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



# CARING CONNECTIONS

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# THE PURPOSE OF CARING CONNECTIONS

*Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 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* 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—not least—concerned congregational pastors and laity. *Caring Connections* also provides news and information about activities, events, and opportunities of interest to diverse constituencies in specialized ministries.

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# Editorial

With this issue, *Caring Connections* is, once again, doing something new. Our choices of topics for most of the issues, in the past, have invited articles written by an enormous variety of authors, which we have delighted to share with you for your “reading pleasure.” Then, the Spring, 2007 issue changed that format a bit. The articles in that issue were drawn from the papers presented at Zion XIII, the triennial gathering of Lutherans in specialized pastoral settings. Some gifts to the church were thus given a wider distribution for those who could not be present at the conference. The Summer, 2008 issue focused on the topic of Clinical Pastoral Education. At the annual conference of the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc. (ACPE) the following October, Diane Greve, member of the Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Council for Ministries of Chaplaincy, Pastoral Counseling, and Clinical Education (ILCC-MCPCCE), and I distributed hard copies of *Caring Connections* to all attendees at the Lutheran Breakfast, and then engaged all present in a rousing discussion of Diane’s article in that issue, titled, “Do We Need More Lutheran CPE Supervisors?”

So, in the past, we’ve had some productive relationships between certain conferences and our beloved e-magazine. And with this issue we continue that relationship, only in a new way. This time the conference hasn’t yet taken place! But, thanks particularly to Brian McCaffrey, chaplain at Lutheran Care Ministries Network, Inc. in Clinton, New York, and member of the planning committee for the Chaplains’ Network pre-conference workshop before the Lutheran Services of America (LSA) annual conference in Washington, DC, we will be dedicating this issue to articles written specifically for that conference!

The theme of the Chaplains’ Network conference, which is scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday, April 28 and 29, is, “Serving the Suffering; Serving the Servant.” Two of the articles in this issue of *Caring Connections* are chapters taken from books written by Flora Slossom-Wuellner and Jane Marie Thibault, which address the thorny problems of burnout and searching for meaning in suffering. Joan Randall, chaplain at Sunny View Lutheran Retirement Community in Cupertino, CA, adds two shorter pieces about her experiences as a pastor being pastored by the residents in the community. Rachel Freed, a social worker and licensed marriage and family therapist, invites readers to consider writing an ethical will! And then, in addition to writing one of the articles himself, Brian McCaffrey has also written a “Guest Editorial,” which is another first for *Caring Connections*!

Here’s that editorial from Brian:

## SERVING THE SUFFERING; SERVING THE SERVANT

*Here is my servant,  
whom I uphold,  
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
I have put my spirit upon him;  
he will bring forth justice to the nations.  
[2] He will not cry or lift up his voice,  
or make it heard in the street;  
[3] a bruised reed he will not break,  
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;  
he will faithfully bring forth justice.  
[4] He will not grow faint or be crushed  
until he has established justice in the earth;  
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.*

*Isaiah 42:1-4*

*Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, [4] got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. [5] Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him....*

*[12] After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? [13] You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. [14] So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. [15] For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. [16] Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. [17] If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. (John 13:3-5; 12-17)*

At the heart of our faith is mystery. This mystery of love, suffering, and resurrection includes Isaiah’s suffering servant and Jesus’ washing of the disciples’ feet. As people who emphasize the value of pastoral care and as spiritual companions, we encounter questions that come from the heart of those on this journey of faith. Perhaps we feel a little more at home with the questions than the answers that never seem big enough.

What does it mean that we’re really called to love one another? Does the model of the suffering servant have anything to say to us or does it only point to Jesus? I have a favorite line from Luther’s “On Christian Liberty”:

*A Christian man [sic] is the freest lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to every one.*

Luther was able to state the paradox of *being* and *doing* within the Body of Christ. I often put it as a question: “Now that you don’t have to do anything, what are you going to do?” God has challenged the model of power as detachment and invulnerability. Luther articulated a Theology of the Cross, which finds God in the midst of suffering and brokenness, of both the world and our lives. Leadership is not found in the glory of success, accomplishment, and power. Rather, leadership within the Realm of God is demonstrated precisely through compassion and vulnerability. The Reign of God is in our triumphant proclamation, “Christ is risen!” but the brokenness of the world’s “not yet” calls us to service.

As chaplains, pastoral counselors, and parish pastors we not only contend with the brokenness of our world and the people we serve, but our own brokenness as well.

How do we achieve a balance between caring for others, our families and caring for ourselves?

Is there anything meaningful that we can do with the suffering we encounter daily that can prevent it from overwhelming us?

Do people with “enough” faith still experience dark nights of the soul?

What “restores our soul” when we feel burned out?

How do we experience hope?

Each of the articles in this journal invites reflection around the main topic of the upcoming Annual Chaplains’ Network Conference, April 28th-29th, in Washington DC. The hope is that these articles and your reflection on them will offer a jumping off point for our conversation.

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Thanks, Brian.

Brian has also asked that we include a notice about the Northeast Forum on Spirituality and Aging, with hopes that some of you might be motivated to connect with that project, and perhaps even contribute articles there as well. Be sure to read and reflect on that “poster.”

For the next several issues we will be including notices about the Zion XIV gathering in Atlanta, with hopes that you will make plans to attend. There’s one in this issue, too.

Kevin and I have the luxury of an excellent Editorial Board, some of the members of which have been publishing their own articles elsewhere. I want to make note of two articles by current and former Board members: In *Clergy Journal* (Oct. ‘08—vol. 85, no. 1), Janet Ramsey has one piece titled “Spiritual Care When Dementia is Present: Holding Fast to the Memory of God” (pp. 9-11), and Dave McCurdy has one titled, “Helping Families Think Things Through” (pp. 6-8).

If you have not already done so, we hope you will subscribe online to *Caring Connections*. Remember, subscription is free! By subscribing, you assure 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. You can subscribe by clicking on the subscription link on [www.caringconnections.org](http://www.caringconnections.org), or by following the directions given on the masthead (p. 3), or in larger print on page 35.

## Call for Articles

*Caring Connections* seeks to provide Lutheran Pastoral Care Providers the opportunity to share expertise and insight with the wider community. We want to invite anyone interested in writing an article to please contact the editors, Rev. Kevin Massey and Rev. Chuck Weinrich.

Specifically, we invite articles for upcoming issues on the following themes.

Summer 2009 “Disaster Response and Pastoral Care”

Fall 2009 “The Role of Forgiveness”

# Naming Your Spiritual Journey: Recognizing the Dynamic Nature of Faith

On this journey of life, spirituality is the very sand upon which we travel.

## Footprints in the Sand

*One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.*

*Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky. In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there was one set of footprints.*

*This bothered me because I noticed that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints.*

*So I said to the Lord,  
"You promised me Lord,  
that if I followed you,  
you would walk with me always.  
But I have noticed that during  
the most trying periods of my life  
there have only been one  
set of footprints in the sand.  
Why, when I needed you most,  
have you not been there for me?"*

*The Lord replied,  
"The times when you have  
seen only one set of footprints in the sand,  
is when I carried you."*

Mary Stevenson



*(The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition. 2000, <http://www.bartleby.com/61/84/F0018400.html>).*

Sanctification is not a word bandied about much in Lutheran circles. A good reason for that is our fear of creating any kind of spiritual hierarchy. As Lutherans we want to make it clear that everyone stands before God equally: we are all saints and sinners. Even though our theology seems comfortable with the paradox of *both-and*, we tend to think of belief as an *either-or*. Faith is often thought of as a noun and can even be understood as a static set of beliefs:

1. *Confident belief in the truth, value, or trustworthiness of a person, idea, or thing.*
2. *Belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence. See synonyms at belief, trust.*
3. *Loyalty to a person or thing; allegiance: keeping faith with one's supporters.*
4. *The theological virtue defined as secure belief in God and a trusting acceptance of God's will.*
5. *The body of dogma of a religion: the Muslim faith.*
6. *A set of principles or beliefs*

*Even though our theology seems comfortable with the paradox of both-and, we tend to think of belief as an either-or.*

I suspect that by not developing a more thorough theology of sanctification, we've not taken seriously or explored the movement of faith through a lifetime: faith as a verb. As Lutherans we don't want to slip into competitive thinking or judgment of a person's faith journey. We do however want to support, encourage and nurture the priesthood of all believ-

ers. I'm one who believes that as pastors we need to be conscious of the process of faith:

*The research of developmental psychologist Erik Erikson, the insights of John Westerhoff and the recently published work of Sharon Daloz Parks (Harvard) broadly support the conceptualization of "faith development" as on-going processes of journey, discovery, change, and rediscovery. These occur throughout and across the life cycle. Daloz Parks argues that the character and complexity of faith, and its various modes of interacting with the larger world, are discernibly and identifiably different at various points in the life cycle. ("Faith is a Verb! Faith Development as a Process of Growth Across the Life-Cycle" by William M. Finnin, Jr.; [www.collegevalues.org/proceedings.cfm?ID=42](http://www.collegevalues.org/proceedings.cfm?ID=42))*

People who have known me over my lifetime will say that I'm pretty much the same person I've always been, yet I can point to many events that have transformed my life. I was premature at birth and, due to too much oxygen in the incubator, I'm visually impaired, which sets me apart from my siblings and peers (it continues to limit what path options are open to me). Fortunately, I loved school. President Kennedy's space race and a wonderful teacher convinced me by fourth grade that I wanted to be a physicist. My father was a heavy smoker suffering from emphysema. He died when I was thirteen. Scouting moved me from being a bookish suburban kid to loving the outdoors. Ten years of being a Scout camp counselor introduced me to many memorable people.

My family occasionally attended a UCC church. I would not say that religion played any real part in my life. I received a scholarship to a Lutheran college. While there I had a conversion experience. I also read Luther's Large Catechism and was impressed. It took a couple more years before I totally threw out the life map I had plotted since fourth grade. The path before me now was uncharted. I resisted for another two years before I entered Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

While at seminary I realized that I would have to make hospital visits. I had never been allowed to visit my dad in the hospital, nor had I ever been in one, except an E.R. for stitches a couple times as a kid. I like people, but before Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), I tended to live in my head and was very uncomfortable with hospitals. Because of my vision I do not drive. Not driving meant that it was difficult for the seminary to find me an internship site; I therefore did my internship in a CPE center. My not driving slowed my receiving a first call as well; I therefore did two more years of CPE Residencies. I was now comfortable and at home serving as a chaplain in a hospital.

I've only scratched the surface of my life; there

has been so much more: job struggles, marriage, deaths, divorce, another marriage, instant family, grandparenting, and health issues. I want to convey that spirituality is not just a separate piece of the divided pie of my life. On this journey of life, spirituality is the very sand upon which we travel. The way we physically and emotionally develop, the lessons we learn, the people we meet, the choices we make, successes and disappointments all create the terrain of our spiritual journey. What we trust and how deeply we trust is not cast in stone. Rather such a relationship is organic, shaped by the care it receives.

**BIRTH**



**DEATH**

**You Are Here!**

**How did you get here?**

**Has the trip been worth the effort?**

**With whom have you traveled?**

**Have there been surprises along the way?**

**What have been the big lessons, so far?**

**Where do you hope to go from here?**

One avenue of transformation in my life has been ideas that start as seeds and grow into whole new perspectives. While at seminary I attended a lecture by a Dominican monk, Matthew Fox, at the Newman Center on the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, campus and the next year at St. Catherine's College in St. Paul. He was obviously no dummy, but I wasn't sure what to make of his theology; particularly because some of my professors were highly critical of his work. Fox left me with a framework of a fourfold path with which I still work. The amazing thing is that I became more comfortable with his theology than with what became my former theology. While at seminary I took my first unit of CPE. The CPE group read *The Living Human Document: Re-Visioning Pastoral Counseling in a Hermeneutical Mode* by Charles Gerkin, which suggested that people's spiritual experiences needed to be interpreted like Biblical texts. In the 1980s I watched the conversation between Bill Moyer and Joseph Campbell on PBS's "The Power of Myth." As with Fox, I can't say that I was comfortable with everything that Campbell was saying, but something was resonating. He talked about the big stories that shape, guide, strengthen and sustain us. In the early 1990s I read Rachel Naomi Remen's *Kitchen Table Wisdom*, which was about the wisdom contained within our own stories, and I resonated with her observation that we have far fewer structures for the sharing of these stories than there used to be. In the mid 1990s a whole cache of books on narrative therapy described how we create our self through the stories

we tell and how we can “re-story” our lives.<sup>1</sup> All of this and much more became the rich soil that nurtured my appreciation of the stories we are and by which we live. Now I’d like to share a little of the fruit I gained while on this journey.

From the moment we are born we are bombarded by stimuli pouring into our five senses. There is so much going on around us at all times that we have to develop filters. Family, peers, and culture share their filters with us as we develop our own. The filters are passed on through positive and negative reinforcements: the “shoulds” and “shouldn’ts”, rights and wrongs, good and bad. The values are embedded in our stories: Words are spoken into the chaos and are given order. The stories retold or created determine what’s important and what is to be ignored. With time comes experience; new stories are added. Some experiences change our perspective. From a new perspective the old stories are reshaped and take on new meaning.

