VOLUME 19 2022 NUMBER 2

Lutheran Services in America
CHAPLAINS' NETWORK

Caring Connections

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

Sacred Sorrow, Healing Rites

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.

Lutheran Services in America (LSA) is one of the largest health care and human services networks in the country, representing 300 Lutheran nonprofit organizations. To donate electronically, access *lutheranservices.org* and use the DONATE button. You, as the donor, can then dedicate your gift for *Caring Connections* and make a gift electronically. All of us at *Caring Connections* appreciate your support.

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*.

Has your email address changed?

Please notify us of that change by re-subscribing at *lutheranservices.org/newsletters#cc*.

Credits: cover, istockphoto; pp43, 45, 46, Mark Whitsett

Editorial Office: Editor, *Caring Connections*, c/o Lutheran Services in America, 100 Maryland Ave., Suite 500, Washington, DC, 20002, or email Bruce Hartung at *hartungb@csl.edu* or Diane Greve at *dkgreve@gmail.com*.

Electronic Subscriptions: Please visit *lutheranservices.org/newsletters#cc* and click on "Click here to subscribe to the Caring Connections Journal" to receive automatic notification of new issues.

News, Announcements, Events: E-mail items to Christopher Otten at *christopher.otten@elca.org* or David Ficken *ESC@lcms.org*.

Contents

Editorial. 1
Diane Greve

Seeing the Face of the Deceased in Celebrations of Life for the "Nones" 4
Jacqueline Linden-Schade

The Mornings and Evenings of Mourning: Before and After Death 8
Beth Hoeltke

Natural Burial: Entrusting Our Bodies to God's Good Earth Opportunities for Pastoral Care 12
Kent J. Burreson

Loved to the Grave 16
Ryan Hochgrebe

One Person's Journey through Grief 19
Greta Bernhardt

Good Mourning: The Therapuetic Use of Ritual with Bereaved Kids and Their Families 22
A conversation with Vicki Scalzitti, interview by John Schumacher

Responding to Pregnancy and Infant Loss: A Framework for Ministry 28
Catherine Malotky and David Engelstad

African Americans and Grief 32
Russell Belisle

Grief and Mourning Among the Navajo (An Outsider's Perspective) 36
Timothy Norton

Reclaiming Breath 40
Jazzy Bostock

Weep with Those Who Weep: Sharing in Grief, Remembering and Rejoicing Among Those with Cognitive Disabilities 42
Mark D. Whitsett

In Memorial 47

Christus in Mundo Awardee 48

Call for Articles

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

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

2022.3 Nourishment for the Ministry Journey: Responses to "A Thousand Foot View" ***(Deadline for articles August 15, 2022)***

2022.4 Changing Face of Ethics in Healthcare Ministry ***(Deadline for articles November 15, 2022)***

Editorial

Diane Greve

IN THE CONTEXTS where chaplains, pastoral counselors and certified educators serve, we care for people in grief who are of many faiths and, increasingly, many with none. In addition to the various beliefs, we also need to consider the cultures of the individual and their families. And then if we are honest, there are different cultures and mourning rituals in rural North Dakota and in rural North Carolina or from New York City to Los Angeles. It is unrealistic to be competent in all of the practices of those diverse groups we encounter but we do want to be sensitive and open to their grief norms and the needs of various populations.

Of course, each person brings their own way of handling death. No two of us are alike. And each situation calls for its own approach. In our Lutheran traditions, All Saints Sunday is a helpful way to honor the dead within the context of community. Some churches will read the names, ring a bell, light a candle. Powerful ritual. In Mexico, Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) provides a time to remember the deceased family members. Across the world, symbols of water, fire, earth and air/breath are regularly used in remembering and honoring our loved ones. The rites of burial need to have integrity for the person being remembered, the family and friends, as well as the minister presiding.

Many people today are saying they don't want a funeral, a memorial service nor a celebration of life. "Don't bother. Just cremate me and throw me in the river." Personally, those comments make me very uneasy. I believe each person is a sacred embodiment of our Creator and is deserving of a proper recognition. In my years serving as a long-term care chaplain, I would often be asked to conduct services for people who had not been in church for decades, if ever. And yet their family wanted some type of ritual for closure. I was always honored to provide these services. One family did not want to take the cremains after the time of remembrance, "Would you just take them to the river? He liked the river." People process their grief in many different ways. And yes, I took them to the river.

The rites of burial need to have integrity for the person being remembered, the family and friends, as well as the minister presiding.

In this issue of *Caring Connections*, our ministry colleagues tell of their experiences and share their wisdom regarding grief and mourning from various perspectives. I am grateful to each of them for their willingness to do this. I hope you, the readers, will find yourselves pondering the ministry situations you have been in and how you might expand your thinking into the future.

I also want to thank **University Lutheran Church of Hope in Minneapolis** for their grant to cover the cost of the layout for this issue. This congregation is my worshipping community. In the past few years, we have remembered our members who have died. This takes place in a Sunday morning worship service soon after their death. The pastor begins the ritual by briefly telling their story and then, at the baptismal font, remembers their baptismal journey with a prayer from the funeral liturgy. Often members are not able to attend a funeral during the week and this allows the family and the congregation to recall God's baptismal promises together.

In this issue we also remember **Rev. Larry Holst** who died recently. Larry was a leader in chaplaincy and pastoral counseling. And we celebrate with **Rev. David Franzen** as he has received the Christus in Mundo award that was delayed in being given. Congratulations David!

This issue is filled with a rich variety of articles that may touch your hearts and expand your vision.

- **Jackie Schade** leads this issue with considering our ministry with those who are the "Nones." This is a situation that is increasingly common today.
- **Beth Hoeltke** makes the case for natural burial and personal preparation of the body after a death as a way to honor the person as well as the earth.
- **Kent Burreson,** a colleague of Beth's, follows up with a companion piece on natural burial practices.
- **Ryan Hochgrebe** remembers the death of his beloved wife and how he prepared her body for burial, reflecting on Jesus' death and burial.
- **Greta Bernhardt** experienced the pain of her father's death during the pandemic and needed to postpone his funeral. Yet, she was able to honor his wishes in the midst of her sorrow.
- **John Schumacher** interviewed **Vicki Scalzitti** as she told of a program, "Good Mourning," that helps children and families mourn the death of loved ones.
- **David Engelstad and Catherine Malotky,** a clergy couple, offer insight into the needs of those experiencing newborn and pregnancy loss. They write from their own experience with newborn loss.
- **Russell Belisle** addresses the many and varied losses of the Black community over the centuries and how Black people commonly grieve today.
- **Tim Norton** serves as a missionary pastor at Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church in Navajo, New Mexico. He reflects on the grief practices of the Navajo people, from an outsider's perspective.

- **Jazzy Bostock,** a kanaka maoli woman, tells of the particular death practices among her native Hawaiian family.
- **Mark Whitsett** developed various grief practices among the people at Cedar Lake with cognitive disabilities and invites us to expand our own assumptions.
- In Memorial
- Christus in Mundo Award Presentation

Seeing the Face of the Deceased in Celebrations of Life for the "Nones"

Jacqueline Linden-Schade

WHEN I WAS ASKED TO WRITE an article for this issue, it was suggested that I consider the following theoretical question from the perspective of a Lutheran chaplain: "Would you be willing to do a celebration of life for us without it being overly religious?" The origin of this theoretical question most likely would have come from someone who considers themselves a "None" and has a deceased family member. This theoretical question was an invitation to explore what ministry with "Nones" might look like.

My sense of chaplains is that you have a passion for supporting others during times of physical/emotional challenge. I believe chaplains are active listeners, self-aware, open to exploring their inner landscape, and flexible. Those very competencies are skills that are necessary when it comes to ministry with the religiously unaffiliated. One more competency may be needed, however, and that hinges on how comfortable you might be with the response, "It depends."

Who are the "Nones"

We live at a time when the number of the religiously unaffiliated is rising very quickly. Years ago, the late Phyllis Tickle published a couple of books about the emerging church. In them, she spoke about a kind of apple cart upset that takes place for society about every five hundred years. Precipitated by a technological discovery, traditional sources of authority are questioned. A re-ordering begins to take place, and eventually new authority emerges. Tickle's belief was that the date that would be associated with seeking new sources of authority was 9/11, and that the emerging church had emerged.

My sense is that while the church may have emerged, we have not sorted ourselves out. My limited experience tells me that we are still sorting out who we are as church. Phyllis Tickle described this process as the church's rummage sale. The present is a time of making difficult choices about what we will throw away and what we will keep.

What I notice in our post-modern world is the move towards authority resting with the individual. Perhaps people sense a greater freedom to say what they really think when it comes to organized religion.

What I notice in our post-modern world is the move towards authority resting with the individual.

If you have never officiated at a celebration of life for a "None," or even been asked, it is likely that you might be at some point in the future. The question you will want to ask yourself, if and when it happens, is whether or not you will choose to be involved. Your answer well might be, "It depends." It might require self-

understanding about what you will choose, what to keep and what you might need to throw away, in order to minister to any given person who considers themselves a "None."

According to Ryan P. Burge, author of the book, *The Nones,* there are three categories of "Nones." They are Atheists, Agnostics and Nothing in Particulars. Atheists do not believe in God or an afterlife. Agnostics are unsure whether there is a God; presumably they might also be unsure as to whether or not there is an afterlife. Nothings In Particulars are those who, when asked in a survey about their religious preferences, will shrug their shoulders and mark "nothing in particular."

In order to make that decision, you will need to have a conversation with the person who asked you to become involved in their loved one's celebration of life.

Another group, those who are "Spiritual but not religious" refers to those who have a connection to spirituality, but are not involved in organized religions. While not considered "Nones," it is a possibility that you might be asked to lead a service by people in this category. As if that were not complicated enough, there is diversity within the different statistical categories.

To Serve or Not to Serve

If asked to perform a celebration of life that is not overly religious, your consideration of the question might be, "It depends." In order to make that decision, you will need to have a conversation with the person who asked you to become involved in their loved one's celebration of life.

You might consider a couple of things. Was your chaplaincy relationship with the deceased or their family a close one? What does your inner sense of integrity tell you about the things that you are willing to set aside and what you cannot set aside? You might choose to be involved. Or, you might need to decline. If the second option is the case, refer the person who contacted you to someone else who could serve them with personal integrity.

My understanding of a celebration of life is that it comforts and supports people as they begin to grieve the loss of a loved one and it honors memory of one who has died. Understandings about the Holy will vary from situation to situation. At a time of loss, though, one thing is clear. A loved one has died, and people are suffering as a result. You have been asked to provide your services for those who grieve.

The grief will have its own particular shape. People are complex in the way that they embody life, joy, and emotional health. There will be sorrow at the loss of a loved one for many reasons. There may be an emptiness of losing someone who has been a solid example of what it means to love and support those around them. There are also people who have been so wounded by life that they will have hurt the people around them. The loss and grief may be complex. There is no one size fits all.

Seeing the Face of the One Who Has Died

My suggestion is that in memorials for the "Nones," you might want to consider the image of "seeing the face of the one who has died." Allow me to explain what I mean.

In my first call, I was sitting in the undertaker's hearse, waiting for the funeral director to attend to some details before heading out to the cemetery. The pall bearers were seated behind me. We were all very quiet. The man who had died was in his thirties, with a wife and children. I suspect that we were all feeling a little numb. Then, one of the men spoke up, "I sure wish I coulda seen ole Jaimie's face when she said that to him." There were low chuckles from the other men. I cannot recall what I had said to 'ole Jaimie' in my sermon. But he was a good guy. For a brief moment his spirit was with us, and we felt a little bit lighter.

In his book "Benedictus", the late John O'Donohue shares a blessing for those who grieve. He begins it by saying:

> When you lose someone you love,
> Your life becomes strange,
> The ground beneath you becomes fragile,
> Your thoughts make your eyes unsure;
> And some dead echo drags your voice down
> Where words have no confidence.

What does it mean to speak words of hope and comfort in any given situation? I think it means encouraging people to be real about what is going on for them when they have to say goodbye to a person who was both gift and grime. And it also means that some kind of redemption will need to be lifted up, even when that redemption comes through the individual perspectives of those who grieve. Those of us rooted in the Christian tradition might need to learn to talk about what redemption looks like in the here and now.

