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



CARING CONNECTIONS

C O N T E N T S

GOD AND SUFFERING

3 Editorial

David McCurdy

4 Letters of Welcome and Support

Gerald B. Kieschnick

Mark S. Hanson

5 Sin and Suffering in the Book of Job

Daniel J. Simundson

7 How Can God Let this Happen?

Kurt Senske

9 There Was No End to the Pain

Jane Otte

11 Surprised by Joy: Reflections on Suffering

John Arthur Nunes

13 How to Subscribe

14 News and Announcements

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling*. *Caring Connections* is sponsored and underwritten by the Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee (ILCC), and is a joint effort of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). We are deeply grateful to the ILCC, and to the ELCA and LCMS, for their continuing support.

In the words of its editorial board, *Caring Connections* is “written 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* will be “academically informed, yet readable; solidly grounded in the practice of ministry; and theologically probing.” We want *Caring Connections* to reach a broad readership: chaplains, pastoral counselors, seminary faculty and other teachers in academic settings, clinical educators, synod and district leaders, and—not least—concerned pastors and laity. *Caring Connections* will also carry news and information about activities of diverse constituencies in specialized ministry.

This inaugural issue comes to you free of charge, and in printed form. Despite the generous support of the ILCC and both church bodies, however, the editorial board has come to realize that sustaining the journal financially as a print venture would be difficult at best. Future issues of the journal will, instead, be published electronically.

Caring Connections will be available online by subscription—still free of charge—or by accessing our web page, which will soon be up and running on the Lutheran Services in America (LSA) website.

The transformation from a print publication to an electronic one should, in fact, enhance the journal's flexibility and usefulness. Online publication will permit *Caring Connections* to appear more often, will allow announcements of upcoming events to be posted in timely fashion throughout the year, and will permit the addition of a position openings listing. **(You will find further information on p. 13 about subscribing to and accessing the journal online.)**

This first issue of *Caring Connections* is organized around the theme “God and Suffering.” Subsequent issues will also be thematic, and we will solicit articles from invited authors. We may also decide to invite articles “over the transom,” and we'll of course let you know if we do. In any case, we do want to hear your comments on themes and articles, and your general reactions to *Caring Connections*. We may include a “readers' response” feature in future issues.

This issue's authors bring wonderfully varied backgrounds to their reflections on God and suffering. They span the academy, the parish, social ministries, and ministries of human care. We thank Dan Simundson, Kurt Senske, Jane Otte, and John Nunes for their excellent contributions. Equally, we thank President Gerald Kieschnick and Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson for gracing this issue with their reflections, prayers, and good wishes.

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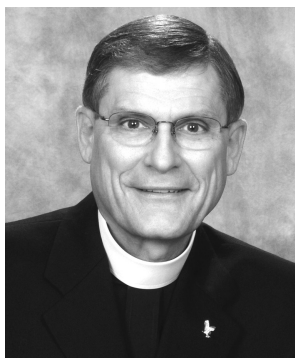
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Letters of Welcome and Support

From President
Gerald B. Kieschnick



As the risen Jesus walked with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, their grief and pain were apparent. They were distraught over Jesus' suffering and death. Jesus responded, "Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" (Luke

24:26). Eventually they recognized Him and grief turned to joy.

Saint Augustine wrote, "God had one Son on earth without sin, but never one without suffering." In a world filled with suffering, God's only-begotten Son was not exempt. Neither are we. Suffering is one consequence of living in this sinful, fallen world.

Yet, in the midst of it all, Jesus brings comfort. He still walks with us, helps us understand and cope with suffering, and assures us through faith of the glory ahead. His word is healing balm for our troubled lives: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

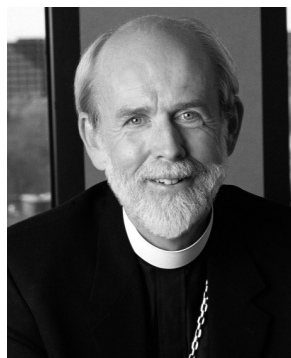
In this journey, we find ourselves walking beside others on the same road. This journal will support those who walk this walk on a daily basis—Lutherans engaged in chaplaincy and other specialized ministries. I remain personally grateful for the pastoral care they provide. As a parish pastor and a national church body president, I have found their service and expertise invaluable to the work of our Lord and His Church, as they help others make sense of God and suffering in trying times.

I pray that these diligent servants will be upheld through this journal as it reflects God's holy Word and purpose in a solid commitment to the Word and Sacrament ministry of our Lord—principles we hold dear in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Transforming lives in time ... for eternity ...

Reverend Dr. Gerald B. Kieschnick
President
Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

From Presiding Bishop
Mark S. Hanson



Throughout Scripture there are stories of God speaking to God's people, offering words of guidance, direction, and comfort. Often God's voice is heard through the voices and life experiences of others, as well as through those sighs that are far too deep

for words. Those who are called to minister to the sick and suffering listen daily for God's voice, providing courage and comfort for the tasks they face. Those who are called to equip others for service in pastoral care and counseling settings constantly seek God's voice of wisdom to inspire and lead them in their sacred task. Those who are called to serve God's people through ministries at the judicatory level seek God's words of guidance and peace as they provide pastoral care to those who struggle as members of congregations and leaders of synods.

