

# Caring Connections

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



*Ministry in Times of Disaster*

## 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.

## Scholarships

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

Applicants must:

- have completed one [1] unit of CPE.
- be rostered or eligible for active roster status in the ELCA or the LCMS.
- not already be receiving funds from either the ELCA or LCMS national offices.
- submit an application, along with a financial data form, for committee review.

Applicants must complete the Scholarship Application forms that are available from Judy Simonson [ELCA] or Joel Hempel [LCMS]. Consideration is given to scholarship requests after each application deadline. LCMS deadlines are April 1, July 1 and November 1, with awards generally made by the end of the month. ELCA deadline is December 31. Email items to Judith Simonson at [jsimonson@aol.com](mailto:jsimonson@aol.com) and to Joel Hempel at [Joel.Hempel@lcms.org](mailto:Joel.Hempel@lcms.org).

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## Call for Articles

*Caring Connections* seeks to provide Lutheran Pastoral Care Providers the opportunity to share expertise and insight with the wider community. We want to invite anyone interested in writing an article to please contact one of the co-editors, Diane Greve at [dkgreve@gmail.com](mailto:dkgreve@gmail.com) or Lee Joesten at [lee.joesten@gmail.com](mailto:lee.joesten@gmail.com). Specifically, we invite articles for upcoming issues on the following themes:

**2018 #2, “Joy in Ministry”**

**2018 #3, “The Opioid Epidemic and Addictions”**

Have you dealt with any of these issues? Please consider writing an article for us. We sincerely want to hear from you! And, as always, if you haven’t already done so, we hope you will subscribe online to *Caring Connections*. Remember, subscription is free! By subscribing, you assure that you will receive prompt notification when each issue of the journal appears on the *Caring Connections* website. This also helps the editors and the editorial board to get a sense of how much interest is being generated by each issue. We are delighted that the numbers of those who check in is increasing with each new issue. Please visit [www.lutheranservices.org/newsletters#cc](http://www.lutheranservices.org/newsletters#cc) and click on “Click here to subscribe to the *Caring Connections Journal*.” to receive automatic notification of new issues.

# Editorial

Lee Joesten

**THE DICTIONARY DEFINES 'DISASTER'** as “any happening that causes great harm or damage; serious or sudden misfortune; calamity.” Disasters come in many forms, some designed by humans and others brought about by “mother nature” (also referred to as “acts of God”). Regardless of circumstances, disasters inflict pain that is both acute and long-lasting. The 2013 #3 issue of *Caring Connections* focused mainly on the challenges of providing care to those involved in disasters perpetrated by other human beings. The primary focus of this issue is on so-called natural disasters. Admittedly there is considerable overlap between the two in terms of effect and needed response.

As a child I remember being in my parents' car and coming upon the scene of an automobile accident. Invariably my father would pull over and get out of our car to “get a closer look.” I remember him returning to the car and describing what he saw. I remember the anxiety generated in me by his description, the snarled traffic, the flashing lights of the emergency vehicles and the people scurrying about. Years later I was a passenger in a car that was directly involved in an automobile accident. Passengers in our car were unscathed, but three people in the other cars involved were killed. These experiences made an indelible impression on my memory, my psyche and my faith. For many years, while I dreaded being at the scene of an accident, I had and continue to have deep respect for those who choose to be first responders. That respect extends to those who provide care to first responders. **Greg Nelson** points out in his article that merely listening to others describe their stories of being in a disaster can be traumatizing to the listener/caregiver.

Contributors to this issue of *Caring Connections* write about their work with people involved in traumatic events that resulted in loss of property and life. They write about meeting the immediate emotional and spiritual needs and those needs that may linger for years. Those who have accepted the call to ministry cannot escape the need to provide care to people caught up in unimaginable disasters of one kind or another at one time or another. People of faith bear witness in such times to the assurance of God's presence promised through Jesus Christ. That assurance conveys comfort when the pain of the disaster is most acute. It can also help instill much-needed endurance as they slog through the following months and years of searching for meaning, purpose and a new direction for their lives.

The articles in this issue try to give guidance to those called upon to accompany victims of a disaster. They encourage patience on the part of caregivers, cautioning them against trying to do too much too fast. They remind us that at the time of a disaster, providing a compassionate, non-anxious presence is the main thing that

victims need. **Glenn Nielsen** writes about the God-given qualities that dogs possess that complement human compassion. He cites numerous examples from being a comfort dog handler of how specially trained dogs contribute healing comfort to victims and first responders alike. **Charles Keogh** shares a poem he wrote when a comfort dog at his facility died. Even comfort dogs die and will be grieved and mourned.

In recent years disaster response has become a new specialization for spiritual care providers requiring a specific set of competencies. **Bill Engfehr** writes about the valuable ministry that a growing number of clergy and other religious professionals provide to their communities as volunteer police and fire department chaplains. These individuals reach out to first responders in ways that few others do. Their roles usually fall outside the traditional role of hospital, nursing home or hospice chaplain. **Bill Wagner** describes the credentialing process that the Missouri Synod has established for those individuals and why it believes the church is well served by encouraging this credentialing.

Disaster and emergency response take an emotional and spiritual toll on caregivers. Caregivers need to be aware of their professional competencies, but they also need to be mindful of their limitations and their own need for comfort, support and renewal. They need to be open and receptive to the same assurance of God's presence for themselves even as they bear witness to Christ's love to others. **Dave Wurster** shares a meditation/reflection that applies the Christ event to our search for meaning in times of confusion and doubt. **Phil Kuehnert** reviews a book that explores the ways in which the Bible tries to quench our thirst for answers when we ourselves feel bereft of things to say in response to disasters.

I have been privileged to serve on the editorial board of *Caring Connections* since its inception. However this is the first issue that I have served as lead editor, having recently taken on the duty of co-editor with Diane Greve. I am grateful for the dedicated service of previous editors Dave McCurdy, Don Stiger, Kevin Massey, Chuck Weinrich and Diane. Chuck deserves a special shout-out for compiling a complete list of the many topics tackled by *Caring Connections* since its beginning. That list is included in this issue. Jasmine Gibson with LSA can assist readers in gaining access to specific issues of interest at [jgibson@lutherservices.org](mailto:jgibson@lutherservices.org).

In closing, I now appreciate firsthand the challenge of helping to produce a respectable and readable journal for church professionals in specialized settings. I'm especially grateful to those who have submitted articles for this issue. Each piece reflects professional competence as well as the human compassion and spiritual depth required of those who minister to others in the wake of a disaster.



# Spiritual/Emotional Accompaniment Post-Disaster

Greg Nelson

**IT DEFINITELY** was not going to be okay. There was simply no way to make it okay. Yet, that is what so many of us wished would happen. The reality was that several powerful tornados had made a nearly mile wide path of destruction across nine counties in southern Minnesota. Well over 4,000 homes were damaged or destroyed and two people killed. That was March 29, 1998.

For the communities impacted, there was no use in trying to convince anyone that it was going to be okay, especially in those early months following the disaster. Just a few days post-tornado, one pastor summarized it by saying, “I am so sick and tired of hearing about a silver lining. That’s not what we need now!”

So, what do people need to help them through the unimaginable, unpredictable, and unanswerable? That’s what I was about to learn over the course of the next year as I became Director of Interfaith of Southern Minnesota, a non-profit formed by multiple faith communities for the purpose of recovery. The work of Interfaith was to be a tangible expression of the church in action.