## TIME

Somewhere in my theological training I was taught to distinguish two types of time: Chronos and Kairos. Chronos of course being chronological or linear time, where one moment leads to the next and before you know it we can measure our lifetime in years. I’ve read life stories that were told within a chronological structure; they often repeat the phrase: “and then”. A linear story reminds me of the old Dagnet series in which the sergeant would say, “Just the facts.” A linear story creates a bare-boned outline of life. A linear story often remains on the surface of a life, and it can be told from the perspective of an objective observer, and can even render a life boring. It can be summarized in the reporter’s questions of: Who? What? When? and Where? Most developmental theories fall within the realm of linear time. They differ in whether they see development as discontinuous or continuous. I favor the more organic growth of continuous. I would say that the discontinuous model better represents kairotic time.

Kairotic time is measured as significant moments. Kairos contains experience that can serve as a source of meaning. We can speak of a “before” and “after” event that is remembered with either a shudder or a smile: a first love, a driver’s license, a graduation, a first job, the death of a loved one, the birth of a child. All these are events that may appear on our linear story. When we tell our story from our perspective of meaningful moments we add some meat to the bone. We move from objective to subjective truth. Here’s where the stories become a little more interesting and, as they say, “the plot thickens”.

You might find it interesting to categorize the kairotic events of your life. A simple exercise, found in Richard Morgan’s *Remembering Your Story: A Guide to Spiritual Autobiography*,<sup>2</sup> is to divide your

life into seven year segments: 0-7, 8-14, 15-21, etc., and to name a significant moment from each segment. My slight adaptation is to think of each segment then as a chapter from your book of life. Give each chapter a title and then create a working title for your book of life (then push yourself a little further and create the cover art for your book).

*For those of us within the liturgical tradition, the many pieces of the liturgical year become familiar enough to become part of our story, linking our personal story with all of creation and the Creator.*

Other chapter variations based on meaning:

**GEOGRAPHY:** Life functions in space. What are the places in which significant things have happened to you?

**RELATIONSHIPS:** All life is meeting others. Who are the three or four people who have had the greatest impact on your life? Why?

**CHOICES:** We are choosing creatures. Think of the important decisions in your life and discuss what they meant to you, how they were made and the rippling consequences.

**PILGRIMAGE:** Some of our experiences we choose to call religious. Think of two or three such experiences that were turning points for you.

**HIGHS & LOWS:** Life is made of joy and sorrow. List a few of the happiest and saddest experiences of your life.

**THEMES** – Lessons learned.<sup>3</sup>

A third kind of time is cyclical, most easily associated with the seasons of a year, seedtime and harvest, the phases of the moon, or the hours of a day. Cyclical time can be considered the universal experience of time because it cuts across cultures. It is also the time of the Church’s Liturgical Calendar. The liturgical year returns us to colors, themes, prayers, and Bible readings (repeated in their own three year cycle) that over a lifetime will engage our history as well as our big and little life changing events, revealing a different perspective or another level of meaning in each cycle. For those of us within the liturgical tradition, the many pieces of the liturgical year become familiar enough to become part of our story, linking our personal story with all of creation and the Creator.

## LITURGICAL THEMES

ADDRESS MAJOR KAIROTIC EXPERIENCES OF LIFE

ADDRESS PSYCHOSOCIAL NEEDS OF

## DEVELOPMENT

### ADDRESS MEANING, PURPOSE AND ONE'S RELATIONSHIP TO SELF, OTHERS, CREATION, LIFE, AND THE DIVINE

FOUR FOLD PATH (adapted from Matthew Fox)

#### Path 1: The Positive

Mountain top experiences are best described as events we don't want to end. In the language of Tillich we could say that it is more about an experience of "Being" than "Doing". Being a witness to a sunrise, sunset, night sky, nature, earthy-ness, passion, panoramic beauty, microscopic wonder, a birth, a first step, a first word, a healing, reconciliation, mercy, a "good" death, an act of creating, or an act of love: all may offer us an epiphany of peace, beauty, wonder, joy, acceptance, a sense of "presence," connection, forgiveness, love, and vocation. The positive always has an element of the transcendent; a stepping out of the ordinary here and now into something MORE real; encountering the Divine, a glimpse of a bigger God. The amazing thing is that the mountain top experience can be forgotten, even dismissed, in the midst of daily routine, the struggle for survival and on-going chaos that leads to hopelessness (in the midst of chaos there is no story<sup>4</sup>).

#### Path 2: The Negative<sup>5</sup>

While mountain top experiences seem to be over far too soon, those that bring us low seem to go on forever. As chaplains this is where we often join people on their pilgrimage. Instead of the beauty of nature we may encounter the raw, thoughtless and destructive power of wind, rain, heat, cold and/or pestilence. Here is where we witness the Psalmist's and Christ's cry of, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" We recall the disciples fleeing in terror, living lies, and being forced to go where they never wanted to go. We meet people who are feeling powerless, out of control (possessed), at the end of their rope; who believe they are worthless, unlovable, and doomed. We get to hear the stories of people living with situations that nobody should have to live with, and we may experience with them the sense of emptiness, absence, loss, and hopelessness. What we haven't experienced first hand we still can imagine: addiction, poverty, homelessness, mental illness, cruelty, domestic violence, sexual abuse, neglect, persecution, oppression, torture, war, and every evil under the sun. We can feel the desire or need to escape, to deny, to become numb in order to continue. It is here that faith becomes entrenched, is abandoned, or is changed.

#### Path 3: Creativity

Two bumper-sticker clichés with some depth of insight are, "It's Not What Life Gives You That Matters, But What You Do With It" and "When Life

*Gives You Lemons Make Lemonade*"<sup>6</sup> From the very beginning of Genesis we are told that God is creative. I'd like to say that being creative is one of the most spiritual experiences we have. The ability to respond to joy by singing, dancing, doing cartwheels, writing a poem, a prayer, or a story connects us to God. Taking something that was meant for evil and from it creating a gift for the common good also connects us directly with God (e.g. the story of Joseph being sold into slavery and the gospel story of Jesus on the cross).

*Unfortunately we often carry an image of vulnerability as weakness rather than the self-emptying kenosis at the heart of Luther's Theology of the Cross.*

Viktor Frankl, an Austrian Jewish psychiatrist and concentration camp survivor said that there is an innate "will to meaning" in all of us.<sup>7</sup> Another way of saying this is that we need to create order out of our chaos. It is my experience and the experience of many that the process of creating is spiritually reenergizing and healing. Julia Cameron, the author of *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1992), has created a number of approaches to get beyond the inner blocks that prevent many of us from even trying to be creative.<sup>8</sup> Art is not the only form of creativity. Seeing a need and responding to it by finding where your talents and passions might best serve the community can be a way of taking grief and transforming it into service. The formation of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (M.A.D.D.) was the result of needing to do something with the sense of helplessness after a tragic loss (<http://www.madd.org/About-Us.aspx>). Many of the volunteers throughout Lutheran Services in America are serving our organizations as a way of creating meaning in response to a difficult time.

#### Path 4: Transformation

Almost all of us would like our lives to be better, but we hope that change will occur in the people and the world around us. Seldom are we willing to change ourselves. Transformation requires a level of vulnerability. Unfortunately we often carry an image of vulnerability as weakness rather than the self-emptying kenosis at the heart of Luther's Theology of the Cross. Vulnerability allows for the potential of change. Even though we have responded the same way ninety-nine times, because we are human, the possibility of change remains. Reflection and imagination allow for epiphanies that open us to whole other levels of meaning. Martin Buber's "*I and Thou*" examined the dynamic of relationships, where the habit of objectification can be trans-

formed through the experience of “the Other.” Also, James Fowler’s *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian* sees the experience of “the Other” as creating an expanding consciousness of interconnectedness, a broadening inclusion, a redefining of our boundaries, a shift in our expectations, an altered point of view—all of which create a new story. An example of this occurs in the familiar poem “Footprints in the Sand” appearing at the beginning of this article. The change in perspective transforms the story from one of disappointment and abandonment into a story of love and faithfulness. If we can allow our perspective to be altered, it is quite possible that we will find ourselves transformed as well.

### THREE ASPECTS OF BEING HUMAN

In 1948 two psychologists, Clyde Kluckhohn & Henry Murray, suggested that there were three aspects of being human:

**I am like all others**

**I am like some others**

**I am like no other**

I’d like to play with these three aspects; suggesting that spiritual maturity requires being able to weave together stories from these three perspectives.

#### **I am like all others = UNIVERSAL—SPIRIT — Cyclical Time**

Cosmic epiphanies being triggered through awe and wonder at the vastness of night skies; the beauty of sunrises, sunsets, nature, creation; the mysteries of birth, death, love, hatred, war, forgiveness, struggle, redemption, reconciliation, loss, grief, survival, renewal, and joy help us recognize one level of our connectedness and God’s Presence. Here I recognize that I am part of a common humanity, with the same basic needs and with the same creator. One example is the number of stories concerning Christmas Eve during WWI, when German, French, English, and American soldiers laid down their arms and came out of the trenches and exchanged chocolate, cigarettes, songs, and family photos. Cosmic epiphanies invite us to recognize how far God is beyond our understanding and that we are part of a much larger picture. Biblically, the Creation story, the Book of Ecclesiastes, Job, Psalm 8 (any of the wisdom literature), and Jesus’ frequent parables of nature model this aspect of our spiritual identity.

#### **I am like some others = LOCAL—COMMUNITY – Linear / Chronological Time**

One gift of the incarnation is the redemption of the material world. Jesus is God’s love set within a historical context, a specific gender and a particular socio-political-economic-religio-ethnic identity. Here we receive the gift of belonging and we encounter the social construction of reality. We learn what our group identifies as important or insignificant: gender identity, class, developmental

theories, medical practices, statistics, religions, denominations, and the proper response regarding those identified as “other.” All of these categories impact our experience of the familiar and the strange. As a working class, Anglo-Celtic male, youngest of four, and baby boomer, who then became the first of the family to be college educated, professional and clergy, I am aware that many of

*My soul is not shaped by what life hands me, but rather by what I do with what life hands me.*

the long standing rules and expectations that I began life with have been questioned and changed by me and our culture. Biblically, the call of Abram and Sarai, and all that follows through the five books of Moses and the subsequent historical books, the prophets, and all of the New Testament are placed within a particular historical context.

#### **I am like no other = UNIQUE—SOUL – Kairotic Time**

I like to make a distinction between Spirit and soul. Spirit is both within and without; it is both before and after me. Spirit makes me part of the big picture, uniting me with all of creation and the Creator. Linear time helps me to develop and grow within the hothouse of community. On the other hand, “soul” is home grown. Our souls are shaped by meaning...not the universal TRUTH, nor the established Truth of our community, but the powerful, albeit smaller “self truth.” The kairotic moments of our life are truly our own. The sun, rain, and garbage of life become the compost that stimulates growth and depth. The stories we tell about life and our place in it reveal our unique talents, personality, and perspective. What have I accomplished or regret; those whom I have loved and who have loved me (including God); what have I done with what Viktor Frankl terms “unavoidable suffering” (the source of both soul food and soul music). My soul is not shaped by what life hands me, but rather by what I do with what life hands me. For example, does my life become more narrow, rigid, and fearful or does my life grow more inclusive, adaptable, and loving? My soul is the place that transforms the things of the Spirit and the energy of the community into the source of inner strength.

All the varied ways we look at our lives can broaden our perspective. A soul can grow full enough to bear fruit that nourishes others.

#### **I AM – Continuing**

He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,

‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’”

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life.

Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and  
 whoever  
 believes in me will never be thirsty.  
 “I am the bread of life.”  
 “I am the living bread that came down from heaven.  
 Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will  
 know  
 whether the teaching is from God or whether I am  
 speaking on my own.  
 “I am the light of the world.  
 Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but  
 will  
 have the light of life.”  
 So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you,  
 I am the gate for the sheep.”  
 “I am the good shepherd.  
 I know my own and my own know me.”  
 “I am the resurrection and the life.”  
 “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come  
 again  
 and will take you to myself, so that where I am,  
 there you may be also.”  
 “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”  
 “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to  
 you.”  
 “I am the vine, you are the branches.”  
 “I am not asking you to take them out of the world,  
 but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.”  
 When Jesus said to them, “I am he,”  
 they stepped back and fell to the ground.  
 The woman said to Peter, “You are not also one of  
 this  
 man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.”  
 Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I?”  
 Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do  
 not  
 write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but,  
 ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’”  
 Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.”