We who have been called into leadership in the church have been called to some form of pastoral care, regardless of our settings. While our areas of service, styles of leadership, and perspectives may differ, we share similar tasks and a common mission. We also share profound opportunities to learn from and support one another in the work to which we have been called.

I am encouraged by the introduction of *Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, as it seeks to build on these opportunities. We have been invited to hear God's voice through the wisdom, the life experiences, and the voices of our colleagues in Christ. I hope that all ministry leaders in this church will respond to the invitation for conversation and mutual upbuilding that *Caring Connections* provides.

In God's grace,

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Sin and Suffering in the Book of Job

Almost reflexively, we make a connection between sin and suffering, yet we struggle with that connection.

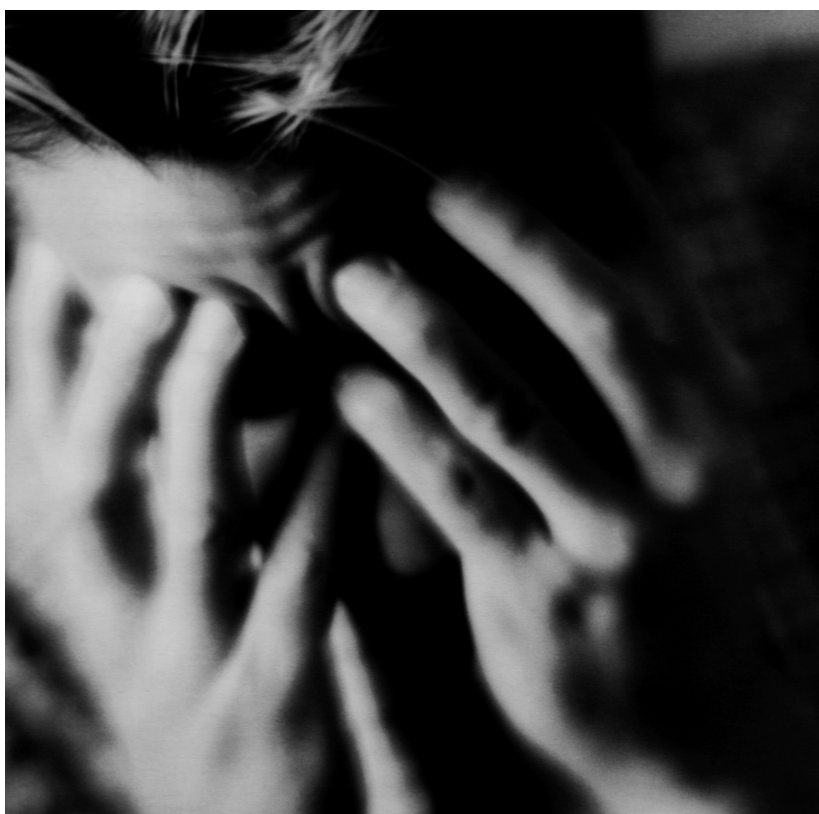
“What did I do to deserve this?” “She is such a good person. Why did this happen to her?” In my years as pastor, chaplain, and teacher, I have often heard questions like these. Almost reflexively, we make a connection between sin and suffering. We want God to be fair, to reward the good and punish the wicked. We want God to be actively involved in the events of the world, including our personal lives.

Even the terrible events of life ought to make sense, since we believe in a just God. So when things go wrong, it must be someone’s fault. We are naturally reluctant to blame God, whose positive attributes we wish to protect. Perhaps there is a demonic force that has something to do with it. Most often, in the biblical tradition and in mainstream Christian theology, the blame for suffering falls on human beings.

Our inclination to link sin and suffering is reinforced by what we read in Scripture: the story of the Fall in Genesis 3; the giving of the law in Exodus and Deuteronomy; the Deuteronomic cause-and-effect interpretation of Israel’s history; prophetic pronouncements of doom because of sin; proverbs that promise good or ill, depending on one’s choices; and Jesus’ association of healing with forgiveness of sins. There are also places in the Bible (such as lament psalms, the book of Job, and John 9) where the simplistic answer that God rewards the good and punishes the bad is challenged. People have been hurt by turning their suffering on themselves, looking for some fault that might have precipitated their present torment. Others—onlookers, friends, well-meaning but clumsy protectors of God’s reputation—have been too quick to “blame the victim” for her own misfortune.

The book of Job provides a good resource for reflecting on this connection between sin and suffering. Whatever else this lengthy and complex book intends, it surely declares that not all suffering is deserved. Job is an innocent sufferer. He is singled out because he has found special favor in God’s eyes, not because he is a notorious sinner. Let us note several points about the connection between sin and suffering in Job.

1. Both Job and his friends want “the system” to work. God is just and the world should be run fairly. It is too scary to think that bad things happen arbitrarily, without anyone in control and



with no real meaning. So they (and we) try to extract meaning from events that, at first glance, may appear senseless. Job and his “counselors” are well acquainted with biblical traditions that connect sin and suffering. They do not want to give these up.

People have been hurt by turning their suffering on themselves, looking for some fault that might have precipitated their present torment.

2. Both Job and his counselors are challenged by his calamities. He is a tough case for his friends to understand. Sometimes sins are obvious and it is easy to interpret them as the cause of one’s suffering. Not so with Job. He is a pious, good person. The faults may be more subtle, but they must be there to protect the friends’ belief system. It will just take more probing to find them. Maybe Job is proud; he thinks he is better than he really is.