One of the early scenes broadcast on the news was of an elderly man crying intensely and having great difficulty describing what he had experienced the day the tornado cut through his neighborhood. I came to understand these tears and confusion as effects of trauma. Later, his responses would become more about grief. Today, these kinds of experiences are often referred to as traumatic grief.

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So, what do people need to help them through the unimaginable, unpredictable, and unanswerable?

Three ingredients typically define an event as traumatizing. The event is uninvited, brings intense fear, and is accompanied with a deep sense of helplessness. It is possible to become traumatized even when listening to someone tell the story of a traumatic event. A common symptom of trauma following a natural disaster is survivor’s guilt. When survivors question why their home was not damaged or they were not injured while others were, it is an indication of survivor’s guilt. It is helpful to recognize the guilt as a signal of trauma as it guides a caregiver’s response.

Grief mounts as more losses from the disaster are realized. Besides tangible items, such as family photos, Christmas decorations and the home itself, there are also intangible losses, such as predictability, dreams, vacation plans, or long-held and previously unquestioned beliefs. Often those beliefs relate to one’s understanding about God and how God works. Did God send the tornado? Cause the tornado? Allow the tornado? What is God’s will and purpose at this time?

In reality, it is not possible to completely separate the trauma and grief. It is helpful to know that people often experience both at the same time. As caregivers

distinguish whether traumatic effects or grief impacts are more difficult at the moment for the person to whom they are ministering, it guides one into more helpful responses. Helpful responses to trauma often involve engagement of self-soothing or life-giving actions, while acknowledgment of the experience of loss is more helpful when grief is the lead experience. Spiritual and emotional recovery through traumatic grief parallels Christ's life, death, and resurrection. People need accompaniment throughout the entire process. The "being there" factor outweighs all others when it comes to spiritual and emotional healing. Being there for someone in the midst of suffering and not attempting to quickly take it away gives the receiver a sense that he/she is not alone and that healing is possible. That compassionate presence will be needed over and over as the survivor experiences multiple griefs, particularly during the first year of recovery.

Not only does a disaster leave a physical mess, it leaves a spiritual and emotional mess as well. It's tempting to try to clean it up by offering a silver lining, suggesting that the person just let go, or even guessing at God's purpose for the disaster. These efforts are not helpful. They reflect the caregiver's need to be helpful more than the survivor's need. The non-anxious and compassionate presence of the caregiver conveys messages like, "I believe in you; we're in this together; God is with us; we got this." Those messages are often powerfully experienced by the receiver as the survivor's experience is acknowledged without judgment.

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The "being there" factor outweighs all others when it comes to spiritual and emotional healing.

Spiritual and emotional healing is invited as caregivers listen to the story unfold. The story of traumatic grief will crystallize over several weeks and months. When left to go over the story alone, crucial information is often omitted. Collaborative storytelling involves three parts, which are co-created with the survivor as the survivor's experience is acknowledged multiple times. The first part has details about the series of difficulties experienced, which may include questions about why and what if. Next the person will begin to describe multiple additional difficulties, including financial, relational, physical, spiritual and emotional.

In the third part the person is ready to detail how s/he made it through the many difficulties. Responses to "how" questions are called resiliencies. Sometimes, the survivor will reveal something that would not be considered healthy. For example, one might hear that s/he got drunk every night for the first two weeks to deal with the anxiety, uncertainty, and stress. It is tempting to judge such actions as negative, which would likely be counterproductive in helping the person heal. An alternative is to honor the person's attempt to handle those difficult days and weeks without judgment and gently guide the receiver into more effective coping strategies.

As the caring listener acknowledges the complete narrative, transformation from survivor to "thrivor" is often witnessed. Nearly a year after the tornado disaster in St.

Peter, a woman was asked how her life was different now. This “thrivers” summarized it by saying, “Now, we use the good China.”

People who have suffered traumatic grief are much more resilient than we tend to believe. In the weeks following 9/11 some experts predicted that about one third of people in New York City would develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the months ahead. When the research was finalized several years later, the actual data revealed that 7.5% of the population had developed symptoms of PTSD.

So, what factors promote healing and foster resiliency? The factors described in earlier paragraphs are crucial. These include compassionate and graceful accompaniment in responding to tangible needs and inviting stories about experiencing the traumatic event. Responders who believe that survivors are resilient offer them an unspoken healing perspective that is mutually beneficial for the receiver and giver. For the latter, it is a burnout strategy. The reality is that caregivers can invite people into steps of healing. Attempting to take the steps for them inadvertently reinforces the belief that the person cannot recover, thereby helping to create a chronic victim.

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The meaning that eventually comes is very often in the form of a gift to others.

Resiliency following disaster is promoted when a survivor takes advantage of opportunities to affect his/her own recovery. Cleaning up the destruction, asking for assistance, participating in community recovery events, or doing whatever one can all bring a sense of empowerment. Asking a person about something in the present moment for which s/he is grateful, as well as identifying actions that help one get through challenging days foster resiliency. Specifying the next small step, encouraging kindness toward others, developing ways one can affect one’s own suffering and finding skills to calm oneself all build resiliency.

The practice of mindfulness also fosters resiliency. Mindfulness is a skill in which one intentionally pays attention to what one is seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling in the moment. It is a powerful skill that expands one’s attention beyond unhelpful thoughts, such as worries or negative self-judgments, to what is real in this moment. The practice tends to be calming and enjoyable.

When one’s personal world is turned upside down, one can experience a loss of meaning. One may think “I took pride in keeping my house up, and now, it is destroyed. What’s the use of getting it repaired?” Meaning tends to emerge well into the process of grieving. It is not helpful to rush it, rather to acknowledge the loss of meaning as one listens to the story. The meaning that eventually comes is very often in the form of a gift to others. That might be volunteering in disaster recovery efforts down the road. A young man who lost his dog decided to care for other dogs at his local humane society as his offering in redeeming the loss.



People of faith have supreme opportunities to foster resiliency because of the example of Jesus and the empowering passion of the Spirit. Just as Jesus noted that all of the commandments are fulfilled in loving God and loving one's neighbor, the faith community has an incredible opportunity to demonstrate God's great love and limitless grace in the midst of a disaster. We clearly do so as we show up with grace-filled responses as people are hurting and trying to reconstruct their lives. It is quite miraculous when both the receiver and giver are transformed in the process.



*Greg Nelson is a Licensed Psychologist and worked with Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota for nearly twenty years. In 1998–1999, he directed the community's interfaith efforts in Southern Minnesota for tornado recovery. He served several years on the ELCA's Domestic Disaster team of consultants in preparing for disasters and responding to disasters. He has facilitated support groups for clergy and physicians with an emphasis on promoting self-care in the midst of change, stress, and relationship conflicts. Since 2008 he has served as a psychologist with the Mankato Clinic, Department of Psychiatry and Psychology, and continues to consult with clergy while also responding to disaster recovery needs for clergy around the country.*

# Comfort Dogs in Times of Disaster

Glenn Nielsen

**HOW LARGE** does an event need to be to be considered a disaster? A shooter in Las Vegas killing almost 60 people at a concert — certainly. A hurricane in Texas destroying thousands of homes, taking lives and leaving people suffering the after effects for months/years — of course. Wildfires in California sending people to shelters as they watch properties reduced to ashes have to qualify as a disaster.

What about a tornado that takes just a few homes in a small town and receives little national media? What about a grade school grieving after two students are killed in a car crash? Or a police officer killed in the line of duty with several hundred officers from around the country showing up for the funeral?

