

Caring Connections

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



Practices of Prayer

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

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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. Chuck Weinrich (cweinrich@cfl.rr.com) or Rev. Diane Greve (dkgreve@gmail.com). We invite articles for upcoming issues on the following themes.

2017, No. 1 (Spring) “Zion XVI” We plan to include transcripts of the major presentations from the conference. Do you have a reflection or opinion about the conference? Please consider writing an article for us. We want to hear from you!

2017, No. 2 (Summer) “Ministry with Immigrants” Are you involved in pastoral work that involves immigrants? Please consider writing about it! Deadline for articles: May 1, 2017.

2017, No. 3 (Fall) “Divine Art of Dying” Drawing inspiration from Herbert Anderson’s book, “The Divine Art of Dying,” we invite our readers to share their journeys with someone who has died or is dying. Or maybe you know someone who is in the process of dying and is open to sharing their reflections with *Caring Connections* readers.

Editorial

Diane Greve

THIS ISSUE focuses on PRAYER. For almost 20 years of my ministry life I was a certified CPE supervisor. A common struggle I would hear from students was how and when to pray for a patient or family. Others had a crisis of faith as they wondered what they were accomplishing through their prayers. Prayer is a common “intervention” for chaplains. Yet, how do we understand what happens when we pray? Where do we get our own inner strength, our spiritual resilience to keep going in our ministry? How do we help others to pray? How can I keep my own prayer life vibrant?

The diverse and varied perspectives included in this issue will offer a rich cornucopia for the reader. Several articles draw from the work and thought of Martin Luther. This is particularly timely as we are in the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. You will find several substantive articles and a collection of vignettes from six chaplains.

- **David McCurdy** explores what happens when chaplains pray.
- Then, drawing from his Grace Place Wellness retreat ministry, **John Eckrich** offers his thoughts on meditation and the use of scripture in prayer.
- **Steve Arnold** considers the Contemplative Chaplain in a nice companion piece to the Eckrich article.
- **Don Stiger** has reflected on the power of prayer for Dietrich Bonhoeffer while inviting us into his journey to Bonhoeffer sites.
- **John Pless** shares thoughts on Luther and prayer from his new book, *Praying Luther’s Small Catechism*.
- **Bill Russell** contributes additional thoughts on Luther and prayer through his summarized conversation with me about an article he wrote for *Word and World* in 2002, “Luther, Prayer and the Reformation.”
- We also have practical vignettes and reflections from several practitioners around the country: **Heather Bumstead, Scott Davis, April Hughes, Sabine Maresco, John Syvertson, and Chuck Weinrich**.
- As in our last issue, again we are including a book review. Here you will find a thoughtful critique by **Nancy Ruth Wigdahl** of Nan Merrill’s *Psalms for Praying*.

In addition, we have revised the last issue on Ministries of Management and Leadership to include an article by **Mark Whitsett**, Director of Pastoral Care at Cedar Lake Lodge in LaGrange, Kentucky. The article came a little after the last issue had been posted, but we chose to rework that edition to include his article entitled, “Domains We Live By: Re-Framing Pastoral Care in Multiple Service Agency Roles.” We hope you will take the time to find and read that addition in Volume 13 2016 #3.

In the most recent issue of *Caring Connections*, Chuck Weinrich announced that Don Stiger would be stepping down as the co-editor and that I would be joining the team as the new co-editor. This is the first issue for which I have been in the lead role. Having only retired from CPE supervision in December 2015, I accepted this role with some hesitancy. How much did I want to add to my responsibilities in this new stage of life? In the past months, I have become better acquainted with this publication and the people who create it. I am honored to be working with the Editorial Board, the staff and with my co-editor, Chuck Weinrich. And I pray that the thoughts shared by your colleagues in these ministries will enhance your practice, enlighten your thinking and warm your heart.

Praying with Patients: What Are Chaplains Up To?

David McCurdy

WHAT ARE CHAPLAINS REALLY DOING when they pray with patients and families?¹ What should they be trying to do? Other questions—such as how to pray with patients, what patients can expect from prayer, whether prayer fosters healing, and how researchers can measure prayer’s “outcomes”²—seem to be asked more often. The question of what is really going on, and what should be sought, when a chaplain prays with a patient or family member deserves at least equal consideration. Addressing that question will be the particular focus of this reflection.

An Existential Premise

The presenting question can be asked and answered from multiple perspectives. I believe it begins, however, as an experiential and existential question, something like this: What are chaplains doing or attempting to do in those moments of encounter when they pray with and for patients? The first and perhaps most important answer can be simply stated. Above all, it seems to me, the chaplain *facilitates the expression of people’s needs, feelings, and yearnings to God*. This formulation is both descriptive and normative; it names what chaplains do, and should do. In an interfaith or “spiritual, not religious” encounter, the patient might use a word or words other than “God,” but the point is the same.

Such facilitation can take various forms. Perhaps the chaplain offers a spoken prayer that lifts up concerns the patient has expressed in a preceding pastoral conversation. Perhaps chaplain and patient pray aloud together, or each prays aloud at some point, or one prays aloud and the other prays silently or prays by listening, and so on. The aim in each case is to help people say what they most need to say, to enable them to express what is on their mind and heart. They might say it first to the chaplain (when asked, for instance, “Is there anything you would especially like me to pray for?”) and later directly to God in their own words.

This statement of the chaplain’s role in prayer may seem an obvious, even elementary formulation. If so, it still seems important to say it. This may be especially true in a time when spiritual care and its expressions, even prayer, are called upon to serve so many masters: the goal of advancing “health,” reducing patient length of stay, promoting chaplains’ membership on the varsity healthcare team or their full “healthcare professional” status,³ to name just some.

“The chaplain facilitates the expression of people’s needs, feelings, and yearnings to God.”

1 In this article I will typically use “patients” to signify both patients and family members, albeit with primary emphasis on patients. Later in the article, I discuss praying with family members more directly.

2 On the problem of studying prayer’s “efficacy,” see especially an article by Jeffrey Bishop, “Prayer, Science, and the Moral Life of Medicine,” *Archives of Internal Medicine* 163 (23 June 2003): 1405–1408.

3 See Martha R. Jacobs, “What Are We Doing Here? Chaplains in Contemporary Health Care,” *Hastings Center Report* 36, no. 6 (November–December 2008), 15–18.

Moreover, as I recently discovered, this perspective seems to resonate with some of Luther's thinking in the *Large Catechism*. Discussing the Lord's Prayer, Luther says that in it God provides specific petitionary language to help us pray, so that "we can see how deeply concerned God is about our needs." Thus we should not doubt that our prayer of need "pleases God and will assuredly be heard."⁴

For Luther, need is so central that it should, in itself, drive us to pray "without ceasing."⁵ Certainly, "[w]e all have needs enough, but the trouble is that we do not see or feel them."⁶ Instead, "[w]e must feel our need, the distress that impels and drives us to cry out."⁷ The needs we pray about may, and should, include the needs of others around us, not least public servants and church leaders. The critical element is the expression of need through petition. Indeed, if there is no petition—if the one praying does not name and ask for something "definite" that he or she "desires"—the approach to God "cannot be called prayer."⁸ In sum, God wants

"We can see how deeply concerned God is about our needs."

you to...feel your needs and wants, not because he [God] is unaware of them, but in order that you may kindle your heart to stronger and greater desires and spread your cloak wide to receive many things.⁹

Here Luther is clearly speaking to Christians about growing their faith as, and because, they recognize and express their needs. Those with whom chaplains often claim no church or other religious affiliation. Even so, as patients they may have a heightened sense of need. In praying, or asking or allowing the chaplain to pray, they are seeking *something*, something they may not be quite able or ready to express. The chaplain's faith, and perhaps the patient's hope if not faith, is that God does hear and care, as Luther says. In that moment, the patient's own heart may be "kindled" in his or her spiritual journey. To use Carroll Wise's classic language, patients may catch a glimpse of "the inner meaning of the Gospel," communicated to them "at the point of their need."¹⁰

In short, the process of self-opening that Luther commends to the faithful takes place among the hospitalized as well. It happens when chaplains pray with patients, when patients pray in the chaplain's presence, and even when patients voice their prayer request to the chaplain. They are opened to God and to themselves, to their feelings and desires, to the lacks in their lives, to their yearnings for healing. They

4 Kirsi I. Sterjna, *The Large Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther*, 1529, The Annotated Luther Study Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), p. 370.

5 *The Large Catechism of Martin Luther*, tr. Robert H. Fischer (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p. 67.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 67f.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 67. As a non-Lutheran, I suspect those better versed in Luther's views on prayer can augment or correct my comments on Luther's approach.

10 Carroll A. Wise, *The Meaning of Pastoral Care* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 8.

reveal their vulnerability and let it be touched. Previously unspoken gratitude or praise may emerge as well. For chaplains, these moments can be marvelous and miraculous to behold—sudden encounters on holy ground.

Some Implications of the Premise

To be sure, responding to prayer requests, and the needs and desires they reflect, can also pose challenges for chaplains. Some prayer requests test the chaplain's default commitment to help the patient or family members express their desires to God. An example will illustrate the problem. Imagine a patient in the ICU who is critically ill, indeed at death's door. The patient's family members staunchly request prayers for healing although medical opinion has ruled out hope of recovery for their loved one and advised cessation of life-sustaining treatment.

Everyone—except the family decision makers—sees that the patient's illness is overwhelming, that aggressive treatment can only inflict more pain and discomfort. Yet family members continue to insist that "everything" be done and even speak fervently of healing. Their theology may look, seemingly with blinders, for a healing miracle from a God of deliverance. Staff members and perhaps the chaplain feel that praying for healing will only feed into the family's "denial."

"It is not wrong to desire healing."

There are various ways to navigate such a request. One course is to hedge on the request for healing in the prayer itself by adding, prominently, "if it be Your will" at the end. Or one might frame the prayer as a general request for God's comfort and love for the patient whatever happens, then append a brief petition for healing. Two caveats are in order, I think. First, it is arguably a misuse of prayer to employ it to "send" the family a covert corrective message (e.g., that they should change their expectation).¹¹ Luther's petitionary logic might also suggest that it is not wrong to desire healing, to hope and pray for it as long as possible, even to the very end.

Second, the very people who express the greatest confidence in a theology of miracles may simply bow to events if their request is not granted and the patient dies. Though grieving, they accept the outcome as the will of a sovereign God rather than complain that they were entitled to see deliverance from death. Their overt faith in God's healing may harbor more complexity and realism than is at first apparent. I am inclined to think that the chaplain's prayer should honor the desire for healing by praying for it without reservation. To yearn for healing of a loved one, and to say so to God, surely is not wrong. Pastoral conversation before or after the prayer may offer opportunities to consider other possibilities.