Maybe he needs a little polishing around the edges, so God is refining him through disciplinary suffering (5:17): "No pain, no gain." Eliphaz even hints at the broader theological point that we are all sinners and no one can claim to be totally undeserving of God's discipline or correction (4:17-19). In short, there must be something wrong with Job or God would not be doing this to him.

Job is unwilling to blame himself, to see his own fault in such horrendous disasters as he has endured. But neither does he want to abandon the system. So he is left with the terrible alternative of having to blame God, whom he calls unfair, unjust,

or punishments must come in this life or not at all. Christianity still keeps the sin-punishment connection but has kicked it into the next world. There God's justice can finally be worked out if it seems absent or incomplete this side of the grave. This possibility can be an enormous relief—and an excuse for delaying efforts to relieve suffering in this world. It also leaves us needing assurance that, when God's justice is finally consummated, we will be among those receiving rewards, not punishment.

5. When God finally speaks, the concerns of Job and his friends are ignored. The system to which they cling in order to make sense of the world's suffering is neither defended nor denied. There comes a time when one needs to abandon the demand for a consistent system. If the only way to make sense of things is to blame someone—God, self, Satan, other people—maybe it is better not to push too far in that direction. Some questions will never be answered. Let God take care of what is beyond your capacity to do or know. It is no simple matter to come to that position—to have such a strong relationship with God that you can live with ambiguity, mystery, limits, an unknown future. Most interpreters believe that Job finally arrived at that place after 41 chapters of argument and struggle with God, his friends, and himself.

6. It takes God's direct action to revive the relationship, to renew Job's faith. How long must a sufferer wait? Can we speed up the process, either for ourselves or for those we desire to help? We cannot control it, but we can hope that God will make an appearance. In the meantime, it is vital to keep the conversation with God alive, if only to complain or to accuse God of not listening. As a friend and/or counselor, encourage that conversation; do not get in the way by criticizing or correcting the complainer, or by apologizing for God. And do not abandon the sufferer, who struggles with the connection between sin and suffering and wonders how God fits into it all.

The counselors argue with Job's words rather than listen to his pain.

partial toward the rich and wicked, a constant tormentor who will not leave him alone but refuses to answer his questions.

3. The counselors argue with Job's words rather than listen to his pain. They treat him as a theological problem to be fixed, not a tormented soul in need of comfort. When he makes nasty accusations about God, they argue that he is wrong and God is not really like that. They use Job's words (15:6) to demonstrate the hidden fault that seemed so elusive when they first tried to make sense of his predicament. Even today, the Bible's lament tradition is denied, swept under the rug, perhaps treated as if it indicates a lack of faith and acceptance. Too many spiritual advisors will not allow suffering people to speak the truth about how awful it is for them and express their doubts about God.

4. Job's pain is intensified because he has no eschatology to fall back on. If God does not act justly in this life toward God's faithful servants, justice will never happen. Except for brief glimmers of hope (in chapters 14 and 19), Job believes that when you are dead, the story is over. Any rewards

For Further Reading:

Three books on this subject that I would recommend (two of them just happen to be written by me):

Hall, Douglas John, *God and Human Suffering*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986

Simundson, Daniel J., *Faith under Fire*. Lima, Ohio: Academic Renewal Press, 2001 (first published 1980)

Simundson, Daniel J., *The Message of Job*. Lima, Ohio: Academic Renewal Press, 2001 (first published 1986)

After several years of service in the parish and as a hospital chaplain, Dan Simundson returned to graduate studies in Old Testament at Harvard. From 1972 to 2003 he taught at Luther Seminary. Now retired, he is "kept busy as I want to be with speaking, writing, and church work."

How Can God Let This Happen?

Suffering can result in good, it can lead to spiritual growth, and it can be transformative

How can God let this happen? With more than 1,000 abused, neglected, and abandoned children in our Lutheran Social Services of the South residential treatment centers and foster homes, our staff is often asked—and often asks—this question.

How can God let this happen? is a question posed by adoptive parents who are unable to conceive and who, after years of trying, testing, and expensive invasive procedures, turn to us for help in forming a family.

How can God let this happen? is what family members of residents in our dementia-care units ask as they see their loved ones devastated by this insidious condition.

Because we are a faith-based agency, some folks think we should have all the answers. We don't. But we are guided by our faith, our belief that God has a purpose for everyone and everything. Eventually, we believe, that purpose will be revealed to us when we are called home.

However, our experience has shown us that suffering can result in good, it can lead to spiritual growth, and it can be transformative.

Several years ago, a girl named Gloria lived in our Bokenkamp Children's Residential Treatment Center for abused and troubled children in Corpus Christi, Texas. Gloria was 14 years old at the time. She was unique among the children at the center in that she was blind. She wasn't born that way. She was blinded because of cocaine overdoses administered by her mother who, in her warped way, thought she was doing her toddler a favor. She was trying to numb the pain as she traded sex with her daughter for drugs.

The children who reside in our centers have been through a living hell. They have been physically, sexually, and emotionally abused. To deal with a world that seems hell-bent on killing them and their spirit, many of these children have built impenetrable shells to protect themselves from additional hurt. When they first enter our centers, most are so deep into their shells, so focused on the hurt they have suffered, that they have trouble relating to or empathizing with other children.