Or smaller yet. Is a family watching a man dying of cancer, leaving three small children, a disaster? How about a car accident that leaves a beloved teacher at a Lutheran school dead? Or my own experience of having a 33 year old son lying dead, unexpectedly and suddenly, in a hospital bed from a pulmonary embolism?

For those of us serving in the Lutheran Church Charities (LCC) K-9 Comfort Dog ministry,<sup>1</sup> we do not use the size of an event to define a disaster. It may make a difference as to how many dogs are sent, but wherever and whenever people need comfort, we go. The mission of this ministry is to use the dogs as a bridge to share the mercy, compassion, presence and proclamation of Jesus Christ to those who are suffering or in need.

My wife Sue and I share the responsibility for leading the Comfort Dog ministry at Timothy Lutheran Church in St. Louis, MO. Our LCC K-9 Comfort Dog is Noah. I invite you to check out his page on Facebook — just type in Noah Comfort Dog. All Comfort Dogs have their own social media accounts. We have taken Noah to the floods in Louisiana in 2016, Texas after Hurricane Harvey in 2017, and the smaller disasters mentioned above. He has made hundreds of other visits in the 3.5 years he's been at our church — in our congregation, in the St. Louis community and around the country.<sup>2</sup>

We have seen Comfort Dogs make a difference during these visits in three significant ways.

First, the dogs as dogs (all are purebred Golden Retrievers) bring comfort as wonderfully created by God with an incredible ability to make a difference in people's lives.<sup>3</sup> After the school shootings in Newtown, CT, *National Geographic* did an article on the healing power of dogs. After citing the work the LCC K-9 Comfort



Each dog has a business card which is given out freely. On the back is the church's name and the Facebook page. We have given out thousands of Noah's cards. He has over 3000 people who have liked his page. Each post is usually seen by 900 to 1,200 people, with some posts going beyond 2,000 views. Some posts are fun, with Noah being a dog. Many tell of what he did that day. Regularly we put up a post that clearly speaks the Gospel. The posts are written as if Noah is speaking. Check out his page!

Dogs did there following that tragedy (which continues to this day in the community and school), the article explored why dogs can make such a difference. Here is one paragraph:

People also benefit from interacting with canines. Simply petting a dog can decrease levels of stress hormones, regulate breathing, and lower blood pressure. Research also has shown that petting releases oxytocin, a hormone associated with bonding and affection, in both the dog and the human.<sup>4</sup>

All of us in this ministry have seen this happen too many times to count. I have had Noah on Concordia Seminary's campus and three different times he has visited with one of the staff who had just lost the family dog due to old age or illness. Watching the tears flow while petting Noah while I simply listened to them talk about their pet gave me a peek into the benefit of having Noah present at such moments. I can relate dozens of other such moments when people are dealing with some of the saddest moments in life: at a funeral visitation, in a hospital room, following a flood or tornado, after a church service, in a school classroom where a child has died, and in a home while a family was going through major issues. Just hugging or petting Noah at those moments is comforting to persons.

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Watching the tears flow while petting Noah while I simply listened to them talk about their pet gave me a peek into the benefit of having Noah present at such moments.

Since I have been working with Noah, I am convinced that we need to read 2 Cor. 1:3 in a fuller way: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.* The little word that I have come to appreciate is "all." Our God is the God of all comfort, whether that comes through His created realm or through the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen. Whatever comfort people find is traced back to God, and He works in wonderfully diverse ways in addition to the most powerful and singular way of the salvation comfort provided in Jesus. We do well when we celebrate all the ways God works comfort in our lives, and not pit them against each other in some sort of temporal/eternal comparison.

Indeed, for some music gives comfort on a downer of a day. The hug of a family member. The words of a supportive friend. The nourishment of food. The beauty of creation. The doctor who relieves our pain with an effective prescription. This brief list barely scratches the surface of God's created means for comforting hurting people. I add to the list the specific attributes of dogs, especially those trained to be a calm, trusted presence like the LCC K-9 dogs are.<sup>6</sup> I can testify that dogs are also God's gracious gift of comfort in our lives. In catechetical terms, we could go back to the Explanation of the First Article in the Small Catechism:

He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life. ... All this He does out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me.

We need comfort and consolation to support this body and life. God, out of grace and mercy as our loving Father, provides what we so need when pain, sadness and grief worms its way into our lives. He does so through His Word and the Gospel, but He also does so through His providential care via so many created means. Both are gifts of grace, and we should never diminish the created gifts even though they are temporary and limited compared to the eternal fullness of the resurrected life to come.

The second way Comfort Dogs bring comfort is by opening doors for their human handlers to bring compassion to those who are hurting. In fact, much of what the Comfort Dog ministry entails is showing compassion toward people who are hurting and simply allowing them to spend time with the dogs and their handlers. It gives compassion for the sake of being compassionate — and that is a good thing. A very good thing.

Compassion is being merciful even as the Father is merciful to us (Lk. 6:36). It is doing what is good and helpful to the least of these — the hungry, sick, naked, thirsty, imprisoned, stranger (Matt. 26:35–36). It is praying for even an enemy (Lk. 6:28). It is displaying the fruit of the Spirit, such as kindness, goodness, gentleness and patience, as part of our Christian lives because Christ has set us free to serve one another through love (Gal. 6:1, 13, 22–23). It is loving our neighbor as ourselves (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 19:19; Rom. 13:9). A statement by Martin Luther comes into play here: “A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.”<sup>8</sup>

Notice that these Scripture passages do not say compassion is a means to some other end, such as evangelism. They are good things to do because our God wants us to care for our neighbor. It is part of our service to others and this world we live in. Being compassionate is a good end in itself. So I can take Noah somewhere and not have to speak of Jesus but still comfortably walk away from that moment having simply shown compassion.

The Comfort Dog ministry offers compassion in many ways, but here are five key times when I’ve seen it as a handler. Notice here I am not talking about the dog as a dog, but as the bridge for the handler to show compassion.

1. **Being a quiet presence and offering listening ears.** In the moments of grief, loss, fear and sadness, people need someone to listen to them. They have stories to tell. They want someone they can trust to hear them out non-judgmentally and supportively. A number of our handlers took Noah to St. Paul’s High School in Concordia, MO, in May 2016 after two seniors drowned on their class trip.



The picture is of children returning to school for the first day after the flooding in Baton Rouge last August. They had been out of school for over a week. Most of these children lost everything in the floods. Noah was one of eight dogs there that week.

At least 10 dogs were there over a period of many days. Classmates came in to hug the dogs, and the handlers became the listening ears as the students told where they were and what happened. Here is a picture of two girls, on either side of Noah, holding each other's hands on top of Noah's side. It was a moment of silence, but surrounded by tears and voices as handlers just listened to the students. Those are powerful moments of compassion.



**2. Paying attention.** Like the listening ear, this involves giving time and energy to paying attention to someone who is lonely or feeling left out or in need of a smile. The dogs are often in nursing homes, at shut-in calls, in schools and just out and about in stores. We know not to plan for quick visits. Walking down a hospital hallway to visit one person can be interrupted numerous times by someone wanting to pet Noah or by being invited into another room. Nurses and medical staff also ask to pet Noah. Those are powerful moments of compassion.