### IAM- Ongoing

I am Brian Kirk McCaffrey  
 I am the son of George & Elizabeth McCaffrey  
 the children of John & Mary,  
 Hazel & the one they never talked about because...  
 I am the brother of Bonnie & Tim  
 I was the brother of Skip  
 I am the product of my genes  
 (which at first glance is a little frightening)  
 I am the product of my environment,  
 my history and culture  
 (I am the Walrus coo-coo kachoo)  
 I am me  
 I am something other than “me”  
 I am human  
 I am in awe, wonder, and fear of Life

I am sometimes confused and saddened by Life  
 I am created in the image of God/dess/Divine  
 I create in the image of God/dess/Divine  
 I am...  
 [TO BE CONTINUED- watch this space]  
 I am more than me  
 I am connected and stretched beyond  
 (my) imagination  
 I am touched by and changed by (my) Life  
 I am a child of God/dess/Divine  
 (with all the rights, privileges, and  
 responsibilities pertaining thereto)  
 I am part of the Creation  
 I am part of the Divine  
 I am part of Goddess  
 I am part of God  
 I am

1 Dan McAdams, *Power, Intimacy, and the Life Story: Personological Inquiries Into Identity* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1988); *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1993); Jill Freedman and Gene Combs, *Narrative Therapy: The Social Construction of Preferred Realities* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996); Gary Kenyon & William Randall, *Restorying Our Lives: Personal Growth Through Autobiographical Reflection* (Westport CT: Praeger Publishers, 1997); William Randall & Gary Kenyon, *Ordinary Wisdom: Biographical Aging and the Journey of Life* (Westport CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001)  
 2 Upper Room Publishing in general, and Richard Morgan in particular, have created the largest catalogue of books addressing the topic of Spirituality & Aging.  
 3“Autobiography in Five Short Chapters,” by Portia Nelson

### I

I walk down the street.  
 There is a deep hole in the sidewalk  
 I fall in.  
 I am lost ... I am helpless.  
 It isn't my fault.  
 It takes me forever to find a way out.

### II

I walk down the same street.  
 There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
 I pretend I don't see it.  
 I fall in again.  
 I can't believe I am in the same place  
 but, it isn't my fault.  
 It still takes a long time to get out.

### III

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I see it is there.  
I still fall in ... it's a habit.  
my eyes are open  
I know where I am.  
It is my fault.  
I get out immediately.

### IV

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I walk around it.

### V

I walk down another street.

4 Arthur W. Frank's *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) pp. 97-115. This is one of those books I think every chaplain should read.

5 Here I go far afield from Matthew Fox's emphasis upon the space between people and atoms, the nothingness before birth and after death and empty void out of which God created all is-ness.

6 Al Mighty God's *Ten Trillion and One Ways To Make Lemonade* (Creation: Eighth Day Publishing, 0)

7 Viktor Frankl's *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986) and *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy* (New York: Meridian Books, 1988).

8 There are numerous books which address creativity and spiritual growth. Here are some I recommend: Susan Zimmermann, *Writing to Heal the Soul: Transforming Grief and Loss Through Writing* (New York: Three Rivers Press 2002); John Fox, *Finding What You Didn't Lose: Expressing You Truth and Creativity Through Poem-Making* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher / Putnam, 1995); Jeri Gerding, *Drawing To God: Art as Prayer, Prayer as Art* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2001); Michell Cassou and Stewart Cubley, *Life, Paint, and Passion: Reclaiming the Magi of Spontaneous Expression* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995); Pat B. Allen, *Art is a Way of Knowing: A Guide to Self-Knowledge and Spiritual Fulfillment Through Creativity* (Boston & London: Shambhala Publications Inc., 1995).

# Our Suffering Can Be Meaningful

I began to wonder if participation in intercessory suffering had secondary effects—positive effects on the sufferer.

Perhaps more than any life experience, we fear physical and mental pain and suffering. Yet pain and suffering are integral parts of life. In the desperate desire to avoid pain, we may claim that the absence of all suffering is a legal right. Fear of pain itself can cause despair, leading to a desire for euthanasia—the flight from our final sufferings.

Not only do we not want to suffer; we do not want to watch the suffering of others, which can sometimes be more painful than the experience of our own suffering. Is there any answer to so much fear of pain? What will keep us from resorting to suicide when the fear becomes too great?

It is crucial for us to deal with the problem of both physical and emotional pain, for we are on the verge of seeing suicide as a reasonable solution to all the varieties of suffering that often accompany aging—not just physical pain.

On October 3, 1993, Louisville's *Courier-Journal* printed the following Ann Landers column. As you read this, keep in mind Ann's influence due to her vast readership.

**Dear Ann:** Who among us does not face the approach of old age with trepidation? I am now 85 and can speak from experience. We see friends and relatives in nursing homes in various stages of deterioration and dread the day we may be in a similar condition.

The thought of imposing on family members or having strangers take care of us is not a pleasant one. This brings me to the point of my letter: Wouldn't it be wonderful if there were a hospice-like place where a person could go when all hope of independent living was gone? A place where one could voluntarily end his or her life?

I envision a place staffed with people whose duty it is to talk things over with those who come and make certain those individuals fully comprehend what they are about to do. The staff would then assist them in taking the final steps.

The place I envision would allow us to exit this life in a dignified, painless, and peaceful manner...—85 AND WAITING IN WASHINGTON

Ann Landers replied:

**Dear 85 and Waiting:** What you have suggested is a sane, sensible, civilized alternative to existing in a nursing home, draining family resources and hoping the end will come soon. Too bad it is against the law.

One who assists in this sort of thing could be charged with murder. In fact, the doctor in



Michigan who, at the time of this writing has assisted in 18 suicides has been arrested.

One day, I hope in the not too distant future, a person who no longer wants to go on living will be permitted to exit with grace and dignity. This sure beats needles, jars, tubes, and respirators—to say nothing of the huge bills—while agonized family members stand vigil at the bedside.

*(By permission of Esther P. Lederer Trust and Creators Syndicate, Inc.)*

This letter was written by a person who talks

*Everyone has a different, highly personal definition of the suffering of "loss of independence."*

about euthanasia as a solution to disability, not a terminal illness. She or he refers to the point at which a person can no longer live independently. That definition includes a large number of people, not just the old but people of any age with disabilities. Everyone has a different, highly personal definition of the suffering of "loss of independence." For some it may mean the inability to drive, and for oth-

ers, confinement to a wheelchair or to bed.

Fortunately, the hospice movement and the growing number of palliative care training programs for health care providers offer an alternative to the euthanasia solution. It may be a case of too little, too late, however, and society in general needs to address the issue, especially with the growing number of Baby Boomers on the horizon (In 2011, a Baby Boomer will turn sixty-five every 7.5 seconds).

We Christians must pay particular attention to our own attitudes and responses to pain and suffering. What does the gospel teach us about how to deal with suffering? The gospel offers us the Passion stories, which tell us how Jesus handled his own suffering. (I won't print them out because of length.)

*Mark 14:32-42*

*Matthew 26:36-68; 27:1-54*

*Luke 22:39-65; 23:1-49*

*John 18:1-40; 19:1-37*

In the accounts of the Passion (I gravitate toward Mark's version), Jesus provides the model for coping with our own suffering. The following elements comprise the model:

Jesus asks his friends to be with him.

When he goes to Gethsemane to find out whether he indeed must submit to the fate he sees coming, he asks his friends to accompany him. He doesn't ask them to alleviate his pain; he just wants them nearby. He exhibits disappointment and even some irritation when they don't share even a bit of his anguish—they can't stay awake to witness his pain.

For us, Jesus' example means we need not suffer alone. There is no value in isolating ourselves from others and protecting them from our pain. Jesus encourages us to ask friends, family members, and caregivers to be present with us in our suffering to the extent that they can do so. We must also realize that, like Peter, James, and John, they may not be capable of standing by and witnessing our suffering. Their inability may disappoint us, but we must not "write them off" if they can't stand close by. As much as they want to be there for us, some people can't endure the sight of a loved one in pain.

When my father was dying of cancer, many of his closest friends stopped visiting him. Their absence saddened many family members, but regular visits from some men who weren't in his circle of close friends surprised and consoled us.

Jesus speaks with his Father about the necessity for his suffering.

If the suffering is not absolutely necessary, Jesus asks that it be taken away (He probably considered other ways to accomplish his mission).

We learn that suffering in itself, for its own sake, is never a good. We never glorify suffering; rather,

we try to alleviate or mitigate both personal and public suffering. On the personal level, this mitigation might include taking an antidepressant for chronic sadness, even though we despise taking medication. On the public level, it might mean lobbying for funds to start a hospice and palliative care agency in our town or volunteering our time and energy to help an existing agency.

*There is no value in isolating ourselves from others and protecting them from our pain.*

Once Jesus realizes his suffering is unavoidable, he enters into it willingly, maintaining his dignity.

Our task, after doing everything we can to get rid of our suffering, is to enter into, experience, and work through the pain rather than flee from it by engaging in self-destructive behaviors, such as self-neglect, use of drugs and alcohol, or active suicide.

After accepting its inevitability and entering into the suffering, Jesus ascribes meaning to it. Some of these meanings might include the fact that he is doing the will of the Father; he is being the obedient son; he is fulfilling the prophecy of the Suffering Servant writings.

We also can assign meaning to our suffering after attempts at alleviation have failed. We can come to an understanding of it, enter into it, and endure it as part of our personal experience, our unique history. We can affirm its role in shaping us as human beings. We can view suffering as a source of growth, of empathy for the suffering of others, as a time of personal testing. The more positive the meaning we ascribe, the better we will cope with our suffering.

Jesus experiences abandonment by his Father but refuses to despair, to disconnect from God.

Any severe and/or chronic pain and suffering can potentially blot out our confidence that God is a loving God—or that God even exists. We find ourselves sorely tempted to believe that God has stopped loving us. Pain, whether physical or psychological, often overwhelms the brain. The experience of pain can eradicate feelings of connectedness, of being loved. This natural experience can happen to the most devout among us.

Though Jesus feels abandoned by his Father, the very act of challenging God keeps Jesus connected to the Father. He lives in pure faith.

We can expect that at some time in our lives we will have to cling to God in the darkness by faith. The fact that Jesus also experienced this feeling of abandonment proves once again the depth of his entrance into our human life.

Jesus realized that his suffering was necessary. The only way he could convince humanity of God's love for us was to die for his cause and his teaching. He put his money where his mouth was, dying for his message out of total and complete God-love for the entire world's well being until the end of time.

Jesus' willingness to suffer gave us a way not only to make meaning out of our own suffering, but also to make it beneficial to others. We receive the invitation to imitate Christ's way of suffering every time suffering comes into our lives. This gift may be the most important and powerful in the entire gospel.

By interpreting our suffering as energy that can be useful to the human community and by offering this energy to God, we unite our sufferings with those of Christ, and refuse to allow suffering to disconnect us from the human community. We actually unite ourselves more closely with others in this ultimate gift of pain energy. In effect, we turn the energy of our suffering into a gift for others to use for their well being.

Finally, we can use our suffering for the world's continuing redemption. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit paleontologist / priest / mystic wrote about suffering as potential energy in *Hymn of the Universe*:

Human suffering, the sum total of suffering poured out at each moment over the whole earth, is like an immeasurable ocean. But what makes up this immensity? Is it blackness; emptiness, barren wastes? No, indeed: it is potential energy. Suffering holds hidden within it, in extreme intensity, the ascensional force of the world.

The whole point is to set this force free by making it conscious of what it signifies and of what it is capable. For if all the sick people in the world were simultaneously to turn their sufferings into a single share longing for the speedy completion of the kingdom of God through the conquering and organizing of the earth, what a vast leap towards God the world would thereby make! If all those who suffer in the world were to unite their sufferings so that the pain of the world should become one single grand act of consciousness, of sublimation, of unification, would not this be one of the most exalted forms in which the mysterious work of creation could be manifested to our eyes?

(Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe* [London: Fountain Books, 1977], 85-86)

Think about the last time you suffered physical pain or illness, intense grief, anxiety, despair, or fear. Perhaps you suffer right now. It doesn't have to be a grave, life-threatening suffering—a painful corn or bunion on your foot will do. Get in touch with that suffering, and consider its effects on your life. Suffering both creates and uses up physical energy (the kind of energy that physicists study). Being conscious of and experiencing the pain

involves an enormous amount of energy as you attempt to deal with it, alleviate it, and continue living a normal life.

One of the major evils of suffering (in addition to

*Jesus' willingness to suffer gave us a way not only to make meaning out of our own suffering, but also to make it beneficial to others.*

the fact that it doesn't feel good) is that pain pulls us away from the human community. Once again, think about the last time you suffered. You didn't feel like going out with friends. You were less likely to help one of your neighbors. You probably felt irritable, desiring only to stay in bed with the covers over your head, away from the world and its demands on your energy. The bottom line is that suffering pulls us into ourselves, where we are less able to relate to and love other people.

Another negative aspect of pain is that it appears to be meaningless. We may try to make sense of it by telling ourselves that we are being taught empathy for others in the same situation or that our mettle is being "tested" in some way, but these are not very consoling meanings. We can view our suffering as an actual commodity of some worth to others that we can use to help humanity, if we recognize and acknowledge the vast amount of energy that suffering both creates and consumes. Energy is neither good nor bad; its value depends on what we do with it. We can use the energy of electricity to light the path of a landing plane or to electrocute a person. It all depends on the intent of the person in charge of the energy.

The energy of fire can warm my house or burn it down; I can choose where I put that fire energy. The same is true of the energy created by my pain. I can use it to engage in therapy for my pain, or I can use it to kill myself. I can use it to motivate me to make the initiative so others won't have to experience the same suffering, or I can let it take me to my bed.