But Gloria drew out the other children at the Bokenkamp Center. These seemingly hardened kids took Gloria under their wing. They escorted her to and from her room, to school, and to the cafeteria.



One day, while I was visiting, I spotted Gloria at a table. She was coloring on a piece of paper.

"What are you working on?" I asked.

Gloria turned to me and said, "I'm coloring a picture to send to my mother in prison—to let her know that I forgive her."

Why does God let this happen? Certainly God doesn't offer up His children for sacrifice so that you and I can learn the lesson of forgiveness. I cannot explain His plan for Gloria, but clearly we can learn from Gloria's suffering and the example of her unconditional act of forgiveness.

Andrea, 38, walked into a Lutheran church office and asked, no, demanded to see the pastor. She was desperate for help. She was unmarried, alcoholic, and pregnant. She drove an 18-wheeler and could not afford the time or expense of caring for a baby. She asked the pastor to help her find a

*Gloria turned to me and said,
"I'm coloring a picture to send to my mother
in prison—to let her know that I forgive her."*

Christian family who would adopt her unborn child. He ministered to her and referred her to Lutheran Social Services of the South. A few

months later, her son was born and he was placed with a loving family.

But that was not the end of Andrea's story. When she was in town, she stopped in to see the pastor and his wife—at all hours of the day and night. She came to trust them, and slowly the details of her life began to emerge.

One of the hardest lessons we have to learn, and one we have to teach the children in our centers, is that we don't know all the answers

When she was 12 years old, Andrea wanted to be baptized in a church, like her friends. "No, you're not good enough to be baptized," her grandmother roughly admonished her. And Andrea came to believe it. Her self-destructive behaviors, alcohol abuse, and sexual promiscuity reinforced what her grandmother had said.

But Andrea wanted things to be different for her child, and eventually for herself. The pastor shared Christ with her and helped her enter a rehab center. In time she became a member of his church and was baptized.

Andrea began to heal from the sexual abuse inflicted by her father when she was a child, and from her alcohol addiction. She began to develop healthy relationships. Out of her suffering came a disciple in Christ, one who had made sure her son would grow up in a home unlike the one she had lived in.

Janelle is a past client of Neighborhood House, an emergency assistance ministry in Lubbock, Texas, that helps people in crisis. Neighborhood House dispenses vouchers to the local food bank and provides rent and utility assistance.

Janelle is now 70. Her life has been far from easy. She raised eight children on her own after her husband left her. She remembers well the dark

days when she walked the streets begging for handouts for her children, and later for her grandchildren.

Now she holds a part-time job and she helps street people find jobs and dignity. Her faith sustains her.

"No suffering can touch me," she says, "because Jesus walks with me and in me."

Suffering comes in many forms that won't heal with band-aids and kisses. Suffering can be inexpressibly painful physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It is difficult to understand the suffering endured by Gloria, Andrea, and Janelle.

One of the hardest lessons we have to learn, and one we have to teach the children in our centers, is that we don't know all the answers. It is all right to admit that you don't know, and then to pray for understanding and acceptance.

What we can teach our clients is that by being part of the LSS family they have become active participants in a Christian community. It is also, in a unique way, a healing community. In the words of Henri Nouwen, "A Christian community is a healing community not because wounds are cured and pains are alleviated, but because wounds and pains become openings or occasions for a new vision."

In the death of Jesus on the cross, what appears to be a horrific tragedy becomes in reality the greatest good (eternal life). Similarly, Gloria, Andrea, and Janelle experienced a transformation of their suffering. Those who aren't Christian are simply unable to understand their triumphs over tragedy.

They don't understand the Christian perspective in which sickness, chronic disease, suffering, and even death can, in fact, be positive events in our lives because they provide opportunities for spiritual and personal growth, as well as eternal life.

This vision is what we as Christians describe as "the theology of the cross." It is the key to living a life of *shalom*, the key to finding peace and meaning in the lives of our clients, volunteers, and staff.

For Further Reading

John McCollough Bade, *Will I Sing Again? Listening for the Melody of Grace in the Silence of Illness and Loss* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003).

Garth Ludwig, *Order Restored: A Biblical Interpretation of Health, Medicine and Healing* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999).

Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Image Books, 1979).

For Further Doing

Implement a Stephen Ministry program as a key component of your social services program. For more information on this innovative application of the Stephen Ministry program, please contact Rev. Mel Swoyer, Director of Spiritual Care, Lutheran Social Services of the South, Austin, Texas. Mel can be reached at mswoyer@lss.org or at (512) 459-1000.

Dr. Kurt Senske is CEO of Lutheran Social Services of the South. He is the author of Executive Values: A Christian Approach to Organizational Leadership (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003) and Personal Values: God's Game Plan for Life (to be released July 2004). Dr. Senske can be reached at kurts@lss.org

There Was No End to the Pain

Restorative Justice is about the balance and shalom needed to live together—the vital healing that everyone needs.

For 14 years, I coordinated a program that helped prisoners' families visit their loved ones at Marion Federal Penitentiary in Marion, Illinois. We gave them rides from town to the prison, arranged lodging, and developed support groups for them. Those visiting were strong women who were caught in the system by their loved ones' actions and were labeled, and often treated, as criminals themselves. Some were hard on the outside, but inside were gentle women who had made poor choices about the men they loved. And there were parents who grieved the loss of sons to prison and struggled with the guilt of having raised a man labeled "criminal."

