies like CPE or DMin all because they recognize the benefits and blessings for them of a trained pastor and a qualified chaplain for the community. This cannot be overstated or under-appreciated!

Bread for the journey then becomes the emphasis on study of the Word such that a Biblically grounded approach to a theology of suffering is at the root of all interactions. The presence of the chaplain brings the love and comfort of Christ Jesus, crucified and risen, to people whose hope is wavering. The chaplain is not there with

a quick easy answer or pithy saying to instantly make things better but with the concrete reminder of the Father's love for whatever situation is at hand.

The church's support of the chaplain can come from the local congregation or the synod as a whole. She, the bride of Christ, is thankful for being fed and nourished by Christ and is excited to share that nourishment through support of the chaplain. In my case, the congregation has whole heartedly supported Police and Fire Chaplaincy. In others, it is a blessing to be able to call on a hospital chaplain to make calls that I might not be able to do in the moment. As one of my fellow chaplains has noted, people might not be coming to church like they have in the past. However, most likely, many will face a time of hospitalization or stay in a rehab or nursing facility sometime in their lives. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to meet these people in times of physical (and often spiritual) distress. The church knows this and supports the connection to Christ through the chaplains in those settings.

He blesses this chaplain through the church who herself has been fed by Christ.

Bread for the Journey. Daily I thank God for His Care and Countenance in this life. Not only does He care for me in all of my physical needs but He cares for my soul. He blesses this chaplain through the church who herself has been fed by Christ. She gathers together in the place God has provided to worship and glorify Him. He sustains her. She further is fed by the very Body and Blood of Christ which gives her the sure and certain hope of eternal life through the forgiveness of her sins and the mandate to reach out to others. The Chaplain serving in the VA, prison, hospital, emergency services, FBI, CIA, DNR, nursing home, hospice or business settings brings Christ Jesus too.

Do you know of chaplains serving in your area? Have you reached out to a chaplain at your local hospital to make a visit with someone you know that needs the loving touch of Christ? Has your church considered making more of an intentional relationship with that chaplain to support that ministry? Another example might be the churches that do intentional prison ministry. Not only do they support the ministry of the prison chaplain but they have trained individuals to help with visits to build relationships for the time when people are released into the community and need hands-on support for living. Are any of your members part of a population that could benefit from a chaplain? Do the veterans in your congregation have access to Word & Sacrament ministry on a regular basis at their VA? If not, might you seek to get this started through your district or synod?

We are blessed with great chaplains in this area and thank God for the support of the local congregations and Synod in the unique ministry setting where God has placed them. God uses chaplains like local parish pastors to bring the Word of God to people in need. It might be a word of correction or forgiveness but in doing so,

the world, supported by Christ and His church, gets to encounter the life-giving Son! Praise be to God for the bread for journey He grants to the chaplains of His church.



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 3 children and enjoys projects around their home and going to their children's events.

A Thousand Foot View

Christopher Otten

ON RARE OCCASIONS, I've had the joy of viewing the lay-of-the-land from the cockpit of an Air Force aircraft. Returning to Baltimore one morning after military exercises in Savannah, Georgia, the Loadmaster called me forward as the cargo plane flew over the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, which connects Annapolis to the outer eastern shore of Maryland. I drive over that bridge frequently. But viewing it from thousands of feet above gave me a different perspective.

In January 2019, I began as the Assistant to the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA for Federal Chaplaincies. In June of this year, my position was changed to include all ELCA Chaplaincies and Specialized Ministries. As the Ecclesiastical Endorser for Chaplains, I have the joy of a “thousand-foot view” of the chaplains.¹ My view may be very different than that of the chaplain in the field: at a hospital, hospice, senior retirement village, or in private practice as a counselor or a correctional chaplain.

To go back to the earlier metaphor, flying over the Chesapeake Bridge is one view. Driving it is another. From the air, one can see construction, cars that speed and weave through traffic, and identify traffic jams. While smartphone apps have minimized many of these challenges for drivers, they are readily viewed from the air as various dimensions of a total landscape.

What is the ELCA's Ecclesiastical Endorser's perspective on chaplaincy? What are the challenges ahead? How's the landscape? What follows is my attempt to answer those questions with three initial observations after sitting in the “cockpit” for only a short time, followed by a suggested course of action.

What are the challenges ahead? How's the landscape?