On the other hand, a striking reality about hospitalized patients is that often healing is not at, or even near, the top of their needs list. Their desires may focus on the needs of others in their lives, a need to be forgiven and amend their own lives in

11 I am grateful to Diane Greve for reminding me of the "prayer as hidden message" problem.

some way, reconciliation with someone estranged, or yearning for a sense of God's closeness and care. Perhaps these needs were not "top of mind" for the patient coming into the hospital, but the situation of illness and a little time to reflect (even with diminishing lengths of stay) may bring them to the surface.

Prayer requests in these instances may appeal less to the intervention of a transcendent Deity in the chain of medical or other events than to the presence and nudging of an immanent Spirit who moves subtly in and between people to affect human relationships and self-awareness. Not incidentally, this distinction between God's transcendent and immanent "working" can be important in pastoral conversations about whether and how patients' prayers are answered.¹²

Prayer in and as Relationship

If prayer brings an immanent God close enough to hear our needs and yearnings, to work in our relationships and even in our hearts, is there then a relational dimension in prayer itself? Jane Vennard suggests that prayer is "about" a relationship with a loving God, then adds that prayer is a relationship with that God. Importantly, she goes on to say that "[t]he relationship is initiated by God; I just respond." In reasoning that seems reminiscent of Luther, she connects this divine initiative with biblical language about God's "wooing and pursuing" us.¹³

"Prayer brings an immanent God close enough to hear our needs and yearnings."

What are the implications of this divine initiative for prayer in the patient-chaplain relationship? When patients express their needs and yearnings in the presence of an unseen God and the visible presence of the chaplain, prayer enters a particularly rich relational space. Perhaps God even "woos and pursues" patients and chaplains into deeper relationship through this unique melding of divine-human relationship and patient-chaplain interaction—an interaction that can itself inspire and shape prayer. In this threefold relationship, it may in reality be the Spirit who prompts the chaplain to suggest prayer, or the Spirit who nudges the patient to request it.

Vennard claims that prayer as a relationship is often a matter of "letting the Spirit out," perhaps because the immanent Spirit is always ready to move in and among us.¹⁴ I would add that the Spirit is also not in our control. "The wind blows where it wills" (John 3:8). This divine freedom means that prayer, including chaplains' prayers with patients and even patients' requests for prayer, is also a mystery.¹⁵ In part it is a mystery because we may not know or recognize when prayer is happening.¹⁶ When,

12 Jane Vennard, "A Praying Congregation: Inviting in the Spirit," presentation (also on compact disc), 28th General Synod of the United Church of Christ, Tampa, Fla., July 2011.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Vennard suggests that "anything and everything" in our lives can be or become a prayer. This is how she makes sense of Paul's call to "pray without ceasing," a text also referenced by Luther in the *Large Catechism* (p. 67).

for example, the patient simply names needs, feelings, or yearnings in conversation with the chaplain, is that already a “petition” that God hears?

A Further Word

I have suggested that the chaplain’s primary task in praying with patients is to help people communicate their needs and yearnings to God. I have explored a few implications of this commitment, including practical difficulties it can present. Other implications (or complications) no doubt deserve careful examination, for example, the place of this understanding in interfaith and “spiritual, not religious” relationships, or its relation to spiritual assessments and any “spiritual care plans” they generate.

It seems to me, however, that attention to these considerations should not—and, I suspect, will not—cause chaplains to lose sight of the marvel and mystery that praying with patients can evoke. Praying with patients reminds chaplains again and again that prayer is a relational mystery to be lived, engaged, and embraced, even as they inevitably and rightly seek to better understand it and integrate that understanding in their practice.



The Rev. David McCurdy, BCC, is an adjunct faculty member in religious studies at Elmhurst College, a retired healthcare ethicist and chaplain, and a retired ACPE supervisor. He is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. McCurdy welcomes questions and comments about this article at dbm1946d@aol.com

Being Present in Prayer: Word-Saturated Meditation

John D. Eckrich, M.D.

HAVE YOU EVER FOUND YOURSELF in a conversation where you realized that you weren't really present, where you were not listening to the other's communication with you?

Have you experienced this as a pastor, a chaplain, a counselor, a nurse or physician, or just as a friend? You know the situation—you're sitting at the bedside, but your mind and heart are far away. You are kidding yourself if you think those you are caring for are not picking up on your absence!

Or, have you recognized your inattention in the midst of a conversation (prayer) with your Creator, Redeemer, Faith Builder?

We live in a multi-tasking society. There are constant threats to obstruct and disrupt our relationships and discourse, particularly, I would suggest, the threats of *noise* and *hurry*. I invite you to consider *pausing* physically, emotionally, and even spiritually before entering times of communication, particularly times of communication with God. I would ask you to consider entering these moments of conversation, even moments of prayer, by approaching them with quiet, solitude, stillness, and *saturated in His Word*.

Let's turn first to the disruptors—noise and hurry. I believe these two great threats to our communication are used by the devil, the world, and our own flesh to absent us from intentionally sitting at the feet of our Savior, God's Word. Noise and hurry seem to be prominent in times of anxiety and fear, which are always present particularly as we work with the people God has placed in our care as pastors, chaplains, spiritual guides, or even as physicians. Anxious noise and hurry accompany the threats and dangers in all of our lives.

Let's look at *noise*. Our environment is filled with sight and sound, especially auditory stimulation. We are bombarded by radio, television, Internet, U-Tube and Pandora—constantly plugged in and often tuned out to the important conversations with those immediately around us. This external noise is amplified by our negative self-talk. Do you find yourself frequently giving yourself a self-hug? Or do you more often greet yourself, or your behavior, or choices with words like *idiot*, *stupid*, *dumbbell* or other self-deprecating names? I would say we are usually the perfect setup for Satan to establish a base of operations to try to separate us from our Savior. Wouldn't it be healthier to find a corner of quiet, a cleft in the Rock of Ages, in which to hear God's voice?

"Noise and hurry seem to be prominent in times of anxiety and fear."

And then there's *hurry*. Chief of sinners have I been in my life as a physician, husband, father and friend. I love the quote of the 19th century counselor and analytical psychiatrist Carl Jung, who said, "Hurry is not of the devil; it is the devil." Jung was probably paraphrasing St. Jerome in the 4th century, "Omnis festinatio

ex parte diabolic est (All haste is of the devil).” We are constantly multi-tasking or distractedly single-tasking our way through life.

As opposed to noise and hurry, the Holy Scriptures give us several beautiful examples of a call to quiet ourselves and to slow down. In the Old Testament, we remember the prophet Elijah. We remember Elijah as he is exhausted after being chased by Jezebel (I Kings 19:1–18). After destroying the prophets of Baal, God calls him to a time and a place of solitude, of rest, restoration, and healing. How does the Creator say He will come to Elijah? In a whisper...

When it is noisy we cannot hear a *whisper*...

From the New Testament, Jesus is coming to visit his family friends, Mary and Martha of Bethany. Martha is busying herself with preparations. She’s clattering dishes and scurrying to cook and clean. Mary, her sister, is sitting at the feet of the Word, listening. Jesus honors Mary’s choice (Luke 10:38–42).

“Might it be healthier to pause our conversations with things of the world in order to come to the Word of the Lord in quiet, unhurried prayer?”

From Christ’s lips at the Sermon on the Mount, we hear,

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues...to be seen by men...they have received their reward in full. *But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen...*for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. Then this is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven...’” Matthew 6:5–14

Finally, from Luther’s great Christmas, Bible-based hymn, *Vom Himmel Hoch*, the verse:

“Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,
Within my heart that it may be,
A quiet chamber kept for Thee.”

So in the settings of anxiety, noise and hurry, might it be healthier to pause our conversations with things of the world in order to come to the Word of the Lord in quiet, unhurried prayer? Might it be better to remember, through God’s Word, who it is who is the Great Physician, the Almighty God, the maker and preserver of creation to whom we are reconciled by Christ? Would it not set us on a steadier path of restoration of our health to have the Holy Spirit lead us to love, fear and trust God, to know by faith that He is listening to our prayer, and to follow His will for all that afflicts us?

When we enter prayer by quieting, by settling and silencing our hearts as we hear the words of the Holy Scriptures, by allowing ourselves the gift solitude and being fully present, then the chamber of our heart is indeed prepared to hear God’s

comfort, hope, and healing. His grace is always there. His grace is always present in Christ.

Let me share what I have found to be helpful to this practice of *Word-saturated meditative prayer* to provide a *pause point* in our journey, particularly in the setting of fear and anxiety.

The Practice of Word-Saturated Meditative Prayer

I like to think of setting aside time to saturate our prayer life in centering ourselves in Christ, by actually praying the Word of God, speaking in His language, aligning us with His will. This may be done with a quiet and unhurried approach to God's Word.

"The practice of meditating on God's Word has a significant history within the Christian faith."

The practice of meditating on God's Word has a significant history within the Christian faith. I would, again, include Mary of Bethany sitting at the Lord's feet from the Scriptures as one example. Along the Emmaus journey of the Church, we have seen further models of meditative prayer: 1) In *Origen*, the indisputable master of the Alexandrian School of theology, transferred to the Latin by St. Ambrose; 2) *Lectio Divina* established by St. Augustine from studying Ambrose; 3) Martin Luther's *Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio, as well as his encouragement to pray the Psalter*;¹ and 4) the second Vatican Council's recommendation of the renewed value of *Lectio Divina*² brought to a practical application through Contemplative Outreach under Father Thomas Keating, O.C.S.O.

All of these church leaders have called us back to mindfully spending time listening to and reflecting on what God tells us about Himself, and especially what He tells us about the saving and substitutionary sacrifice His Son has done for us in his death and resurrection. These disciplines set our intention on the Cross of Christ in quiet, focused, supplicating, receiving, and thankful postures before God's throne of grace and mercy.