What does it mean to speak words of hope and comfort in any given situation?

Crafting a celebration of life gives us opportunities that help others to see the face of the deceased, acknowledge the brokenness in themselves and in the person that they lost and to begin to heal and, if necessary, to forgive their loved one and themselves.

Although this article has at its focus celebrations of life for the religiously unaffiliated, I would like to close by sharing how my own faith experience has helped me to form an opinion about whether or not I would ever lead a funeral service for "Nones."

The family system from which I emerged is one of very broken and wounded people. Most of my life has included healing through therapy, and in these last years of my life, through spiritual formation and contemplation.

There have been times when I have yelled at God, crying out, "Why did you send me to those people, God!" I had been sent to people who were children in aging bodies. I have had long stretches of my life where I felt incredibly alone.

During my Ignatian year, I participated in a contemplative practice that involved praying with the gospels and imagining where I might fit into the narrative. On the day I was to imagine Jesus being with me as a child, my four-year-old self elbowed her way in and sat down with Jesus on the ground. As I watched in astonishment words drifted across my mind. "I laid beside you in your crib when you were a child." I had a Kleenex moment then, knowing that God had been with me, even though I did not know God was present.

When caring for "Nones," it is important to meet and accept them where they are at just as God met me. At some level, their reality would need to be my reality when it comes to planning a celebration of life. On the other hand, I do believe with every fiber of my being that God unconditionally loves each and every person that God has created and that God is present on their journey of life. My deeply held convictions would provide me with the motivation to be available to anyone who is religiously unaffiliated and who asks for my support at the time of a loss.

Rev. Dr. Jackie Linden-Schade was born in Jamaica, NY, and raised in Seaford, Long Island, just outside of New York City. A graduate of the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, she has served as pastor of churches in Nebraska and Illinois, and as an assistant to the Bishop of the Central/Southern Illinois Synod, ELCA. She currently serves on the Ministry Team of Preston Meadow Lutheran Church in Plano, Texas as the minister of congregational care. Jackie is also a trained spiritual director.

The Mornings and Evenings of Mourning: Before and After Death

Beth Hoeltke

The Art of Christian Dying

Some will claim that there is no beauty in death. You will hear that death is only evil and something to withdraw from. But this article helps us understand and see that when we actively participate in death, especially the death of a loved one, such participation can bring comfort and peace even in the midst of death, thereby, lessening the mourning and grief, before and after death. This article coincides with the one from my colleague and friend Dr. Kent Burreson, whose article, *Natural Burial: Entrusting our Bodies to God's Good Earth,* is also found in the issue. Dr. Burreson will help us envision natural burial practices from a Christian perspective.

When we as Christians care for the dying, we express our belief in Christ's death and in his resurrection. Caring for our dead helps us to honor the body of the dead and to see dying as the image of God. In this way, we are not fighting death, although death was not a part of God's original plan, but by participating in it, it proclaims Christ's victory over death.

Let us step back a moment and take a deeper view into what we mean. First, I suggest we begin to see the process of dying as a reality of living. Today our culture, and the church to some degree, close our eyes to death. We hide it behind closed doors, be it the doors of a funeral home, a hospital, or the doors of a nursing home. If we do not have to physically see death, we need not deal with death. But this denial does not stop death or help us to mourn or grieve fully.

Mourning is a reality of any death, but when we participate in the act of death, we participate in and proclaim the life that is yet to be: the resurrection of our own physical body. How can we do this? We do this when we participate in the dying process by choosing hospice or palliative care at home rather than in a hospital or nursing home. When we make these choices, we actively participate in the art of Christian dying. But I want to be very clear, hospice or palliative care are demanding work, and they can be extremely emotional, but what you take with you after death has occurred is truly a beautiful gift of love. As noted, choosing the way of palliative or hospice care is not the easy road or the easier choice, but we have come to learn that the long-term benefits to you, the caregiver, and the one who is dying far outweigh the pain and exhaustion that can occur. Consider seeing hospice and/or palliative care as compassionate comfort care.

Mourning is a reality of any death, but when we participate in the act of death, we participate in and proclaim the life that is yet to be: the resurrection of our own physical body.

After this care has ended and death presents itself, there is still much love and care to be shared with our loved one's body.

After Death Care

After death care is nothing new. It has been around for hundreds of years, but in the last 150 years or so, when we set death aside for others to deal with, we also set aside the care of our loved one after death has occurred. Rather than calling a funeral home to "take" the body, we'd like you to consider washing, anointing, and casketing or shrouding the body yourself, with loved ones to assist you. Consider not embalming the body, or your own body for that matter, after death. Embalming, as in many other decisions of caring for our dead today, is just something we do. But embalming itself is NOT required by any state in the United States. In reality, embalming is truly an invasion and detriment to the body, which has been given to us by God and there is hardly ever a good reason to embalm. Even state restrictions are starting to be relaxed and in only a few states is one required to embalm a body in order to cross state lines. Today, airlines have also changed restrictions requiring embalming in order to transport a body. But should you choose to use a funeral home the chances are extremely high that they will require the service of embalming. Remember this is a service they offer and if you use their services, they have a right to require it of you.

Rather than calling a funeral home to "take" the body, we'd like you to consider washing, anointing, and casketing or shrouding the body yourself, with loved ones to assist you.

There are many options to embalming which include keeping the body cold with dry ice, ice packs, etc. or stored in appropriate refrigeration for a long time after death has occurred. Should you choose not to use a funeral home and instead hold a visitation prior to the funeral in your home or church, this too can be accomplished by simply keeping the body cool/cold. Typically, you have up to three days, but if all the arrangements cannot be accomplished in a day or two after death, consider rental time at a hospital or funeral home to keep the body cool.

When a funeral home prepares a body, as noted, they usually will require embalming. In addition, they wash the body using a disinfectant solution, which is of course not necessary. In most cases, the body needs only to be simply washed with water and a mild soap. The simple purpose is to help alleviate some of the sights and odors that typically occur following death. This provides an opportunity to participate in caring for your loved one and washing the body becomes a gift of love. This could simply be a spouse, family members, or loved ones. If planning a vigil or wake, washing the body is a beautiful way to honor our loved one's body. It also becomes our final opportunity to come into physical contact with the body. Caring for a loved one's body after death engages not only our heart and mind, but it engages our being with the other in a way that facilitates the grieving process.

After death care offers us many ways to physically engage with the dead. Although many of us have anointed the sick, here we would like you to consider anointing the body for its burial. "And while he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment, pure nard, very costly, and she broke it and poured it over his head... What she came to understand, she has done, she has anointed my body for burial" (Mark 14:3, 8). Anointing a body can also be a beautiful act in caring for our dead. A dear friend of mine did this upon the death of his wife and found such a wonderful emotional connection in anointing her body. This may provide a time of prayer or song and in a beautiful sense a way to return our loved one back to God our Creator.

Today, most people do not even recognize many of these practices as options in which one is able to participate in caring for our dead.

Today, most people do not even recognize many of these practices as options in which one is able to participate in caring for our dead. But now there is more research showing how when one participates in the caring of the body both before and after death, the pain of death is tended to in a unique way. The mourning and/or grief is strengthened in hope and the promise of that resurrected body to come. Although at first glance it may be difficult to consider, it may become a beautiful gift to not only the loved one you have cared for but also to yourself. Caring for our dead can look similar to the way we cared for them prior to baptism. Here we washed, dressed, and wrapped them to present them to God as a way of returning them to their Creator.

Wrapping or Casketing the Body

In addition to caring for the body, you might consider participating in wrapping or casketing the body for burial. With natural burial you will need to choose a casket/coffin[1] that is non-toxic and biodegradable. An option most don't consider, but a wonderful option, is a beautiful shroud or death blanket. Material or fabric options must be of natural fibers such as wool, silk, hemp, or cotton. This can be a beautiful way to display the body for wakes or for placing directly in the coffin or casket. If choosing this option, consider buying a shroud that includes a built-in carrying board for ease of transportation. Esmerelda Kent with Kinkaraco.com provides lots of options for beautiful handmade shrouds.[2] This is the option I have chosen, to have my body shrouded then transported by way of a horse drawn carriage.

Burying the Body

A final way to participate in caring for the body includes burying the body. Most cemeteries provide this option but understand it takes a lot of manual labor to

[1] For more information on casket and coffin options see Dr. Burreson's essay.

[2] See Kinkaraco® Green Funeral Products for more information of shroud options.

accomplish this task. Some cemeteries offering natural burial allow families to participate in every aspect of the process from digging the grave, transporting the body, lowering the body into the grave and filling the grave for final closure. Consider having shovels available for all to participate in physically filling the grave. Although this last step, shoveling the dirt into the grave might be one of the most difficult, it might also prove to be the most healing act in which you participate. This is the final act of honoring your loved ones. Although the sound of the dirt hitting the body or casket can be haunting, as it is the sound of finality, it is the sound of death. Allow yourself to mourn but do so remembering and trusting in the resurrection of the body. Death is not the end. Death cannot, does not win! Jesus does! This is the promise we hold on to.

Should you choose any or all these options and are not sure where to start, consider hiring someone known as a home funeral guide, a death doula, or death midwife, although today very few come with Christian understanding. Yet, their role is to empower the family, to guide, support and provide knowledge through the death process. They have no desire, unlike the traditional funeral director, to direct and control the funeral process.

People who have participated in some, or all, of these natural burial practices have found that it provides them with a more loving and personal experience which may even help them in and through the mourning and grieving process. In this sense it is a healthier experience because we are acknowledging a death has occurred and we celebrate the body's return to God while awaiting the resurrection of the body. Resurgam!! I will rise again!! Amen!

Dr. Beth Hoeltke is director of the Graduate School at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, where she serves to advise and supervise its students, oversee the components of graduate education, and promote academic quality and integrity. She has served in this role since 2016.

After earning a bachelor's degree in Industrial Technology and a master's degree in Education from the University of Wisconsin-Stout, in Menomonie, Wisconsin. Hoeltke earned a master's degree in Systemic Theology and a Ph.D. in Doctrinal Theology from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

Hoeltke's areas of special interest include natural burial options for Christians, a biblical connection between food and theology, understanding the role of women in the church from a biblical perspective, theology and ethics with a focus in environmental and ecological issues, and hymnody in worship. Additionally, she pursues research, writing and public speaking on the theology of creation and its intersection in daily life and communal practice.

Before joining Concordia Seminary, Hoeltke worked as a secondary and post-secondary education teacher, as well as in the semiconductor test equipment and printing industries. In addition to her role at the Seminary, Hoeltke also serves as an adjunct professor at Jefferson Community College in Hillsboro, Missouri.

Natural Burial: Entrusting Our Bodies to God's Good Earth

Opportunities for Pastoral Care

Kent J. Burreson

NATURAL BURIAL, OFTEN REFERRED TO AS GREEN BURIAL in the environmentally focused literature, may be a new concept to readers of this journal. Even for those who may be familiar with the practices of natural burial, my hope is to introduce all to natural burial and the significant opportunities for pastoral care that arise in shepherding someone through considering natural burial. This article partners with my colleague Dr. Beth Hoeltke's article in this issue, "The Mornings and Evenings of Mourning: Before and After Death," expanding the notion of natural burial beyond the immediate concern for burying the dead to the entire process of preparing for death in pastorally responsible ways.

First things first. So, what is Natural Burial?[1] It is a way of caring for the dead that entails the least possible environmental impact. It is the act of returning the body to the earth in a manner that does not inhibit decomposition. Unlike modern (since the 1850's) burial practices, it is not a new idea. Natural burial has been practiced for millennia and is still the most practiced way of burial throughout the world. Here are the four primary aspects that define natural burial:

- Rejecting the practice of embalming
- Burying directly in the earth without vaults or liners
- Burying solely in biodegradable containers
- Burying in natural burial grounds that promote healthy ecological practices

As we will see, these practices can be arranged on a spectrum so that people can engage in natural burial in ways with which they are comfortable. At the origin point of that spectrum would be the first practice above, the rejection of embalming. The spectrum would flow from there through the other practices listed as well as additional practices of caring for the dying and the dead which Dr. Hoeltke will outline in her article.

These practices can be arranged on a spectrum so that people can engage in natural burial in ways with which they are comfortable.