There is another use for energy generated by our pain that people in the past intuited but today is substantiated by quantum physics. According to the string theory of quantum physics, we are all interconnected by subatomic "strings," along which energy flows from one created thing to another. We can use our will, our intention, to direct this energy wherever we want it to go (This sounds like the scientific equivalent of Jesus' image of the vine and the branches). Our life energy is a participation in God's energy. We can either give it directly to others as a gift of loving energy, or, even better, we can return it to the Giver with the intent that God combine it with divine energy and direct it toward a particular person or cause.

In other words, God acts like a transformer by gathering the energy and giving it extra oomph or power. If we give it to others by ourselves, that is wonderful. But if we give it to God who then gives to whomever God wants to give it, we increase the benefit. The idea is similar to prayer. When we pray, we stop our activity and focus our consciousness on the act of praying; we expend mental and physical energy for the well being of others.

What about the person to whom we offer this energy—is this loving energy forced on him or her? No, it is offered. The person may accept or refuse it, just as in the case of prayer. Some people ask for the prayers of others; some express gratitude when they learn that others are praying for them. Some never know that others are praying for them. Some refuse prayer. It doesn't matter whether people know they are being prayed for (research has shown that cardiac surgery patients who are prayed for—even without their knowledge of the prayers—recover more quickly than patients who are not prayed for).

What is true of the energy of prayer can also be true of the energy of suffering. By using the energy of pain and suffering in this way, we practice intercessory, dedicated, or redemptive suffering, thereby participating in Christ's ongoing redemptive work.

The everyday practice of redemptive suffering has its basis in a Catholic devotional practice once widely used, but now considered old-fashioned. Years ago, prior to Vatican II, a common spiritual technique was to "offer up" one's sufferings to Christ on the cross for the continued redemption of the world.

When I was little, if I fell and scraped my knee, I would run into the house to have my mother clean, bandage, and kiss it to make it better. While cleaning the knee she would slow down my tears by saying, "Don't waste your time on tears; offer up your pain to Jesus." Most often she would just say, "Offer it up!" and I knew exactly what she meant. It was amazing how quickly I could turn my attention from my pain to the excitement of having something to give God on behalf of other people.

The practice of "offering it up" has its theological foundation in Paul's letter to the Colossians, in which he states, "I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (1:24).

Paul does not mean that through his death on the cross Christ did not fulfill his redemptive work; the redemption is definitive. However, the world is still not perfect; and the calling, privilege, and task of every follower of Christ involve continued participation in the ongoing work of redemption until all things are brought together in Christ.

On a physical level, in varying degrees, we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned, shelter the homeless, heal the sick, give money to and for the poor, educate the ignorant, protect the vulnerable, work for

justice, bury the dead, study and uncover the workings of the universe, create beauty, steward our natural resources, and engage in other redemptive actions, either as part of our paid work or as volunteers.

## *Jesus has promised us that we can use our suffering energy for the welfare of all.*

On the spiritual level we preach Jesus' message and demonstrate his love through our own behavior: we pray for the living and the dead; we fast, baptize, forgive, bless, instruct, counsel, create beauty, worship, and break bread with one another, all in Christ's name and for the world, in union with Christ. Jesus has promised us that we can use our suffering energy for the welfare of all.

This is a wonderful, redemptive activity for those of us who are old, because most of us have body parts that ache, hurt, or just don't work. There always seems to be "leftover" pain, even when we've taken the recommended dose of ibuprofen. Redemptive activity is also a perfect practice for people who are homebound and bedridden. So often when we are ill or in pain we find that we can't pray. We may be unable to sustain our energy in prayer, but we can certainly offer our suffering energy to God for others' welfare.

Matthew 18:20 "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Intercessory suffering may be even more effective when it is performed as a group. I was asked to help a group of nuns who were having a difficult time handling the many physical and psychological sufferings common to late life (but never common to the individual sufferer). Many were making frequent trips to physicians in Louisville, a trip of over fifty miles on narrow winding roads. Instead of offering individual or group counseling, I invited the sisters to join an intercessory suffering group. Thirteen signed up, and we met each month for a year. The superior of the convent kept track of the effects of the nuns' participation and the heartening results. The number of visits to out-of-town physicians decreased by 60 percent, and verbal complaints about aches and pains virtually ceased. One withdrawn sister emerged from her self-imposed seclusion and began to visit the library each morning to read the paper, searching for needy people or world events that required her suffering energy. Finally a few months later, in a survey of the mission assignments of the entire order, thirteen sisters claimed intercessory suffering as their mission.

On the basis of these results, I began to wonder if participation in intercessory suffering had secondary

effects—positive effects on the sufferer. I now have a small grant to investigate my hypothesis that if one offers suffering energy for the good of others, one will actually hurt less in the process.

If you are interested in creating an intercessory or dedicated suffering group in your church or among your friends, here are the steps.

### Practicing Dedicated Suffering in a Group

Gather in small groups of three to ten people once each week.

Designate a leader who will also participate as a “sufferer.” This does not have to be the same person each week, nor does it require special religious training or education.

Convene with a prayer.

Read Matthew 18:19-20 as the opening scripture.

Offer the following prayer: “Dear Jesus, we recognize that the suffering you endured for us on the Cross was not wasted. The power of your loving energy opened wide the gates of heaven and brought us, your very own brothers and sisters, into the arms of the family of God. Through the example of your suffering, you have taught us a way to offer, for the wellbeing of all humankind, the energy that our own suffering creates. We pray that each time we meet to offer our energy for you to give to whomever needs it, we come closer to the fulfillment of your kingdom on earth, just as it is in heaven. Thank you for inviting us to participate in this work with you. Amen.”

Go around the room, with each person stating simply, without elaboration and comment by others, the predominant suffering she or he currently experiences. If there is no current suffering, persons may offer past suffering.

After all have stated their pain, discuss to whom the gift of the collective energy of the group will be offered. After the group has decided, the leader says the following prayer: “Dear God, please accept this gift of our suffering energy. Take it and transform it into the energy of love. Combine it with your infinite love and send your Spirit to deliver it as a gift to [name the person(s) or causes] or to whoever needs it the most. Once again, thank you for the privilege of participating with you in your work of loving all that is. Thank you for teaching us that our suffering, which we once thought was useless, has infinite value in the realm of God. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Remain together in prayerful silence for five minutes (or as long as the group desires).

Sing a doxology such as “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, ye heavenly host’ praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.” Or sing a hymn such as “Now Thank We All Our God” (or whatever song of thanks and praise the group prefers).

Dismiss the members with hugs and mutual

encouragement to practice intercessory suffering individually until the next gathering.

Finally, those of us who are old and those of us who work with older adults (and are aging as well) must keep in mind that the pains, indignities, and mental and physical sufferings endured in old age, especially frail old age, are nothing less than an invitation or opportunity to share in Christ’s Passion. Old and young, we are called to honor, respect, cherish, and support their suffering as such. If we lack enthusiasm about entering into and sharing the passion of Christ, we simply need to keep in mind that neither were Peter, the other apostles, or Jesus himself for that matter. But if we persist in our efforts, God will bless us with the strength to do so.

### Food for Thought and Talk

Read Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; and Luke 23:26. Try to imagine yourself taking the place of Simon of Cyrene, the man dragged from the crowd to help Jesus carry his cross. What do you see, feel, hear, smell, and think? Who do you know who might benefit from practicing intercessory suffering individually? How might belonging to an intercessory suffering group help you? If you have reservations about intercessory suffering, what are they? Picture yourself as Peter, James, or John in the garden of Gethsemane with Jesus. What do you see? How do you feel?

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# Spiritual Exhaustion and Depth Renewal

We feel as if we should be the source and never-ending fountain of love, redemption, good cheer, and fortitude at all times and in all places.

*A church member has just lost a parent. Another member is scheduled for surgery. Yet another member is having marital problems.*

*Just another day in the life of a congregation.*

*Church leaders (both clergy and lay) give immeasurable comfort and nourishment to those in need. But it sometimes leaves them drained, stressed, and wounded. "Feed My Shepherds" addresses the struggles and burnout experienced by those in care giving ministries and offers practical tips to practice healthy spirituality.*

*"While all Christians need nurture, the active leader who encounters spiritual and emotional stress daily has special, urgent needs," writes Wuellner. "If the shepherd is not fed along with the sheep, that inner hunger and fatigue, those unhealed hurts can cause the shepherd to do great, unconscious harm to those within his or her care."*

*By looking at the intense, healing relationship between the risen Jesus and his disciples, Wuellner offers a paradigm of healing for today's disciples as well. She draws on scriptures from the Gospels' post-Resurrection narratives and adds spiritual reflection, personal questions, and guided meditations that can meet a variety of needs.*

[FROM THE DUST JACKET]

They were not just traumatized and wounded men; they were exhausted men. Anyone who has suffered shock and grief knows how deep and pervasive the fatigue is. After the first adrenaline response to emergency, tiredness spreads swiftly throughout the body and mind. Emotional responses begin to shut down. One wishes to sleep forever but sleep is short and broken. Oddly enough, great and unexpected joy with its radical change in one's life is also high on the stress list, eventually bringing deep temporary fatigue.

Jesus' disciples had experienced the shock of the betrayal and the inexpressible grief, which came on the very heels of Palm Sunday's triumph. Then they had experienced the hostility of the community, their own danger, the empty tomb, the flying rumors of the Resurrection, and finally the shock of joy on Easter night.

Even after the Resurrection we still sense the disciples' bewilderment and uncertainty. Why does John's Gospel tell us of their sudden decision to go



fishing? Is it an instinctive longing to get back to the old accustomed ways? Do they want some distance from those overwhelming perplexities of shock, grief, joy, and bewilderment all combined? We can imagine their thoughts: *What will come next? Better not to ask. Anything can happen now. At least fishing is a sure thing.* They understand about fishing. That is what they had done before they met Jesus.

*After the first adrenaline response to emergency, tiredness spreads swiftly throughout the body and mind.*

But even the fishing lets them down. They fish all night with no results. No fish, no sleep!

Then in the early morning freshness they see him. He stands on the beach by the water's edge and calls out to them. He tells them where to let down the nets for a haul, then invites them to the shore where a fire and cooked breakfast await them. He breaks the bread and the cooked fish and serves them. Only then does he start the deep healing of Peter's shame and grief and give him the mandate to reach out to all the hungry sheep of the world. First,

Jesus ministers to his disciples' tiredness.

For most of us in Christian leadership, pervasive tiredness is not usually the result of a series of climactic crises. For most of us, it accumulates so gradually over months and years that we do not recognize it. Spiritual exhaustion and/or chronic inner tiredness do not always manifest themselves in outer tiredness. Their symptoms are widely diverse. Spiritual exhaustion may manifest itself as restlessness; compulsive overworking; irritability; numbing of emotional response; mood swings; compulsive and escapist eating, drinking, reading, exercise, television watching. It can cause heavy prolonged sleep or restless broken sleep. We may experience unusual amounts of daydreaming, difficulty in concentration, intense longings for solitude or an equally intense need to be with others. Feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness often accompany spiritual exhaustion. Eventually the body's immunity weakens. I have noticed that when I begin to feel inappropriately anxious or nervous, it is—for me anyway—an unfailling sign of deep inner tiredness.

Obviously, these symptoms can have other causes, so we need to have them medically checked out. It is especially important to rule out the beginnings of clinical depression. But even if we discover that illness or depression is the problem (perhaps I should have said *especially* if illness or depression is the problem), we need to ask if something in our life is causing this exhaustion.

Monica Baldwin's autobiographical account will sound familiar to many Christian leaders:

As a rule one is first attracted to prayer by the joy and sweetness one finds in it....And then—often suddenly and for no apparent reason—the sunshine vanishes. Instead of the warmth and color that have hitherto permeated everything, a dreadful depressing grayness...blights every detail of one's life like a bleak east wind....The entire spiritual world seems meaningless and unreal; even one's own vivid spiritual experiences fade out like half-forgotten dreams. One becomes keenly, sometimes agonizingly, aware of everything prosaic....

Worse, one's condition is often aggravated by odd, inexplicable stupidities of hand and mind. One drops, spills, breaks, upsets and loses things: forgets one's duties, does one's work badly and finds oneself in awkward situations that lead to humiliation and reproof. Bitterest of all, one is beset by horrible temptations to see in Religious Life the most fantastic of all delusions and oneself as a pathetic fool for having undertaken it.

Normally one would turn to prayer as an escape from all these tribulations. But to those in the grip of real spiritual desolation, the hours of prayer are perhaps the hardest of the whole depressing day.<sup>1</sup>

Baldwin calls this experience spiritual desolation, and certainly it is. But my guess is that most of the

underlying cause is severe inner fatigue and spiritual exhaustion.

Reports of just what percentage of Christian leader are experiencing severe fatigue vary widely. Depending on the survey, it varies from thirty percent to seventy-five percent. But all reports agree that the percentage is astonishingly high for a profession in which the work schedule is flexible and is supposedly grounded in depth relationship with the Source of all energy, love, and strength!