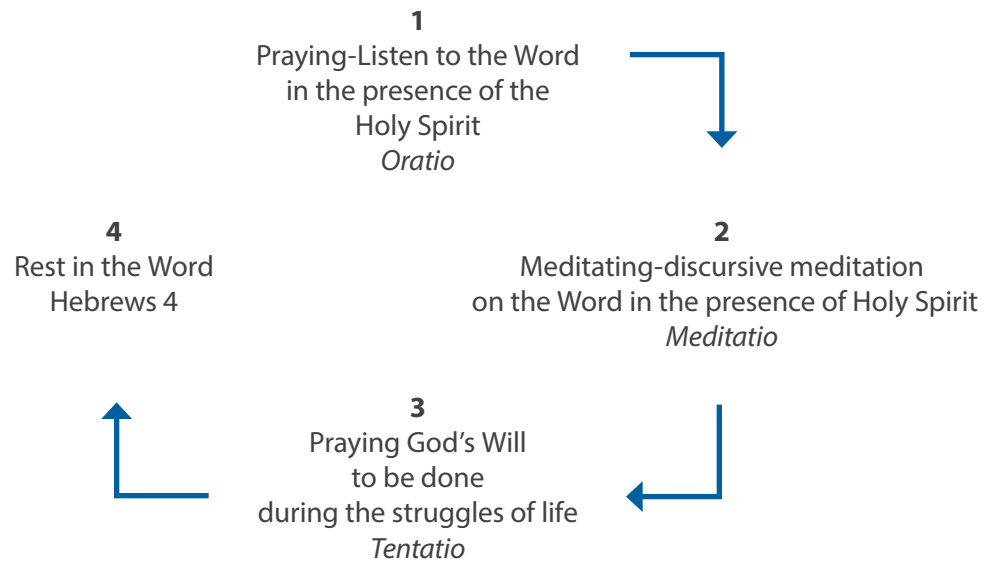
Through our Grace Place Wellness Retreats (www.graceplacewellness.org), we offer Christ-centered meditation through a practice we call *Word-Saturated Meditative Prayer*. Generally, it follows the four-part, circular, prayer-pattern of *Lectio Divina*. Let me share that form of prayer with you in the hope that it might find value in your spiritual walk with the Savior. In this meditative prayer practice, we place Luther's concepts of *Oratio, Meditatio, and Tentatio* into a finite time-frame for the purpose of praying "hours" of daily prayer (although that was not necessarily the specific intent of Luther's guidance to us).

1 *Lutheran Study Bible*, PIML, pp 6-7, an introduction to the reading of the Psalms by Martin Luther

2 Vatican II Council, September, 2005

Word-Saturated Meditative Prayer

(Quieting and Slowing Down)



Begin:

Choose a brief section of the Scriptures on which to meditate. Generally, merely a few verses from any chapter will suffice. You may choose this randomly, by just opening the Bible, or you may follow a prescribed sequence from a devotional guide or even a lectionary appropriate to the season.

Might I suggest one of these passages to consider for reflecting on the anxiety?

- Psalm 23 “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want...”
- Psalm 147:11 “The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His steadfast love.”
- Psalm 16:1–2, 5, 8–9, 11 “Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge...”
- Psalm 25:1–2, 6, 16–18, 20 “To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul; in You I trust...”
- Psalm 27:1, 4–5, 7–8, 13–14 “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?”
- Matthew 4:23–24 Examples of Jesus healing every disease.
- Romans 8:26–32, 35–39 “The Spirit helps us in our weakness...the Spirit intercedes for us with groaning too deep for words...If God is for us, who can be against us ...”
- Isaiah 41:9b–10 “... Fear not for I am with you; ...I will strengthen you, I will help you...”
- 2 Corinthians 1:3–5 “...Who comforts us in all our troubles...so through Christ our comfort overflow...”
- 1 Peter 5:7 “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

Before entering the prayer, begin with:

Quieting: I invite you to begin by taking a few moments of quieting, breathing slowly and deeply. Try a five-count to breathe in and a seven-count to breathe out. In doing this, your pulse and blood pressure reduce.

With a slowing and quieting of your body comes a quieting of your mind. You may let go of the internal conversation, which can often be so distracting to begin meditating on the Word. Sometimes it is helpful to replace your own thoughts with a *breathe prayer*, such as, “Lord

“We come to God’s Word quietly and unhurriedly to hear His whisper.”

(as you inhale), have mercy (as you exhale).” The use of a word or phrase like this, helps to quiet both your mind and spirit, so that, like Mary at Bethany, you can sit at Jesus’ feet and listen to his Word. It is a mindful, Christ-focused quieting. I realize that for some, using terms like, “Lord, have mercy,” or “Christ, have mercy,” might be disruptive. Merely breathing consciously will suffice.

By *pausing internal, self-conversation*, you have the opportunity to let go of ingrained emotional-response habits and behaviors, and rather, hear the power of God’s Word within you. A healing and restructured emotional-response pattern can begin and is now directed by the Holy Spirit. We come to God’s Word quietly and unhurriedly to hear His whisper, to open ourselves to the working of the Holy Spirit within our hearts, and to understand God’s good will for us as His beloved children.

The Prayer:

1. LISTENING TO THE WORD: As you are quieted, then offer a prayer inviting the Holy Spirit into your time of being in God’s Word, asking that the Holy Spirit work God’s Word and Will within you. Theologians like Luther suggest reading the Word aloud so that it is heard not just by your heart but also on your ears.

2. DISCURSIVE MEDITATION: Having quieted and received the Word of God, now you are praying in God’s own words, in His language, and doing so in the presence of the Holy Spirit. In this second phase of Word-Saturated Meditative Prayer, we discursively meditate on His Word. We can reflect on the entire text of the chosen passage, or even just a word or two of the Scripture for the day. One might allow several minutes for this time of reflection in the presence of the Spirit.

3. PRAYING GOD’S WILL: Through the Spirit, God has worked His Word within us. However, we know that the forces of sin are also always present, tempting to separate us from the love of God. Therefore, we begin a time of praying God’s Word and will into our specific intentions, concerns, struggles, and yes indeed, our praise, thanks and celebrations of life. Here, we ask that God’s will, as expressed in our meditation on His Word, be applied to our daily faith-walk. We know that Satan, the desires of the world, and our own flesh, will tempt us to try to separate us from our relationship with God.

4. REST: We then take just a moment, in Part 4, to rest securely in the Word, being held in the arms of our Savior, the Good Shepherd. Being refreshed by being in God's holy Word, we may be guided back into the Scriptures for further reflection, or be released into the activities of our day.

On our Grace Place Wellness Retreats (www.graceplacewellness.org), we suggest three cycles of this meditative prayer model. First, we read the entire chosen text for the day. Second, we focus on just a word or phrase from the text on which to reflect under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Third, because we do this in a group setting, we take time to share our meditation with each other, to receive insight from those journeying with us. Often, we close the third cycle with the Lord's Prayer for our time of personal intention.

The direction and focus is to breathe in and within the Scriptures throughout the entire prayer, including adding a moment of rest as we prepare to return to a reading of God's Word. Our intention and direction is to invite God to work His Word within us, whether actively, as the Holy Spirit guides us during the time of quiet meditation, or passively, simply opening ourselves up to God to fill us with His presence. God is giving; we are receiving. We eat, drink and inwardly digest His messages of comfort, love, peace, and joy.

"God is giving; we are receiving. We eat, drink and inwardly digest His messages of comfort, love, peace, and joy. "

You can add a moment of reflective song to close your time of Word-Saturated Meditation. For many, that can be the singing of a verse or two of a familiar hymn, or a Christian-based song. Here again, let me offer some familiar hymns and songs:

- "My Faith Looks Up to Thee"
- "O God, Our Help in Ages Past"
- "Jesus, Grant That Balm and Healing"
- "Your Hand, O Lord, in Days of Old"
- "Be Still, My Soul"
- "You Who Dwell in the Shelter of the Lord"
- "I Leave All Things to God's Direction"
- "When in the Hour of Deepest Need"
- "A Mighty Fortress is Our God"
- "Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus"
- "Breathe on Me, Breath of God"

Finally, go in peace and serve the Lord throughout your day.



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The Contemplative Chaplain

Steve Arnold

IT WAS JUST one of those days. The chaplain walked into the office of the health care institution with a plan for the day that was gone within ten minutes. Messages on the phone indicate that three people were actively dying and others await surgery. The institution requires meetings and the supervisor asks when the newsletter article will be done. It is just one of those days, and it seems to be speeding out of control.

Every chaplain has days like this, along with some days that are better and some days that are worse. The reflective chaplain begins to realize that it is very hard to stay focused when there is so much activity, so many demands and so many needs. Lack of focus becomes problematic for the chaplain because it then becomes difficult to be fully present with each person in need. To be effective, the chaplain must be fully present with each person and must have the ability to listen with deep intent to the needs being shared.

The practice of a chaplain is both an art and a science. The Preamble to the Standards of Practice for Professional Chaplains, as developed by the Association of Professional Chaplains, states:

Chaplaincy care is grounded in initiating, developing, deepening and closing a spiritual and empathic relationship with those receiving care. The development of a genuine relationship is at the core of chaplaincy care. Relationships underpin, even enable, all the other dimensions of chaplaincy care to occur.¹

There are certain professional skills that can and must be developed within the chaplaincy context, but the heart of building genuine relationship comes from having time to spend with a person and being able to be focused and fully present to that person. In most chaplaincy settings, the ability to have enough time is a challenge. The reality is that chaplaincy time pressure does happen. The question becomes, “How does the chaplain meet this challenge?”

“In most chaplaincy settings, the ability to have enough time is a challenge.”

When the chaplain loses focus, it is also very difficult to include self-care into the mix. Yet, self-care becomes exceedingly important in allowing the chaplain to be mindful of those being served. One component that is often overlooked is the self-care that comes through prayer. Too many times, a chaplain is heard saying, “I just do not have time for prayer. I cannot add one more thing to my day.” Hopelessness comes through these words, predicting that the chaplain’s effectiveness is diminishing.

1 www.professionalchaplains.org/content.asp?pl=200&sl=198&contentid=514

A strong personal intervention calls the chaplain back to the center core of God's presence in life. God invites this centering and offers a place of rest and hope. Richard Foster writes,

For too long we have been in a far country: a country of noise and hurry and crowds, a country of climb and push and shove, a country of frustration and fear and intimidation. And he [*sic*] welcomes us home: home to serenity and peace and joy, home to friendship and fellowship and openness, home to intimacy and acceptance and affirmation.²

"The chaplain must periodically stop and pray, in order to stay mindful."

And so it is that in prayer the chaplain can find a place of rest and renewal. Prayer is that time to be silently present before God. In the silence God shapes, transforms and restores our being. It is in prayer that the chaplain can restore focus and be led to be mindful of the One who is present and the one who is present.

Thomas Merton writes:

Prayer does not blind us to the world, but it transforms our vision of the world, and makes us see it, all men [*sic*], and all the history of mankind, in the light of God. To pray 'in spirit and in truth' enables us to enter into contact with that infinite love, that inscrutable freedom which is at work behind the complexities and the intricacies of human existence. This does not mean fabricating for ourselves pious rationalizations to explain everything that happens. It involves no surreptitious manipulation of the hard truths of life.³

In the Benedictine rubric of "*ora et labora*", prayer is work and work is prayer, so that the two become a way of life, and all is done in the context of living in the presence of God. The chaplain, then, is invited into the presence of God to experience that presence and to become transformed by prayer as a way of life.

Centering prayer and contemplative prayer have roots in the monastic tradition where the liturgy of hours shape the disciple into a rhythm of prayer and work. The monks would stop from their work every few hours to pray and center, while ruminating on the Word that they had read earlier. These are times to pray sacred words, sit in the silence, breathe the deep breaths of life, and listen to the presence of God. This practice absolutely collides with contemporary practices of productivity and activity, but this time of reflection and rumination and silence is where mindfulness develops and the relationships of chaplaincy have their roots. The chaplain must periodically stop and pray, in order to stay mindful.