Often we would hear "When will Daddy come home?"

"My family does not understand why I keep visiting my husband. They want me to get a divorce."

"Our son has been in prison for 10 years, and we are not healthy enough to visit much any more. He is so afraid one of us will die before he comes home."

"Since Dan went to prison, no one at church will talk to me."

They were thankful for any small kindness because they received nothing of the sort in their hometowns. Some women lost their jobs, their homes, and their extended family because they chose to remain faithful to their loved ones. So it was women who opened the door to the criminal justice system for me, women who shared their pain and heartache. After all, it is women and their children who visit in prisons.

These women and children came from all over the country to this small southern Illinois town. They reminded me of the strangers, sojourners, and widows of the Old Testament—the outcasts God called the people of Israel to care for. We were following the biblical admonition to provide hospitality as Sarah and Abraham did to the angels. What burdened my soul was that they kept coming, and there was no end.

In 1996, I took a job with Lutheran Social Services of Illinois as executive director of Prisoner and Family Ministry. Our programs worked with those incarcerated and their families. I felt a great need to learn more about life on "the inside," and it was the men on death row who taught me more. Theirs was obviously a different kind of struggle—a life of extremes. Their cells



and death row itself were rancid. They had no privacy, and many had no life other than their cases. Often their families were long gone and their only friends were each other. Some men had no awareness of the pain they had caused their families or the surviving families of their victims. Some were so close to mental illness—because of the hellish conditions they lived in, their past lives, or just being born that way—that they could not see past their pain to the pain of another.

"Since Dan went to prison, no one at church will talk to me."

Talking to these men took me deeper into the suffering caused by crime. The worst part was knowing that we Christians needed to be there, but our presence was not enough. It could not, by itself, bring healing. The pain and suffering that human beings inflicted on each other turned inward on prisoners themselves, and radiated into so many other lives. I knew that prisoners' families were affected, that many victims' lives were forever changed, that many men in prison had no life. Was Christ sufficient for all this? *Christ was sufficient, but our ministry was not.*

I began reading about Restorative Justice (RJ). The RJ philosophy encompasses all who bear the scars of crime: families of all parties, victims, offenders, and the larger community. Restorative Justice stresses listening to the people who have been harmed and helping to restore them to wholeness as much as possible. Because those who have harmed others are held accountable for

a solid example of how we are to minister with and learn from the Samaritans of our day. We cannot do justice, we cannot begin to heal, we cannot start to restore our communities, without the Samaritans. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). Our God-given ministry of reconciliation includes the entire world, the world beyond our Lutheran churches and indeed beyond the Christian church. We cannot even start this enormous task alone. God uses all people—Samaritans, too—to teach and to heal.

I have seen Restorative Justice work. During a family group conference, I heard the “confession” of two youth who had damaged the property of an elderly woman. She forgave them their “sin” against her, and together they worked out a plan to replace her property. Included in that plan were regular visits to her home. She wanted them to know her as a neighbor, not as a victim of their crime. She also wanted the youth to read letters from her imprisoned grandson so that they would not go to prison one day.

A friend of mine lost her daughter to murder. It was the boyfriend who was responsible. It took my friend more than seven years to confront what this tragedy did to her relationship with God and to the rest of her family. Through a victim-offender mediation process, she went to the prison to see the young man responsible for her daughter’s death. She gave and experienced unexpected forgiveness, and she came to greater wholeness.

Except for families, chaplains may be the only people outside “the system” who see some prisoners. Through their faithfulness to the Gospel, they can prepare the way for Restorative Justice. I strongly recommend that everyone, including chaplains, learn more about RJ. Indeed, each of you is already on your own RJ journey. You already have thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about people affected by crime. Think about how you as an individual and as a member of a congregation can participate in an RJ effort. Hearing stories of circles (a form of group process), family group conferences, and mediations will inspire you, but there is no substitute for participating in a healing process. Then begin to tell your own story. That is how RJ is transmitted: through stories. Christ, the great storyteller, knew it all along.

Jane Otte is Executive Director, Prisoner and Family Ministry, Lutheran Social Services of Illinois. In 1995 she received the U.S. Department of Justice award as Citizen Volunteer of the Year for her work on behalf of prisoners’ families.

We cannot do justice, we cannot begin to heal, we cannot start to restore our communities, without the Samaritans.

their actions, offenders are enabled to become competent and provided with ways to give back. And since all of us are part of a greater whole, the involvement and safety of the community are key to Restorative Justice.

RJ resonated with my Lutheran roots. It created a space in which healing of the soul and of relationships was possible. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God . . . is faithful and just . . .” (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 56) At its core, Restorative Justice is about confession and forgiveness. These words are not always used in RJ, but the concepts are the same. The powerful, transformative effect of being accountable for our actions before God and one another has been lost in the present criminal justice system and, sadly, in modern life generally. Restorative Justice is about the balance and *shalom* needed to live together—the vital healing that *everyone* needs.