**3. Visiting the least of these.** We take Noah to adult day care centers. He goes to a Cerebral Palsy day care center. These are people who cannot stay by themselves. They sit all day in a care center. Many are in wheel chairs. Most have limited mental capabilities. While they are not forgotten, they are not living the “full life” Americans so treasure. They love Noah. Why? Because the handler is bringing him to them. He rests his head on their laps so they can pet him or so the handler can take their hands and help them pet him. They get to play hide and seek with Noah — hiding his ball and then having him come in to find it. Handlers take the dogs to hospice patients, to lonely seniors in assisted living quarters, and to our shut-ins. Those are powerful moments of compassion.



**4. Giving hugs.** Sometimes people just need a hug or someone to share a tear with them. With Noah by our side at a funeral visitation, these moments of shared grief lead to the comfort that physical touch gives. Certainly, a funeral visitation leads to hugs, but something is added with a dog there. A few weeks ago someone in Texas asked us to go to a funeral visitation here in St. Louis. The family members did not belong to our churches, but three dogs (Tabby, Esther and Noah) shared the four hour visitation. We didn't know the family members, but the dogs opened up the opportunity to express sympathy with more than words. Those are powerful moments of compassion.

**5. Praying.** When the opportunity presents itself, we ask if we can pray with the people we are visiting. One of our handlers is a cancer survivor and she takes Noah to the cancer treatment floor at St. Mary's hospital near Concordia



Seminary. She is adept at offering a prayer for the person as Noah sits by the person's side or even lies in bed with the patient. The handler walks down the hallway and is stopped by someone. Within five minutes she is offering up a prayer. On occasion I have taken Noah to a deployment after some tragedy or disaster. One of the staff at LCC, Rich Martin, wonderfully listens to someone, tells about the dogs, then listens some more, and then easily and comfortably asks if he can pray for the person. He doesn't get turned down. We are gathered in the home of someone after a tornado, and he is leading us all with bowed heads in prayer. These are words of trust in our caring God and for His help for the people who are hurting. Those are incredibly powerful moments of compassion.

In each of these situations a Comfort Dog has opened the door for the handler to provide comfort, care, kindness, patience, goodness, mercy, love, and gentleness to those in need, including the least of those in our society. The dogs provide a bridge for the compassion to be extended to the neighbor through a faithful follower of Jesus. That compassion is a good thing.

The third way the Comfort Dog ministry brings comfort during a disaster, regardless of size is by speaking of Jesus. On occasion there is the opportunity to speak of Jesus and His salvation. While a dog can bring comfort as one of God's creatures and while showing compassion is often a valuable gift to someone in itself, we also are hopeful that a visit can lead to more. Sometimes showing compassion allows us to bring the presence and proclamation of Jesus into the situation. And we want to walk through that door that the Lord has opened through the Comfort Dog ministry.

For example, when the dogs go to visit someone regularly, a relationship develops with the person needing comfort and also with the staff or caregivers of the person. Perhaps it is a question of why we are doing this ministry, and we can speak of how Jesus' compassion for us leads us to show compassion to others. Perhaps someone asks us about why our church sponsors this ministry, and we can tell them what we believe about Jesus. At our congregation we have the following mission statement for Noah Comfort Dog ministry: *Touched by God's grace, Timothy's Noah Comfort Dog Ministry shows care and compassion, with Noah as the bridge, to connect people to Jesus.* Happily, sometimes we are able to connect the person to Jesus and what He has done for us.

Visits may produce sacred moments when the Gospel can be shared. In August 2016 I took Noah to Baton Rouge after flooding destroyed much of Louisiana. Seven



The picture is of a young girl from Memphis who came to St. Louis for surgery. She had to lie on her back for two days following surgery. We were asked to go and visit her. Her family belongs to a LCMS congregation in Memphis. Noah went on Saturday evening. Tabby Comfort Dog (St. Paul, Des Peres, MO) went on Monday when the girl started physical therapy. Sheba Comfort Dog (Immanuel, Washington, MO) went to the home where she stayed before returning home. When the family returned to Memphis, Job Comfort Dog (Christ the King, Memphis, TN) visited her. Evangelism was not the purpose, but compassion for a family in Christ was.

other dogs were there. We stopped for lunch at a crowded Chick-fil-A restaurant. When we walked in with the dogs, everyone watched. Some came up and talked with us. As I was leaving with Noah, I noticed an older couple sitting with a woman appearing to be younger than they were. I could see them looking at Noah so I stopped to talk. The older woman began to pet Noah and soon opened up to me, a total stranger, about how they lost everything in their house. The younger woman was their daughter who had come from Texas to help them. While the mother and I talked, the daughter broke down in tears and excused herself to go to the bathroom. The conversation soon focused on Noah. When the daughter came back, the moment seemed right for me to speak about Jesus to them. I closed with a prayer that spoke of the saving love of Jesus on the cross and resurrection. This exchange took about 10 minutes, while the other dogs and handlers were waiting in the parking lots, also meeting people going in and out. But for me time had stood still, and the tears in their eyes became a sacred moment of witness to Jesus in a horrible situation for this family.



The picture is following the prayer I had with Ernie, a resident in an assisted living facility. He is in his late 90s and lost his wife about a year earlier. After the prayer was finished, this was what I saw.

This article has argued that a disaster's size is less important than the need people have for the Comfort Dog ministry. But the big disasters are the ones that have received the most publicity, from local news (Noah has appeared on St. Louis TV stations 5 times in 3.5 years) to national media.<sup>7</sup> At disasters like the Pulse nightclub and Las Vegas shootings, Hurricane Harvey, Louisiana floods, and police office funerals (to name just a few), the Comfort Dogs are there for the victims and their families. But they are also there for the first responders (picture is from Las Vegas), 911 operators, facility employees, people at memorial services, hospital staff, coroner's offices, Red Cross volunteers (picture is from Hurricane Harvey), and others who have been affected by the tragedy. Tim Hetzner, President of LCC, sent me these two pictures to give a glimpse of the incredible work these dogs and their handlers do, reaching people that most helping organizations just can't connect with. Why? Because the dogs open doors and become a bridge to ministry that otherwise wouldn't occur.



I finish this article on the Comfort Dogs in times of disaster with a personal time of needed comfort. On Wednesday, September 6, 2017, our son Matthew died at Mercy Heart Hospital. As I mentioned earlier, he was 33 and, despite the efforts of the doctors and nurses, could not be brought back to us alive. For us and our family, it was and still is a disaster.

On the following Sunday afternoon, we held the visitation at our church. The Comfort Dogs came, 10 of them besides Noah. They greeted people at the entrance to

the church, in the narthex and in the aisle leading to us. The next day they were back for the funeral service. As we walked in as a family, we asked for them to walk behind us and sit up front on the other side of the sanctuary, across from us, where we could see them. Each dog had two to four handlers, dedicated brothers and sisters in Christ we have come to know and love as we have worked with them at other events. Everyone who came to the visitation and to the funeral saw them and had the opportunity to spend time with the dogs.



As a family, the comfort these dogs brought to us during that time of grief was immense. Sue and I held the dogs. We were hugged by the people who brought them. They cried with us. They are our Comfort Dog family. They made a huge difference during our time of pain and tears as we experienced it from the receiving side. From that time of intense sadness I learned firsthand that the LCC K-9 Comfort Dog ministry is an incredibly powerful and effective means of bringing the compassion, mercy, presence and proclamation of Jesus during a disaster — whatever size that disaster may be.