Rejecting the Practice of Embalming

All the practices that constitute natural burial provide ways to honor the bodies of the dead in accord with the biblical narrative. God creates each person with a

[1] Dr. Hoeltke and I prefer the term natural burial to green burial because it connects with the scriptural narrative of God's creation of the human body as part of the natural, good creation God willed into existence. While certainly the term green burial can be used and is appropriate, it places the primacy on environmental concerns as opposed to the biblical narrative.

wonderfully crafted, beautiful, and good body (Genesis 1:26–31). God's gift of an embodied life is to be treasured. Embalming—as a very intrusive practice—fails to honor the body in this way. And embalming is rarely necessary and not legally required in any of the United States. Using time-honored and significantly less-intrusive ways to cool the human body (dry ice, gel ice packs, Techni-ice, and refrigeration) until interment are much more pastorally appropriate ways to care for the dead bodies of the baptized.

Burial in a Biodegradable Container

The spectrum of practices expands beyond embalming into the use of only biodegradable containers for the interment of the body. These containers include both soft substances—wood, bamboo, cardboard, and fabrics—cotton and silk shrouds. These containers must have a net-zero environmental impact: completely biodegradable and contributing no harmful substances or toxins to the environment. Current burial practices place tons of fabricated hardwoods and metals through elaborate caskets into the ground. Simple softwood caskets or linen/silk shrouds focus attention on the Creator's wondrous gift of the human body and the promise of the resurrection of the dead in the rule and reign of God in Christ. These burial containers include cardboard coffins decorated by the grieving—a very cathartic act—especially for children mourning the death of a loved one. They include woven fiber caskets and hand-crafted pine boxes, often prepared by a carpenter with a connection to the deceased. Beautiful silk or cotton shrouds[2] can be purchased, but they could also be made by a family seamstress out of quilts or other fabrics that hold a special memory for the deceased and their loved ones. All of these provide avenues for pastoral care that immerse the grieving in remembrance and memory and in the promises of God.

These burial containers include cardboard coffins decorated by the grieving—a very cathartic act—especially for children mourning the death of a loved one.

Interment Directly in the Ground

The third primary practice in the spectrum of natural burial is that we place coffin/casket or shroud bearing the deceased's body directly into the ground without the use of any concrete (or metal) vaults or grave liners. Grave liners cover only the sides and top of the casket. Vaults cover the casket on all sides. As a result, in our modern way of death we introduce more than 1.6 million tons of concrete into soil in the United States each year. Interment directly in the ground honors the body as the vessel of God that "is sown perishable" (1 Corinthians 15:42) but will be raised imperishable. Christians should not conceive of the body as something that is to be preserved (which is impossible in any case). God will transform our lowly bodies to be like his Son's body. As the funeral liturgy reminds us, we are dust and to dust

[2] For more information on fabric shrouds see Dr. Hoeltke's essay.

we shall return and as Paul concurs, "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:49). Placement of the body in its biodegradable burial container directly into the ground affirms this Christian confession. We entrust our bodies into the hands of the Creator so that God can in Christ refashion them into the spiritual bodies he desires to craft for the new heaven and the new earth. It reflects that we humans are made from the earth, returned to the earth at death, and will be recreated from the earth when God culminates his reign.

We entrust our bodies into the hands of the Creator so that God can in Christ refashion them into the spiritual bodies he desires to craft for the new heaven and the new earth.

Burial in Natural Burial Grounds

The final linchpin of natural burial practices is burial in cemeteries that promote the ecologically healthy practices of natural burial. Modern cemeteries are lawnscaped cemeteries. They are meticulously planned and manicured, like professionally sculpted golf courses. They are often very sterile and disconnected from the chaotic beauty of nature itself. And they promote the development of practices, such as embalming and the use of vaults and liners, which abuse the earth.

Challenging the predominant notions of the lawnscaped cemetery, the natural/green burial cemetery appeared, first in the United States at Ramsey Creek Preserve (www.memorialecosystems.com) in Westminster, South Carolina in 1996. Established by Dr. Billy and Kimberley Campbell, Ramsey Creek continues to be a leader in the natural burial movement, now counting over 300 natural burial cemeteries and grounds throughout the United States.

So, what constitutes a natural burial cemetery as opposed to a lawnscaped cemetery? Natural burial cemeteries and grounds include these things:

- Natural environment for burial consistent with historic land contours and usage in that context (i.e., woodland terrains remain woodland terrains, prairie terrains remain prairie terrains)
- Forego toxic embalming
- Eliminate vaults
- Choose biodegradable containers, caskets, shrouds, and urns
- Discontinue herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers
- Encourage sustainable management practices
- Often use natural stone markers and GPS capabilities to mark grave sites
- Often support land conservation efforts

All natural burial cemeteries fit the first six criteria above. While the number of natural burial cemeteries throughout the country is relatively small, they are growing in number. A non-profit agency that can be of help in locating a natural burial cemetery is the Green Burial Council (GBC, www.greenburialcouncil.org). Their

mission is "to inspire and advocate for environmentally sustainable, natural death care through education and certification" and their vision is "to ensure universal access to information and environmentally sustainable death care."[3]

Not all green burial cemeteries are certified by the Green Burial Council (for example, Ramsey Creek Preserve in South Carolina is not GBC certified), and so are not on their website, however, the majority of natural burial cemeteries are certified by the GBC. The GBC classifies natural burial cemeteries by three categories: Hybrid Cemetery, Natural Burial Ground, and Conservation Burial Ground. The following definitions come from the GBC website. A Hybrid cemetery is: "A conventional cemetery that offers the essential aspects of natural burial, either throughout the cemetery or in a designated section. GBC certified hybrids do not require vaults and must allow for any eco-friendly, biodegradable burial containers, such as shrouds and soft wood caskets." A Natural Burial Ground is: "A cemetery dedicated in full to sustainable practices/protocols that conserve energy, minimize waste, and do not allow the use of toxic chemicals, any part of a vault (lid, slab, or partitioned liner), markers made of non-native stone, and burial containers not made from natural/plant derived materials."

Finally, a Conservation Burial Ground is: "A type of natural cemetery that is established in partnership with a conservation organization and includes a conservation management plan that upholds best practices and provides perpetual protection of the land according to a conservation easement or deed restriction."[4] Interment at any of these natural burial grounds would entail considerable progress through the practices of natural burial. In terms of pastoral care, burial in a natural burial ground allows the deceased and Christian community to honor God's good creation as a gift and to confess God as the wondrous Creator of all things.

Awareness of the shape of natural burial and its spectrum of practices allows the chaplain and pastoral care counselor to guide the dying, their loved ones, and the Christian community into a way of dying and burial that best comports with the Christian story and with the confession of the faith of the baptized dead.

The Reverend Dr. Kent J. Burreson is Louis A. Fincke and Anna B. Shine Professor of Systematic Theology at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. A doctoral graduate in liturgical studies from the University of Notre Dame, he teaches courses in systematic theology and liturgy. His interest in natural burial developed, in conversation with his colleague Dr. Beth Hoeltke, as a response to the American way of death. Prior to his call to Concordia Seminary, he served as a pastor in Mishawaka, Indiana. He lives in Saint Peters, Missouri, with his wife, Cindy. They are the proud parents of two adult daughters.

[3] Green Burial Council, www.greenburialcouncil.org/our_mission.html.

[4] Green Burial Council, www.greenburialcouncil.org/our_standards.html.

Loved to the Grave

Ryan Hochgrebe

THERE'S A MONSTER OUT THERE that far too many of us have encountered. It breaks into our lives, wreaking havoc in every corner. Then when it gets a strong enough grip, it begins to slowly steal things from us. We lose our health, our confidence, our plans, our dreams, our hair, our strength, our abilities, and, yes, in time it may even take our life or the life of our loved one.

In November 2018 our family found ourselves face-to-face with this monster when my wife, Robin, was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer. Our grief as a family started then and there, and it has become, sadly, a part of our family since. Over the course of the next three years, we watched as the ill effects of treatment and cancer tormented my wife. Physically, she had rashes, coughs, and various levels of fatigue that impacted daily life. Beyond that her sleep patterns were constantly changing and anxiety became ever present.

Yet, when Jesus stands by your side there is always hope. We enjoyed some good days and even months, but the cancer soon spread to her lungs, her retina, and eventually it spread to her brain. We kept praying, and we kept waiting for our Almighty and Merciful God to say yes to our plea for healing. But our Lord had different plans.

In October of 2021, Robin entered home hospice care, and by mid-November the little losses continued to pile up. She lost her ability to think clearly, to read, to write, to walk on her own, and eventually she was bed ridden and unable to even talk. The grief was great as we began preparing for her death. To be honest, I thought I was ready. I had "gotten our affairs in order," I had prepped our two children, and we had a good support system around us. But the deepest hurt was still to come.

On Monday, January 10, 2022, my dear wife Robin took her last breath and transitioned from life on earth to life in heaven. It was a rather peaceful moment with Carmen, sitting on the bed with her mom, and myself on the other side, kneeling on the floor next to the bed. Yet we also were met with an overwhelming sadness, hurt, and a heaviness that cannot be described, although many know it.

We kept praying, and we kept waiting for our Almighty and Merciful God to say yes to our plea for healing. But our Lord had different plans.

While tears ran down our cheeks, I wondered how we would get through the next few days and months. Yet I was certain of the care of our Lord in and through all of this. I remain so proud of both of my girls (Carmen, 21/ Heidi, 7) because the task of caring for a parent (or wife) in their dying days is no simple or worldly thing. It requires respect and humility, but it also has eternal significance too: Jesus entrusted the three of us to usher Robin into her heavenly dwelling until the day of our Lord's

return and the resurrection of all flesh. I saw Jesus in my girls as they hugged their mom, administered medicines when she hurt, prayed with her, spoke tenderly to her, laughed with her, wept over her, cleaned her, and fed her.

After Robin passed, the hospice nurse gave me the time and space to prepare Robin's body for burial. I took this time to wash her body and hair, doing so with my tears at times. So many memories and thoughts stirred in my mind, including the story of the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears (Luke 7:38). I believe that I felt some of that same brokenness in those moments.

With the nurses' help, I then put some clean and beloved clothes on Robin's body. Trembling, I anointed both her head and heart with a fragrant anointing oil as I spoke these words: "May God the Father, who created this body; may God the Son, who by His blood redeemed this body; may God the Holy Spirit, who by Holy Baptism sanctified this body to be His temple, keep these remains to the day of the resurrection of all flesh." Then Carmen and I wrapped Robin's body in a freshly cleaned white sheet.

"May God the Father, who created this body; may God the Son, who by His blood redeemed this body; may God the Holy Spirit, who by Holy Baptism sanctified this body to be His temple, keep these remains to the day of the resurrection of all flesh."

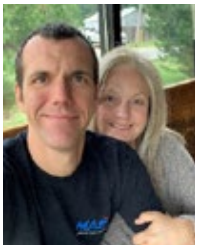
Why did I do all this and why do I share this with you? Let me offer you two reasons. First, it was an intensely emotional and spiritual gift to me. This is the woman I vowed to have and to hold, in sickness and in health, until death do us part. I hate that death came so soon, but by the grace of God I was able to fulfill that vow. I needed those last moments to care for the woman I so dearly love, the one that God saw fit to bring me together with in the oneness of marriage. It was good for my soul, it was rich for my faith, and it was a calling from the Lord who says, "love one another" (John 13:34). Secondly, I share this with you because I truly believe what I confess (as the Scriptures confess). Our bodies are beautiful gifts from God as He knit each of us together in our mother's womb. They should be cherished, cared for, used for God-honoring purposes throughout life, and respected even into the grave.

So, I treated Robin's body the way Jesus' body was treated. "After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews" (John 19:38-40).

As I walked through these burial preparations and wept, there was something surreal that while I cared for Robin's body in some way, shape, or form, I was caring for Jesus' crucified body as well. I wept over His death as I wept over hers. The beauty in this connection is that three days after Jesus' was buried, He rose in the flesh from

the grave. I confess and believe one day Jesus will raise Robin, in the flesh, from her grave and she, too, will be able to take her burial clothes, fold them up, and leave her grave never to enter again (John 20:7). While Robin's body has since been put in the ground and will return to dust, the Lord's resurrection gives us certainty of a future that we will see Robin in the flesh again. Yes, incredible hope remains. It's what Robin and I confessed throughout this journey and I continue to confess as long as there is breath in my lungs. Yes, with the church, we believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. The monster has devastated our lives with grief but it cannot steal our hope.