The journey into RJ took me unexpectedly to another place where women voiced the pain and devastation of victimization. Their voices were familiar, but they cut into my Lutheran heart because much of their pain and anger was at God for allowing harm to their families. As one who worked with prisoners and their families, I could not address their spiritual struggle. I was on the “other side.” *Christ was sufficient, but our ministry was not.*

But another look at the Good Samaritan story renewed my faith. After all, the “Good Samaritan” was not a “good” Jewish man. Jesus’ story is not only an indictment of the religious community, but

For Further Reading

Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice* (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2002). [(800) 762-7171]

Surprised by Joy: Reflections on Suffering

God literally goes to hell and back to bring us back—
into a real relationship with God.

When tough times invade our lives—as they inevitably do—most of us scramble urgently for a survival response. Ordinarily, only after the dust settles and the storm calms do we probe for answers to “Why?” The theology of the cross may then surprise us with new understanding.

For centuries, the faithful have found that the passion of the Christ provides an interpretative and implicative lens for human suffering. The level of this inquiry rose at the time of the Reformation. “For millennia God had justified man; now man, on the basis of his own reasoning powers, would try to justify God and the existence of evil in divine creation.”¹ Heirs of the Lutheran tradition have tended to focus, even joy in, the paradox of the cross. Here, they discover (1) Christianity’s defining event and (2) God’s mechanism of salvation, as well as (3) a mysterious rejoicing even in the midst of catastrophe (2 Corinthians 6:10).

Joy in suffering? Such a dramatic message is necessarily public and centrifugal. It pushes hard from the center—the cross—to be heard; it pushes especially toward the margins and the marginalized. To redeem the whole creation, the God-man endured God-forsakenness because of joy (Hebrews 12:2). The cross, then, is transformed from an ignoble instrument of execution to the definitive source of blessing.

Like much in life itself, the cross is unlikely. God on a cross? What’s more, God saving us through a cross? We find it unlikely because, unlike human hearts, God’s heart is cross-shaped. God’s love emanates from the bottom up, not from the top down; from this point of crucifixion, not from glorification; in tense struggle, not in facile accommodation; from the ground-level of engagement, not from the safe pinnacle of attainment.

Paul anchored his faith in the “secret” of the cross. The result was that he learned not to be sabotaged by circumstances—either by success or by suffering (Philippians 4:11-12). That suffering is inevitable goes without saying. That joy might be proffered as a positive fruit of suffering is a claim requiring a theological roadmap if we are to grasp it. It begins with the fact that the very support we receive through the worst of human suffering has its source at a point of ultimate suffering, or Divine pathos. In our affliction, God is empathetically present (Isaiah 63:9).



For believers, the real presence of the One called alongside to help us (Advocate) brings real joy.² This Holy Spirit brings understanding of the cross’s reality. Faith is paramount as the instrument for receiving the Spirit’s nurture and gifts.³ In spite of the supposed human preference for honeyed amusements, ear-tickling words, mellifluous solutions, and anesthetized options, the theology of the cross is a reality theology: at the cross we see God “keepin’ it real.”⁴

*Joy in suffering? Such a dramatic message is
necessarily public and centrifugal.*

It’s real because here life’s two most inescapable realities confront us: real sin and real death. About these there is no arguing. The devil’s flaming darts sear and scar. Temptations terrorize.

Death deeply stings. Seemingly rapturous relationships rupture. Good businesses go bankrupt. Wars rage. Sickness steals without warning. The theology of the cross does not paint these over with a brush-stroke of denial or philosophizing. At the cross,

land, even in the midst of stifled, muffled, muted praise in a Gulag or ghetto or prison or concentration camp, God surprises with joy. Joseph Sittler makes the following musicological point of fact: "It is interesting to recall that the most rollicking music old periwig Bach ever wrote is not dedicated to the joy of tobacco (although he did that) or coffee (and he praised that) or the inventiveness among his fellow musicians, nor dedicated to the levity of the Count of Brandenburg, but *In Dir ist Freude* ('In Thee is Joy')!"⁸

Creaturely things burst through their suffering to join in the hymn of creation as God's joy radiates with cosmic dimension. Once bitterly estranged, since the cross of Christ all things now yearn toward redemption (2 Corinthians 5:19). Derek Walcott, the third-world Nobel Prize-winning poet, offers a Davidic personification of joy-full praise, from the littlest subatomic particle to the largest supersonic boom:

... And it all sang,
surpliced, processional,
the waves clapped their hands, hallelujah!
and the hills were joyful together,
arpeggios of lizards scuttled the leaves,
swift notes, and under earth
the stifled overtures of cannon thunder.⁹

God does not find joy in us because we try hard (Romans 3:23); pleasing God is never fully possible. Neither does God find joy in us because we suffer. And though God has a decidedly favorable disposition toward and preference for sufferers, our suffering does not evoke from God any saving favor. Only the suffering of Jesus Christ finally pleases the Father, conquering the devil and satisfying the justice of God. Since the righteous requirement is fulfilled in the person and through the work of Jesus, therefore in Jesus is our gladness also, even in the midst of the most calamitous sadness. Our joy is only *extra nos*—outside of ourselves. This confession of faith will impel us joyfully back into the world, ready to suffer: "One who says *credo* without willingness to suffer, and if necessary die, for the faith has not genuinely said *credo*."¹⁰

Lutheran spirituality finds, then, its surprise and core at the cross. Though he writes from beyond the Lutheran tradition, Thomas Finger offers an apt articulation of how caring connections are extended from this ground zero of suffering.