## Endnotes

1 Lutheran Church Charities responds to people in need in a variety of ways. Besides the K-9 Comfort Dogs, this national organization and LCMS RSO provides Disaster Relief crews, conducts a K-P Police Ministry and a Kare-9 Military Ministry. I am writing about just the Comfort Dog ministry in this article. To see the fuller picture of what LCC does, please visit: [www.lutheranchurchcharities.org/mission.html](http://www.lutheranchurchcharities.org/mission.html). There you will read of the unique funding approach of “dollar in-dollar out” for disaster response, can check out the various dogs in the ministries and view various news items about the dogs and other work LCC does at various events.

2 Like all the other dogs in the ministry (over a 100 in 23 states), we never charge to make a visit. Timothy congregation includes a small line item in the budget for Noah’s ministry. The rest of his expenses are covered through donations, and the people who take Noah to events do so as volunteers.

3 Much of what follows comes from an article I wrote for Concordia Seminary’s e-journal, *ConcordiaTheology.org*. For the full article in which I respond to a negative blog post about the Comfort Dog ministry, see [concordiatheology.org/2017/05/compassion-evangelism-and-the-comfort-dog-ministry](http://concordiatheology.org/2017/05/compassion-evangelism-and-the-comfort-dog-ministry)

4 Amanda Fiegl, “The Healing Power of Dogs,” in *National Geographic* (December 12, 2012). Accessed at [news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2012/12/121221-comfort-dogs-newtown-tragedy-animal-therapy](http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2012/12/121221-comfort-dogs-newtown-tragedy-animal-therapy)

5 All of the dogs go through at least 2,000 hours of training before being placed in a congregation or institution, and are trained to the level of a service dog.

6 I accessed this online at: [www.prayingthegospels.com/rare-quotes-by-martin-luther/short-quotes-martin-luther](http://www.prayingthegospels.com/rare-quotes-by-martin-luther/short-quotes-martin-luther). While doing so, I came across this quotation about dogs: “The dog is the most faithful of animals and would be much esteemed were it not so common. Our Lord God has made His greatest gifts the commonest.”

7 For just a few of the national news pieces, look at this section of LCC’s home page. [www.lutheranchurchcharities.org/inthenews-featured.html](http://www.lutheranchurchcharities.org/inthenews-featured.html).



*Glenn A. Nielsen has served at Concordia Seminary since 1990. He currently serves as the Director of Vicarage and Deaconess Internships. He is also the Director of Placement. He teaches as a Professor in the Practical Department. Since August 2014, he and his wife Sue have led the Noah Comfort Dog ministry at their church, Timothy Lutheran, St. Louis, MO. He is also the Regional Coordinator for the Missouri Valley Region of the Comfort Dog ministry. They have four children. As mentioned in the article, their oldest son Matthew died in 2017. They have three living children — Holly (Jason), Tim (Katie) and Beth (Alex) — and two grandchildren — Lana and Grayson.*

# Perils of Death Notifications for a Police Chaplain

William F. Engfehr III

**THE SUICIDE DEATH** of a member of my congregation led me to volunteer as a police chaplain. A city police officer asked me to go to my member's home. I spent the day with the husband, parents, and children of my member. The house was also full of investigating police officers, some of whom were friends of the family. As I was leaving, I asked the assistant chief of police (also a member of my congregation), "Who takes care of the officers when they have to deal with things like this?" He replied, "The chaplain — if we had one."

I had been searching for an opportunity to also serve the community. Was this it? I talked more with the assistant chief and we agreed to ask the chief. The chief (an "old school" officer) said the department didn't need anything like a chaplain. A month later at a district Pastors' Conference, I saw a notice that the Illinois State Police were looking for chaplains to expand a new program. I applied, waited through the six months of background checks and interviews, and was accepted as a chaplain.

A week of training at the State Police Academy included a variety of classes, one of which was death notifications. The policy of the state police was to have a chaplain take the lead on death notifications whenever possible. The steps in the process were the following: obtain the victim's name, an overview of what happened, and contact information for the notification; arrange for a uniformed officer to accompany the chaplain; when arriving at the notification address, introduce yourself and the officer, verify the identity of the person to whom you were speaking, and ask to enter the home. Once inside, we would ask if there was anyone else in the home with them. After asking them to sit down and verifying their relationship to the deceased, the chaplain would gently (but directly) tell them their loved one had died. After answering their questions about what happened, the officer typically left while chaplain remained behind to assist with phone calls and to be with them until other supportive people arrived. The chaplain would make sure they had contact information for the coroner (or funeral home), the investigating officers, and him or herself. Throughout the process, the chaplain would listen carefully for invitations to pray or other opportunities to minister. Eventually, the chaplain would leave, likely never to see them again. Most often police chaplains walk alongside persons in one of the worst moments of their lives, provide comfort and support, and then turn their care over to their own clergy or other support network.

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I had been searching for an opportunity to also serve the community. Was this it?

Over the years that followed, I conducted many death notifications. While trying to follow the preferred procedures, I always needed to remain flexible. But never like



one mild day in mid-September. There had been some showers early in the morning. My secretary announced a phone call from the local police department. I recognized the voice immediately as one of the telecommunicators. “Chaplain, can you respond to a 10-50 K-King (code for a vehicle crash with someone killed)?”

When I arrived on the scene of the crash, I realized this might not be an “ordinary” death notification. The devastation was extensive. The damage was horrific. I could not even identify the make of car, only that it was white. An ambulance was just pulling away with siren blaring when I saw the yellow tarp lying on the pavement covering a body.

The police chief asked me to do the death notification and gave me the information needed. An official from the nearby high school arrived with emergency contact information for the victim’s mother with only a name and a toll-free number. Since the victim lived in the neighboring village, the chief suggested that I go to that police department and request an officer from there to accompany me. I met an officer at that station, and we went to the victim’s residence. There was no one home.

I quickly realized, I was going to have to call the toll-free number the school had provided. I went with the officer back to his station, thinking it would be better to call from there because the Caller ID would show a police department name and not my cell phone. Maybe calling the number would give me the name of the company and its address so I could go there to make the notification.

Not ideal, but the best I could hope for under the circumstances. When I dialed the number, my desire to do the notification the “preferred” way ended.

The person answering the phone identified herself as Angie (not her real name), who was the mother of the victim. Now what do I do? My mind began to race—as did my heart. I identified myself as a police chaplain and told her that her daughter had been involved in an automobile accident. She accused me of playing a practical joke. I assured her that I wasn’t joking. I directed her to look at the Caller ID of the number I was calling from. Angie remained doubtful. “My daughter didn’t drive to school today.” I replied, “I know. She was a passenger in a car driven by (checking my notes I shared the first name of the driver).” “What kind of car was she in?” I didn’t know, but I said “White”. She began to accept that this was not a joke, and that I was who I claimed to be. Now what do I do?

I asked Angie if she had any coworkers nearby. She said she did. I asked to speak to one of them. I identified myself and told the coworker I had bad news to share with Angie and asked if she would just stay with her. I asked her to give the phone back to Angie, and I repeated that her daughter had been in an accident, that she had been badly injured and had died as a result of her injuries. She wanted to know where it happened, and I got the idea she wanted to go to the scene. Instead, I asked her to

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I met an officer at that station, and we went to the victim’s residence. There was no one home.



meet me at my local police department. I asked to speak with her coworker again and explained what had happened and that I did not want Angie driving. I asked if someone would bring her to the police station, or if I should I come and get her. They agreed to have someone bring her. I then asked Angie if she would contact her husband, or if she wanted me to. She said she would.