This process of stopping can be lengthy, as in one hour at a time, or it can be brief, flowing from the longer periods of prayer earlier in the day. A chaplain can

2 Foster, Richard. *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, Harper San Francisco, 1992

3 Merton, Thomas. *Contemplative Prayer*, Doubleday Religion, 1969

simply stop outside the room where a visit is about to take place, take a deep breath, center, and become mindful of the presence of God. One minute can be enough to provide a restful embrace from God, especially if longer times are held elsewhere.

How then might a chaplain develop this way of life, flowing from prayer? First, it is important to note that there are no magical techniques that will suddenly bring forth a presence. There are no incantations. There is just simply a time with God.

It is helpful to find a quiet place where one can be in silence for the lengthier prayers. While sitting in the silence, begin to breathe in a meditative way that is deep and from the diaphragm, allowing oxygen to flow freely through the body and the brain. Then one might slowly pray a Psalm text, listening for a word or phrase that speaks. Sit with the word or phrase and allow it to wash over gently, allowing for God's shaping and transformation. Rest in the silence and in the word. Then, just allow time for quiet. This is not a time for active reflection, study or internal dialog. This is a time for quiet as the word works through the system.

Developing a pattern of contemplative prayer allows the chaplain to develop a presence that permeates what the chaplain does. To listen to God in prayer sharpens the listening skills of the chaplain. Now the chaplain might truly hear both what the person is saying and what God is saying. Listening happens best when one is focused, and the ability to focus flows from prayer.

And so, in a rhythm of contemplative prayer, the extremely busy chaplain can be busy and focused. Taking time each day to begin in the silent presence of God provides a discipline that fosters centeredness in all that is done.



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Praying with Bonhoeffer

Don Stiger

*Come now, highest feast on the way to everlasting freedom,
Death. Lay waste the burdens of chains and walls
Which confine our earthly bodies and blinded souls,
That we see at last what here we could not see.
Freedom, we sought you long in discipline, action and suffering.
Dying, we recognize you now in the face of God¹*

AS I LOOK BACK on over 37 years of pastoral ministry, most of it in the context of healthcare institutions, one of the more gratifying memories I retain is that of consulting with medical residents in the confines of my office. Two years ago, following an annual didactic series I offered at NYU Lutheran Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York, “*Spirituality in Patient Care*,” an enthusiastic medical resident made an appointment for the purpose of exploring a research project she was considering. Upon entering my office, she immediately noticed and inquired about a collage of pictures arranged over my desk: a random assortment of prints reflecting significant sites relative to the life and ministry of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I had taken most of the pictures myself in December 2012 during a personal Bonhoeffer pilgrimage. They included: Bonhoeffer’s parents’ home in the Grunewald neighborhood of Berlin, the attic study in that home where he was arrested by the Gestapo on April 5, 1943, the headquarters of both the Confessing Church and Abwehr,² the parish where he served as pastor to troubled youth, Tegel Prison, and a few others.

“Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German pastor, theologian, author, conspirator, and martyr, continues to have a profound impact on my life, faith, and ministry.”

Though distant in both time and place, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German pastor, theologian, author, conspirator, and martyr, continues to have a profound impact on my life, faith, and ministry. Indeed, if had I not encountered both *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Letters and Papers from Prison* in a sophomore-level religion course, I may not have pursued ordained ministry as a vocation. So, not surprisingly, I was more than eager to respond quickly to this medical resident’s queries, “Who is that guy? What are all those pictures about?” When at last I concluded a rapid-fire overview of Bonhoeffer’s life, as well as his reflections on “religionless Christianity”, she responded in a unique and somewhat unexpected way: “Hmmm...he sounds like a person who must have *really* prayed a lot.” Confirming her impression, I then loaned her my well-worn office copy of *Life Together*.

1 Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) “Stations on the Road to Freedom” Tegel Military Prison: August, 1944

2 Nazi “CIA” where Bonhoeffer operated as a double agent

Fast forward to this past October 2016. As my wife, Chris, and I were enjoying a week of traipsing through the southern Bavarian Alps, we were able to locate and spend an afternoon at a place where, undoubtedly, Dietrich Bonhoeffer “*really* prayed a lot.” We had found the Benedictine monastery in the small Bavarian village of Ettal, nestled in the scenic Garmisch-Partenkirchen region of southern Germany. Ironically, the monastery is located not far from Berchtesgaden and Hitler’s infamous lair, “Eagle’s Nest.” Though hindered by the Nazi period and the Second World War, this Benedictine Abbey dating from ca. April 1330 continues to develop as a vital Christian community in which four generations now live together, serving church and society.

The Ettal monastery served as an ideal place of retreat for Bonhoeffer from November 1940–February 1941 as he sought to avoid the oppressive surveillance of the Gestapo and escape some of the dangers attending to his growing involvements in the Resistance. Given that this particular monastery was also the locus of some of the activities within the Catholic Resistance movement, Ettal offered a friendly sanctuary of rest, safety, prayer and study for Bonhoeffer. It was there that Bonhoeffer also completed some major sections of what would remain his unfinished ‘magnum opus’, *Ethics*.

“I wondered about the frequency, intensity and even content of Bonhoeffer’s prayers and meditations in that sanctuary.”

Reflecting back on our visit, Chris and I later realized that we spent most of our time at Ettal in total silence, whether sitting in the Basilica or strolling the grounds. The ambience of the space itself seemed to draw us into prayer and meditation. I can only imagine that the same held true for Bonhoeffer throughout those winter months. As we sat quietly in that Basilica, I wondered about the frequency, intensity and even content of Bonhoeffer’s prayers and meditations in that sanctuary. It was in those moments that I had a mysterious, yet very comforting, sense of Dietrich Bonhoeffer praying *with* and *for* me.

While I did not anticipate seeing much reference to Bonhoeffer at the monastery, Chris and I were quite taken by a bronze memorial plaque in his honor and memory, prominently displayed just inside the main entrance to the Basilica. Upon returning home, I did some research and found this from one of his letters: “I rejoice here [at Ettal] in daily morning prayer...such well-organized days make work and prayer, as well as my interactions with people, easy for me and spare me the spiritual, physical, and mental hardships resulting from disorder.”³ Obviously, Bonhoeffer had actively participated in the worship life of the Ettal monastery. And, while there, he was quite touched to learn that his earlier writings were so appreciated by the community as to be occasionally read as meditations at meals.

His closest friend and confidant, Eberhard Bethge, records that the section of *Ethics* to which Bonhoeffer gave primary attention that winter centered on Luther’s

3 Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition 16:78

notion of “justification of the sinner by grace alone.” In addressing that most central of all Lutheran doctrines, Bonhoeffer once again reached for the Psalms. Always understanding the Psalms as the prayer book of the Bible, Bonhoeffer once wrote, “It is not our prayer that interprets the Psalms, but the Psalms that interpret our prayers.” As with Martin Luther, the Psalter was for Dietrich Bonhoeffer “the prayer of God in Scripture.” He contended that “the only way to understand the Psalms is on our knees.” In expounding upon the doctrine of justification, he turned to Psalms 9 and 107. Praying and probing those particular Psalms while at Ettal, Bonhoeffer fused together the immediate reality of the Third Reich’s increasingly dark and ominous activities with his own personal/pastoral hungering for justice and mercy. Given that his involvement in the conspiracy to assassinate Hitler had intensified, that now included the painful sacrificing of his earlier commitment to pacifism:

“It is not our prayer that interprets the Psalms, but the Psalms that interpret our prayers.” –Bonhoeffer

*O Lord, see how my enemies persecute me!
Have mercy and lift me up from the gates of death,
that I may declare your praises
in the gates of the Daughter of Zion
and there rejoice in your salvation.
The nations have fallen into the pit they have dug;
their feet are caught in the net they have hidden.
The Lord is known by his justice;
the wicked are ensnared by the work of their hands.*
Psalm 9:13–16

As if to contrapuntally align one Psalm/prayer with another, Bonhoeffer then immediately lifts up these verses of assuring grace:

*Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love
and his wonderful deeds for his people,
for he breaks down gates of bronze
and cuts through bars of iron.*
Psalm 107: 15–16

As we know from Bonhoeffer’s *The Cost of Discipleship*, any expression of “cheap grace” is just that—cheap and inauthentic. Faithful discipleship always calls us to strive for the fullest possible congruence of belief and behavior—the kind of behavior that Jesus, “*the man for others*”, embodied and imparted in the Sermon on the Mount. Such congruence constitutes the very substance of true discipleship. And, striving for such congruent behavior can be expected to carry with it a cost.

I’ve come to think it most unfortunate that, for many, Dietrich Bonhoeffer stands as an almost larger-than-life, “superman”, granite-like figure; one seen as so

brimming with unshakable faith, intellectual prowess, and courage that his frequent bouts of self-doubt, depression, anxiety, and vulnerability become lost to us. It is well documented that he was a person and pastor who truly plumbed the depths of human suffering, spiritual struggle, painful loneliness, and vulnerability. Those who knew him most intimately cited his capacities regularly for warmth, humor, and empathy far more than the bold decisiveness that marked his public ministry. Just as the Psalms spoke *for* that Dietrich Bonhoeffer, his poetry and prayers speak *for* us and *with* us. I continually experience that in *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

"Poetry and prayer were synonymous for Bonhoeffer."

As is very apparent throughout *Letters and Papers from Prison*, poetry and prayer were synonymous for Bonhoeffer. One such poetic prayer remains perhaps his best known, particularly for the ways in which it continues to speak both *for* us and *with* us to this day. It, too, was written from Tegel Prison just weeks before the prayer cited at the beginning of this article, and immediately following upon his learning of yet another failed attempt on Hitler's life. Scribbled in ink in July 1944 and included in letters to both Eberhard Bethge and his parents, it captures the emotional and spiritual tension Bonhoeffer so often experienced—of strength and weakness, fear and serenity, love and loneliness, depression and hope:

Who Am I?