*The more tired we are, the less we want to put out a hand to take the very things that will help us.*

When unhealed fatigue reaches a certain point, we begin to avoid the very things that offer us the hope of refreshment and renewal. The very condition of being renewed seems too demanding. I recall a time of my own illness and fatigue when the brilliant red of a Christmas poinsettia was too stimulating in its vibrancy. Even looking at it made me tired, and I finally asked my husband to take it from the room and put it where I would not have to see it.

In the same way, I have sometimes avoided the very prayer time that I knew would help me. I have sometimes avoided reading a challenging book or pursuing a helpful personal encounter because I know it will give me the strength I need. At the moment I don't want that strength. I want to be left alone to rest, even from God. Such contrary behavior is similar to our avoidance of exercise even when we know we are tired *because* our circulation is poor. A brisk walk would make all the difference, but because we are so tired we don't want the difference. Thus a vicious cycle begins. The more tired we are, the less we want to put out a hand to take the very things that will help us.

As I reflect on this strange paradox, I think I understand at least one of the possible meanings of that mysterious comment in John 21 as the disciples head their boat toward land in response to Jesus' invitation: "Now none of the disciples dared to ask him 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord" (vs. 12).

Yes, I understand that. Often I have not asked, "Who are you?" to a challenge from God just *because* I know who it is. If I ask, I will get an answer—and then I will have to do something about it. Even worse, God will supply the energy to do something about it! And right now, that is the last thing I want!

In my earlier ministry, I simply accused myself of laziness at such times. A pejorative categorization explained my condition and neatly pigeonholed it. Slowly I learned to ask the deeper questions of inner resistances and other "negative" responses: "Who

are you? What are you telling me? Are you coming from some deep fatigue in my life?"

Slowly I have learned (and so often forget), when another Christian leader comes to me to share the problem of spiritual fatigue and lethargy, not to say, "Oh, what you need is more daily prayer discipline, more exercise, more involvement with others—and here is a reading list full of wonderful books that will get you going!" I'm trying to learn to say, "Let's look and listen together for the cause of such spiritual fatigue in your life."

The causes of such inner fatigue are legion and complex. You may wish to reflect on the following questions:

***Do I believe that a minister or Christian leader "ought" to be willing to be worn out for others?***

We looked at this problem in previous chapters on woundedness, and we will reflect upon it again in the chapter on spiritual draining. This concept—that the more one is exhausted in the service of others, the more worthy one is in the sight of God, oneself, and others—is one of the most deep-seated and hard-to-heal of inner fatigue.

***Do I have unrealistic self-expectations?*** This relates closely to the problem just stated, of course. We feel as if we should be the source and never-ending fountain of love, redemption, good cheer, and fortitude at all times and in all places. We have inner images of everything's going to pieces if we do not hold it all together. We use words like *ought* and *should* a great deal about ourselves and feel guilty when we are ill, tired, grieving, bewildered.

***Do I feel it difficult or humiliating to receive help from others?*** It was almost impossibly difficult for Peter to let Jesus wash his feet at the Last Supper, although Jesus had let Mary of Bethany wash his feet just the week before (John 12:3). Christian leaders have trouble sharing needs and feelings with others. This problem is often rooted in our perception of our role as primarily servants of others and of God (*see chapter 2*), rather than as the friends and the beloved who delight in receiving as well as giving.

***Do I have few or no borders and boundaries in my leadership?*** This problem is almost universal. Because we work primarily with other people, our work may not have clear limits and clear closures. The roots are always dangling. I know one pastor so devastated by this problem that he gradually began abandoning all his pastoral responsibilities except his perfectly designed liturgical service each Sunday. That task could be finished, completed with no dangling ambiguities, and rewarded with satisfactory feedback. How often we long for a clearly defined eight-hour-a-day job with observable results and definite closures. The lack of clarity and define limits in our work makes saying no or drawing rea-

sonable limits for ourselves extraordinarily hard. The whole concept of limits becomes murkily ambiguous.

***Do I always feel I should be doing more?*** While closely related to the previous question, this question's roots go deeper than the problem of professional limits. Even in rest times or holidays many of us feel a need to be nonstop in our self-improvement, our creativity, our spiritual disciplines, our intercessory prayer, our cultivation of the mind, our social justice concerns. "Onward and upward forever!"

*I know one pastor so devastated by this problem that he gradually began abandoning all his pastoral responsibilities except his perfectly designed liturgical service each Sunday.*

This nonstop pace often is tied to a genuine passion for our work and a genuine longing to experience life fully: to go through every open door, to seize every opportunity, to join every good cause, to sign up for all the workshops. We can reach the point where our genuine gifts wear us out because they are so exciting we don't know when to stop!

But for some, the problem finds its roots in a deep dissatisfaction with self. All my life I've heard quoted that ancient but pernicious old saying, "God is easy to please but hard to satisfy." At first this advice sounds wise and accepting, but actually it is extremely damaging, both spiritually and emotionally. How would we feel if our spouse said, "Yes, you do often please me, but basically I'm not satisfied with you"? How are children affected if we never give them the feeling that their poems, gifts, school performance, or chores delight *and satisfy* us?

Obviously we need to be honest about a genuine cause for dissatisfaction. But in a daily, ongoing relationship, chronic dissatisfaction is totally toxic, spreading like poison into families, communities, and whole cultures. Unfortunately, we often consider constant dissatisfaction to be a sign of love and concern for the other, thinking that only through this means can we help ourselves or another keep growing and improving.

Actually, dissatisfaction is the worst possible environment for healthy growth. Without honest praise (too often confused with spoiling or flattery), we become starved of self-esteem and joyous empowerment. When honest praise is withheld, some experience hopelessness, others chronic, frustrated anger. The deprivation of honest praise can cause wounds that are felt for a lifetime. This deprivation can cause us to feel we must always be doing more in order to earn full acceptance from others.

I wonder if this desire and need for honest praise is one of the main reasons the scriptures keep urging us to open our mouths and give praise? Joyful praise that expresses delight in God, another, oneself is the essential food for wholeness.

***Am I drained by the darkness and toxicity of others around me?*** This serious source of deep inner fatigue can affect us over generations in our families and is often a cause of exhaustion in daily professional relationships. I reflect on this problem in depth in chapter 9.

***Are my prayer life and spiritual disciplines themselves stressful and tiring?*** Often the very spiritual responses intended for our renewal have become sources of burdensome fatigue. This is especially true if we become rigidly inflexible in our personal prayer discipline, or if we have entered a discipline unsuited to our personality and our unique way of responding. This issue will be considered at length in chapter 10.

***Have I increasingly abandoned daily intentional communication with God?*** As I shared in chapter 1, this neglect was certainly one of the several causes of my own deep fatigue in ministry. I simply had given up the daily deep drinking from the Source of life. For me that grief of God as expressed through Jeremiah had become true:

They have forsaken me,  
the fountain of living waters,  
and hewed out cisterns for themselves,  
broken cisterns,  
that can hold no water (Jer. 2:13, RSV)

Even though I have been in a specialized ministry of spiritual renewal for twenty-seven years, and even though I have learned the forms of spiritual response that most fulfill my personality type, nevertheless sometimes I forget the intentional drinking each day from the Source. For me, the intentional drinking does not need to be in the same way or at the same time each day or for the same length of time. But if I do not drink at all, deep fatigue is the inevitable result.

***Have I been in unrelieved, one-sided intensity recently?*** Unrelieved intensity over anything eventually causes deep lassitude. Strangely enough, this intensity may include time of prolonged, deep, spiritual change and growth. Evelyn Underhill, one of the most gifted spiritual writers and leaders of this century, wrote that the “dark night of the soul,” which nearly all the great mystics experienced sooner or later, often is rooted in fatigue:

Psychologically considered, the dark night is an example of the operation of the law of reaction from stress. It is a period of fatigue and lassitude following a period of sustained mystical activi-

ty...However spiritual he may be, the mystic—so long as he is in the body—cannot help using the machinery of his nervous and cerebral system in the source of his adventures...Each great step forward will entail lassitude and exhaustion for that mental machinery which he has pressed into service and probably overworked.<sup>2</sup>

*What Underhill says about exhaustion stemming from intensity, especially one-sided intensity, is characteristic of any prolonged, sustained intensity in our ministries: depth counseling, intense study, a long period of sharing the pain of another.*

From the *spiritual* perspective of inner fatigue, Underhill has a most interesting insight:

The Dark Night, then, is really a deeply human process in which the self which thought itself so spiritual, so firmly established upon the supersensual plane, is forced to turn back, to leave the Light, and pick up those qualities which it had left behind. Only thus,...not by a careful and departmental cultivation of that which we like to call [one’s] “spiritual” side, can Divine Humanity be formed.<sup>3</sup>

Thus Underhill makes a significant point here: the intensity of the spiritual quest and experience is not the only element that can exhaust us; even more exhausting is the frequent one-sidedness of the intensity. Jesus invites us to “be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48), but a more accurate translation of the word “*perfect*” is “whole.” Jesus is not enjoining us never to make a mistake or to renounce our humanity. We are called into wholeness, which means to bring all our aspects, all that we are into God’s presence, God’s light. Building that trust will take time. Entrusting to God those parts of ourselves that we had not thought “spiritual” enough will take time and healing. God loves us in our totality.

What Underhill says about exhaustion stemming from intensity, especially one-sided intensity, is characteristic of any prolonged, sustained intensity in our ministries: depth counseling, intense study, a long period of sharing the pain of another. During any special demand with its necessary focused power, being intentional about Sabbath interludes is essential.

***Am I carrying around within me great burdens of unhealed woundedness?*** This vast inner load, the focus of chapter 5 and 6, is one of the most toxic,

destructive forms of fatigue. It inevitably affects and infects those around us. As mentioned earlier, the healing of wounds, which all human beings need, is urgently required by the religious leader who has the potential to do so much harm through his or her repressed anger and fear.

**Am I constantly expecting my ministry and those involved with it to fit into my categories and agendas?** Expectations and fatigue besets so many strong, gifted leaders (parents and spouses too, for that matter). Changes in plans, interruptions, surprises, and unexpected disruptions can cause deep frustration in a highly structured person who has developed clear and concise plans. In the long run this frustration can cause a hopeless, angry tiredness. Sometimes the leader is genuinely more gifted than the rest of us in envisioning the unfolding of a plan or program. But sometimes the leader's fatigue is rooted in a deep anxiety that cannot tolerate ambiguity or challenging changes. Invariably and inevitably, however, the very nature of ministry must include the unexpected, the surprises, and the interruptions. Undoubtedly one of the most exhausting challenges of ministry is to be simultaneously the efficient, well-organized leader who "runs a tight ship" and the flexible, open-ended leader who tolerates ambiguity with grace!

The problem of this challenge stretches back to the earliest days of Christianity. Paul, for example, reflected on the necessary balance between the spontaneous outburst of enthusiasm and tongue speaking in worship with the need that "all things should be done decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:40).

I quoted earlier from James E. Ditté's book *When the People Say No*, which has helped me the most in dealing with the everyday surprises, disruptions, general resistances, and unexpectedness within ministry. I like what he says about our constant temptation to confront the unexpected with rigid agendas:

The God who refused to be confined to a temple or to a set of laws, to the expectations of disciples or Palm Sunday crowds or crucifying enemies, to the structures of thought or of organization throughout the church's history—that's the God who refuses to be confined to any definition of ministry or agenda for the day, however valid and right that definition may be.

There is, indeed *an eerie link between agenda and suffering (italics mine)*. The tighter the agenda, the more painful is any disruption of it. Disruption does not produce the suffering. Disruption is only disruption; it inflicts pain only if there is a tautness... The tense body is damaged by the blow that the relaxed body rebounds from. It is undue reliance on the law that makes the law, or its breaking, damaging.<sup>4</sup>

**Am I entering a time of deep inner shift and growth?** Most ministers and other Christian leaders

sooner or later experience that deep, disturbing, exciting inner shift that signals something is changing—something new is developing or growing within us. It is rather like a slow earthquake! We may experience a change in dreams or in interests. Deep bodily and emotional energies may awaken old ways of living; old hobbies, even former relationships may become unsatisfying. We may feel a sense of restlessness and impatience, energy alternating with fatigue.

*Undoubtedly one of the most exhausting challenges of ministry is to be simultaneously the efficient, well-organized leader who "runs a tight ship" and the flexible, open-ended leader who tolerates ambiguity with grace!*

Often these inner changes signal new guidance from God. Perhaps we are being invited into a new form of ministry, such as chaplaincy in place of parish work, or parish work in place of counseling, or counseling in place of administration, or the other way around. Perhaps we are being guided not into another form of ministry but into a different way of living our present ministry, with a new rhythm, a new focus, new priorities, new inner spaces. Perhaps we are being called to send down deeper roots into our personal way of spirituality. New gifts may be unfolding, or old forgotten gifts may be awakening. In any case, the call is to freshness and new creativity.

Misunderstanding or revisiting this call can lead to profound conflict and inner fatigue. A significant scriptural metaphor for this condition might be seen in Jonah's flight from God's call to Nineveh, the resultant storm at sea, and his attempted escape through his sleep in the ship's hold. We do experience a storm and exhaustion when we resist the call to a new inner life, and often we try to escape through inner anesthetics or addictions. But if we listen carefully to this profound summons (perhaps with the help of friends or spouse in a discernment process), the way will open to the most exciting unfolding in our Christian ministry or leadership that we have ever known.