I returned to my local police department and arranged to use a private room off the lobby. Soon, a man came running in the front door. I assumed correctly that it was Angie's husband. I met him in the lobby and identified myself. He said, "My daughter, is she OK?" Suddenly I realized I was about to make my second notification of the day, again not in the "preferred" way. I took him to the private room and told him the news. Shortly afterwards Angie arrived, accompanied by several coworkers. I went through the details, answering as many questions as I could. They made some phone calls while I arranged for water and snacks to be brought in. Then they asked to see their daughter. Knowing this was important for them in order to grasp the reality of the situation, I called the chief and learned their daughter had been taken to the local funeral home. I called the funeral director so he could get things set up, and then I took them to see their daughter. After viewing the body, we returned to the police station, where several relatives had arrived. I had asked earlier if they had a church home and a pastor they could call. They said they had none.

Eventually they gathered things up to go home. One of their relatives asked me to say a prayer which I did. We said our goodbyes and they left. Likely, I would never see them again.

I didn't see them again until eight years later. My youth group leader stepped in my office to tell me that one of the youth had brought a visitor to the meeting the previous night. She thought I might know the girl. Her older sister had been killed in a crash eight years before, and she thought I was with the family. I made sure I was at the next youth group meeting and met Dee (not her real name). Over a period of many weeks, we talked occasionally as she visited youth meetings and worship services. Dee accepted my invitation to the next adult instruction class. Upon completion of the classes, she wanted to be baptized and confirmed. On the day of her baptism, the youth group held a special reception for her. Dee's mother, Angie, was at the reception. She remembered me, and we talked briefly.

Dee began bringing her mother to church. We talked occasionally, and finally one day we had a chance to talk about the day her daughter died. I shared that it was not the "preferred" way to do a notification and that I still had regrets about the way I did it. She said, "Pastor, there is not a lot I remember about that day, but I have always remembered your kindness and your caring." Angie continued to attend church. She eventually attended an adult instruction class and became a member.

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One of their relatives asked me to say a prayer which I did. We said our goodbyes and they left. Likely, I would never see them again.

It had not been the preferred way to do a death notification, but I had still conveyed compassion and concern at a painful time in their lives. At the time I hadn't thought so, but it had still been effective ministry.



*Rev. William F. Engfehr III has 40 years of experience in pastoral ministry, including 20 years as pastor of Holy Cross Lutheran Church and School, Collinsville, IL. He has served as a chaplain with the Illinois State Police for 25 years. He is a member of the Greater St. Louis, Southern Illinois and Central Illinois Critical Incident Stress Management Teams, a Child Trauma Specialist, District Disaster Response Coordinator for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) Disaster Response, endorsed by LCMS as an Emergency Services Chaplain and Disaster Response Chaplain, and an instructor in Crisis Intervention at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO. He is a recipient of the St. Louis American Red Cross 2014 Community Preparedness and Resilience Award for his work with the Red Cross and Faith-based Communities in Disaster Preparedness. Engfehr has been married to his wife Lois for 44 years. They reside in Collinsville, IL. They have three married children and five grandchildren.*

# Emergency Services Chaplaincy and Disaster Response Chaplaincy in LCMS

**William W. Wagner**

**IT'S 12:07 A.M.** when the phone rings. It's the dispatch center calling to inform me that a house fire has occurred on the west side of town with a fatality. The Deputy Fire chief is requesting my presence. I arrive at the scene within 35 minutes and report to the incident commander. He informs me that the family is at the next door neighbor's. I ask the family's name only to discover that it is the retired principal of my congregation's school. I approach the family and extend my sympathy for their loss. I visit with them a short time and offer a prayer.

The deputy fire chief informs me that the victim has been transported to the hospital. I offer to drive the family to the hospital. Before we leave I talk briefly with the firefighters who pulled the young man from his basement room to see how they are doing. The family and I continue on to the hospital. When we arrive, I accompany the family to a private room and then proceed to the emergency room to get them updated information. The ER doctor informs me the victim is deceased. Together we go to inform the family of their son's death.

I offer another prayer with the family for comfort and strength and then, with their approval, notify their pastor of the situation. When their pastor arrives at the hospital, I once again offer my condolences and leave. I return to the fire scene to see how the firefighters are coping and if they need anything additional from me.

August 29, 2005 the Category 3 hurricane, Katrina, hit the Gulf coast of the United States. Winds of 100–140 miles per hour stretched some 400 miles across the Gulf States. There were over 1,800 fatalities and \$125 billion in damages.

Because the South Wisconsin District of the Missouri Synod (LCMS) had a Critical Incident Stress Management team (CISM) made up of professional church workers, our district president volunteered us to the Synod to go to the area and evaluate the damage to properties and church workers. Our assignment was to start in the east and work west, visiting our congregations.

We met with victims in shelters, damaged homes, and congregations. Pastors and others would refer us to people to visit. Most of our ministry was listening to their stories of what they experienced and their hope for the future. We also prayed with them. One congregation had opened its fellowship hall as a Red Cross shelter. Since it was his facility, the pastor felt he had to be present 24-7. By the time we met with him

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Most of our ministry was listening to their stories of what they experienced and their hope for the future.

he was extremely fatigued and greatly stressed. Our team relieved him, so he could go home to shower and get some sleep.

The two illustrations above show the difference between Emergency Services Chaplains (ESC) and Disaster Response Chaplains (DRC). Emergency Services Chaplains work closely with first responders (law enforcement, fire, dispatchers, EMS) in a variety of tragic events such as automobile and other crashes, fires, suicides, homicides, etc. Emergency service personnel see and experience more traumatic situations in one week than the average citizen does in a lifetime. Chaplains play a critical role in helping ease the pain that emergency personnel carry from one event to another throughout their careers. Sharing with them a loving God who knows us and cares for us is a vital task. The chaplain's assistance with angry, traumatized, or hysterical citizens provides major stress relief for emergency personnel.

The LCMS Disaster Response Chaplain focuses on the wellbeing of congregations, church staff, and their ministries in the community. Upon the request of the district president or congregational pastor, the DRC assists pastors and congregations following a crisis event. Many pastors possess the same type A personality that emergency personnel do. They feel a dedication and responsibility to those they serve, often to the detriment of their own physical and mental health. When a major disaster occurs, their drive to help is even greater and can go on without stopping. The DRC, when invited, provides a break to local pastors either for rest or to deal with members of the congregation without having to concern himself with routine activities.

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Chaplains play a critical role in helping ease the pain that emergency personnel carry from one event to another throughout their careers.

## History

For many years ESC's questioned why they could not be endorsed as were chaplains serving in institutions and the military, especially because they too had specialized training. Major endorsing agencies all required a minimum of four units of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). The requirement of CPE or equivalent was appropriate for those whose primary role was institutional chaplaincy or pastoral counseling since that was their career. Most ESCs on the other hand are called to serve as pastors of congregations and volunteer to serve their communities as an ESC. Finding the time and the finances to obtain CPE, plus getting time away from the congregation to serve as an ESC, was problematic.

Since endorsing agencies were reluctant to endorse, ESCs turned to the Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee (ILCC) for Specialized Pastoral Care and Clinical Education. A special meeting with that committee was held in Chicago in 1999 to discuss the possibilities of including ESCs in the required standards for endorsement

but relaxing the CPE requirement of four units of CPE. However, the committee thought the requirements for ESCs should be the same as for other chaplains.