As the Son's arms are stretched out toward the sky and he cries out in his sense of abandonment, and as the Father gazes down, as it were, in anguish and compassion on his beloved Son, the whole history of human agony and ultimate desolation passes between them.¹¹

Caring connections are made personally and surprisingly when we risk "being real" with one another.

God confronts these realities face to face. Bleeding sweat and sweating blood in the garden (Luke 22:39-46), Jesus faces his future with courage, not fear: real spit hitting his face, real spikes tearing his hands and feet, a real spear gouging beneath his ribs. God literally goes to hell and back in order to bring us back into a real relationship with God. Talk about *surprise!*

Paul later vows to preach nothing but this reality. As we offer the Word to one another, the body broken and wine outpoured, the splashing water of Father, Son, and Spirit, God is *really* present. But never is God present in our suffering in a manner we can fully anticipate. Caring connections are made personally and surprisingly when we risk "being real" with one another.⁵

God's joy comes personally, yet it comes also from the unexpected edge, with surprise timing. Were joy to train into our pain-freighted lives with an announced schedule, we might reject it or return it to the Holy Spirit from whom it came. People living with pain do not care to hear abstract theories and tidy theologies of suffering.

Henri Nouwen has observed that even those in professional ministry suffer often from a joylessness that is predatory upon and parasitic of their vitality.⁶ They are angry at their leaders for not lead-

Were joy to train into our pain-freighted lives with an announced schedule, we might reject it or return it to the Holy Spirit from whom it came.

ing and at their followers for not following. They are angry at those who do not come to church for not coming and angry at those who do come for coming without enthusiasm. They are angry at their families, who make them feel guilty, and angry at themselves for not being who they want to be. This is not an open, blatant, roaring anger, but an anger hidden behind the smooth word, the smiling face, and the polite handshake.⁷

Joy has also a doxological dimension. For even in the midst of singing the Lord's song in a strange

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Endnotes

1. Mark Lilla, "The Big E," *The New York Review of Books*, June 12, 2003, 46. This article is a review of *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternate History of Philosophy* by Susan Neiman.

2. "The joy of the Christian disciple is not only the joy of recognizing that Jesus has conquered death in his resurrection (20:20); it is an abiding joy resulting from Jesus' presence in the Paraclete. The first joy follows the sadness and suffering of Jesus' departure in death; the second joy (which is a continuation of the first) exists alongside the suffering imposed by the world." See Raymond Brown, *The Gospel of John*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 733.

3. Faith recognizes and receives the biblical characteristics of joy: a song in the heart (Colossians 3:16); a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22; Romans 14:7); sustenance through difficult circumstances (Acts 16:25; Romans 5:3; Colossians 1:24); even in sorrow (2 Corinthians 6:10); through tears (2 Timothy 1:4). Joy is in God (1 Thessalonians 3:9, Philippians 3:1); this joy is related to hope (Romans 12:12). In particular, the

Philippian church was intoxicated with the joy of the Lord. This joy is connected to faith (Philippians 1:25); is symbiotic within the fellowship (Philippians 2:28-29); is indicative of readiness for martyrdom (Philippians 1:25). Joy is in the Lord, is experienced temporally, but is not temporary (Philippians 4:4).

4. An urban colloquialism.

5. *Surprised by Joy* is the title also of C. S. Lewis' story of his transition from Christianity to atheism and back to Christianity. This autobiography is, he concedes, "suffocatingly subjective." Arguably, what is most personally true bears also the greatest universal truth.

6. This joy-sapping anger can only be countered by reinterpreting our suffering in light of the sufferings of Christ—recognizing that what we suffer fills up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ (Colossians 1:24). Not that Christ's redemption is incomplete, but what we suffer in joy serves the world as a living sacrifice and a sign of Christ's suffering. The apex of Habakkuk's praise arose at the nadir of his life (Habakkuk 3:17-18). Seeing him, who could not also rejoice?

7. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 21-22.

8. Joseph Sittler, *The Care of the Earth and Other University Sermons* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 95.

9. Derek Walcott, *Collected Poems: 1948-1984* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998), 207.

10. Thomas C. Oden, *The Living God*, vol. 1, *Systematic Theology* (San Francisco: Harper, 1987), 11.

11. Thomas N. Finger, *Self, Earth and Society: Alienation and Trinitarian Transformation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 302.

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Subscribers to future issues of Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling will be notified by e-mail when each issue is published. We hope you will subscribe. The process is simple: go to www.lutheranservices.org, select Networks, then select Affinity Networks, then select Chaplains' Network, then select Resources, then select Caring Connections and register on that page. You will need to provide your name, your organization's name, your e-mail address, and your ZIP code. Subscribers and nonsubscribers alike will soon be able to access this inaugural issue of Caring Connections electronically by visiting the LSA website. The second issue of Caring Connections will be published in about six months.