May the Lord give you hope as you mourn and serve those who mourn.



Pastor Ryan Hochgrebe was born and raised in St. Louis, MO. A graduate of University of Missouri-Columbia (2007) and Concordia Seminary-St. Louis (2012). He has been a parish pastor since 2013, first serving as sole pastor at Mt. Olive Lutheran Church in Folsom, CA., and currently serving as minister of children & youth/associate pastor at Timothy Lutheran Church and School in Blue Springs, MO. Hochgrebe's special interests include discipleship and spiritual growth. Ryan and Robin married in 2013 prior to moving to California. Robin passed in January 2022. They have 2 daughters, Carmen and Heidi.

One Person's Journey through Grief

Greta Bernhardt

MANY PEOPLE HAVE AT LEAST ONE PERSON in their daily lives that they count on for love, advice, or validation. With that one person, no matter what is going on in your world, you cannot wait to share thoughts, ask for expert advice, or go to for comfort on a bad day. It seldom enters your mind that one day your "person" will leave this earth for heaven, and you will be alone.

My father was my "person." Our Lord Jesus called my father to heaven on February 18, 2021.

It has been a journey with many adventures this past year without my "person." My father died in the midst of COVID-19 restrictions. Many years ago, when his health began to fail, he had written instructions to his family and pastor regarding his wishes for a church funeral followed by a military burial. His wishes were to have many people in church singing hymns which he carefully selected with the instruction to make sure they sing every verse as "good Lutherans do." Our state restricted church attendance to a maximum of twenty-five people. His wishes were for his nephew to play the trumpet in church and at the cemetery. COVID restrictions said no.

We decided to wait out the COVID restrictions, but my fear was that it would be too long since my father's death and people would be over their grief and not want to come. Finally in April 2021, just in time for Easter, restrictions changed to allow seventy-five people in church and allowed singing hymns again. Alleluia! The memorial service was well attended by friends and family with singing and the trumpet blaring during his beloved hymn, "For All the Saints."

Now what? Life goes on. But how am I supposed to continue on this journey through life on earth without my "person ...my Daddy... my earthly guide... my earthly rock. The one God gave me to rely on, to guide me, to encourage me?" St. Paul tells us that we grieve as people with hope — hope in the resurrection of Christ and the joy of the Last Day — and we do, however even those with strong faith grieve the loss of day-to-day interactions with loved ones who have left us. This past year has been a very lonely time for me. It was a time of insecurity, a time of uncertainty, a time of grief: physical, emotional, and spiritual grief.

Even those with strong faith grieve the loss of day-to-day interactions with loved ones who have left us.

Grief is a journey one must go through, not something to get over. Grief is natural, normal, and necessary for healing. Grief is not experienced the same way in all people. Grief is personal and affects the whole person – body, mind, and soul. For me, physically my body feels tired even though I get plenty of sleep, my heart feels

empty, and there are frequent headaches. Emotionally, there are times of anxiety when faced with a decision that I would have normally reached out to my person for advice, times of sadness when participating in an activity we used to do together that I am now doing alone or with someone else, and the feelings of loneliness that overwhelm me at times when I feel misunderstood or judged without my person to validate me.

Spiritual symptoms of grief are often not as obvious and can be hidden from those who are not trained in spiritual counseling. Spiritually, for a time, I was angry with God for taking my person from me. When it became clear that the time was coming for my person to be with Jesus, I prayed selfishly, trying to bargain with God for more time with my person. "I need him more than you do, God." "Please don't leave me here on earth without him." "If You must take him, take me too." Elizabeth Kubler-Ross said, "Denial helps us to pace our feelings of grief."

When it became clear that the time was coming for my person to be with Jesus, I prayed selfishly, trying to bargain with God for more time with my person.

There is a grace in denial that is nature's way of letting in only as much as we can handle." For me, denial is God's grace — God's way of giving me a place where He holds me for a time until I am ready to move on. The answers to my prayers came. God said, "I need him in Heaven with me, I am leaving you on earth for now to do the work of My Kingdom. I will not leave you nor forsake you. Press on faithful servant!"

Grief is not hidden from God. In Psalm 38 David writes, "I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning. For my sides are filled with burning and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart. O Lord, all my longing is before you; my sighing is not hidden from you. My heart throbs; my strength fails me, and the light of my eyes — it also has gone from me. My friends and companions stand aloof from my plague, and my nearest kin stand far off." These are the words of a man deep in grief but keenly aware of God's presence.

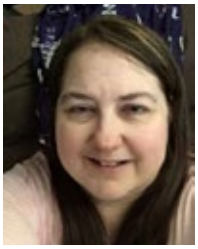
As a hospice social worker, I routinely counsel patients and their families with respect to anticipatory grief and provide grief counseling. One of the first things to keep in mind is that expressing and experiencing feelings and/or emotions as they well up in us is healthy. Feelings and emotions — good or bad — that are bottled up or pent up inside of us eventually explode. Explosions can be messy and rarely happen in a timely or appropriate manner. Second, tears are not shameful. Tears and crying are healthy, natural ways the body releases toxins. It is okay to let your tears flow when they come. Third, there is no guilt or shame in having fun without your person. It is okay to laugh at something funny, especially when your person would have laughed if he or she were present.

My "person" found humor in many daily mishaps (without injuries, of course). In one of my adventures this past year, my sister and I were attempting a home

improvement project that normally our father would have "supervised." However, without his supervision, the project did not have the intended outcome and in addition left a rather large hole in the wall. I mean, a BIG hole in the wall. After much discussion on how to fix this problem, we decided it would be humorous to hang the large portrait of Dad, which was made for his memorial service, on the wall to conceal the hole. Done! Every time I would walk into that room and see his portrait hanging there, I laughed. I heard his voice saying with a chuckle, "Really, girls!?!"

There have been many losses and changes in my journey since the death of my "person" last year, such as changing workplaces and moving to a new home. Changes can create bittersweet feelings and also add to feelings of grief. While it is exciting and comforting to be able to move back home to be closer to family and friends for support and encouragement, there are also additional losses, such as loss of environment, of relationships with coworkers, and of friendships with neighbors, to grieve. Kubler-Ross said, "The reality is that you will grieve forever. You will not 'get over' the loss of a loved one; you will learn to live with it. You will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again but, you will never be the same, nor would you want to." This quote has become my mantra and I am striving to achieve being whole again.

I am blessed to be a part of a loving, caring congregation that I am privileged to serve as their deaconess. I am a Stephen Leader and have the support of my pastor and the other Stephen Ministers. It is important to remember that even though we may be trained to be chaplains, spiritual counselors, social workers, or therapists, etc., and that we have been educated and trained to assist others with death, loss, and grief situations, we are not equipped to treat or counsel ourselves. The greatest shout out to our professions is actually seeking assistance from a pastor, deaconess, chaplain or counselor when we are experiencing grief or other crises in which we are struggling. I pray those struggling can find peace in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and be led to seek counseling and support from those whom God has placed on this earth to ease the way through the journey.



Deaconess Greta Bernhardt, MSW, CSWA, LICSWA, is an LCMS endorsed chaplain currently working for Providence Hospice in Everett, Washington as a social worker. She graduated from Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis in 2016 with a Master of Arts, in Systematic Theology and Deaconess Certification. She earned her MSW from Saint Louis University in 2017 and completed Clinical Pastoral Education in 2018. In addition to being a hospice social worker, Deaconess Greta has been called to a non-stipendiary position to serve the congregation of Immanuel Lutheran Church in Everett, Washington, where she teaches youth confirmation and is engaged in Stephen Ministries as a Stephen Leader.

Good Mourning: *The Therapuetic Use of Ritual with Bereaved Kids and Their Families*

A conversation with Vicki Scalzitti, interview by John Schumacher

JOHN— Let's set the context for our conversation. What is Good Mourning?

VICKI—Good Mourning is one of the first of twelve children's bereavement programs in the nation. It was established in 1988 at Lutheran General Hospital — a prominent children's hospital serving families in communities of the metro Chicago area. There was a support group serving siblings of children who were chronically, seriously or terminally ill. What happened was that some of those children died and it didn't feel appropriate for the bereaved siblings to be in the group with kids who had living siblings. Carol Stevens, who was a chaplain in the hospital, out of her own experience of being a bereaved child through the loss of her mother, began this little program for those kids who had lost their siblings. It grew into a comprehensive program, which is child-focused but family-centered. To get into the program you have to have a bereaved child or young person somewhere between the ages of 3 and 25 who has experienced the loss of someone significant to them through death. All the services the program offers are for the whole family at one time and in one location. Family members are not always in the exact same intervention, but we treat the family as a whole.

Good Mourning offers ten support groups over the course of a year, one per month, where kids are in age-appropriate groups and adults are in loss-appropriate groups. Kids are grouped in pre-kindergarten through 1st grade, or 2nd and 3rd grades, or 4th and 5th grades, or middle school, or high school, or young adult groups. The adults who come with the children may be in a newly widowed group or longer widowed group. There is also a group for people who are bereaved parents, meaning they've lost a child and their children have lost a sibling. There is a mixed lost group which may include: siblings raising siblings' children; people who have lost their own parents and have brought their kids who are grandparentally bereaved; adoptive and foster parents; and also, parents who are no longer married to the other parent at the time of that person's death. They might have had grief issues but didn't truly have widowed persons' issues because they were no longer proceeding in that relationship with the person who died. Periodically we have provided Polish speaking and Spanish speaking groups as well.

All the services the program offers are for the whole family at one time and in one location.

In addition to that monthly intervention ten times a year, Good Mourning provides a family camp every autumn and a special holiday remembrance event in

December. Throughout its 32-year history, Good Mourning has been able, at least to this point, to provide those services at no cost. The corollary to Good Mourning is a program called Grief at School which provides instruction to educators and advocacy for bereaved children and families. We provide classes and have supported schools with crisis interventions.

J — You spoke of the various age-appropriate interventions which are provided at the Good Mourning monthly gatherings. Is ritual part of the menu of interventions you use?

Sometimes you watch their little eyes get as big as plates as you go around the circle and hear 45 to 50 kids introduce themselves as grievers.

V — There are elements of ritual every time we gather those kids, even in the way we begin groups at Good Mourning. We bring all the kids together in a big circle, and we go around the circle asking the kids to state their name, their age or grade in school and who died in their family. Now initially, psychologically and emotionally, what that does is allows the child to experience that they are not the only one. Many kids, when they first come to Good Mourning, are not aware of that. They feel like they are the only one who has experienced a loss. Sometimes you watch their little eyes get as big as plates as you go around the circle and hear 45 to 50 kids introduce themselves as grievers. With no pun intended, it is eye-opening for those children. The psychological part of the experience is the recognition that "I'm not alone," that we have common purpose and that is so important.

For the child, the ritual of the circle is bringing those important people by name into this space — and to do that as a group of mourners. This ritual aspect of naming is important. This is the spiritual dimension of it. We say your name in this space. I call you to me in this space and you're present. That's at the beginning of every single meeting. Yes, I think ritual grounds all of it. We know grief happens to every human no matter how old you are. It happens to us physically, which is something we overlook. It happens to us emotionally; it happens to us psychologically. It happens to all of us spiritually as well.

When we talk to kids, sometimes it is the very first time a little one will have developed vocabulary about spiritual matters. This happens as the child is engaging in their very first conversations about where Daddy is or what happened. Recently a good friend of mine, who's a Good Mourning volunteer, had her granddaughter lose her other grandma — not my friend, the other grandma — and the granddaughter is four and a half. There was a lot of stunning conversation in the family about "What are we going to tell Bella? What are we going to do with Bella? Oh my God, how are we going to say this to Bella?" So, mom sits down and says to Bella, "Sweetie, you know Gigi (grandma) got very sick and she went to the hospital, and this is very sad, but Gigi died." Bella put her arm around mom and said, "Don't worry, mama, we'll always have her in our hearts." So much for how we all had to worry about what to say to Bella. I suspect that some of those words probably come from a Disney movie

because there's something "wrong" with Disney in case you don't know. They have Bambi, Lion King, Snow White — it's all about dead people all the time. I suspect that she heard something like that out of the mouth of a Disney princess. For kids, sometimes their first conversation about spirituality comes out of this experience.