*Who am I? They often tell me
I would step from my cell's confinement
calmly, cheerfully, firmly,
like a squire from his country house.*

*Who am I? They often tell me
I would talk to my warders
freely and friendly and clearly,
as though it were mine to command.*

*Who am I? They also tell me
I would bear the days of misfortune
equably, smilingly, proudly,
like one accustomed to win.*

*Am I then really all that which others tell of?
Or am I only what I know of myself,
restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage,*

*struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing
my throat, yearning for colors, for flowers,
for the voices of birds,
thirsting for words of kindness, for neighborliness,
trembling with anger at despotisms and petty humiliation,
tossing in expectation of great events,
powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,
weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,
faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?*

*Who am I? This or the other?
Am I one person today, and tomorrow another?
Am I both at once? A hypocrite before others,
and before myself a contemptibly woebegone weakling?
Or is something within me still like a beaten army,
fleeing in disorder from victory already achieved?*

*Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am Thine.⁴*



The Rev. Don Stiger recently retired as Senior VP for Mission and Spiritual Care at NYU Lutheran Medical Center, Brooklyn, NY. He is an ordained pastor in the ELCA, a board-certified chaplain in the Association of Professional Chaplains, and a certified supervisor in the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education. Don served for six years as Director for Ministries in Chaplaincy, Pastoral Counseling and Clinical Education at the ELCA Churchwide Office in Chicago. For seventeen years he served as a hospital chaplain and supervisor of clinical pastoral education at Advocate Lutheran General Hospital, Park Ridge, Illinois. From 2012–2016, Don served as co-editor of Caring Connections. He is married, has two adult children, and resides in Somerset, New Jersey. Don's wife, Christine, serves as Senior Pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Somerville, NJ.

⁴ Bernd Wannewetsch, ed., *Who Am I? Bonhoeffer's Theology Through His Poetry* (T&T Clark 2009).

The Catechism as a Tool for Prayer¹

John Pless

“... a Christian without prayer is just as impossible as a living person without a pulse.”²

We are most accustomed to think in terms of studying the Small Catechism or learning it by heart but rarely do we hear Luther’s language of praying the Catechism.³ The Catechism functioned, for Luther, as a book of prayer. Albrecht Peters captures Luther’s intention: “Praying the catechism is not merely for children and the simple; it is no less the duty and the joy of the mature Christian. Because the triune God Himself is the true teacher of the basic mysteries of the faith, all Christians are His pupils. Prayerful meditation on those basic central texts of our Christian faith draws our inner man into the dynamic of the Spirit of God. These texts and the light of faith from them pull us out of evil thoughts, still and diffuse unrest of our hearts, and form a sturdy protective barrier against demonic temptations.”⁴ Such praying is serious business; it is not mindless meditation or wordless impulses to connect with a higher spiritual power. Prayer learns how to listen to the Word of the Lord and out of that listening to speak to Him. In so doing, prayer is the Christian’s engagement in battle against the Satan. There is no neutrality here; one is either aligned with the Triune God or is positioned with the devil.⁵

Positively, to pray the Catechism is to learn how to speak to God the Father in the name of the Son through the Holy Spirit who calls us to faith in the Gospel. It is based on God’s command and promise. Negatively, this same prayer is directed against the devil as he would pull us away from the Father through distrust of the Son, causing us to doubt the promises of the Gospel. Prayer for Luther involves spiritual warfare and catechism is both a weapon and armor.

By teaching the faith, the Catechism also teaches us how to pray. Not only does the Catechism teach us how to pray, but it can be prayed. Luther demonstrated how the catechism is to be prayed in his celebrated letter, *A Simple Way to Pray*,

“By teaching the faith, the Catechism also teaches us how to pray.”

1 This article is adapted from the author’s *Praying Luther’s Small Catechism* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2016), 1–13.

2 Luther, cited by Albrecht Peters, *Commentary on Luther’s Catechisms Volume III: Lord’s Prayer*, trans. Daniel Theis (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 29.

3 Kenneth F. Korby observes that “The *Small Catechism* (1529), intended to be prayed, made a lasting impression on evangelical prayer. In that catechism, in addition to prayer instruction by means of the exposition of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Our Father ... Luther gave simple instructions for family prayer which became a kind of ‘house.’”—Kenneth F. Korby, “Prayer: Pre-Reformation to the Present” in *Christians at Prayer*, ed. John Gallen, S.J. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1977), 123.

4 Albrecht Peters, *Commentary on Luther’s Catechisms Volume I: Ten Commandments*, trans. Holger Sonntag (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 33.

5 Note the observation of Peters: “Studying and praying the catechism takes place on the battlefield between God and anti-god; there is no neutrality here. Nobody stands for himself here.” Peters, *Ten Commandments*, 31.

addressed to Peter Beskendorf, the town barber in Wittenberg written in 1535. Here Luther utilizes catechesis for the life of prayer demonstrating that there is both discipline and freedom in the praying of the Catechism.⁶ Rather than constraining and confining, the texts of the catechism serve to anchor the praying Christian in God's Word as the "breathing space of the Holy Spirit" to borrow language from Oswald Bayer so that the believer is ushered into the expansive vistas of God's mercy and grace in Christ. Here the Christian is freed to confess and praise, to be taught by God and guided with His truth.

Before coming to the catechetical texts, Luther provides Peter with some preliminary instruction on prayer. Recognizing that both the flesh and the devil incessantly attempt to derail the practice of prayer, Luther counsels the barber out of his own experience: "when I feel that I have become cool and joyless in prayer because of other thoughts (for the flesh and the devil always impede or obstruct prayer), I take my little psalter, hurry to my room, or if it be day and hour for it, to church where a congregation is assembled and, as time permits, I say quietly to myself and word-for-word the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and if I have some time, some words of Christ or of Paul, or some psalms, just as a child might do."⁷ Luther sees this verbal meditation as kindling the heart for prayer.

"The evil one tempts us not to pray."

A daily routine of prayer is recommended to Peter as a salutary discipline: "It is a good thing to let prayer be the first business of the morning and the last at night."⁸ Establishing set times for prayer does not contradict the biblical dictum to prayer without ceasing (Luke 11:9–13; I Thessalonians 5:17; Psalm 1:1). Nor does the practice segregate prayer from daily life as Luther asserts that prayer and work go hand in hand. For faith, work is prayer. For unbelief, work becomes the opposite of prayer—that is—it becomes cursing.

The evil one tempts us not to pray: "Yet we must be careful not to break the habit of true prayer and imagine other works to be necessary which, after all, are nothing of the kind. Thus at the end we become lax and lazy, cool and listless toward prayer. The devil who besets us is not lazy or careless, and our flesh is too ready and eager to sin and is disinclined to the spirit of prayer."⁹ Therefore, Luther sees it necessary to help Peter and other Christians learn how to pray according to God's command and promise.

Luther gives a "model prayer" that serves as a preface to the Lord's Prayer. This prayer includes a confession of unworthiness on account of sin. It then moves

6 Note the observation of Martin Brecht: "Nowhere is the connection between order and freedom in Luther's practice of prayer so clearly demonstrated as in his advice for Master Peter"—Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: The Preservation of the Church 1532–1546*, trans. James Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 14.

7 American Edition (AE) of Luther's Works Vol 43:193. Edited by Gustav Wiencke. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968.

8 AE 43: 193.

9 AE 43:194.

to ground the prayer in the command and promise of God echoing the language of the *Small Catechism* even as it implores the Father in the name of Jesus and in communion with “all thy saints and Christians on earth.”¹⁰

Each petition is used as a foundation and platform for praying. Luther shows Peter how to unpack each petition for supplication and intercession while providing model prayers as well as pastoral instruction along the way. For example, see Luther’s parenthetical admonition in regard to the person unable to forgive his neighbor under the fifth petition.

Faith is essential for prayer. The great word of prayer is “Amen.” It is the word of faith that binds us together with all Christians: “Finally, mark this, that you must always speak the Amen firmly. Never doubt that God in his mercy will surely hear you and say ‘yes’ to your prayers. Never think that you are kneeling or standing alone, rather think that the whole of Christendom, all devout Christians, are standing there beside you and you are standing among them in a common, united petition which God cannot disdain. Do not leave your prayer without having said or thought, ‘Very well, God has heard my prayer; this I know as a certainty and a truth.’ That is what Amen means.”¹¹

“Faith is essential for prayer. The great word of prayer is ‘Amen.’”

Praying the Lord’s Prayer does not bind us to “words or syllables” but focuses attention on the thoughts comprehended therein. “It may happen occasionally that I may get lost among so many ideas in one petition that I forgo the other six. If such an abundance of good thoughts comes to us we ought to disregard the other petitions, make room for such thoughts, listen in silence, and under no circumstances obstruct them. The Holy Spirit himself preaches here, and one word of his sermon is far better than a thousand of our prayers. Many times I have learned more from one prayer than I might have learned from much reading and speculation.”¹² There is no need to rush through the Lord’s Prayer for Luther. One can be drawn into the depth of its richness as it compasses all things for which the Christian is authorized to pray.

That the Lord’s Prayer may be prayed at such a leisurely pace does not mean that it is prayed mindlessly. Just as a barber has to pay attention to how he uses his razor so must the Christian attend to his prayers with “concentration and singleness of heart.”¹³ Therefore Luther concludes: “This in short is the way I use the Lord’s Prayer when I pray it. To this day I suckle at the Lord’s Prayer like a child, and as an old man eat and drink from it and never get my fill. It is the very best prayer, even better than the psalter, which is so very dear to me. It is surely evident that a real master

10 AE 43: 194–195.

11 AE 43:198.

12 AE 43:199.

13 AE 43:199.

composed and taught it. What a great pity that the prayer of such a master is prattled and chattered so irreverently all over the world!...In a word, the Lord's Prayer is the greatest martyr on earth (as are the name and word of God). Everybody tortures and abuses it; few take comfort and joy in its proper use."¹⁴

Along with the Lord's Prayer, Luther teaches Peter how to pray the Decalogue offering a fourfold template for praying the Ten Commandments: "I take one part after another and free myself as much as possible from distractions in order to pray. I divide each commandment into four parts, thereby fashioning a garland of four strands. That is, I think of each commandment as, first, instruction, which is really what it is intended to be, and consider what the Lord God demands of me so earnestly. Second, I turn it into a thanksgiving; third, a confession, and fourth, a prayer."¹⁵

"When it comes to prayer, sometimes less is more."

Luther then provides model prayers. For example with the First Commandment, Luther sees these four parts: (1) Instruction—God teaches and expects us to have faith in no one or nothing other than God Himself; (2) Thanksgiving—God is our God. He has provided us with all that we are and all that we have; (3) Confession—We acknowledge our "countless acts of idolatry" and our ingratitude (4) Prayer—Preserve us from unbelief and ingratitude.¹⁶ According to this pattern of instruction, thanksgiving, confession, and prayer, Luther says we see the Ten Commandments "...in their fourfold aspect, namely, as a school text, song book, penitential book, and prayer book."¹⁷

The Apostles' Creed is also suggested as a text to kindle prayer using the same template: "If you have more time, or the inclination, you may treat the Creed in the same manner and make it into a garland of four strands."¹⁸ Luther then shows how this is to be done with each article of the Creed.