Nevertheless, soon after that meeting of the ILCC, the LCMS wanted its ESCs to have a process by which they could be endorsed. Thus it came up with standards that kept the basic requirements, but only required one unit of CPE instead of four. Following those standards, the first ESC in the Missouri Synod was enabled to be endorsed in 2002. However, for multiple reasons only one ESC presented himself for endorsement until more than a decade later.

In 2013 a Task Force was established to review and develop standards to make it more practical for ESCs to obtain endorsement. The process was field tested in 2014 by 10 ministers seasoned in ESC. The agreement they made with LCMS Specialized Pastoral Ministry (SPM) was if they beta tested the endorsement process designed for those in ESC, they would be granted ecclesiastical endorsement.

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Prior to 2014, many of our LCMS chaplains were serving police and fire agencies throughout the country, but most of them were unidentified because there were no standards or accountability until that time.

## Why the Process?

Emergency Service Chaplains have an important specialized ministry. They provide counseling, ministerial services, Critical Incident Stress Management, spiritual care and other tasks for law enforcement and fire services. We have a saying that goes, “All chaplains should be clergy, but not all clergy should be chaplains.” It should be noted that in the LCMS, only pastors have thus far presented themselves for endorsement. However, ESC endorsement is open to commissioned ministers as well.

Prior to 2014, many of our LCMS chaplains were serving police and fire agencies throughout the country, but most of them were unidentified because there were no standards or accountability until that time. The level of practical training they had was unknown. Many of the ESCs were unknown to the District Presidents which created problems for ecclesiastical supervision, especially when issues were brought to their attention.

Although the challenge remains (a) to keep district presidents informed of this ministry, and (b) to promote endorsement among those providing ESC — who may or may not have the necessary, basic training — the LCMS is seeking endorsement for all serving in ESC. Although it is estimated that over 100 ministers are providing ESC in LCMS, only 13 have been endorsed at this time with another 8 engaged in the endorsement process. Five are credentialed to serve as DRCs.

The endorsement process requires 47–49 contact hours of coursework in identified areas for fire or law enforcement chaplaincy, 100 hours of ESC experience, congregational support, adherence to the SPM Code of Ethics, an extensive application process that includes a face-to-face consultation by peers, and the



commitment to maintain one's endorsement by submitting an annual report that requires 20 hours of continuing education and biannual peer-review.

Because endorsement required continued education, the SPM Office provides semi-annual, regionally located, nearly all expenses paid, practical educational events for all specialized pastoral ministers. Educational events not only address contemporary topics, but also give time for worship, reflection and networking. To remain endorsed 20 hours of CEU's are required each year to assure the agencies served that their chaplain is a professional and is polishing and developing new skills.

## Endorsement and credentials

Finally three important terms need clarification. In the LCMS, Endorsement gives church body approval or support to someone or something. A district president has the authority to "endorse" a ministry context to which a minister may be called. The LCMS SPM religious endorser endorses an individual minister for SPM.

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To remain endorsed 20 hours of CEU's are required each year to assure the agencies served that their chaplain is a professional and is polishing and developing new skills.

Within LCMS SPM, credentialing is the additional (beyond what is required for ESC endorsement) process utilized to "credential" those who want to serve as Disaster Response Chaplains. Credentialing in DRC requires CISM Group and Individual, Lutheran Emergency Response Training (LERT), and deployment to a disaster scene with one of our Disaster Response specialists.

Certification is a designation earned by a person to assure qualification to perform a job or task. Thus, in the LCMS, for example, seminary graduates with a Master of Divinity degree are certified to serve as "general practitioners" in parish ministry. If they want to serve in a specialized ministry (e.g., missionary, military chaplain, ESC, hospital or prison chaplain, etc.) they are required to get additional training/education. If those in SPM wish to become recognized by a professional organization, they need to acquire additional training and/or education as well as experience before presenting themselves for certification.

Besides the educational events provided by our Synod's SPM Office, there are other agencies that provide training for ESCs. The most recognized are Peace Officer Ministries (POM), International Conference of Police Chaplains (ICPC), and Federation of Fire Chaplains (FFC). While they provide a basic track of training they do not lead to credentialing. These organizations do not provide certification, but do provide CEUs which meet some of the required courses for endorsement. In addition to these organizations, other training is available from International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF), The American Red Cross, and the LCMS Office of Disaster Response.

While the ESC endorsement and DRC credentialing processes take time and effort to accomplish, it is well worth it for the reasons previously stated. For additional information about ESC or DRC and required standards, contact the Specialized Pastoral Ministry Office at [spm@lcms.org](mailto:spm@lcms.org) or find them on the web at [www.lcms.org/spm](http://www.lcms.org/spm).



*Bill Wagner has served as an emergency services chaplain since 1987. He is a recipient of Jack A. Price award from the International Conference of Police chaplains and is also a Fellow in that organization. The William W. Wagner award for Excellence in Chaplaincy is named in his honor. He has also received the Christus In Mundo award. He presently serves as pastor of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. Wagner serves on the Specialized Pastoral Ministry Education Planning Committee and is disaster coordinator for the South Wisconsin District of the Missouri Synod. He and his wife of 53 years, Joy, have three grown children and 5 granddaughters.*

# See The Baby Jesus

David Wurster

*Introductory note: In time of disaster or great stress we humans attempt to figure out and explain the ways of God and thus to feel some control and “justify the ways of a loving God to the mind of the human”—theodicy. This is very natural. The real glory of God in “grace and truth” breaks through beyond the control of human intellect into theophany, a realm of cosmic power and wonder. In the movement from theodicy to theophany the Lord is recentering a human life from a simple self center to a self centered in Christ. In the process the old self dies and a new self is born (Romans 6). This dying and rising is a life long inner battle and victory in Christ (Romans 7). The Lord of life is present in all kinds of crises from disasters to the wonder of wedded love and new birth to shift us beyond our self center into the wonder and mystery of new life. His breaking and building goes on in multiple dimensions (Jeremiah 1). His gracious recentering affects our intellect, feelings and vision. Often the “word made flesh” appears in the very center of a disaster—theophany. This is a reflection/meditation that attempts to help us move from theodicy to theophany.*

**JESUS WAS TRAVELING** with his companions on a journey of catastrophic consequence. He talked to them about life and death matters, but they had trouble hearing him. They had faith in him, but they were still awed by human accomplishments and decent and helpful religious doctrine. In one story Jesus pointed out a poor widow with a penny, but they focused on the opulence that most of us long for in some way. Then the country boys from Galilee turned their eyes to the magnificence of the temple stones and architecture in the big city. “Wow, look at those stones and masonry and size of those buildings, Jesus!” The response of Jesus shocked them, coming from another world as it did. “You see those great buildings. Not a stone will be left on another; everything will be pulled down.”

The words Jesus spoke to them drew from the history of their people and projected forward into their unfolding story. Some people living at that time would live to see the destruction of the temple in the middle of a brutal war and persecution. About the same time Mount Vesuvius erupted and shook the civilized world and colored the skies. The mountain fell into the sea, and the waters roared (Psalm 46), and the end came upon Pompeii. Some of the people in those days would likely use the words of Jesus for comfort and meaning, and the words would eventually find their way into the Gospels for all of us to reflect upon.

He talked to them about life and death matters, but they had trouble hearing him.