J — I was going to ask about diversity — do families and kids bring a diversity of cultures, tradition, and experience that makes it hard to do ritual that addresses them all? However, I hear you saying that ritual connects to the universal.

V — They've always connected to that universality. We ask families at intake, "Would you like to share your religion with us?" I'm not going to pretend that the groups aren't primarily Judeo-Christian. I remember an encounter with a Jehovah's Witness child who stood up in group and told everybody their loved ones were not in Heaven, they were sleeping in the ground, and they were only going to go to Heaven if they were one of the 144,000 people that were going to go to Heaven. The response to that is, "Oh, different families believe different things." So, are there times in all of this when you have to explain to children that people have different ideas and beliefs? You do, but oddly enough, they don't seem to have very much trouble with that. Their response to "Everybody believes different things" is: "Oh." Kids don't seem to have the same need to convince everybody else they're right that some adults do. Culturally, kids certainly experience different things. For example, some children have been present at cremation because their cultural norm is that family is present at cremation. Children have had different experiences, without a doubt, much of it is based on spiritual beliefs or family traditions.

Do families and kids bring a diversity of cultures, tradition, and experience that makes it hard to do ritual that addresses them all?

J — In working with this diverse community of grievers, who may believe or experience things differently, were there any practices you observed that struck you about how the family is using ritual in their bereavement?

V — What strikes me is that some families are so much "better" at it. It seems more natural to them. There are our Latinx families, and the candle traditions and how that is honored in the home. Greek Orthodox families, when observant, are also supported by very carefully timed expressions and rituals. I think that's rich for families and I think that's helpful. I think America, for all the power that comes from our diversity, sometimes seems a little lost in the face of loss. We have yet to establish something that's really the American way of death. It may be because we're so different and we come from so many different places.

The second part, I believe — it's only my personal belief — America's very fond of winners and we don't do the most difficult passages well in this country. We're really a young country when you think about other nations across the globe. We don't necessarily embrace what is hard, what is difficult, what is loss. I think it's one of the

reasons we have trouble with hospice in this country where in Europe it's so easy to explain hospice. People who hesitate to sign up for hospice in America are still by and large saying, "Never say die." I think it comes from our young culture. America struggles and I think out of that will come a more mature culture, and the American way of death might become clearer to us. Right now, we're moving toward making less of death. I remember going to a conference where the speaker was talking about death in Africa and saying how much of representative money in people's lives got spent around their death. And he observed in America, we're the only ones now who are throwing a party without the guest of honor. We don't want bodies there; we don't want sadness. Right now, we think we can minimize death, but I think this will be interesting as our culture continues to evolve.

People who hesitate to sign up for hospice in America are still by and large saying, "Never say die."

J — This would seem to have significant impact on the work you do in a young culture, where we minimize death and struggle to address loss. Asking people to talk with a child about death, would seem to be beyond our capabilities.

V — Which is what is so interesting about ritual. What you realize in all the deaths we've seen at Good Mourning — over 4,000 deaths represented in the families — is how, almost to a person, it's the raising up of the individual they lost that becomes the moment they identify with and tie to so strongly. For example, we're dealing with the topic of change, and we give kids chameleon pictures to color. We're talking about how chameleons change when things around them change. We're like that as people and as families — when things around us change we have to change. We like some of those changes, we don't like some of those changes and some of those changes are just okay. We're coloring chameleons and we're talking, but here's the thing — for every child, the chameleon winds up having to be beautiful and the reason is because it's got something to do with my special person. This chameleon suddenly takes on all this import because this is something about my person. We see the investment in this connection to "my" person — and that is the one thing that, universally, we see at Good Mourning. This is true even for those people with whom the kids' relationships may have been ambivalent, ambiguous, or difficult.

Suicide mostly happens, we believe, because of mental illness. Sometimes mental illness in a family is not all about warm fuzzies. Sometimes those family relationships can be fraught and difficult. The same thing may be said about addiction and about deaths that happened because of a substance use disorder. A person is not always easy in the life of a child. One of the things we do is help kids "do" grief right, which means all of it, even acknowledging that people aren't always easy, and people are complicated. You give a kid a chance to say that, and you give a kid a chance to revisit some of the positive things. You let everything have its day, you let everything have its place.

I remember we had a child at Good Mourning whose father completed suicide and the child didn't really know his father very well. He was a young kid when his father died. He wrote an essay at age thirteen about perseverance and holding on and holding out and difficult times and that they pass and that we just have to hang on. As he ends the essay, he talks about his dad and he concludes saying, "...and if my dad were here today, he would tell you the same thing." In the course of this kid's grief work, this person doesn't become a liability. He becomes the person who would, if he were here today, share this lifesaving message. This life affirming message. That's who he is in his kid's life. There is such a thing as Good Mourning. I know, it's a cute program name — we all love the cute name. But more important than that, there is good mourning. Good mourning helps build good lives.

In a culture that minimizes death and will not discuss it, Good Mourning is countercultural.

In a culture that minimizes death and will not discuss it, Good Mourning is countercultural. And not just Good Mourning. Let's give a credit to those programs and people who have been doing this work across this country and do it every day. There are people helping grieving kids to work this change.

J — Before we conclude, was there anything else I should ask you?

V — You should ask me about the memorial table at camp. What I'd like to say to you is that the content of ritual for children includes participation, an act. It includes something physical that's a reminder. It includes a transitional object.

At our family camp, the memory table is central. We do a kind of ice-breaking activity first, but when we move into our main meeting space where families will be doing all their therapeutic activities, the first thing we do is set up the memory table. Every family has brought a picture; they're holding the picture of their special person. The memory table is visible to everybody in the room. It's draped and decorated in a way which has something to do with the theme of camp. As the ritual begins everybody gets a tag to put on their picture. It takes them ten minutes to write the name, which just shows you what is happening in those moments. It takes ten minutes to write a name on the tag.

J — Ten minutes because...

V — Because it's the person. They're already beginning to find a way into the depth of that relationship and this connection and this weekend. When the tags are completed, we call the families by their last name, one at a time. There's beautiful live harp music or guitar music or keyboard music in the background, with harp music being the gold standard. The family comes up and one person leans into the microphone and says the name. They put the picture on the table. We've got naming, we've got connection to a physical transition to that person's picture. We've got a place of importance. We're elevating it, we're saying a name and listening to beautiful music. Those are all

elements of ritual for kids because kids don't sit and just watch ritual. When you've got a kid, you have to get that kid moving.

Speaking of our December holiday gathering, through the years I've had people say to me "You can't possibly have 3- and 5- and 7-year-olds sitting there while you light sixty-five candles and say people's names. That takes forever." And it does because every family must walk from wherever they are sitting and light their candle. People who have said that you can't do this are amazed, "Oh my gosh, they're sitting there." For 3-year-olds we do have restless kid patrol. We have people who'll come and take a kid out if it's getting too hard. But you can't believe the 4- and 5- and 6- and 7-year-olds who just sit there through the whole thing mesmerized and waiting for that moment, waiting to hear that name, waiting to walk up there and light that candle. The fact that they don't miss any part of it, that they understand it and they sit there like — not like they are in church, no offense, folks, but better— you know demonstrates the depth of the connection made in this ritual. I think this is an important thing to know about kids and ritual — it's not just static. You have to have touch points; you have to assign something to do. You have to hear the person's name and raise them up. You have to do these things. I think this is what is important about rituals with kids. It's not dragging a kid in to watch anybody's ritual. It's a kid ritual.

J — Kid ritual is the naming and remembering. It's participation which is both personal and communal. It's having a tangible object to bring — and to take home again.

V — That's what a kid ritual is. This was the only thing that we didn't really touch on which I thought might need saying.

J — Thank you.

Vicki Scalzitti, Manager for Family and Community Education Programming, has worked in children's bereavement for more than thirty years, the last twenty-five as the director of the Good Mourning program at Rainbow Hospice and Palliative Care, Mount Prospect, Illinois. She has been a frequent workshop presenter and keynote speaker for the national gatherings of Bereaved Parents of America, Compassionate Friends, and the National Fallen Firefighters Family Survivor Conference. Vicki is the author of The Road to Good Mourning: A Parent's Guide to Growing Resilient Children Through the Grief Experience. *She is co-author with Anne Berrenberg and Jack Cain of* Ten Steps for Parenting Your Grieving Children.

John Schumacher, BCC, prior to his retirement, served as Manager for Spiritual Care and Healing Arts at Rainbow Hospice and Palliative Care. He and his staff were also frequently tapped as a volunteer professionals for the Good Mourning program. No one says "no" to Vicki. John serves on the Editorial Board for Caring Connections.

Responding to Pregnancy and Infant Loss: A Framework for Ministry

Catherine Malotky and David Engelstad

WE ARE BOTH PASTORS, and because we are also parents of a twin daughter who died in infancy, we have paid special attention to ministry in response to pregnancy and infant loss. Part of David's work as a hospital chaplain included many years leading a hospital-sponsored pregnancy and infant loss support group. Together, we have written a book on this subject published by Fortress Press, *Carrying Them with Us: Living Through Pregnancy or Infant Loss*.

Our culture underplays the loss and trauma of this kind of loss. Especially pregnancy loss often goes unreported so we may rarely be called to respond. Public health advances mean more babies survive birth, so even infant loss can be rare. For this reason, most of us are unprepared to respond, even as professionals. Because of this, responses of family, friends, and clergy to bereaved parents are often superficial and awkward. Our aim is to increase your familiarity with the dynamics of pregnancy and infant loss, and offer a framework for providing care and ritual support that can help you to be more effective when responding to this loss.

The loss of a dream

Pregnancy is generally the fulfillment of the dream of parenthood. Because of our cultural expectations, the "expectant" birth parent assumes pregnancy will produce a live birth and a healthy baby. When a pregnancy ends in death — whether from miscarriage, abortion, stillbirth, or infant death soon after birth — the experience is traumatic because it's such a mismatch to their expectation. In the hospital support group, the bereaved parents often said: "How can this be happening?" Ironically, they were not seeking *reasons or answers*. Instead, this question expressed their bewilderment, betrayal and disbelief. What they were actually saying was, "I can't believe this is happening."

Public health advances mean more babies survive birth, so even infant loss can be rare. For this reason, most of us are unprepared to respond, even as professionals.

"Why did my baby die?" is an existential question, a spiritual question, and — at the moment of death — a question that begs empathetic companionship, not proffered reasons or answers. Recall the story of Jesus telling his disciples that he must die. Peter responds, "This must never happen to you." While we could imagine that Peter's response was well-intended, Jesus did not experience it as such. Indeed, Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind me Satan."

It is good to linger here for a moment. A culture that categorizes children as our future rarely prepares parents to bury their children. When a pregnancy or infant

death occurs, our cultural instinct is to distance ourselves from that reality. We don't want it to be true. We don't want life to work like this. We don't want God to allow this to happen.

Consequently, most people's instinctive response is to "soften the blow" or seek to make things better. Parents in the hospital support group regularly reported hearing people say things like, "At least you're young and can have another child," or, "At least your baby died young, before you had time to get really attached," or, as happened to us, "At least you have one baby still alive." Bereaved parents try to hear these statements as caring, but in the group they revealed that they experienced these statements as dismissive, unhelpful, hurtful, and even cruel. What's strikingly absent in this approach is an honest acknowledgement that something unimaginably sad has occurred.

Some parents wonder: "Am I still a parent if my baby died in-utero or was stillborn?"

To make matters worse, bereaved parents can themselves feel as if their fetus or baby didn't live long enough to be a "real" person—*no one has met them; no one knows them*. Some parents wonder: "Am I still a parent if my baby died in-utero or was stillborn?" Sherokee Isle's groundbreaking book, *Empty Arms*, captures these feelings in its title.

One: Be present and acknowledge the loss

So, the first big thing we need to do is be present with the loss and trauma rather than trying to make it better somehow. That's internal work for all of us. No minimizing; no "At least..." Empathy, not sympathy! Be with the pain and bewilderment. Share it because it is painful and bewildering for all of us.