When it comes to prayer, sometimes less is more. Peter is cautioned to beware of attempting too much: "Take care, however, not to undertake all of this or so much that one becomes weary in spirit."¹⁹ Luther did not want to overburden the laity with ponderous exercises which would discourage perseverance and singleness of heart in prayer. The texts of the catechism provided both depth and simplicity providing the Christian with space for reflection and meditation.

14 AE 43:200.

15 AE 43:200.

16 AE 43:200–201.

17 AE 43:209.

18 AE 43:209.

19 AE 43:209.



The Rev. John T. Pless is assistant professor of pastoral ministry and missions at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne where he also serves as director of field education. Prior to joining the faculty, he served for seventeen years as campus pastor at University Lutheran Chapel at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. From 1979 to 1983, he served on the staff at the Chapel of the Resurrection at Valparaiso University. Since 2009 he has served as a visiting lecture at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Pretoria, South Africa.

Prof. Pless is the author of Martin Luther: Preacher of the Cross-A Study in Luther's Pastoral Theology, Mercy at Life's End, Handling the Word of Truth: Law and Gospel in the Church Today, A Small Catechism on Human Life, Word: God Speaks to Us, Confession: God Gives Us Truth, Praying Luther's Small Catechism and numerous chapters in other books published in both the United States and Germany. With Matthew Harrison he is editor of Women Pastors? The Ordination of Women in Biblical Lutheran Perspective. He served on the Agenda Committee for the Lutheran Service Book and is a member of the Catechism Revision Committee. He is book review editor for Logia: A Journal of Lutheran Theology and a member of the editorial council of Lutheran Quarterly. A regular lecturer at various conferences both in the United States and overseas, Prof. Pless is a fellow of the Luther Academy for Madagascar where he coordinates theological conferences each year. He served two terms as co-president of the International Loehe Society, is a member of the International Bonhoeffer Society and the LCMS Committee on the Sanctity of Human Life. Prof. Pless is chairman of the LCMS Commission on Doctrinal Review. In 2013, his former students recognized his 60th birthday with a festschrift, Theology is Eminently Practical: Essays in Honor of John T. Pless edited by Jacob Corzine and Bryan Wolfmueller.

A Conversation with William R. Russell on Luther, Prayer and Today's Chaplain

Diane Greve, co-editor of Caring Connections, and William "Bill" Russell sat down together to consider some of the implications of Martin Luther's teachings on prayer and the circumstances encountered by Lutheran chaplains in this second decade of the 21st Century. Reference is made to an article Russell wrote for Word & World in Winter 2002, Volume 22, Number 1, pp 49–54, "Luther, Prayer and the Reformation."

DIANE: *You have written that "Luther puts catechetical material into a prayer book. Put another way, Luther puts prayer as the core feature of catechetical material...like two chambers of a single heart working together to give life to his understanding of evangelical theology [52]." You also go on to refer at some length to Luther's A Simple Way to Pray for a Good Friend. I wonder what implications there might be for chaplains in this work.*

BILL: In the German, the word that is translated as *simple* might better be understood as practical, down to earth, regular. Luther was writing publically to his barber who has asked him for advice on how someone like himself (a barber, probably illiterate, family-man) might pray effectively.

DIANE: *Are there practical applications for today?*

BILL: For an easily distracted person, Luther gives a method of prayer and meditation that helps to focus. Tonight I will be visiting a parishioner preparing for surgery. Rather than doing a lot of talking, I will bring some scripture and we can meditate on God's Word. Luther recommends... "If I have trouble praying when my heart has grown cold, I go to church if it is the appointed time. If not, I take my psalter that is so dear to me. He includes the Lord's Prayer. He starts with the text. He allows himself to be engaged by God with the text and/or with the community. That is what we will do tonight.

"Luther gives a method of prayer and meditation that helps to focus."

DIANE: *Could we say to today's chaplain, to stay grounded in your Christian faith, you need to be part of a worshipping community?*

BILL: Yes, for sure. I spent 5 years as a campus pastor, it is easy to be outside the main rhythms and streams of the synod and the Lutheran church when we serve in ministries outside the parish. Staying in Christian community is essential. Luther would agree.

DIANE: *Both staying grounded for themselves as a chaplain and staying grounded in their faith as an anchor for their ministry seems important. Do you have thoughts on the second part of this?*

BILL: I believe Lutherans have a great starting point from Luther in the Heidelberg Disputation when he says, A theologian of the cross says what a thing is.¹ If somebody's kid dies, it is more than appropriate to be sad, to grieve.

"So many people in Luther's day and our own see God as judge."

DIANE: *For sure. That is a key starting point for me too. In your article, you discuss some of the practical applications from Luther's A Simple Way to Pray.*

Luther apparently sought to reach at least two interrelated goals with respect to his catechetical emphasis on prayer. His first goal was to teach believers about the one to whom they were to pray. This goal would involve a proper theological understanding of the basics of Christian theology, summarized in the Ten Commandments, The Apostle's Creed, and the Lord's Prayer.

Second, Luther taught believers what and how to pray. He therefore chose a catechetical strategy that delineated the basics of theology in a manner that could be grasped by what he called "the simple laity" and had informed prayer as its end result [54].

As we look at applications for today's chaplain, could we modify this first goal to ask patients about the one to whom they pray? Would that be in keeping with Luther's thought?

BILL: To know about the God to whom they pray is a good thing to know, if one is to provide effective pastoral care. Luther's view of God changed as he studied Scripture, responded pastorally to folks (like his barber), and engaged his opponents. He came to know a God of grace and love and mercy, not a God of judgement and condemnation. So many people in Luther's day and our own see God as judge (and I can imagine patients who see their illness as punishment they deserve). For Luther, that needed to be fixed.

DIANE: The challenge for chaplains is that we cannot impose our belief on the patient.

BILL: How do you work with a patient who has an unhealthy view of God? Such as, "I set the barn on fire as a kid when I kicked over a lamp and all my life God has been

¹ This quote is from *Luther's Thesis for his Heidelberg Dissertation*, #21, "The 'theologian of glory' calls the bad good and the good bad. The 'theologian of the cross' says what a thing is." Dillenberger, John, editor. *Martin Luther, Selections from his writings*. Anchor Books: Garden City, New York 1961, p 503.

punishing me (and this tumor is just one more example of my punishment)?” I can try to empathize with a person in this situation—such a heavy burden to carry for a life time. That’s painful, heavy stuff. What do you do?

DIANE: We would need to start with where the patient is and listen to their point of view, how they make meaning of God, of this story in their life. If we have several visits, we might be able to offer another way of understanding God. How might Luther be a resource?

BILL: Luther starts with a text, in his case, the Word of God. I believe it is in keeping with Luther to ask the patient if there are sacred writings the patient holds dear. A verse of scripture, a sonnet from Shakespeare, a reading from the Koran? The chaplain can bring that back to the patient in a future visit and they could explore the text together.

DIANE: I like that. Does Luther offer wisdom around intercessory prayer?

BILL: What comes to mind is his explanation of the second commandment, of not using God’s name in vain but rather to call upon God’s name in prayer, praise and thanksgiving.” Luther would certainly affirm parental gratitude for a healthy baby, but he would hesitate to call a birth defect “God’s will.” Or if I walk away from a plane crash and the other 300 people die, I’m not going to say it’s God’s will that the other people died. I am, though, thank God that I am alive. Luther might even add, “I could be dead, but I’m not. What, then, am I called to do and be with the rest of my life?” This is in fact the same situation that faces each of us with each breath, each heartbeat (but I digress).

“Give us this day, our daily bread . . . what does that mean?”

DIANE: Both you and John Pless have written about Luther and the Lord’s Prayer.

BILL: For Christians, this prayer is opportunity for *lectio divina*. It invites us to move through each petition of the Lord’s Prayer and to ponder, to meditate on what it is saying for us and to us today. In 1519, like a good 16th Century Catholic, Luther understood the daily bread petition to mean Jesus, communion, bread of heaven, transubstantiation. Later, in 1529, when he publishes the Small Catechism, he sees daily bread as everything needful for daily life. Give us this day, our daily bread... what does that mean? Bread could include doctors, chaplains, food, all we need to live from one day to the next.

DIANE: The Lord's Prayer does not just belong to Lutherans, it is common ground for the ecumenical chaplain. It is used in 12-step recovery programs. We might ask what the prayer means to the patient.

BILL: Good Lutheran question: What does this mean? Great opportunity for deeper conversation. For example, "Thy will be done..." What are we praying here? If I am more debilitated after surgery, did I pray for this? Was this God's will? Christian faith does not make things easy. In the daily bread petition, we are focused on one day at a time. The 12-step people may be on to something here, one day at a time.

DIANE: In your article, you named three practical guidelines that Luther offered his barber for praying: being open to the Holy Spirit, posture (kneeling, standing) and to pray first thing in the morning and the last thing before going to sleep [53]. Might the chaplain draw from this good advice as well?

BILL: Absolutely. The chaplain can pray, silently or aloud, before the visit and after the visit with openness to the Holy Spirit working in and through this visit. Luther seems more interested in furthering the relational dimensions of Peter's faith in God than making sure the barber follows a prescribed pattern. Therefore Luther encourages Peter to "speak or think...as you can"[53]. The chaplain and the patient will pray as they can, being open to the working of the Holy Spirit.

DIANE: Thank you, Bill. I have enjoyed our time together. Have a good evening.



The Rev. William Russell currently serves as parish pastor at Augustana Lutheran Church in Minneapolis and Instructor of Religion at Augsburg College in Minneapolis. He holds a Ph.D. in religion from the University of Iowa and has written extensively on Martin Luther and the Reformation.

Vignettes on Prayer

Another Way to Pray

Heather Bumstead

FOR YEARS there has been a prayer request box in the Chapel at Froedtert & The Medical College of Wisconsin's All Faiths Chapel. Like many others in similar chapels, it has cards to collect written requests which are lifted up in weekly worship.

This prayer box, however, has a companion across the chapel where a tree stands, adorned with ribbons. This particular tree is a Prayer Tree and the ribbons all bear prayers written upon them. Day and night families, patients, and staff stop to write their prayers on a ribbon and tie it to the tree whose branches fill at an ever-increasing rate: "Please heal me." "Help me find a job." "Grandpa, I will always remember."

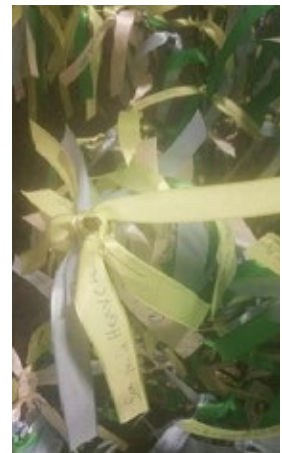
The ritual of writing the prayer and tying the prayer to the branches seems to touch something deeper in the spirit, no matter the faith tradition of the person doing it. The ribbons are respectfully removed several times a year. The first time, there were 500 or so ribbons on it. The last time there were over 800. No matter the number, each prayer represents a small piece of the one making the prayer, lifted up and cared for by this silent sentinel which offers another way to pray.