Occasionally persons involved in deep and rapid spiritual change and growth may have some startling and disconcerting experiences: sudden surges of powerful, tingling energy throughout the whole body or parts of the body, or sudden perceptions of inner or outer surrounding light. We may hear sudden sounds like a rushing wind or experience sensations like rising out of the body: We may see or sense another presence in the room. We may experience a new clairvoyant sense of events yet to come, or events occurring far away.

Those who are spiritually awakening seem to be experiencing these phenomena in increasing numbers in recent decades, though such experiences are by no means universal. Such phenomena are ancient, well-attested experiences of spiritual awakening, which different cultures and religious traditions call by different names. Probably, in such experiences, the neurological system is giving signals of the spiritual energies that are pouring in and moving within us. For most people, the whole process is so slow and gradual that we have few or no sensory signs, although most of us will have an awareness of deeper intuitiveness and more sensitive perception.

Obviously, it is good sense to have unusual, disconcerting symptoms checked out medically. But if one's general health is good, if one's daily life is active, responsible, and satisfying, if one's relationships are fulfilling, if no moral degeneration or deep disturbances of inner peace occur, there is no reason to fear mental illness or demonic infestation. It's senseless that so many Christians are both ignorant and fearful of these ancient, widespread spiritual phenomena.

If such phenomena occur, meet with an experienced spiritual director or counselor who can discuss the process and suggest well-balanced, informative books.<sup>5</sup> It is also important to eat healthful, nourishing food, to exercise in the fresh air, and to get plenty of rest. Consider temporarily moving away from long, intense meditation into shorter prayers throughout the day.

Scripture indicates many such experiences, though most of the scriptural examples unfold into a full mystical vision, a clear voice of God, or outstanding gifts of the Spirit. In the Hebrew Scriptures, for example, the prophet Ezekiel tells us:

Then the spirit lifted me up, and as the glory of the Lord rose from its place, I heard behind me the sound of loud rumbling (Ezek. 3:12).

Or from Job:

Now a word came stealing to me,  
My ear received the whisper of it. ...  
A spirit glided past my face. ...  
It stood still,  
but I could not discern its appearance (Job 4:12, 15-16).

We may think also of Saul's experience on the road to Damascus:

Suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul" (Acts 9:3-4).

For most of us, a sudden experience of transcendence or the supernatural will not reflect the full vision as experienced by Ezekiel or Paul. It may signal only one awakening aspect of the divine-human encounter. But it is nothing to fear. We need

a lot more intelligent, informed, Christ-centered guidelines from our churches.

**Do I give myself regular "Sabbaths"?** Even if we achieve well-balanced work schedules and limit our professional and emotional demands, we still may experience exhaustion if we are not intentional about our regular personal Sabbaths.

## *Each hour we need tiny Sabbath moments of inner renewal.*

For example, each hour we need tiny Sabbath *moments* of inner renewal: gazing at a sunbeam on the floor, looking at a beloved painting, smelling a flower, touching a leaf, listening to a bird, stretching and breathing deeply, holding our hands under running water, gently palming our eyes, or just quietly sensing God's breath upon and within us. Such tiny but powerful Sabbath moments are especially important after intensive thinking, working, or interaction with other people.

Each day, we should set aside at least one hour of Sabbath time to be and to do what delights us most. We might walk, enjoy a garden, listen to music, read a delightful book. Whatever we choose, we should do it with joy, not compulsion. God is present with us in these moments of personal delight as much as when we are praying.

We need one day a week for relaxing, joyous, humanizing activities. The original scriptural concept of Sabbath was not that of heavy church responsibilities or even of intense prolonged prayer. Originally it was given as a day of total peace and relaxation; a time to enjoy God's presence, knowing God also rested after the intensity of creation. The act of resting is a holy act.

We need a week each year (not the regular family holiday) where we can go off alone or with a few like-minded friends or spouse for a quiet retreat. It need not be a time of intensive reading or contemplation but a time of walks, music, drawing, sleeping, keeping a journal—whatever refreshes and renews us most deeply.

Hearing about other Christian leaders' experiences and celebrations of Sabbath is both interesting and helpful. One minister told me she leaves town the night before her weekly day off, so that the next morning she is already within her ambience of rest. An active church laywoman I know takes her hour of refreshment and delight first thing in the morning when she writes poetry of thanksgiving.

A pastor told me that he walks at least once a day to a nearby Catholic chapel where he sits quietly breathing in the peace of Christ's presence, gazing at the votive candle by the Reserved Sacrament (many Protestants find this practice helpful, including myself).

Another lay leader prepares a fresh vegetable drink each day and walks slowly through his garden for half an hour while sipping it. One busy conference executive keeps a cassette player in her office. Once a day she closes her door, puts her feet up and listens to her favorite music for half an hour! Another pastor enjoys walking, resting, or playing tennis with his wife during his quiet hour. He feels, quite rightly, that marriage is as holy a commitment as is ordination.

Yet another lay leader sits quietly at her table after breakfast, a candle lit, reading a few scripture verses, and inwardly talking with God about the events of the day ahead. A Christian businessman schedules a half-hour appointment with himself each day (writing the date in his appointment book) and keeps the date as definitely as if he were meeting a colleague. He takes himself for a walk, talks with God, sits down with a book, or opens the window and breathes the fresh air. Sometimes he takes out his collection of cartoons and gives himself the good medicine of hearty laughter.

One pastor told me that for fifteen years he has met with an ecumenical group of other ministers once a year for five days. They pray together, talk together, laugh together—balancing times of togetherness with times of solitude.

We need to take responsibility ourselves for our Sabbath times with unapologetic firmness and clarity. Though we have a right to expect compassionate respect and concern for our well-being and needs from our colleagues, friends, spouse, congregations, synods, and conferences, I believe that Christ also says “Feed my shepherds” to each of us personally. We are beginning to understand self-care in Christ’s name as a holy act, not only as stewardship to God’s “temple” within us, but as deep witness to the faith that we are God’s beloved. We are not instruments or slaves. We are the friend, the child, the spouse, the close, the dear one in God’s heart.

“Take, eat, this is my body...” To take is as necessary as to receive. They are equally important, but they are not the same. And both acts are as holy as giving.

I offer six suggestions for the prevention and healing of spiritual fatigue. They all may help you, or perhaps only one will be right for you at this time. I do not know who first invented the phrase “soaking prayer,” which is my first suggestion, but I find that it is one of the most helpful.

## MEDITATION AND PRAYERS

Then the Lord said to Moses,  
“I am going to rain bread from heaven for you,  
and each day the people shall go out  
and gather enough for that day” (Exod. 16:4).

### Soaking Prayer

Lay aside all intensive prayer and reading. Lay aside intercessory prayer for a while (God will take care

of those for whom you pray as you rest). Make your body comfortable and at rest, whether on a bed, a deep chair, on the floor, or on the ground.

With thee is the fountain of life:  
in thy light shall we see light (Ps. 36:9, KJV).

*We need to take responsibility ourselves  
for our Sabbath times with unapologetic  
firmness and clarity.*

Think of God’s warmth and light surrounding you, as if you lie in the sun or a pool of water. If this image seems too warm or confining, think of yourself in a cool, blue lake or lying on the beach with the ocean waves gently washing over you. Or you may wish to think of yourself as an underwater reef, slowly swaying in the water currents, or as a flexible tree rocking in the breeze. Some other image may come. You may wish to let your own body slowly and gently rock from side to side as if you were being cradled.

Or you may just wish to lie very still and let God’s light and breath flow slowly and deeply into every part of your body, saturating you just as water saturates a sponge. Your whole self is washed in God’s presence.

This prayer can last for fifteen minutes or for several hours. Let it send you into sleep if you wish.

If you are seriously fatigued or ill, let this be your only form of prayer for a while—maybe for weeks. I have known people who were healed of illness while using this form of prayer. I strongly advise at least a few minutes of this form of prayer each day to prevent exhaustion.

### Bodily Prayer

After a few minutes of soaking prayer, lay your hands gently on your heart, your abdomen, your forehead, or over your eyes, and inwardly (or aloud) pray slowly with pauses after this manner:

The living love of Jesus Christ now fills me...  
calms me...heals me...renews me...

You can touch or just think of any part of your body in special need and pray this prayer of Christ’s indwelling presence. Use any words that you feel are right for you.

### Breathing Prayer

He breathed on them and said to them,  
“Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:22).

As you rest your body, think of your breath flowing in and flowing out. Let each gentle breath (do not force it) become for you God’s breath of life

breathed into you. Let the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, flow into your body like light as you breathe. Think of the rhythmic motion of ocean waves, the rhythm of your own gentle heartbeat.

Think of each painful, tired, or stressed part of your body as breathing in and out God's breath, as if each painful part had its own breathing organ. You may wish to touch this body part as it breathes in God's light.

### Special Prayer Words

(This helpful approach is featured in Basil Pennington's *Centering Prayer* and Ron DelBene's *Breath of Life: A Simple Way to Pray*)

Choose, or let form within you, a word or a short prayer phrase that helps you focus best on God's presence or that expresses your own deepest need or longing.

If a single word, it could be something like *peace, release, God, Jesus, Spirit, light*. If a phrase, it could be "God, I need to feel your closeness" or "Jesus, fill me with your light" or "Holy Spirit, breathe upon me"—short, rhythmic phrases that say what you feel. Let this special word or phrase go through the day with you, becoming a central pool of peace and strength for you. Eventually you may find the prayer spontaneously changing as you change.

### Parable Walk Meditation

Set out on a walk alone with no special agenda or goal. Walk slowly, and ask God to show you something on the walk that you need to hear, see, smell, or touch. You will know the sign when you encounter it. It will have a special meaning for you and will be significant for you at this time in your life.

The special sign or message may be seen in a tree's shape, the sound of a bird, or a fragrance that awakens a memory. The significant sign may come through a child's voice. It may come through the feel of a flower petal or tree bark. It may come through the sight of a special house, the face of a passerby, or the sight of a cat, dog, bird, or beetle. Whatever the sign, it will have a personal meaning for you: a memory that needs healing or one that brings refreshing joy, a simple gift of renewal from God, a sudden delight or laughter, the thought of someone who needs prayer. Whatever the sign and its meaning, you will recognize it as God's special word for you today.

Walking while praying is much more helpful for some people than lying down or sitting still.

### Receiving Sacramental Food from Jesus the Christ

This meditation was a bit startling to me when I felt it first inwardly suggested, but it has become for me one of the most healing and empowering prayers of all. I don't wait until I am exhausted; I enter into it almost every day.

Think or picture yourself at the table of the Last Supper or with the disciples on the shores of Lake Tiberius. Think of or picture Jesus pouring out the wine, breaking the bread, and bringing them to you personally, giving them to you.

*Think of or picture Jesus pouring out the wine,  
breaking the bread, and bringing them to you  
personally, giving them to you.*

Or let the Christ bring you the bread and the cup right in the room where you are now. Receive these nourishing gifts from his hand with love and thankfulness, taking all the time you need, knowing that the deep sacramental bonding continues unbroken through the centuries between the risen Christ and each of us.

The envisioning of this nourishment can be a powerful intercessory prayer for another person or even a whole community as we picture or think of Jesus giving that person or that communal body the bread and cup of life.

Of course, the sacrament of Communion in church was meant to be a service of healing, restoration, and renewal. In times of deep physical, emotional, or spiritual fatigue, I suggest receiving this sacrament as often as possible. As it is given, sense the powerful and loving energy streaming into your heart and body. If you are in deep prayer for some person, bring him or her with you in your thoughts and heart to the Communion table.

In confidence of Thy goodness and great mercy, O Lord,  
I draw near, as a sick person to the Healer,  
as one hungry to the Fountain of Life...  
a creature to the Creator,  
a desolate soul to my own tender Comforter...  
Thou art willing to give me heavenly food...to eat,  
Which is indeed no other than Thyself the Living Bread.<sup>6</sup>

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1 Monica Baldwin, *I Leap over the Wall* (New York: Rinehart & Company, 1950), 219-20.

2 Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism* (New York: The Noonday Press 1955), 382

3 *Mysticism*, 388.

4 James E. Dittres, *When the People Say No: Conflict and the Call to Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979), 60.

5 I highly recommend *A Further Shore* (especially chapters 10-12) by Yvonne Rason and Teri Degler (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco 1996) and *Transcend: A Guide to the Spiritual Quest* by Morton T. Kelsey (Paulist Press, 1981). *Transcend* is out of print but is probably available in church and public libraries.

6 “Concerning the Sacrament from Book Four,” *The Imitation of Christ*, Thomas à Kempis (Hollywood, Calif.: The Marcel Rodd Company Publishers, 1945), 205-6.

# The Ethical Will: The Most Important Document We Will Ever Write

We find the courage and the language to tell our loved ones and the world who we really are and what matters most deeply to us.

Although I'm not a chaplain (I'm trained as a clinical social worker), I hope my personal observations and professional experience with **ethical wills** over the past dozen years, will encourage you to write your own ethical will and it will find ways into all aspects of your spiritual and clinical work.