New and noteworthy

Christus in Mundo Award Recipients

At the Zion XII Chaplains Conference, held February 5-8 in San Antonio, four people received the Christus in Mundo award. They were:

Rev. Bill Adix (ELCA)
 Rev. Howard Mueller (LCMS)
 Deaconess Dorothy Prybylski (LCMS)
 Rev. Ray Runkel (ELCA)

The Christus in Mundo ("Christ in the world") award is "the highest award for distinctive service in Ministries in Chaplaincy, Pastoral Counseling, and Clinical Education" (MCPCCCE). The award "recognizes ministries as a reflection of the care Jesus gave to persons whose lives were in crisis." Recipients are selected by the Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee for Ministries in Chaplaincy, Pastoral Counseling, and Clinical Education (the ILCC).

The ILCC fosters "inter-Lutheran cooperation and coordination" in "programs and activities" related to MCPCCCE. The Zion conferences, which bring together Lutherans who serve in these specialized ministries, have been held every three years through the last 36 years.

Criminal Justice Ministry Handbook Published

Criminal Justice Ministry: A Congregational Handbook for Jail and Prison Ministry, published last fall, was the fruit of inter-Lutheran collaboration, primarily between the Division for Congregational Ministries of the ELCA and the Board for Human Care Ministries of the LCMS. The 80-page notebook is designed to sensitize and train members of local congregations who are involved, or wish to become involved, in jail and prison ministry.

Representatives of specialized ministries involved in the project included Dorothy Prybylski and Richard Tetzloff of the LCMS and Donald Stiger of the ELCA. The publication was supported by a grant from the Cooperative Parish Partnership Committee of Thrivent Financial for Lutherans.

A three-day introductory training event, held in Chicago October 2-4, 2003, drew a diverse group of 100 participants. While most were from the ELCA and LCMS, they were joined by several participants from other churches.

Criminal Justice Ministry is available from Augsburg Fortress at (800) 328-4648 for \$6.00 plus shipping.

Workplace Ministries White Paper Completed

An ELCA Workplace Ministries Consultation, convened in Chicago in June 2003, was followed in January 2004 by a white paper titled "The Workplace: A Frontline Mission of the Church." Among the participants in the consultation were ELCA chaplains and pastoral educators, pastoral counselors, and seminary faculty and staff members.

The report recognized and reaffirmed the importance of professional chaplaincy in the workplace as well as congregations' attention to work issues and the ongoing ministries of their members in the workplace. It also recommended that the church be able and available—equipped with "business savvy"—to address concerns that the business community and its leaders might have about workplace ministry.

The authors of the report, Sally Simmel and Don Stiger, urged the church to engage in strategic planning for ministry in the workplace. They also encouraged support for the "cadre" of consultation participants who expressed willingness to serve as a steering group for next steps, particularly in light of structural changes and staffing reductions within the ELCA.

The project, jointly coordinated by the Department for Ministry in Daily Life and the Division for Ministry, was supported by a grant from Thrivent Financial for Lutherans. The white paper's recommendations were to be a subject of discussion at the March 2004 meeting of the board of the Division for Ministry.

Recent and upcoming events

LCMS

May 10 - 12 The Concordia Deaconess Conference was held in Fort Wayne.

July 10 - 15 The LCMS Synodical Convention convened in St. Louis.

Inter-Lutheran

April 30 - May 1 The Lutheran Network for Mental Illness held its meeting in Chicago.

May 20 - 21 The Lutheran AIDS Network gathered in Chicago.

October 1 - 2 The Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee (ILCC) will meet in St. Louis.

November 12 The annual meeting of ACPE (see below) will feature a joint, co-hosted denominational breakfast for LCMS and ELCA attendees.

Ecumenical/Interfaith

April 22 - 24 AAPC (the American Association of Pastoral Counselors) held its annual meeting in San Francisco.

April 24 - 28 The annual meeting of APC (the Association of Professional Chaplains) was held in Dallas.

July 12 - 16 The International Conference of Police Chaplains met in St. Louis.

November 10 - 13 ACPE (the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education) will hold its annual meeting in Portland, Maine.

Further reading

For Further Reading

Hall, Douglas John, *God and Human Suffering*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986.

Simundson, Daniel J., *Faith under Fire*. Lima, Ohio: Academic Renewal Press, 2001 (first published 1980).

Simundson, Daniel J., *The Message of Job*. Lima, Ohio: Academic Renewal Press, 2001 (first published 1986).

John McCollough Bade, *Will I Sing Again? Listening for the Melody of Grace in the Silence of Illness and Loss*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003.

Garth Ludwig, *Order Restored: A Biblical Interpretation of Health, Medicine and Healing*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1999.

Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*. New York: Image Books, 1979.

Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*. Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2002. [(800) 762-7171]

For Further Doing

Implement a Stephen Ministry program as a key component of your social services program. For more information on this innovative application of the Stephen Ministry program, please contact Rev. Mel Swoyer, Director of Spiritual Care, Lutheran Social Services of the South, Austin, Texas. Mel can be reached at mswoer@lss.org or at (512) 459-1000.

Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling *welcomes your submissions of news germane to specialized ministries as well as announcements of forthcoming events. You may e-mail news items and announcements to one of the Caring Connections news editors: John Fale at John.Fale@lcms.org and Bryn Carlson at bcarls@covcable.com*

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G O D A N D S U F F E R I N G

- 5 Sin and Suffering in the Book of Job**
Daniel J. Simundson
- 7 How Can God Let this Happen?**
Kurt Senske
- 9 There Was No End to the Pain**
Jane Otte
- 11 Surprised by Joy: Reflections on Suffering**
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