How to Do It:

The Prayer tree is made of branches (ideally coated with flame retardant spray) arranged in a large, sturdy pot. It is important that the pot be fairly heavy. Although most use some Styrofoam blocks to place and arrange the branches, it is also important to use a fair number of rocks over and around them. The weight of pot and rocks helps keep the tree stable as many hands move the branches in tying their prayer ribbons.

The prayer ribbons used at Froedtert are single-faced satin. Single-faced gives a non-shiny side upon which even a ballpoint pen can write. Even when a gel or other higher-quality ink pen is provided, some folks inevitably use a ball point (plus the provided pen will occasionally disappear).

What do we do with ribbons removed from the tree? Froedtert saves the removed ribbons and burns them offsite. Like the disposal of the flag, it is respectful and also symbolic as the smoke sends the prayers on the final leg of their journey. If you plan



to burn your ribbons, it is important the ribbon material be mostly natural fiber as all-synthetic materials like acetate produce noxious smoke and fumes and tend to partially melt rather than burn.



The Rev. Heather Bumstead, serves as a chaplain at Froedtert & The Medical College of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and as a parish pastor at Bethania Lutheran Church in Racine, Wisconsin. She also serves on the Caring Connections editorial board.

Patient's Prayer Set Discharge in Motion

Scott Davis

THE OLDER FEMALE patient lay in the Intensive Care Unit of Saint Louis University Hospital, unresponsive to stimuli of sound or touch. The plans to move her to an appropriate rehabilitation facility were stymied, frustrating healthcare staff and the patient's family.

On this particular Ash Wednesday, the Pastoral Care Office had received a late-afternoon request for the disposition of ashes upon a patient. The request was made by the daughter, who was by her mother's side in the Intensive Care Unit. The patient was listed as Roman Catholic.

Arriving early for class that evening, I asked one of the deacon-aspirants to attend to this request. The deacon-aspirants in the Archdiocese of Saint Louis entered the practical unit of hospital visitation at Saint Louis University Hospital with the expectation that sacramental ministry to fellow Roman Catholics would be the central focus. It was not. The design by this ELCA Lutheran Board Certified Chaplain (and ACPE Supervisor at the time) was to expose them to patients of all faith orientations and acute-care health situations. Deacon-aspirant Jim willingly accepted the invitation to visit.

Having checked with the ICU nurse, Jim knocked on the glass door and entered upon permission from the daughter who was sitting at bedside. Jim learned something of the patient's life and the family frustration from the daughter. The daughter reiterated her request for ashes for her mother and herself. As Jim began the Ash Wednesday rite, the nurse entered the room and asked if she might also receive ashes. Jim proceeded with the words and the actions, *schmutzing* the ashes on the women's foreheads. Then Jim sat beside the patient, asked permission and took her hand as he invited the women to pray the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father..." began Jim. "Our Father..." echoed the nurse and the daughter. "Our Father..." whispered the patient.

The nurse gasped. The daughter began crying. Three voices continued in unison, with the patient's voice leading the chorus. When the *Our Father* was finished, the nurse excused herself with the comment that she needed to call the doctor. The

patient responded! She spoke! She demonstrated the sign of being cognitively ready and appropriate (according to the Rancho scale) to be discharged! The daughter kept repeating in wonder, “Oh my God, thank you, thank you!” The patient’s capacity to remember and speak the familiar prayer set her discharge in motion.

When Jim returned to the classroom, he was confused and awed by what he experienced. I remember in the debriefing time cautioning that the experience in the ICU might be a momentary phenomenon; but other deacon-aspirants already were praising God for the divine intervention. It was not an isolated happening.

The next morning, Sue, the lay-Catholic female chaplain for this neuro-ICU, heard the report and returned to the patient’s bedside. This time, another familiar prayer was offered to the patient. “Hail Mary, full of grace...” began the chaplain. And in the presence of the day-shift nurse, the patient responded “Hail Mary, full of grace, Our Lord is with thee...” The chaplain continued to offer the next words, and the patient provided the next words in addition. The discharge plans set in motion that day were fulfilled thanks to a pastoral care intervention. Prayer remembered, prayer spoken was sign of readiness that the healthcare team sought.

“The patient’s capacity to remember and speak the familiar prayer set her discharge in motion.”



The Rev. Scott K. Davis was ordained in 1980 by the Lutheran Church in America and was endorsed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Specialized Pastoral Care in 1993. He is a Board Certified Chaplain-retired in the Association of Professional Chaplains. He was Director of Clinical Pastoral Education in the Pastoral Care Department of Saint Louis University/ Saint Louis University Hospital from 1996 to 2007, and held the same position at Lehigh Valley Health Network from 2008–2012. He currently pastors Brickerville United Lutheran Church in Lititz, Pennsylvania.

Prayer Warrior

April Hughes

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation” Mark 14:38

I WORK FOR Barnes Jewish Hospital in St Louis, a Level One Trauma Center in St. Louis, where I am the only chaplain covering the third shift. I am responsible for those admitted to the hospital from the emergency room, for eight intensive care units, labor and delivery, as well as oncology. I respond to calls by pager, telephone referral, or random visits when I come upon a family, someone crying in our waiting rooms or sitting in the chapel. At times I am called by hospital security because a family member in our main lobby is in distress. For me, prayer is a spiritual means of communicating... calling out, seeking, and dialoging with God.

I have been taught to pray from my early childhood by my grandmother: to place a petition before God with expectations that He has heard me and is concerned, caring, present and will answer. She taught me to pray the Lord's Prayer, the Bedtime Prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving over food, life, the events of the day, etc. In my calling to chaplaincy it is most common for people to request prayer for pain relief, end-of-life decisions, hope in the midst of despair or when making difficult decisions. Prayer has a calming effect at the time of sorrow, when in spiritual pain, when feeling alone or lonesome. Prior to surgery or during a trauma many families, friends and pastors come together to seek God through prayer. Peace is found in parting good-byes to loved ones. Prayer calms anxious thoughts and gives peace to a trouble heart.

One night I was called to the Emergency Room for a VOV (Victim of Violence) gun shot. I met with the parents of this twenty-three year old male who had been rushed to surgery prior to the family's arrival. Their first response to seeing me, the chaplain, was that he must be dead. After providing family with the comforting words that "I am here to walk alongside you in this journey," their anxiety level was lowered. Then, after meeting with doctors and surgeons, I asked the family for permission to pray. After prayer the family was grateful as they re-claimed their hope and faith in Jesus Christ.

Have you ever heard the expression Prayer Warrior? Well that is a gift with which I identify. I began my chaplain ministry using a prayer booklet and seeking direction in written words revolving around the circumstance. Then I began to depend on the power of the Holy Spirit. Patients and their families began to respond that the prayer seem personal, like I knew them on a very personal basis. My prayer deeply identified with their need. Then I realized the gift that had been given to me was that of a Prayer Warrior.

Prayer is my own personal source of survival in my chaplaincy role. I pray prior to entering a room and seek what God would have me do and say. Prayer is my source for releasing my children and grandchildren into such a violent world each day with hopes that they will return safe and without harm. I pray continuously for the ending of a day and the beginning of a new day, for my children and grandchildren at work and in play, for the chaplaincy team, my church family, and my deaconess community. I pray for my own health and welfare, and when life presents me with those mud-holes or rough side of the mountains, I find peace in prayer and seeking prayer for others.

As William Murphy sings, "Prayer is what I do when I want to be close to you [Lord]. I lift my hands in praise!"



Deaconess April Hughes, contract chaplain, Barnes Jewish Hospital, St. Louis, Missouri. April also serves part time in parish ministry and is an active mother and grandmother.

The Lullaby

Sabine Maresco

IT IS GETTING LATE and I am ready to call it a day when the charge nurse catches up with me and somewhat apologetically says, “I know it’s been a long day, but could you check in with Mark before you leave, he is unusually restless today.” Mark is a young man who has been hospitalized for more than two months following surgery. Multiple complications and a prolonged intubation resulted in a tracheostomy, which continues to inhibit his ability to verbally communicate.

The unit has grown quiet with the approaching evening hours, reminding me how much my introverted self is longing for solitude. For a moment I toy with the idea of simply referring the request to the night chaplain but even before I come to a decision I have wandered to the end of the hall and stand in front of Mark’s door. His room presents with the usual array of IV drips, feeding lines, and electrodes, all attached to the figure of a now rather thin young man in a washed-out green hospital gown. His skin shows the paleness of someone who has not been outside in months. The curly dark hair is moist and matted, framing a face that is bathed in a rosy hue, which—oddly—makes him look well. I suspect he is running a slight fever again. His eyes are closed and the expression on his face has an air of annoyance. As much as the constraints of the attached lines allow, his arms are moving aimlessly through the air.

.....
“How about I tuck you in and help you prepare for a restful night—maybe even start with a bedtime prayer?”

“Good evening Mark...It’s me—Sabine—your favorite Chaplain (added with a smile)” Without opening his eyes, he turns his head and brings one of his hands in my direction. I take hold of it and Mark responds with a surprisingly strong grasp. As many times before, I sit and tell him about the life outside of his window—the trees that are letting go of the last leaves and the air which for the first time this morning had a feeling of winter, that certain chill that speaks of snow. It turns into a long story about death and rebirth; Mark’s eyes are half open now but, save for the hand I hold, the restlessness continues.

“Your nurse told me that you have not been sleeping well. How about I tuck you in and help you prepare for a restful night—maybe even start with a bedtime prayer?” He nods and I wonder if he really heard the words or just *felt* the question.

“Our Father...” Instead of the usual bedtime fare I have decided on the Lord’s Prayer. As Mark had grown up Lutheran that particular prayer may have a familiar cadence and, indeed, there are two discrete tears slowly making their way from the corners of his eyes and the grip on my hand tightens.

Okay chaplain, what else? The nurse had left the room during my nature story and I am less self-conscious as I begin to softly sing Brahms’s lullaby—a melody the hospital plays overhead every time a child is born.

“Guten Abend, gute Nacht...” I am not the greatest singer in the world and I only recall the German text that speaks of God who will wake us in the morning...but bad singing or not, Mark’s eyes are closing slowly and his body seems to come to stillness. It will take another fifteen minutes before I can take back my hand without him fighting it, fifteen minutes for the frightened little boy inside the man to find peace in God’s embrace.



After twelve years as health care chaplain, the last eight spent as Oncology Chaplain with the Providence Portland Cancer Center, Deaconess Sabine Maresco is enjoying her new designation ‘rBCC’ (Retired Board Certified Chaplain) while living on Oregon’s breathtaking, wild Pacific Coast. With her husband, who died much too soon in 2000, she raised two children, Michelle and Michael. Each of them has gifted her with two grandchildren—life is full of wonder. Sabine has been rostered as an associate in ministry in the ELCA.