Let's start at the beginning. First, **what is an ethical will and where did it come from?** The ethical will is an ancient document from the Judeo-Christian tradition. The original template for its use came from Genesis 49:1-33. A dying Jacob gathered his sons to offer them his blessing and to request that they bury him not in Egypt, but instead in Canaan, in the cave at Machpelah with his ancestors.

Today, people identify Deuteronomy 32:46-47, where Moses instructs the Israelites to teach their children, and Matthew 5, where Jesus blesses his disciples, as examples of ethical wills. The early rabbis urged men to **transmit the tradition's ethical teachings** and they communicated orally to their sons. Later they were written as letters. German and Spanish examples of these letters can be found today in the Fordham Library Archives. For example, Eleazar ben Samuel HaLevi of Mainz, Germany, who died in 1357, wrote to and instructed his sons to "Put me in the ground at the right hand of my father..." ([www.fordham.edu](http://www.fordham.edu)).

So that's the history lesson. But **what makes the ethical will so powerful and popular today?**

I'll start with my personal answer: I was introduced to the ethical will by a rabbi speaking to a women's group. I was so entranced with the idea that I raced home to my computer to write to my son and daughter. Although historically the ethical will was for men, I set aside the patriarchal in our patriarchal tradition, saying to myself, "Well, I too—mother and ancient hippie feminist—have wisdom, values and love to express to my children and grandchildren." What I wrote that day is the **most important message** I have ever written.

When I finished, I experienced a **deep sense of well being**. I'd told my children about our family history and values. I'd expressed my love for and pride in them. I'd blessed them with the hard-earned wisdom of my life experience and the lessons I'd learned from it. I'd shared my love of life, and my dreams and hopes for them. I'd asked their forgiveness for the wounds they bear from my imperfect



parenting. I'd explained my rationale about the philanthropic and personal financial decisions I'd put in place. I'd shared stories about the meaningful "stuff" I wanted them and their children to have and pass down. I'd spelled out details about what I wanted and didn't want, clarifying and personalizing my advance directive. I'd asked them to care for

*"Well, I too—mother and ancient hippie feminist—have wisdom, values and love to express to my children and grandchildren."*

me if necessary as I neared death, and let them know my need for dignity, and the ways I wanted to be remembered. I felt relieved, at peace, unafraid, and felt great gratitude for the blessings of my life.

After my powerful personal experience I began—as a professional educator—to **share my discovery with others**, especially women. First, I wanted to empower women to free ourselves from the silence that has long held us hostage; to reverse our mistaken idea that we can't write, or that if we could, we have nothing worthwhile to communicate and preserve.

Second, I wanted people of every circumstance and in every transition to realize that we are each unique and sacred beings. We all have both ordinary and extraordinary gifts, and we each have valuable experience and life-lessons to transmit to others. We can, together in what I call “legacy circles,” find the **courage and the language to tell our loved ones and the world who we really are and what matters most** deeply to us.

People resonate with the themes, but find the term “ethical will” difficult. I began to refer to this document as the “**spiritual-ethical will**” and more recently as “**legacy letters**.” There are several key elements in a **contemporary spiritual-ethical will**. First, it’s important to differentiate legacy writing from memoir or spiritual autobiography. Though the content may be similar, **the intention** for writing a spiritual-ethical will is **to transmit love and learning to future generations**. At the very core its purpose is to transform the ancient traditional **instructions** (what modern wants to be controlled from the grave?) into the more explicitly spiritual “**blessings**” for future generations. Central to this writing is the **integration of the larger context** of our times that shape us **with our own personal experience and learning**.

An example is a letter written recently in a legacy circle that meets these criteria and will be a treasure to the writer’s grandchildren (You can read it, Sample #2, at the end of this article).

Andrew Weil, MD, a physician widely respected in alternative medicine and in spiritual circles, promotes preparing an **ethical will as a gift of spiritual health** to leave to your family in his recent book, *Healthy Aging, A Lifelong Guide to Your Physical and Spiritual Well-Being*. He also asserts that the ethical will’s “main importance is what it can give you in the midst of life.”

So **what does the ethical will give us in the midst of life?** While writing an ethical will links you to your history and future generations, clarifies your values, and communicates a legacy to those you love, it simultaneously addresses deep **universal needs** that we often don’t even realize we have.

Legacy writing **clarifies our identity and focuses our life purpose**. These are the unexpected gifts received in the midst of life. Beyond them, **six additional needs are addressed** as we write our spiritual-ethical wills. They include our need to belong, to be known, to be remembered, to have our lives make a difference, to bless and be blessed, and to celebrate Life. No matter how difficult a person’s situation or circumstances, the gifts arrive invariably accompanied by hearty laughter and the sweet tears of amazement, gratitude, release, fullness, and a sense of peace.

I’ve observed these needs being nourished in **people writing legacy letters** in hospitals and religious communities; in work and retirement; with professionals, homemakers and corporate managers; with new parents, grandparents, seniors; with the

aged, the ailing and the dying; with people of every age, of various ethnicities, faith traditions, economic and educational levels.

A physician friend, neighbor and colleague of mine began his ethical will work in earnest after a **young chaplain** approached him at a loss about how to help a **young man dying** in the hospice unit. Distracted, the man was sure that after his death

*I began to refer to this document as the “spiritual-ethical will” and more recently as “legacy letters.”*

there would be nothing of him left on earth, not even a memory. The physician explained the ethical will to the young chaplain and suggested that he visit the patient with pen and paper so he could write to someone. Later the chaplain told the physician that the one page letter had made all the difference. Writing it had significantly reduced the man’s anxiety and he’d died peacefully two days later. My friend is Barry K. Baines, M.D., whose book, *Ethical Wills: Putting Your Values on Paper*, is a valuable guide.

While I was writing *Women’s Lives, Women’s Legacies*, I approached a social worker at the Minnesota **Women’s Prison** about doing a legacy writing series with the inmates. I wanted to be sure that what I was writing and teaching was universally applicable, not just for educated, privileged women. When I finished explaining why I thought legacy writing would be beneficial, she responded with great enthusiasm that she had “the perfect group” for me, “**the lifers**.” I was taken aback and truthfully more than a little frightened. I asked her why this group. She said that I’d talked about how much we all yearn to be remembered. This group was no exception in their need, she said, but in many cases their families never communicated or visited, actively worked to forget them, and even denied their existence. I facilitated legacy writing with these women for months; they found it healing; they felt reconnected to the human race, and their **heart-felt legacies were moving and beautiful**.

**Chaplains may be the very best messengers** for the spiritual-ethical will. You have access to people seeking healing beyond the traditional medical model. Whether your work is with those who’ve received a serious diagnosis, are undergoing treatment, are dying, are loved ones of the aging and dying, the spiritual-ethical will is a **miraculous healing tool**.

More broadly, many of us realize that life is fragile, that we do not control the number of our days. We feel a **sense of urgency** to document our legacies to help shape this unfolding new world. As we fulfill the individual responsibility to preserve our

values and love, we simultaneously participate in strengthening the fabric of our communities and culture (You can read a powerful example, Sample #1, at the end of this article).

May your spiritual-ethical will be an eternal link connecting you to generations past and yet unborn, and may all your legacies be blessings.

### Sample 1: Barack Obama's Legacy Letter to his daughters, 1/18/09

Dear Malia and Sasha,

I know that you've both had a lot of fun these last two years on the campaign trail, going to picnics and parades and state fairs, eating all sorts of junk food your mother and I probably shouldn't have let you have. But I also know that it hasn't always been easy for you and Mom, and that as excited as you both are about that new puppy, it doesn't make up for all the time we've been apart. I know how much I've missed these past two years, and today I want to tell you a little more about why I decided to take our family on this journey.

When I was a young man, I thought life was all about me—about how I'd make my way in the world, become successful, and get the things I want. But then the two of you came into my world with all your curiosity and mischief and those smiles that never fail to fill my heart and light up my day. And suddenly, all my big plans for myself didn't seem so important anymore. I soon found that the greatest joy in my life was the joy I saw in yours. And I realized that my own life wouldn't count for much unless I was able to ensure that you had every opportunity for happiness and fulfillment in yours. In the end, girls, that's why I ran for President: because of what I want for you and for every child in this nation.

I want all our children to go to schools worthy of their potential—schools that challenge them, inspire them, and instill in them a sense of wonder about the world around them. I want them to have the chance to go to college—even if their parents aren't rich. And I want them to get good jobs: jobs that pay well and give them benefits like health care, jobs that let them spend time with their own kids and retire with dignity.

I want us to push the boundaries of discovery so that you'll live to see new technologies and inventions that improve our lives and make our planet cleaner and safer. And I want us to push our own human boundaries to reach beyond the divides of race and region, gender and religion that keep us from seeing the best in each other.

Sometimes we have to send our young men and women into war and other dangerous situations to protect our country—but when we do, I want to make sure that it is only for a very good reason, that we try our best to settle our differences with others peacefully, and that we do everything possible to

keep our servicemen and women safe. And I want every child to understand that the blessings these brave Americans fight for are not free—that with the great privilege of being a citizen of this nation comes great responsibility.

That was the lesson your grandmother tried to teach me when I was your age, reading me the opening lines of the Declaration of Independence and telling me about the men and women who marched for equality because they believed those words put

*May your spiritual-ethical will be an eternal link connecting you to generations past and yet unborn, and may all your legacies be blessings.*

to paper two centuries ago should mean something.

She helped me understand that America is great not because it is perfect but because it can always be made better—and that the unfinished work of perfecting our union falls to each of us. It's a charge we pass on to our children, coming closer with each new generation to what we know America should be.

I hope both of you will take up that work, righting the wrongs that you see and working to give others the chances you've had. Not just because you have an obligation to give something back to this country that has given our family so much—although you do have that obligation. But because you have an obligation to yourself. Because it is only when you hitch your wagon to something larger than yourself that you will realize your true potential.

These are the things I want for you—to grow up in a world with no limits on your dreams and no achievements beyond your reach, and to grow into compassionate, committed women who will help build that world. And I want every child to have the same chances to learn and dream and grow and thrive that you girls have. That's why I've taken our family on this great adventure.

I am so proud of both of you. I love you more than you can ever know. And I am grateful every day for your patience, poise, grace, and humor as we prepare to start our new life together in the White House.

Love, Dad

### Sample 2: Martha's Legacy Letter to her grandchildren, 1/27/09

Dear Jessie, Nick and Melissa:

You were aware—you were here to witness the most historically important event of my lifetime. I

want to give you some background to the miracle of Barack Obama's swearing-in ceremony, as he became the President of the United States of America.

In 1952 when I was 10 years old, my dad and mom drove our family to Florida. It was my first time driving through the South and the first time I remember seeing 'negroes'. Their dilapidated houses, which we called shanties, lined the sides of the roads, sometimes had only three walls, some had boards missing on the roofs. My nose was pressed to the window and I felt pity and curiosity and confusion and fear. I didn't know about life beyond Edina and downtown Minneapolis. We stopped to get something to eat and I wouldn't eat the food from their stores, accepting only a coke because it was in a bottle.

In the 50's and 60's my eyes were further opened by protests and civil rights workers killed and the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy, and race riots as the struggle for equal rights played itself out. What an awful truth knowing that our country was wrong, when I had been raised to believe we were close to perfect and comprehending some of the 'truth' of the lives of African Americans. The knowledge that life is horribly unfair and my blessed life was an accident of birth was humbling and in some way shameful.

During the fall of 2004 I was invited to attend a gathering to meet a young black man running for the Illinois senate seat. He had spoken at the Democratic Convention and I was impressed by his vision for America. When he arrived on the lawn of a Lake Harriet mansion I can only tell you that there was an aura around him. I didn't have to see him to know where he was. I don't remember what he said, only that he excited and inspired all of us. This young charismatic man, who happened to be black, with grace and passion shared his belief that we could become a better nation. Finally, I had found someone I wanted to support, this man who filled me with hope that he and we could bring about change. He believed in the greatness of our people, as I was horrified that my countrymen were about to re-elect George Bush. When Barack decided to run for president I feared that our people were still asleep and wouldn't hear his message, but he won Iowa and the impossible no longer was. Everywhere men and women of all backgrounds were listening and starting to believe that we could be THE United States of America, that honesty and openness, caring for those who are vulnerable and leading by example were values worth fighting for. This man, Barack Hussein Obama, who happened to be black, brilliant and articulate, compassionate and idealistic, shared his ideas and he was heard.

Martin Luther King, Jr. asked that we not be judged by the color of our skin but rather by the content of our character and that day November 4, 2008 arrived in my lifetime. The enormity of the emotions of that night and the days to follow cannot be

expressed in words. We celebrated, we cheered, we laughed, we hugged each other and many of us wept because the joy was too deep, the significance too great and the price too heavy, and we continue to weep and to rejoice.

The lesson witnessed is that ANYTHING is possible and dreams can come true.

My prayer for you, dear loves of my life, is that you pay attention to the world around you and not just your world. That you see others through eyes of love and not fear, that you are quick to see the similarities and slow to see the differences. I pray that you are open to the miracles all around you and the divine in all you meet.