Community

The chaplaincy community is alive but fatigued. Rich relationships have been strained by a worldwide catastrophic pandemic. But even before the pandemic, the “community” of Lutheran chaplains was strained by two factors. The breakdown between the various Lutheran church bodies in North America has led to more isolated and insular communities. The formation of lifelong Lutheran relationships that used to begin in college has migrated to the seminary where one might get to know a cohort of friends. During COVID, even those relationships underwent a

¹ For the purpose of literary ease, this article and the observations of its author will use the term “Chaplain” for all ELCA Rostered Leaders who serve in institutional settings, excepting outdoor and campus ministry, to include those who serve in what was formerly ELCA MCPCE: Ministries of Chaplaincy, Pastoral Counseling and Clinical Education. MCPCE's are, by definition, Chaplains.

digital, distanced metamorphosis. So where do Chaplains connect, if not in college or seminary? Where can they form supportive relationships? Zoom? Facebook? Unlikely. Official, professional associations are vital.

Continuing education and collegial support

Formal opportunities for Lutheran Chaplains to meet as *colleagues* has been likewise restricted by COVID and by the breakdown of our official relationships since the ELCA's 2009 vote to be a fully inclusive church.

“Zion Conferences” where Lutheran Chaplains used to meet are a thing of the past. Beginning in Atlanta, the ELCA piggybacked its Federal Chaplains with larger churchwide gatherings: the Rostered Leaders Gatherings (RLG) and the Churchwide Assembly (CWA). This will continue with ELCA Chaplaincies. However, the ELCA is currently planning to limit its Churchwide Assembly to official delegates to follow public health distancing and masking safety protocols. It is unlikely that there will be a Chaplain Gathering which usually precedes that gathering, given the spike in COVID cases in the Rocky Mountain regions of the west. The next ELCA Chaplain gathering, beyond the CWA, will be the Rostered Ministers Gathering in Phoenix in 2023, which was postponed in 2020 and rescheduled for 2023. ELCA Chaplains may meet before that gathering in a special cohort, should they choose to attend. What is the greatest factor in choosing to attend?

“Breaking bread” is not organic and interpersonal through this technology. New networks, local and national, must be envisioned and birthed in order to meet this need.

Financing Assistance.

Chaplains' continuing education has long been dependent upon the institutional budgets where the chaplain serves. And, the national budgets of the synodical and churchwide judicatories have been streamlined. Often chaplains need to take vacation time and cover all their own expenses to attend a church sponsored event. Those CEU events are the place where chaplains have sharpened their skills, formed relationships, reconnected with their Lutheran identity, and experienced self-care and respite. Yet, many employers fail to value this investment through their operational budget. While new digital platforms have emerged, like the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab, the weakness of these technologies lies in their lack of face-to-face, flesh and blood relationships. “Breaking bread” is not organic and interpersonal through this technology. New networks, local and national, must be envisioned and birthed in order to meet this need.

In short, COVID has accentuated the weaknesses in our Lutheran networks for chaplaincy recruitment, formation, endorsement, and support. Community,

continuing education and collegial support, and financial assistance are needs that must be addressed with creativity. Long gone are the days when one unit of CPE could get a minister into a chaplaincy position. All chaplain modalities require at least 4 units of CPE as an entry point, plus Board Certification within the first two years of hire, plus annual sustainment of those credentials. As chaplaincy expands, and its value is recognized through care for patients and their families, and as fatigued healthcare workers are buoyed by their chaplains, so must the opportunities increase for chaplains to forge relationships, receive respite from a network of care, and attend funded collegial continuing education options. How might this happen?

If we are serious about following our Lord for the sake of the church and for the sake of the world, chaplaincy must be funded as a missional outreach like the ELCA Young Adults in Mission (ELCA-YGAM).

First, *raise awareness* of the need. While all chaplains are ministers, not all ministers can be chaplains. It takes a long-term vocational calling to acquire the CPE formation and requisite certifications to be a professional chaplain or to serve in a specialized setting such as pastoral counselling. While funds are raised for seminary costs, the expenses of professional associations, specialized training, and post-seminary professional cohorts need to be established. This should be a priority in the institutional budget where the chaplain serves but also synodical and churchwide budgets. If we are serious about following our Lord for the sake of the church and for the sake of the world, chaplaincy must be funded as a missional outreach like the ELCA Young Adults in Mission (ELCA-YGAM). With that life-impacting program, youth are funded locally, regionally, and nationally to represent our faith communities in mission.