I Invite You to Pray

John Syvertson

MANY YEARS AGO, I was visiting an elderly woman in a nursing home. In our discussions we arrived on the subject of prayer. This woman told me that in her retirement years she was a contemplative and prayed the Minneapolis phone book. I didn’t quite understand so she explained on January 1st she started in the white pages on letter A and read each name and prayed “I pray for Mr. and Mrs. _____.” By December 31 she reached the letter Z and occasionally finished before the end of the year and would start over again. This conversation affirmed for me the need to pray for those I know and those I don’t know.

In this era of social media, it has become part of my prayer discipline to follow this mentor as I pray for people I know and those I don’t know. I do not pray the phone book each day; however, most days I use the “What’s on your mind” to post on Facebook, inviting people to join me in praying for people experiencing different joys or stresses in their lives. I choose the subject by prayer requests, by what is going on in the news and sometimes by my own personal needs along with others experiencing that same joy or challenge.

“I use the ‘What’s on your mind’ to post on Facebook, inviting people to join me in praying.”

For example, in the course of my day, I may see someone on the street who may appear frazzled from the holiday season. In response, I may post on Facebook, “I invite you to pray for those who are overwhelmed by the holidays, and those who are anxiously anticipating them.”

I carefully use the words “I invite you to pray for ...” This verbiage actually comes from a mentor of mine at Luther Seminary by the name of Bill Smith, former

professor at Luther. By using the word “invite,” it opens the door for the reader to accept or not accept the invitation. (Using the word “ask” in my opinion feels more obligatory to me as the person is being requested instead of invited.)

On Veteran’s Day I invited prayer for those who were remembering loved ones who served in the military and those who are currently serving in the military. There are days when it appears to be too many things to pray about so I invite people to pray for ... The reader can fill in the blank on what their needs or prayer concerns are that day.

Quite often a particular prayer hits a certain person in a way that is totally unexpected. For example one Facebook friend scolded me that I had revealed what they were going through in their personal life. I reminded the person that I had not had a recent conversation with them and I was unaware of the situation. After some time, it became a standing joke with this individual that the posted prayer was just what they needed at the time or what they were going through. Some of the people have expressed that they start each day with this prayer, and others who are not “prayers” have expressed a desire to rediscover their faith. I too invite us all to pray without ceasing and to pray for all of God’s children whether we know them or not.

Also, it is part of my ministry at the nursing home where we pray communally for each resident every morning, and for each staff member, not by name but rather by department. This prayer ministry is held in one of the dining rooms in which I use a microphone so the residents and staff can hear us praying for them.

For me this practice reminds me of the woman who prayed the phone book. Likewise, “I invite you to pray...”



The Rev. John Syvertson, chaplain at St Luke Homes & Services, Spencer, Iowa. John was ordained as an ELCA Word and Sacrament minister in 2003 and, in 2014, became a professed member of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans.

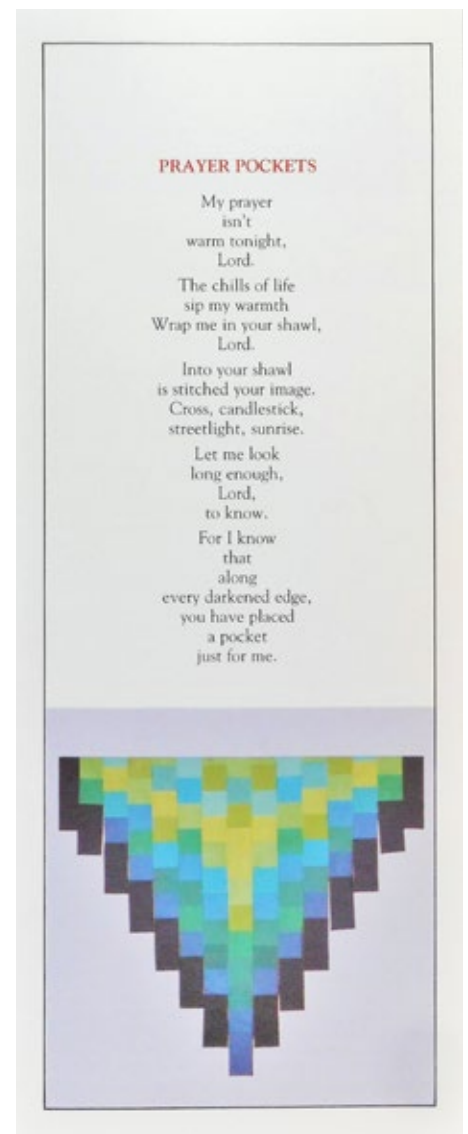
Prayer Pockets

Charles Weinrich

A LOCAL WEAVER, Nancy Boney, was commissioned to create four wall hangings to be rotated and hung behind the plain marble altar in the Elizabeth Monroe Memorial Chapel at Overlook Hospital in Summit, New Jersey. Pictured is one of these pieces titled “Prayer Pockets.” Although the photo doesn’t clearly show this, into each of the dark blue corner squares of material is sewn a pocket. At the door of the chapel we placed a small writing table, a stack of blank 3x5 cards and a pen, with a notice inviting visitors to write their prayer requests on a card and place it into one of the pockets. Once a week, I or one of the other chaplains on staff would collect the inserted cards and, standing at the altar, pray for the persons named on the cards.

The day Nancy brought the completed piece we hung it for the first time. As we stood there appreciating her artistic work, I told her it reminded me of the Western Wall in Jerusalem. She said she was unfamiliar with what that was. I explained about the practice of faithful Jews standing at that ancient section of the old temple construction and, as part of their prayers, taking small slips of paper upon which they had printed specific requests they wished to bring to God and, folding them up, wedging them into crevices between the stones. When she heard this, Nancy began to weep. She was profoundly moved, as was I, at the power of the collective unconscious evidenced through her creativity.

Many people made use of that means of making tangible their prayers for their loved ones in the hospital. When we soon thereafter developed a brochure informing people about the Department of Pastoral Care, we included photos of each of the four wall hangings. A close friend of mine (former seminary classmate), Art Giger, wrote a poem to accompany each wall hanging. The poem for “Prayer Pockets” is included in the picture.



The Rev. Charles Weinrich served as chaplain and CPE supervisor at Overlook Hospital in Summit, New Jersey before moving to Milwaukee where began a CPE program at The Village at Manor Park. He and his wife, Carol have now retired to Port Orange, Florida. Chuck is co-editor of Caring Connections.



Book Review:

Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness by Nan C. Merrill. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2007. 297 pages.

Nancy Ruth Wigdahl

ALTHOUGH I AM NOT a fan of scripture paraphrases, I was drawn to this book because of the author's engaging and warm style of paraphrasing the book of Psalms. Nan Merrill was (d. 2010) the founder of Sounds of Silence in Detroit in 1987, an urban contemplative community welcoming persons of all faiths and cultures. Nan Merrill was the editor of the monthly newsletter for this contemplative community and served with urban parish teams facilitating retreats for over thirty years.

In the preface to the original edition, the author is adamant that this book in no way replaces the "well-loved, still meaningful, and historically important Psalms of the Hebrew tradition" (x). As with many scriptural paraphrases, the intent is to be a companion to the reading of the Psalms which provides fresh eyes on traditional writings. As a chaplain who serves in a multi-faith institution, *Psalms for Praying* offers a worship tool when I am struggling with what readings to use in public meditation and worship. Above all, this book serves as a healing meditation amid these socially uncertain times.

Some may be troubled by the absence of any formal reference to God other than the title "the Beloved" or "O Gracious One." In this paraphrase, the Psalms take on a consistently first person and conversational tone with the use of "the Beloved" which conveys a prayerful warmth and intimacy. The struggles, the praise, the angst and the celebration of the Psalm writers remain in this paraphrased version of the Psalms. The captivating interpersonal style led me to feel embraced by the personal "Beloved." I recommend this book for private devotion and also encourage chaplains to consider its potential as a resource for public devotions and interfaith worship settings.



The Rev. Nancy Ruth Wigdahl is a chaplain and ACPE Supervisor with Fairview Health Systems in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She also serves on Caring Connections editorial board.

News, Announcements, Events

In Remembrance



Richard “Rick” Warger, 67, of Rocky River, Ohio, retired chaplain, died on November 26, 2016. He was the Retired Executive Director of Chaplain Partnership, formerly Lutheran Chaplaincy Services in Ohio. He was an innovator in contracting chaplaincy services decades ago. Chaplain Mark English reflected on his memory of Rick...

“I marveled at how many people he knew when we went to Zion conferences. He was smart, generous, witty, and an all-round good guy.”



Harold M. Yoder, 94, of Columbia, South Carolina, retired ACPE Supervisor, died on November 24, 2016. He was a World War II veteran, a pioneer in the Clinical Pastoral Education movement, and a lifelong learner. He achieved a second degree black belt in karate, was an avid runner, grew grapes and made wine. He was open-minded and openhearted man, encouraging others to “take people as you find them.”



Melvin “Mel” Witt, 89, died April 30, 2016 in St. Louis, Missouri. He has served over 20 years as an Air Force chaplain. Following that tenure, he took the position of Director of LCMS World Relief and later as development counselor for LCMS World Relief. He had a lifelong trust in God, and “his gentleness, his kindness, his compassion...drew people to him.”



Ronald “Ron” Mahnke, 75, died on July 18, 2016 in Sauk Rapids, Minnesota. He served in parish ministry following ordination. From 1980–2003 he served as Supervisor of Clinical Pastoral Education in a hospital setting in Minot, North Dakota. A former CPE student commented, “I called him my father because he second fathered me and mentored me; gave me a new heart and mind and vision for life

which I am living now.”

If you know of colleagues who have died or of additional upcoming events, please contact Joel Hempel at joel.hempel@lcms.org or Judy Simonson at judith.simonson@elca.org

Dates to Remember

- MARCH 13–15** Caring for the Human Spirit Conference
Chicago, Illinois
healthcarechaplancy.org
- MARCH 19–22** College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy (CPSP) — The 27th Plenary
Orlando, Florida
cpsp.org
- MARCH 23–26** American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC) Annual Conference
Decatur, Georgia
aapc.org
- MAY 3–6** Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) Annual
Conference/50th Anniversary
Minneapolis, Minnesota
acpe.edu
- MAY 16–18** Combined ESC Conference and SPM Educational Event
Oakland, California
lcms.org/spm
- JUNE 22–25** Association of Professional Chaplains (APC) Annual Conference
Houston, Texas
professionalchaplains.org
- SEPT. 19–21** Combined ESC Conference and SPM Educational Event
Belleville, Illinois
lcms.org/spm