Melissa, Nick and Jessie, each of you is a miracle and each divine.

I love you, Baba.

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*Rachael Freed, MSW, LMFT taught English, served in the Peace Corps in Tunisia, and practiced psychotherapy for thirty years. Freed is a Senior Fellow at the University of Minnesota's Center for Spirituality and Healing. She is one of the 'experts' whose work with the ethical will is included on Dr. Andrew Weil's integrative health web sites. Her work is highlighted at [Legacy.com](#), [AgingPro.com](#), and [AgeWellHomeCare.com](#).*

*Rachael Freed is the author of [Women's Lives](#), [Women's Legacies: Passing Your Beliefs and Blessings to Future Generations](#) and [The Women's Legacies Workbook for the Busy Woman: A Step-by-Step Guide for Writing a Spiritual-Ethical Will](#).*

*Freed is currently working on [Harvesting the Wisdom of Our Lives: An Intergenerational Legacy Workbook for Seniors and Their Families](#).*

Visit [www.Life-Legacies.com](#) for more information, and to subscribe to the free monthly e-letter, Legacy Tips & Tools.

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# Where the Rubber Meets the Road

We all suffer; it is the human condition. We all can serve; it is the greatest of human interactions, modeled by our loving God in Christ Jesus.

On one of my first days in Sunny View Care Center, Martha came to visit. She could no longer see or walk, her hearing was fading, and she had just recently begun hospice care. She asked a caregiver to wheel her into my room. They knocked hesitantly on the open door and Martha called out, “Pastor Joan. Pastor Joan. Can I come in?” And when I asked her to please do so, she put out her hands, feeling her way toward me, as her CNA pushed her up to my bed.

Our hands connected and Martha asked, “Can I pray for you?” And she did, a simple, powerful prayer to her beloved Lord to heal me. And then, as we sat there quietly for a few minutes, I was reminded why I had chosen to come to this nursing facility rather than another to undergo my initial rehabilitation process.

Three days before, I had gone into a drug store, proceeded up an aisle, and before I saw the half inch of water on the floor, I had—oh so gracefully—flown through the air and hit the floor, still sliding along the tile until I stopped, with my shoulder caught under the lip of the bottommost shelf. Following Jesus apparently doesn’t include walking on water. The good news was that I only broke my hip. The bad news was that I broke my hip.

Off to the Emergency Room. Surgery the same evening. Physical Therapy begun before twenty-four hours had passed. And the decision about rehab.

My colleagues at Sunny View Lutheran Retirement Community were startled that I wanted to come back to OUR Care Center, OUR Nursing Facility, especially since there was only a semi-private room available. But I didn’t think twice. Why would I want to be cared for by any team of caregivers other than the best?! I knew these nurses, these nursing assistants who took seriously the part of the job description that reads, “other duties as needed.” I knew the housekeepers who could tidy up a room at the same time as tending to a discouraged heart. I knew the maintenance team who could fix the heat, repair an electrical short in a microphone, and take the time to listen to a resident’s view of the day, all at the same time. I knew the dietary team that didn’t settle for ‘okay,’ but did their best, and beyond, to work within dietary restrictions to make a dining experience to which residents could look forward. I knew the activity staff for whom massaging a painful back was as important an activity as was a major holiday party. I knew the business office that coordinated with res-



idents and families to make sense of bills, insurance and all that part of the puzzle. I knew the residents, had sat by THEIR beds after a broken hip or during the last hours of their lives in this world. And I knew that all of these people were a proud part of the pastoral care team; I counted on them every day. So I looked forward to seeing for myself how this was all true, where the rubber meets the road, as they say.

*I knew that all of these people were a proud part of the pastoral care team; I counted on them every day.*

I did have second thoughts as I saw the bedside commode and felt the pain in my hip and wondered if it wouldn’t have been better to have gone somewhere where I didn’t feel I had to be nice, where I could yell, scream and be real. But these were my friends, and if you can’t yell, scream and cry with your friends, if I couldn’t be real here, then maybe the family dynamics here weren’t as ideal as I had thought.

We would see. I was determined to be a Care Center resident, not a princess with special privileges. At the same time, I of course understood that my stay would be temporary and that I wasn’t the average resident.

The first Sunday in the Care Center, I resolved to make it to our community church services. I had help getting ready, but with that said, by the time I had breakfast, washed up, struggled into my clothes, and got into a wheelchair, I was pretty much spent. I wheeled myself to the Care Center lobby area, where residents had gathered to listen to music while the multipurpose room was transformed from breakfast room to worship center.

As I sat in my wheelchair in the lobby, I thought of the care conferences I had attended as chaplain, and how we would brainstorm about how to keep Care Center residents engaged during these transition hours, these times between formal activities. We wanted to ensure that our residents were not bored or ignored. And now as I sat with the other residents, with a full stomach and a tired body, I realized that the residents that I had seen falling asleep in their wheelchairs after breakfast on occasion, were not bored. They were exhausted! If someone had approached me that Sunday morning, even for a bit of conversation, it may have been more than I could have handled. At least inside, I would have cried out, "Please. Let me rest a minute. Just a minute. I'm so tired. Please let me rest."

The residents around me that morning taught me that we serve each other, care for each other, simply by letting each other be ourselves, be real, in the midst of whatever the day brings.

They taught me that being part of the human family, the Christian family, is like taking one huge global set of marriage vows with one another, agreeing to be with one another in sickness and health and for richer and poorer.

Sharing meals with the other Care Center residents opened my eyes in another way. There's something about the level playing field of a supper table. One evening, as we ate, the resident across from me was looking at his meal with a furrowed brow, and I asked, "Are you all right?" He looked at me with a smile quivering at the side of his mouth and said, "No, half of me is left." I laughed. I was taking myself way too seriously.

Residents from other levels of care at Sunny View found a balance between wanting to support me and yet also respect my need for rest. In their desire to serve me, they found that notes and cards provided a good middle ground, and they reminded me of the power of a written message to bring hope and healing. I was also amazed how residents found ways to take up the slack in the Pastoral Care Department, as they visited and cared for their fellow residents while I was recovering. Their enthusiastic attention to one another reminded me that I was not the only one who provided spiritual care at Sunny View!

My time in the Care Center coincided with the Beijing Summer Olympics. In the evenings, I would wheel myself down to the dining room where there was a large screen TV and watch the evening's Olympic events with staff, and with the residents

who were still up. One of the CNAs in our widely multi-cultural staff was from Beijing. The other residents kidded and cheered us on as we rooted for our national heroes. Differences in age, abilities, nationalities, and cultures all melted away as we, as residents and staff, were simply ourselves, having a good time, and as we committed ourselves to start practicing for the next Olympics, putting together a Sunny View team.

*As I sat with the other residents, with a full stomach and a tired body, I realized that the residents that I had seen falling asleep in their wheelchairs after breakfast on occasion, were not bored. They were exhausted!*

But my stay was not all fun and games. One night I awakened at what I assumed was the usual time when my pain medication was due. I rang for the nurse, and realized that it was way too early for another dose. I felt so helpless. I had always thought I had a high pain threshold, and so this constant throb stunned me. I didn't want to be a wimp, and yet my body demanded that I ask for help. I will never forget the struggle I saw in the nurse's face, a struggle to do what the orders called for along with a compassionate desire to want to make me more comfortable. It must be a dilemma nurses face often, made more difficult by knowing that even as one resident is being cared for, there are others waiting. In her creative efforts to meet my need, wipe my tears, *be* with me, and still be true to the rules, my nurse taught me that serving is figured out one moment at a time, one situation at a time, one person at a time, as we see one another as simply children of the same heavenly Father.

Now that my hip is healing, now that I'm back to work, now that I spend my days but not all my nights in the Care Center, I pray that I never forget that service has nothing to do with roles or job descriptions, or age, or physical and mental ability. We all suffer; it is the human condition. We all can serve; it is the greatest of human interactions, modeled by our loving God in Christ Jesus.

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# Veterans Day

We serve, we support, we encourage, we teach ... *each other*.  
Service is always mutual.

Sometimes it's hard to tell who is serving whom. It was a bright fall morning, the first anniversary of the dedication of a Veteran's Memorial in Cupertino, California. Because of the personal story of two Cupertino families, a powerful veteran's memorial had been built in the midst of a lovely city park, a place where neighbors walk and picnic...and remember.

I had the privilege of accompanying residents from Sunny View Lutheran Retirement Community to the veteran's program. We arrived at the park in the community van, and were greeted by middle school students who personally escorted each veteran to his/her seat. It felt good to watch these fine men and women treated with such respect and honor.

The program focused on the story of Matthew Axelrod and James Suh, two Navy SEALs who were killed in 2005 trying to rescue fellow soldiers in the mountains of Afghanistan. It was a touching service as representatives of the two families spoke, placed flowers at the base of a statue of Axelrod and Suh, and as a commanding officer of the young men spoke of their desire and commitment to serve their fellow soldiers, their families, and their country.

An honor guard. Our national anthem. Speeches from local dignitaries. Moments to stop and intentionally honor veterans past and present on this day in November. And tears, as each sat in the late morning sun with personal and corporate memories of triumph and loss.

As the service continued, a vet from Sunny View took my hand, and held it throughout. We shared pride and tears and tissues. When the formal service was over, my friend and I, still hand in hand, walked down to the memorial area, to walk on specially formed and inscribed bricks that cover the ground with remembrance and inspiration. As we walked, I was careful to hold the resident's hand tightly with my left hand, knowing that he isn't always steady on his feet. With my right hand I rolled a walker, *my walker*, as I made sure I, too, was steady as I recovered from a broken hip.

The resident looked down at me and said, "Are you doing okay?"

Who, indeed, was serving whom?

In his words, and in the tightening of his hand around mine, I realized for not the first time or the last, that service is always mutual. We serve, we support, we encourage, we teach...*each other*.

Service is always mutual.



*"The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding  
our lives together as a church:  
every part dependent on every other part,  
the parts we mention and the parts we don't,  
the parts we see and the parts we don't.  
If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the  
hurt, and in the healing.  
If one part flourishes, every other part enters into  
the exuberance.  
You are Christ's body – that's who you are! You  
must never forget this!"  
(1 Corinthians 12:24-27, The Message)*

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## New and noteworthy

ZION XIV  
OCTOBER 21 – 24, 2010  
THE LODGE AT SIMPSONWOOD  
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

**Speakers:** Tentative commitments have been received from both LCMS President Gerald B. Kieschnick and ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson to be with us for this event.

**Theme:** The conference will explore the theme: “Firm Foundations: Theological Challenges of Pastoral Care in Contemporary Specialized Ministries.”

**Location:** Seclusion in the Heart of Atlanta. The Lodge at Simpsonwood is a Christian adult and family retreat center nestled in the heart of metro Atlanta, Georgia. It is surrounded by 227 acres of woodlands along the Chattahoochee River with three miles of wooded trails. Designed to harmonize with nature, all facilities are within easy walking distance of one another.

Plan to hold these dates on your calendar and look for further details in the coming months.

Zion XIV Planning Committee  
Margaret Anderson  
Evon Flesberg  
Ben Moravitz  
Chuck Weinrich  
Bryn Carlson, Chair

### Give Something Back Scholarship

The next deadline for this joint Lutheran scholarship fund is August 15th. The awards will then be made in November. Scholarship funds are awarded to individuals seeking ecclesiastical endorsement and certification/credentialing in ministries of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and clinical education. The fund has a corpus of \$146,896.44 with grants totaling \$6000.00 per year (\$3000.00 semi-annually.) More information and application forms are available on both the ELCA and LCMS web-pages.

### AGING WITH GRACE

*The Northeast Forum on Spirituality and Aging seeks persons with a passion for ministry to, by, and with older adults to contribute: book reviews, reports on ministry ideas, programs, materials, meditations, both informal and academic papers, articles of interest, poetry, liturgies, and blog discussions.*

The elderly are the fastest growing resource of the Church! Our life expectancy has grown by twenty-five years in the last one hundred years. It is expected to grow another twenty-five in the next one hundred years (One could say that we are having to deal with an issue of aging of biblical proportions).

The experience of aging is filled with struggle and loss, but also growth. In the face of our societal ageism, there are not many models either of aging with “grace” or of respect for elders. Many see old age as a problem to solve, as an illness to be cured, as an obstacle to be avoided, and even as a curse; yet one biblical interpretation of old age is as *blessing*. With so many years being added to life, the ministerial needs of our older members are changing. How do we help them to weather the struggles? How do we explore old age as a time filled with the Presence of God?

One of the goals of [www.nefosa.org](http://www.nefosa.org) is to create a website where issues of spirituality and aging (across denominations and faith traditions) are reflected upon and discussed. We are also looking for articles regarding struggles and successes in senior and intergenerational ministry. For further information contact Rev. Brian McCaffrey at [bmccaffrey@lutherancare.org](mailto:bmccaffrey@lutherancare.org).

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## Recent and upcoming events

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### Inter-Lutheran

October 21-24, 2010 Zion XIV takes place at The Lodge at Simpsonwood in Atlanta, Georgia

## How to Subscribe

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