As chaplains and pastors, you can also respond with **rituals of acknowledgement**—acts/words that make it clear that a "real person" has died, a person of utmost importance to the parent(s). Our faith tradition is helpful here. Jesus asked his disciples to wait and watch with him in the Garden of Gethsemane as he prepared to die. Holy Week recalls in detail the suffering and death of Jesus. Holy Week does not gloss over or minimize Jesus' suffering. It is in facing death that we find new life.

It needs to be said that facing death is not easy. Be prepared to hear bereaved parents say things like, "I'll never be happy again," or "Life as I know it has ended," or "I might just as well have died with my child." The gulf is immense. Be with them so they are not alone. These rituals are ways of helping them mine their emotions to build memory.

Rituals of acknowledgement include:

- Presiding over the sacrament of baptism for the child (including a baptismal certificate).
- Encouraging parents to preserve mementos that can remind bereaved parents of their child: a piece of clothing or stocking cap, a blanket or crib toy, a hospital

report, the birth certificate if there was a birth. These items are concrete reminders of the fetus or infant who has died. To ritualize the importance of these items, you could say a blessing over them, and/or invite the parent(s) to create a special place for them, so they can return to them later,

- Invite and honor the stories the parent(s) have of their pregnancy and all that led up to this moment. What led them to dream of and seek to bring this child into being? How was the pregnancy going? What were they feeling? If it was an infant who died, what was the birth like? What did it feel like to hold their child? Did they hold the child after s/he died? If yes, what was that like? Leave time/space for the parent(s) to tell their story. As a final step, you might wonder with them how they will carry and share their story in the months and years ahead.

Invite and honor the stories the parent(s) have of their pregnancy and all that led up to this moment.

Two: Public grief support

A second set of rituals can be gathered under the heading of "**grief**." Because we imagine that you are practiced at providing this kind of grief support, we'll be a bit brief here. A primary set of rituals includes a funeral service, commendation and naming service. At David's hospital there were templates for each of these services—which were designed with the flexibility of accommodating various faiths and spiritualities. You may also wish to consult your Occasional Services book and hymnal.

These services accomplish four critical things:

- acknowledge that a death had occurred;
- recognize that the fetus/infant who has died is precious, loved and will be remembered;
- place the parent(s)/family in the context of loving support; and
- provide a blessing for the parent(s)/family and the deceased.

It is possible that a "formal" grief ritual may seem premature to the parent(s). The parent(s) also might prefer to participate in such a ritual in the context of their faith community. If so, it is often enough to conduct a shorter, more *informal* service of naming, commendation and/or blessing. You can create these services spontaneously. Just include the four elements. If you can, invite staff who have cared for the family.

Three: self-care

Finally, consider rituals that honor and promote self-care. The opportunity here is to encourage grieving parents to develop rituals—you could also think of them as *habits or practices*—that help them to cope with the trauma of their child's death.

The daily impact of grief is surprisingly substantial. People tend not to eat well when grieving. They have little energy for life tasks. They may sleep poorly or sleep a

lot. Bereaved parents are also recovering from the physical realities of pregnancy and childbirth. As is true for so many, asking for help is hard. It requires an admission and acceptance of vulnerability. You can prime them for this reality and encourage them to feel permission to ask for support.

To anticipate a decrease in energy/motivation, wonder with the bereaved parent(s) how they might discern what to spend their limited energy on. For example, could they practice making a list of what they think "needs" to get done; then assess what they truly have the energy to do; and—if there's a gap—decide either to let something go or ask others to help with that task.

Help the bereaved parent(s) find the hope/motivation/inspiration) to keep going. For example, can they prioritize their energy for something that really feeds them: bible or devotional readings, tending a garden, music, watching birds (think Matthew 6:26), caring for a pet, taking a walk, etc. In this, you are not trying to move them to feel hopeful when they do not. Rather, you are acknowledging that their grief can induce a sense of hopelessness—and because of that, wondering with them about practices that could help them make it through the day.

The emphasis of this article has been on rituals suited to the early stages of grief—which is where we imagine you will most often encounter parents experiencing pregnancy or infant loss. However, there are many more rituals appropriate for these grieving parents in the months and years following that loss. For more on this topic, see our book, *Carrying Them with Us: Living through Pregnancy or Infant Loss*. (2019 Fortress Press). For a more detailed discussion of rituals, see especially pages 95-103.

Blessings on your ministry to these precious and hurting parents, and on your desire to learn how to provide that ministry as faithfully and helpfully as possible.

Rev. David Engelstad is an ELCA pastor whose ministry was offered in parish, long-term care and hospital settings. He retired in 2020 after serving 25 years as a chaplain with Fairview Health Services. Since his retirement, he has remained busy with family and friends, house projects, church and CPE, camping and running, reading and drawing.

Rev. Catherine Malotky is a retired ELCA pastor who was called to serve in parish and non-parish settings as pastor, editor, teacher, and writer. She writes a regular column in the ELCA women's magazine, Gather, and contributes to stewardship and Bible study resources. She is privileged to share her life with David, their two amazing surviving daughters (and their spouses), their adorable children, and an energetic rescue canine. On a life-long quest for justice and beauty in the world, she is grateful to have a chance to contribute to God's vision for a more loving world.

African Americans and Grief

Russell Belisle

DEAR READERS, I am thankful for this opportunity to share with you about the topic of African Americans and grief. Though grief is something that all people experience, I am using this opportunity to share that which is distinctive to African Americans when it comes to grief. It is my hope that there will be an "ah-ha" moment or two for you and that you will have a better understanding of who we are, and how we grieve.

My desired outcome is that you will love, appreciate, understand and respect the African Americans in your life who are going through the grieving process. In order to paint a picture of African Americans and Grief, I will use three questions to organize this article.

1. What is grief?
2. When did African Americans begin to grieve?
3. How do we manage our grief?

What is Grief?

Grief is often defined as the human response to loss or change. For example, if a person drops a penny on the ground, that is a loss. Now if you have ever lost a penny, you know what the value of that loss is to you, and whether or not your grief is great enough to lead you to bend down and pick it up. This time, imagine that you drop a $100.00 bill. This is also a loss. However, for most people the grief of this loss would be significant enough to lead them to search for it and pick it up. It is the value of the loss that dictates our response.

What is your grief like? Is it more like a penny's worth, or like $100.00 worth? Loss can be experienced when one has a broken relationship such as the loss of a friend, a divorce, the death of a pet, a child moving out and going to college, or the death of a loved one. Our emotional response to that loss is a demonstration of our grief. For many African Americans, the emotional response to grief is closer to $100.00 than the penny.

It is the value of the loss that dictates our response.

When did African Americans begin to grieve?

Africans arrived in America in a state of grief due to the loss of dignity, respect, home, language, land, family, culture, and traditions. Being chained and shackled to each other created a community of grieving people.

In the city of Memphis, Tennessee, on the corner of Front Street and A.W. Willis (formerly Auction Street), there is an auction block. Aside from being a tourist attraction, it is a concrete reminder of how African American families were

broken, separated, and lost. The auction block is a tangible reminder of African American grief.

When Africans were first brought to America, they were experiencing the grieving process. Many immigrant groups suffered loss and grief upon leaving their homes and coming to America. However, their grief was tempered with hope for better lives for themselves, their families, and even those left behind. No other group has a grief the same as African Americans, who had no known hope. It was during their passage that these powerless people began to realize their loss and express the pains of grief. It is my belief that this was the beginning of a generational grief with echoes that are still experienced today.

Due to the continual loss of communities, violence, and mass incarcerations, we continue to grieve.

Due to the continual loss of communities, violence, and mass incarcerations, we continue to grieve. As a people, we came to America in a state of grief. There were few compassionate people, coping mechanisms, or support groups to help with the transition. Everyone was on their own to develop a method to cope with this grief and trauma.

How do we manage our grief?

African American grief can be loud and hard to miss. We want you to know that we are experiencing the pain of loss. There is no mistaking the feelings of loss that a person is experiencing. It can include outbursts, tears, loud sobs, and shouts. Some people have termed this, letting it all out. It communicates a message. "I am in pain from my loss." This is how $100.00 worth of loss looks. This is enough to make the casual observer uncomfortable and take notice. The griever is uncomfortable and hurting and they want you to notice and maybe feel the way that they feel. This behavior can help the griever achieve a cathartic moment. This was one of the few coping mechanisms available to those first African who were brought to America.

Family and faith are important during the grieving process. During times of loss and grief it is important to surround ourselves with family. The more family the better. With many African Americans, family reunions are conducted during the months of July and August. These gatherings often last two to three days. Family comes from all over America for the purpose of laying eyes upon one another, knowing each other, and celebrating each other's lives. The practice that was lost when Africans were taken is made anew in America. During this time of gathering, new births are acknowledged, life achievements are celebrated, and the names of departed family members are called. With many families, a candle is lit as the person's name is called. A prayer may be said as they are remembered and all of the candles are counted. This helps with the grieving process.

In addition to the family, the faith community is a beacon of hope after one experiences a loss. At times, people are closer to church family than blood family because they see them every week. It is expected that faith family will practice a ministry of presence by being with a grieving person during a time of loss. Church members will often bring meals, sing songs of hope, place names on the prayer list, and share favorite scriptures with the person who has experienced a loss.

It is common for members of the African American community not to conduct a sad funeral service; but rather a "home going" celebration. During the celebration it is a common practice to present a resolution. This practice in the African American church often involves a large organization such as city government, other churches, fraternities, sororities, or a company honoring the deceased person in an effort to help the family with grief. These resolutions may include naming a street after the deceased, having the city declare a day in their honor, naming a space in their building after the deceased, or just resolving to remember them and tell others.

It is common for members of the African American community not to conduct a sad funeral service; but rather a "home going" celebration.

The practice of storytelling among our people can also be an aid in the grieving process. In the face of a death, telling and retelling events about the life of the deceased has brought comfort to both the person telling the story and the one who hears. In the case of my own family, my mother spoke of loved ones that she grieved. Many of these people I had never met. The repeated telling of their story helped her with her grief. It also helped me to know and grieve them. This tradition allowed me to understand more about my family and the way that I grieve. Story telling can help keep the memory of the deceased alive and give comfort to those who survive.

In addition to the stories that we tell, we have membership in organizations that can help us grieve. Many African Americans are members of fraternities, sororities, social clubs and service organizations. The relationships with these organizations can often be like family. When a member finishes their life, the local chapter will often grieve together. For this purpose, these organizations have developed their own ceremonies that help grieving members address the death and remember the brother or sister who has passed on. They also show honor to family members, and let the family know that they are not alone in their grief.

In addition to everything that I have mentioned, we know that professional counseling services are available to members of the African American community. Often however, the individuals do not avail themselves of this resource, preferring to work things out on their own. Commonly, African Americans do not trust "outsiders" with feelings and emotions. For this reason, we are slow to avail ourselves of these services. It is difficult to manage grief on one's own, and by ourselves it can be difficult to move on. When the first Africans were brought to America, they did not have professional support, faith and family support, or the help of social and service.

This behavior of suffering our grief alone is something that we have inherited and passed on from generation to generation. This is a growth area for us as we struggle to trust the mental health community.

I thank you for allowing me to share with you, how grief affects the African American community. There is much more to be said as we unpack this topic; I have written these words in hopes of presenting you with a better picture of who we are and how we grieve.

Russell Belisle is a board-certified chaplain and a member of the Association of Professional Chaplains. He spent 15 years serving Methodist Hospital of Memphis, Tennessee as a chaplain and member of the congregational health network. The congregational health network was an innovative ministry that provided a partnership between Methodist Hospital and hundreds of congregations of faith in Memphis, resulting in a healthier city. Currently, he is serving as the pastor of Cross of Calvary Lutheran Church of Memphis. Pastor/Chaplain Belisle has also served as an instructor for Mental Health First Aid, DEEP Diabetes educator, and as a Chronic Disease Self-Management educator.

Grief and Mourning Among the Navajo (An Outsider's Perspective)

Timothy Norton

ALTHOUGH I AM GLAD to contribute some thoughts and experiences to this issue of *Caring Connections*, I do so with trepidation. Probably the most important *caveat* is the attempt to write anything about any culture (even our own) must confront the reality that "cultures generally persist and yet continually change."[1] Grieving rituals that I have experienced may continue, but on the other hand they come with no guarantees and could vanish in the years to come. Secondly, while it stands to reason that, "informed outsiders can often see certain things more clearly than the insiders themselves,"[2] it is also undoubtedly true that we human beings "seem to be incurably subjective."[3] I am not a professional anthropologist and the best I can do is reflect a limited set of observations.