Chaplains, for their part, must stay connected to their local church, synod bishop and assemblies, and to their national Ecclesiastical Endorser to strengthen that collaboration. As the saying goes in Federal Chaplaincy, “Unreported ministry is unfunded ministry.” Yet the vital work of many chaplains frequently goes unnoted and undetected. Donors give, and mission funding expands, when the story of effective ministry is shared. Many chaplains view themselves as independent operators, with salaries and benefits that are not borne by their faith community that endorsed and called them. Yet some synodical bishops see the value of their chaplains. They hear the impact and effectiveness of chaplaincy ministry. The partnership between worker, churches, bishop, and the churchwide network of chaplains must be highlighted and shared.

Second, a *national conference* of Lutheran chaplains should be reinvented. In this regard, the ELCA, the LCMS, and other Lutheran church bodies in America must view themselves as collegial partners instead of adversaries in this endeavor.

Do our differences matter? Of course. Yet, a national conference of Lutheran chaplains would provide a place for chaplains to support, sustain, and strengthen one another like a family reunion. All Lutherans are cousins. Perhaps we are not kissing cousins. But this chaplain knows that the Lutheran family, even if we are sometimes feuding cousins, can provide lovely and lifegiving relationships despite our significant differences. We must work together in the field of chaplaincy or fail to fill the need in this expanding mission field of care and compassion. Zion Conferences for chaplains may never return in the way they were for several decades. But something must take its place.

Last of all, *local networks must be nurtured*. If COVID has taught us anything, we've learned that we need each other. As rostered parish ministers have been restricted necessarily from local hospitals, prisons, and nursing homes, chaplains have not been limited in most cases. The pastor or chaplain who has been doing ministry alone has been doing ministry in its weakest way. We are stronger and better together, even though establishing and keeping those relationships will take some effort. Chaplains must extend their ministry beyond the walls of their institution even while local churches and synods reach towards them. Now is the time to join hands in partnership. Synodically called chaplains along with federal chaplains are encouraged to join in their local conference meetings and to make every effort to attend synod assemblies to network, share capabilities, build on one another's best practices, and tell stories of effective ministry. Ask to speak at your synod assembly on behalf of the Synod's chaplain outreach. The church needs chaplains! And chaplains need the church. This is an organic, symbiotic relationship that needs to be valued, made a priority, and strengthened. If synod assemblies can pause during votes and breaks to hear "mini-commercials" and updates from their camps, colleges, seminaries, and various other ministries, then synods who issue these calls need to also hear from their chaplains as an extension of their ministry.

During my career as a military chaplain, there were times when we were put through Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Exercises (CBRNE). During that training, we had to don special equipment, hunker down, and still do our jobs under the most restrictive and austere conditions. COVID-19 has been such an exercise! Our chaplains have been donning protective gear, staying-in-place, and continuing ministry in the worst of times during a global pandemic. But it's no practice "exercise." This is the real deal that confronts us.

Never in recent history have the sick, the elderly, the imprisoned, the first responders, medical professionals, and caregivers needed their chaplains more than now. Lutheran chaplains have risen to the occasion! Their care, listening ear, compassion, ingenuity, and resilience have simultaneously supported our

communities. This ministry accentuates the acute need for more support from and collaboration with other Lutheran colleagues to sustain these ministries.



Christopher Otten serves as the ELCA Endorser for Federal Chaplains and, as of June 2021, for all the chaplains, pastoral counselors and clinical educations under synodical calls in the ELCA. Chaplain Otten retired from the Air Force in February 2020 as the full-time support Chaplain for the 175th Wing of Maryland's Air National Guard, responsible for the spiritual welfare and morale of 1,500 personnel and their families. As a military chaplain, he has had numerous deployments and critical

assignments over the years.

He was ordained in 1995 after completing his BA in Philosophy at Nyack College, New York, and his MDiv at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. His Clinical Pastoral Education was at Laclede Groves (Webster Groves, MO) and his Internship at Bethany Lutheran Church (Alexandria, VA). He has served congregations as a Pastor, Assoc. Pastor, and Sr. Pastor in the DC/MD/VA area, as well as Wahiawa, Hawaii; Cleveland, Ohio; and McAllen, Texas.

Chaplain Otten, who grew up in Greensboro, NC, now lives in Baltimore, MD, with his teenage son, Elliott Samuel, and their Pomeranian dog, Augustus, as well as Rehoboth Beach, DE, with his partner, Timothy P. Credle, originally from Remsen, NY. He commutes into DC, where he works in the ELCA's Capitol Hill office.

Notes from our Readers

Response to last edition of *Caring Connections*: WOW. This was a symphony for ministry and living. It had the deep bass notes and brilliant high notes. The articles on music touched core issues of life and those on prison—that of bottles and bars touched core issues of life and the Gospel. The short pieces were nice interludes between the larger movements. Thanks.

Rev. David Wurster