Grief and loss are part of all human experience, but what of people where it is especially acute? It is not a point of pride, but despair, that Native Americans in general and Navajo people suffer the highest rates of suicide,[4] domestic violence and alcohol abuse[5] of any ethnic group in the U.S. These realities compound an already fraught environment.

Imagine a young family with three children. The mother is under 30 and the father as well. Within a three-year span, the father commits suicide, and the mother loses two of her siblings (a murder and an accidental death). What sort of mental state might the children, who are all under 5 years old, be in? This is not a made-up scenario, but the actual circumstances of a family in the community where I serve. Another family has six children all under the age of 10. The father ended his own life at this fragile point in the children's development. One of the young boys in this family told me, "We cried until we had no more tears."

It is not a point of pride, but despair, that Native Americans in general and Navajo people suffer the highest rates of suicide, domestic violence and alcohol abuse of any ethnic group in the U.S.

These examples are meant to convey the idea that, in this environment, grief rituals have to do some heavy lifting. Although I cannot possibly convey all the "Native American" rituals (since there are as many different ones as there are tribal

[1] Charles Kraft. *Anthropology for Christian Witness.* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 360.

[2] Ibid., 77.

[3] Ibid., 24.

[4] www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/suicide/rates_1999_2017.pdf accessed on 3/17/22.

[5] www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/liver_disease_mortality/liver_disease.htm. accesed on 3/17/22. The raw data does not show Native Americans by race, but the states with the highest mortality for liver cirrhosis are New Mexico, South Dakota, and Wyoming. All of these have large Reservations and Native populations.

groups) the bare fact of sustained and continued grief is a commonality among most indigenous people in North America. The author Sherman Alexie relates a tale of being asked by Navajo woman what his clans are (clans are an important marker of Navajo identity), and he responds that he "was not raised inside a clan structure"[6] but hypothetically, if he were, he could introduce himself this way: "My name is Sherman Alexie and I was born from loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss. And loss."[7] In other words, although each Native culture is different, collectively they have all suffered tremendous losses and traumas.

"My name is Sherman Alexie and I was born from loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss and loss. And loss."

There are two aspects of Navajo grief and mourning that I would like to spend the remainder of this essay describing: the family meeting and the funeral service.

A family meeting is an event that takes place immediately following the death of anyone in the community. It may be formal with addresses given and a meal, but more often it is a drop-in type of open house. A family meeting serves many functions, in a highly impoverished community, group participation is needed to defray funeral expenses, so there is always a solicitation of donations. A family meeting also serves to relay information about the funeral place and time, and information about the deceased. But perhaps the most important function of a family meeting is communal grieving analogous to the Jewish practice of sitting shiva. The main point is not to give money at a family meeting, or even a stirring oration, but to sit silently with the bereaved and by one's presence communicate sympathy and solidarity. Many hugs are exchanged, and tears flow as people freely express their grief and loss. Family meetings usually last 2–4 hours for 3–5 days. In that time there is ample opportunity for people who have not seen each other recently to reunite and re-establish the ties that bind them together.

The most common Navajo funeral is an open casket, where the body of the deceased is present. Less common, but making inroads is a memorial service where the body of the dead person was cremated, and the ashes are present at the memorial. In an informal survey of local pastors serving in the area (but among Anglo Americans rather than Natives) the exact inverse is the case; that is, the majority are cremated but only a tiny minority have the body present in a casket. This reality is strange given the cultural practices of Navajos. Traditionally the Navajo wanted little contact with a dead body. The belief was (and is) that at death the person became a *ch'íįdii* that is a "disembodied spirit," but the word can also mean, "ghost, devil, evil

[6] Sherman Alexie. *You Don't Have to Say You Love Me: A Memoir.* (New York: Little Brown, 2017),140.

[7] Ibid., 141.

spirit."[8] It is easy to see why it would be undesirable to be in the presence of such a being.

The fact that contact with the dead is undesirable and yet a body is much more common at Navajo funeral than a non-Native one, is a curious reality. Yet, for Navajos there are purification rituals to mitigate the damage. The rituals serve the dual function of communal action as well as addressing the problem. The two rituals I have observed as most common are smudging and keeping the four days. Smudging is when a fire of juniper wood, bark and scales is made at the edge of the burial site, each participant takes the smoke from the fire, and "washes" themselves with it. The four days are the time immediately after the funeral where the people in contact with the body abstain from sexual relations, washing, and eating to excess (fatty foods, rich meats, etc.).[9] One last custom that I have observed is that while a machine, like a backhoe, usually digs the grave, it is filled in by a group of men with shovels after the casket is lowered.

The fact that contact with the dead is undesirable and yet a body is much more common at Navajo funeral than a non-Native one, is a curious reality. Yet, for Navajos there are purification rituals to mitigate the damage.

As is often the case, it is hard for someone to articulate exactly how this custom got started (have you ever asked why we started to have bridesmaids?) so I have not been able to unearth the origins of the manual filling of the grave. My own takeaway is that doing something physical assuages the anger and despair associated with loss. And, this custom is very beneficial, especially given that men are far more prone to violence than women. In this way, they spend their energy on something constructive and have nothing left for destructive purposes.

These observations will probably only be beneficial to those serving on the Navajo Reservation. For the vast majority of others (*i.e.* almost everyone reading this) what is the takeaway? Careful observation of the people we serve, and their customs is important, not only for valuing the person, but seeing how the LORD is preparing them to hear His Word (Is. 45:18–22). Secondly, acute grief although very common among Native Americans is not unique to them. How do we minister to people who have suffered tragedy upon tragedy? This is not an easy nut to crack, but it is where the promises of the Gospel become all the more significant. Our epistle reading for the fifth Sunday of Easter (Rev. 21:1–7) is a poignant reminder of how our Lord's Resurrection reverses the sorrows of this world: "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more

[8] Robert W. Young & William Morgan Sr. *The Navajo Language: A Grammar and Colloquial Dictionary* (Albuquerque: UNM Press, 1987), 295.

[9] The Franciscan Fathers writing in 1910 reported concerning the four days: "In deference to the spirit of the deceased the mourners and family abstain from unnecessary conversation, from their usual sports, from travel and labor." Franciscan Fathers. *An Ethnologic Dictionary of the Navajo Language*. (St. Michael's Press: St. Michaels, AZ, 1910), 455. Part of this custom has changed in the 100+ years since it was recorded, most people travel since the Reservation is so spread out.

death, or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away." This is the best salve for the wounds of acute grief.

Tim Norton is the missionary/pastor at Shepherd of the Valley working with the Native American (Navajo) congregation there. He has been in mission work for most of his ministry life, most significantly as a church planting missionary in West Africa. First, he and his wife, Heidi, went to the Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire) and served there from July 1999–March 2001. For 10 years they served a Muslim people group, the Maninka of Guinea, West Africa. In 2013 Tim received a call to serve as missionary at Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church in Navajo, New Mexico. He graduated from Concordia University in Irvine in 2017 (MA Theology and Culture) and was ordained the same year.

Reclaiming Breath

Jazzy Bostock

MY MOM TELLS THE STORY of losing her adoptive father — John Dominis Holt, a man she dearly loved. She, her adopted sister (my Aunty Allie), and her brother (my Uncle Dan), were gathered around his bed. They took turns beginning with the one closest — leaning in, to share space with him. Finally, he exhaled for the last time. The three of them leaned in, inhaled, and held the breath for a moment before letting it go. This practice is deeply rooted in our kanaka ʻoiwi heritage. The ha — the breath — the life force — is passed from one to another. No one should die alone. They leave their spirit, their mana, in their breath which is passed on.

The awareness of breath lies deep in the etymology of our language — aloha can be translated many ways, but one that I was taught is that it is a culmination of alo — face, presence, front— and breath — ha. Meaning, when you bid someone hello or goodbye or when you tell someone you love them, you bring the presence of your breath. Often when kanaka maoli greet one another, we press our foreheads and noses together and share an inhalation — a present breath facing one another.

I heard this story a few times growing up — perhaps because I was a child who often asked, "but why?" prompting deeper and deeper sharing and storytelling. Perhaps because I was trying to make sense of the importance of people who had since passed — trying to write my family tree in my head, fleshing out their leaves. But, for the times I heard it, I never really understood it. I never really knew what a last breath was like — never really understood the labor of it.

When I was in college, I spent some time volunteering for St. Joseph's House — a nonprofit which houses folks with AIDS or other terminal illnesses who otherwise would be living unsheltered. It is a beautiful, beautiful ministry. It's a liminal place — the residents changing when rooms free up because someone has passed from this life to the next. The staff and volunteers are exceedingly gentle offering different levels of accompaniment as their guests walk closer to the end of life. At the point that someone is no longer able to come downstairs for meals, meals are brought to them, allowing the comfort of staying in bed. As they stop eating and begin to require more rest, they are still accompanied. Staff spend hours at their bedside. Sometimes this accompaniment might be in reading aloud or in conversation, but often it is in silence. Their practice is to match the breath of the guest.

Finally, he exhaled for the last time. The three of them leaned in, inhaled, and held the breath for a moment before letting it go.

Anyone who has walked someone to their death knows that the closer one gets, breath becomes less steady, more labored and irregular. At St. Joseph's house, this was a small way to experience in your body a fraction of what someone else might

be experiencing. I did it just a few times — and it was hard. Breath, a steadiness we count on for most of our lives, is as ephemeral as life itself. Sometimes the time between inhalations would feel unbearable.

After spending some time with folks in this way, my understanding of this ancient practice grew. It is not just a way to carry a part of someone's mana — someone's spirit — with you, it is also a practice of empathy. It is a way to enter that space in-between this world and the next — a way to be reminded of just how thin the veil is that separates us.

In the time of the COVID pandemic, we have come to a new collective awareness about the power of our breath, about the particles it carries, about the strength it can have. There is a lingering fear, perhaps of that strength — a fear of what we cannot see in all that we exhale, a fear of the viral load we may be passing to one another unbeknownst to ourselves.

This practice of passing on breath — of leaning in and of bringing into your body a part of the one you love — is almost Eucharistic. A body, given, broken, and offered for you. A taking in of something that isn't ours, in the hope that we might take on some of that spirit.

Our breath carries the strength of who we are, the strength and resiliency of our ancestors, our iwi kupuna. From breath God gave us life, made dusty mud into being. Our spirits are carried on our breath — passed from one generation to the next.

Rev Jazzy Bostock, a kanaka maoli woman, serves two small communities — St. John the Baptist, Episcopal, and Maluhia Lutheran, ELCA, both on the west side of Oahu, in Waianae. She received her Masters in Divinity from Yale Divinity School, and is Episcopally ordained. She spends her days caring for the people in her churches, tending to her garden and chickens, laughing with her wife, walking her dog, and enjoying the sunshine.

Weep with Those Who Weep

Sharing in Grief, Remembering and Rejoicing Among Those with Cognitive Disabilities

Mark D. Whitsett

THIS ISSUE OF *CARING CONNECTIONS* HAS PLACED US where Pastoral Care often finds itself: in the place of loss, especially in times of death and dying. Grief, mourning, and sadness leaves even "the strong" and "put together" off balance and uncertain. People look to "understand" to integrate loss into the present, to live with grief in a way that does not overwhelm but finds "wholeness" or some type of peace. Such mourning, even in persons who are equipped with internal, communal and spiritual reserves, is difficult at best.

But what if the context of loss is among persons with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities? In the situation of death and dying, persons with cognitive challenges may be perceived as "children in adult bodies," as "not able to understand" death and dying. Families, having a loved one, perhaps with Down Syndrome or some other moderate or severe cognitive disability, might suggest at the death of a parent or close relative that the person with the disability NOT be told because of their "limited understanding" or that they shouldn't be involved with the dying process or funeral because they would just "get upset."

For fourteen and a half years as the Director of Pastoral Care (now recently retired), I have shared in the lives of about 300 people supported by Cedar Lake, a Recognized Service Organization of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and an Affiliate of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Cedar Lake has done this service in the Greater Louisville, Kentucky region for over 50 years. This includes a staff of over 430 who attend to individuals in the community, in apartment buildings, in staffed residences, adult day programs, supported employment, and in long-term care settings for those who are medically fragile.

I have come to know the individuals at Cedar Lake as friends and "family" and in whose lives the "face of God" is also displayed in witness, especially at times of loss.[1] When given opportunity to meet the reality of death and dying, I have seen grief on the part of people with cognitive disabilities and their ability to teach others about an unvarnished awareness of death, eternity, God's presence, joy and hope in Christ. Together we have shared in the sudden death of our Cedar Lake

I have seen grief on the part of people with cognitive disabilities and their ability to teach others about an unvarnished awareness of death, eternity, God's presence, joy and hope in Christ.

[1] The author is grateful to Cedar Lake administrative staff for their cooperation, review and suggestions in the production of this article. Also, there was verbal approval for the use of pictures provided based on releases on file with Cedar Lake from guardians of individuals pictured.

friends, of individuals dying after being absent in the hospital, and of being with individuals we supported as they went through the stages of end of life. We have also had to share as parents, siblings, staff members and beloved volunteers have passed away.

In what follows are stories involving the people at Cedar Lake illustrating their engagement with and insights into death and loss. In response over the years, we have looked for concrete, intentional ways to facilitate engagement with loss as it is focused on hope in God's presence and Christ's love. We have looked for consistent ways to provide a place for identifying loss, beginning to engage grief, and to remember the hope that we have in Christ. From this perspective, we will again ask what is understood and more importantly, what any of us need to understand when it comes to learning about grief and mourning as taught by those who have cognitive challenges.

Revealing Stories

"Praying for the Dead"—The Eternal is Now

As a faith-based Lutheran-affiliated organization, Cedar Lake has had weekly Chapel services available for the people they support. When I began conducting these services, I gave individuals the opportunity to indicate for whom or what they would like to pray. Many either verbally or non-verbally indicated their desire to pray for family, especially parents or siblings. Gradually it dawned on me that many of these family members had passed away, some many years ago.

While a theology of praying for the dead is not a focus of Lutheranism, I could certainly frame these prayers as "giving thanks for" family members. But over time, I came to realize that for many, if not most of the people we work with, that their sense of time was not so much about past, present and future but primarily about NOW. Their sense of loved ones in heaven, eternally with God was a simple held reality. The difference was that their experience of their loved one, now in heaven, was just as real as if they were standing there in the room with them. The eternal is now! Death does not change that sense of "being with."

What Does Allen[2] Understand?

Allen is non-verbal and seems to live very concretely in terms of food, drink, shelter and relationships. After a brief illness, his mother had died and his family and the staff asked me to tell Allen. Staff were concerned because he could have challenging behaviors when upset. I was concerned because I had no idea if he would indeed understand what I was about to tell him. I attempted to keep it as concrete as possible, to indicate that mom had been sick, had to go to hospital and did not get

[2] All names used in the body of this article are changed to protect the privacy of the individuals involved. The general situations are descriptions of actual events.

better, that her body had stopped working and now she had died and was with God in heaven. (Whew! I'm still concerned about the approach!) Allen was non-reactive as far as could be seen. But for the next four weeks he did not want to come out of his room. What did he understand? Maybe more important what was he feeling? Certainly, grief and loss, but showing it his way.

What did he understand? Maybe more important what was he feeling?

What Kind of Car Does Jimmy Drive?

Danny was blind and confined to a wheel chair. For years his friend Jimmy had lived in the same suite with him. Jimmy had been under hospice care for a number of weeks. People came and went from Jimmy's room. Eventually, he peacefully passed. Meanwhile, Danny quietly went about his days. No one had specifically interacted with Danny about Jimmy's dying and yet soon after Jimmy died, Danny asked a staff member, "Did Jimmy die?" To which the staff truthfully replied, "Yes he did." At which point Danny asked, "What kind of car does Jimmy drive?!" (Now you have to understand two things. Danny was always asking people what kind of car they drove and second, he generally never asked a question he didn't already have an answer to.) So, the staff asked," What kind of car do you think Jimmy drives?" To which Danny replied, "Oh, he has wings!" Danny clearly saw, was well informed and had understanding of the moment for sure!

Is that Dana, Did She Die?

Donald and Dana both had Down Syndrome but had been a "couple" for many years, holding hands, going on dates. Their care and love for one another was apparent to all. Quite unexpectedly Dana passed. Donald was told and "seemed" to get it, but it was not until we were at the funeral home and we together walked up to the casket and he saw her that he comprehended. He looked at me with anguish and said, "Is that Dana? Did she die?" To which I had to affirm she did. Donald was like anyone else who has comprehended the shock of loss, reviewing over and over with words and gestures what had happened to the one who was the love of his life.

Jesus is with Me, Jesus is with Me, Pastor Mark!!!

Eddey and I would regularly drive to see his mom, who required the services of skilled nursing care in a long-term care facility. Eddey needed regular support for adult daily living and was now in his late 50s. He loved his mom dearly and was concerned for her fragile health. Then, one day, the unwanted call came to Cedar Lake that his mom had died. As his friend and Pastor, I shared her passing with Eddey as he sat in his usual chair in my office. He was clearly shaken, literally and figuratively. Then he said with quivering but firm voice, "Jesus is with me, Jesus is with me, Pastor Mark!" His heart was breaking but his hope was in the One who he

knew was with him. In that moment Eddey made the good confession, even in his fears and sadness.

Intentionally Touching the Sadness but Celebrating the Hope

The stories told above are a few of hundreds, but hopefully represent how the people we support at Cedar Lake meet the reality of loss, mourning and grief. Alongside these events are avenues for intentionally touching the sadness together and then celebrating the hope. There are several pathways that we travel together as we share in times of loss.

Praying for/Being with the Dying

Weekly devotional and Chapel services give individuals at Cedar Lake the opportunity to identify for themselves and others those who are in need of prayer, especially the sick and those who may be in their closing days of life. Persons with disabilities are often very compassionate toward the hurts and needs of others, including peers, family and staff. They tend to be exceptionally attentive and are ready to volunteer such prayer needs and concerns. Therefore, we regularly ask for those concerns as well as suggest that we pray for such circumstances. Praying also can include being with peers who are in their last days. Individuals may come and sit, "keep vigil" along with family and friends. This seems to give a matter-of-factness, an acceptance of the dying.

Memorial Services

At the death of an individual who has lived at Cedar Lake, usually the next day, there is an opportunity for individuals who have known and/or lived in proximity with the person who has died, to be personally informed that the person has passed. At our long-term care facility, we meet in our Chapel where we can project pictures of the person on a screen as they were in the activities of life. We will remember them as they were to us but also remember them as being with God and knowing his full love in heaven, being with Jesus. We will pray for them with thanksgiving, for each other, the Lord's Prayer and sing songs of hope and faith. This is a brief time (15 minutes) together.

Participating in the Funeral

As it makes sense and is physically possible, we encourage a more formal funeral service to occur. Often families will ask that this takes place at the Cedar Lake Chapel, where individuals supported by Cedar Lake can also participate. If that was the case and I was leading the service, I would ask individuals to help with the service, perhaps to help sing a song or repeat a scripture or to remember the person who has died. If the funeral occurs elsewhere, we work to facilitate participation for those who desire to.

The Memorial Tree

During the Christmas season a separate Christmas tree is maintained in our Chapel as Memorial Tree. The tree has an ornament for each individual supported by Cedar Lake who has passed away over the years. Their name has been inscribed on the ornament along with date of birth and death. Individuals and staff have the opportunity to personally place these ornaments on the Memorial Tree and to remember these individuals. There are currently over 90 people with their names inscribed there.

What is Understood—What is Needed?

"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep," are not just words of Apostolic wisdom but St. Paul urging genuine Christ-like care for one another.[3] Paul similarly posits the interconnected reality of those who are the children of God in Christ. "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."[4] He even claims that the "less honorable" parts of the body need greater honor. Why? Because, "the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable."[5]

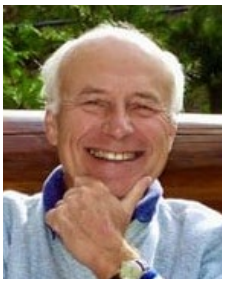
I think persons with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities are included in the people who are "indispensable" to the body of Christ. They have much to teach us, in this case not only about mourning and loss but also about the eternal, the immediacy of heaven, the presence of Christ and the sureness of the promises of God. They remind us that there is joy when such does not ever seem possible again. Instead of assuming lack of understanding, the likelihood is an understanding deeper than words or mere reason, for it is rooted truly in the grace, mercy and peace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Rev. Dr. Mark Whitsett, Ph.D., over the course of 43 years, has served in parish ministry as a bi-lingual-multicultural pastor in New York City; in parish ministry in the Midwest; on the adjunct faculty (theology and religious studies) of Concordia University Wisconsin; as Director of Pastoral Care at Cedar Lake; and now, has recently "retired." He also serves on the editorial board for Caring Connections.

[3] (cf. Romans 12.9–15) All Scripture quotes are from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (2016). Crossway Bibles.

[4] (cf. 1Corinthians 12.26)

[5] (cf. 1 Co 12:22–25)



In memory of Rev. Lawrence Holst

Rev. Lawrence Holst of Skidaway Island, Savannah, Georgia, passed away on February 18, 2022 at the age of 92. An early pioneer in the fields of pastoral care, pastoral counseling, and clinical pastoral education, Larry was the Director of Pastoral Care at Lutheran General Hospital (LGH) in Park Ridge, Illinois for 35 years. LGH became an early accredited center of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education. Out of the Department of Pastoral Care, he also established a community pastoral counseling center which became an accredited training center of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. He became the voice of the hospital on many sensitive issues related to medical ethics. An energetic innovator Larry was instrumental in creating a nationally recognized Center for Clinical Ethics as well as a hospital-based Parish Nurse Program.

Larry's influence extended well beyond the local hospital. In 1972 he spent a year as a missionary in Tanzania East Africa where he established a pastoral care program and a mobile medical outreach program to remote African villages. Prior to his retirement he led a planning group representing the ELCA, the UCC, the Evangelical Hospital Association, the Lutheran General Health System and the Christian Medical College and Hospital in Vellore, Tamil Nadu, South India. This collaboration resulted in the creation of a clinical pastoral education program in Vellore's expansive and sophisticate medical center.

In 1979 The College of Chaplains awarded Larry its Distinguished Service Award, and in 1983 he was invited to deliver the Russel Dicks Lecture. In 1998, he was awarded the Lutheran Christus in Mundo Award. He edited or co-edited three books including *Toward a Creative Chaplaincy*.

Larry was beloved by the entire hospital community and renowned for his sharp wit and vivid sense of humor. He was often invited to emcee at farewells for hospital staff in various departments. Despite growing up on Chicago's south side, Larry was a lifelong Cubs fan. He finally got to celebrate a Cubs World Series win at age 86. Larry had a profound influence on a countless number of chaplains, pastoral counselors, students, community pastors, and professional colleagues. His legacy lives on through them all and through his surviving wife Fay, four children, and several grandchildren.

Submitted by Lee Joesten

Christus in Mundo Awardee

The Rev. Dr. David Franzen was honored by the North Carolina Synod of the ELCA and their bishop, the Rev. Timothy Smith, with the "Christus in Mundo" award for his decades of exemplary ministry in ELCA Specialized Ministries.

Dr. Franzen was recognized on May 8th during Sunday morning worship at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Durham, North Carolina, where David and his family gathered to thank God and celebrate this milestone.

Historically, this award is given at the Zion Conference. David was selected to receive the award in September 2019 but for various reasons, the Zion event did not occur and then the pandemic came complicating the presentation again. We are grateful he has now received his award.

The overarching theme of David's ministry career has been pastoral care and counseling of troubled people, and the training and supervision of persons preparing for careers in these ministries. It began in seminary with his CPE internship at Elgin State Hospital and continues into his retirement in a part-time pastoral counseling practice he loves. He has been a leader in supporting chaplains, pastoral counselors and certified educators in the North Carolina Synod. In retirement David has published a number of journal articles and book reviews.