The disciples' first response was a common one, namely to get some control over Jesus' shocking words with a time frame or intellectual frame of some kind. Many religious fundamentalists have tried to get a time schedule for the end of the world. They have also attempted to come up with diagnostic signs to predict the end. Many of us modern people feel some control when we get a time frame for when winds and rain will begin and end, especially in a disaster. This can be helpful to a degree, but Jesus told people of his day, "You know how to read the signs of the weather, but you can't read the signs of the times."

Jesus did not give them a time table. Instead he gave them himself. His answer came from a whole different dimension than the one they were in at that moment. He said, "Careful! Don't panic and run after false messiahs or salvations. The real help in time of disaster is in front of your face and talking to you."

Jesus then went on to list the various disasters we humans frequently experience in life. (Cf. Mark 13) There are natural disasters like earthquakes, floods, famines, and storms. These can open cracks of vision into cosmic disasters and conflicts in sun and moon and stars, which we understand better today but which are still way beyond our feeble power to control.

Then there are political disasters like wars of huge magnitude with many military and civilian victims. Connected with wars are rumors of wars and conflict at every level of life magnified by modern media. There are mass shootings and bombings and attacks and the shockwaves of panic that follow. There are domestic and family conflicts that result in trauma and even death. There are religious disasters with the collapse of religious institutions to strike at the core of our personal and cultural soul. There is always the danger that in the midst of anxiety people will try to find a simple quick fix with some false messiah. If someone says, "We will stop this kind of thing—shooting, drug epidemic etc.—once and for all!" that is a good clue a false messiah is speaking.

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If someone says, "We will stop this kind of thing—shooting, drug epidemic etc.—once and for all!" that is a good clue a false messiah is speaking.

The disciples found themselves shaken to the core on a Friday afternoon when the last of their human faith constructs collapsed, and Jesus breathed his last. He did this amidst cosmic, natural, family, and religious disasters and great persecution. The religious leaders even grabbed a false christ as Jesus said they would; they said their king was Caesar. Pilate goaded them into screaming blasphemy.

When it all came apart, where were the disciples to look? Did they remember Jesus' words, "if anyone says look, here is Christ, don't believe it." Where should they look but right in the middle of the cosmic battle. Out of a Saturday dark beyond all human comprehension Sunday would dawn, and they would hear his voice from another world speaking in this world, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me I send you." He opened their minds to understand the scripture.

There are times in ministry when the earth changes, mountains shake, the waters roar, and all is shaking, and we need to hear, “Be still and know that I am God. I cause desolations and make wars to cease. I will be exalted among the nations, and I will be exalted in the earth.” (paraphrase of Psalm 46) Where will we find God? In the midst of it all—there is a river, the streams of which make glad the people of God.

One of my favorite students was a Roman Catholic priest, Fr. Mike. He was studying for his Master’s Degree at Niagara University, and I was his supervisor. He was a Polish priest, reared in an Irish parish, and spoke fluent Spanish from a dozen years on the streets in El Salvador. He did his field work in a parish in the inner city of Buffalo. In supervision I frequently ask, “Any crises we should note?” One day he said the usual, “No.” Then after a moment of thought he said, “Does a homicide count?” I responded, “Well maybe we should consider that a bit.” He was working with a family, and over the weekend a man had killed his nephew.

As we reviewed the different dimensions and implications for Mike’s ministry he looked up and said, “You know, all this counseling theory runs out at this point. What do I have left?” I said, “You are now to be the best priest you know how to be—that you can do!” Out of the disaster Christ did appear to Fr. Mike and the people, then his considerable skills were used to good effect. So in any disaster; if we can be still long enough to allow Christ to appear out of the middle of it all, then our skill and training as first responders, volunteers, or others involved will blossom forth with gracious effect.

A Sicilian business acquaintance of mine has an interesting practice in some of our conversations. When we talk about the disasters and confusion in the world, he will simply say in his gentle way, “It’s the baby Jesus.” The conversation goes on, but that comment remains.



*David F. C. Wurster, PhD received a BA from Concordia Senior College (1965) and an MDiv and STM from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis (1969 and 1970). He was ordained in 1970 at Valparaiso, Indiana and served congregations in High Ridge, MO, Ridgewood, NY and Buffalo, NY. He received the LMHC credential in New York in 2006. He has served as a parish pastor and a pastoral counselor in a dual style ministry for 40 years. He has been retired from the parish for eight years. He has served as an adjunct faculty member at seminaries, universities and colleges as teacher and supervisor for students in graduate programs. He has also served as a consultant in conflicted congregations. He is married to Ruth, a professional musician and teacher. They have two married daughters and four grandchildren. In retirement he serves as board member and staff consultant for the Samaritan Counseling Center of Western New York. He also plays banjo and guitar with a jam group. He and Ruth travel extensively.*



*Charles Keogh is lead chaplain at Denver VA Medical Center. When the medical center's comfort dog, Waffle, unexpectedly died in 2017, the news hit many staff like an unforeseen disaster. Curious the threads woven between the kingdoms of animals, humans, and God ... and how mercy can mend a hurting heart. Chaplain Keogh penned the following poem as a tribute to Waffle.*

## Frayed

Frayed rolled up leash; unrumpled mat lying on the floor;  
Bone dry bowl just sitting there; no sniffing at the door.

It's time to walk. It's time to go. Where is that muzzling nose?  
Not to be found, it's absent. And, only ... heaven knows.

The stillness still continues. The quiet fills my ears.  
No panting tongue, no doleful look; my eyes are wells of tears.

Keep busy here and busy there, what's happened to the time?  
Racing, crawling, then it stops. Remember when you were mine?

But more than that; yes, so much more, I lived inside your day.  
You first were mine then I was yours. Your kindness came my way.

You drew me in. You made me yours by laying on my feet,  
My heart perked up. My mind calmed down; a near miraculous feat.

As mornings come then fade away, there's an emptiness I've found.  
Oh, how I miss that wagging tail. How I loved that dear ol' hound.

Bless'd memories linger in my mind as I go from place to place.  
leash is frayed and at times I am, but you taught me of God's grace.

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*Rev. Charles Keogh is a board certified chaplain currently serving as lead chaplain, Denver Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Denver, CO. He has a BA from Concordia College, St. Paul, MN and an MDiv & STM from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO. He did his CPE at Providence St. Peter Hospital, Olympia, WA and Kansas City VA Medical Center. He has served congregations in the United States and Canada. He is married to Kathryn Ann; they have four adult children and two grandchildren.*



## Book Review: *What Does the Bible Say About Suffering* by Brian Gregg Han. IVP Academic, 2016

Reviewed by Philip Kuehnert

**IN 1918 AND IN 1919** my family suffered because of the disasters of WW I and the flu epidemic known as “Spanish Flu” or “La Grippe.”

On August 9th 1918 my uncle Walter, age 24 was “machine gunned down” by “a bullet that entered his eye. He did not suffer.” He left 11 siblings and his parents.

Six months later, on February 16, my Aunt Anna, the oldest of 14 children died at the age of 34 a victim of the flu. She left 10 siblings, her parents and a husband with five children ages 4–9. She suffered for two weeks before she died.

The stories of their deaths and the suffering that they brought to the family were told from time to time by my father. He suffered these deaths of his siblings until he died. With each telling there was no remission of his grief. With each telling there were always multiple references to the Bible. From letters of that time relating their deaths and from their obituaries, there were frequent references to the Bible seeking understanding, comfort and always, hope.

Brian Han Gregg’s book *What Does the Bible Say About Suffering* identifies 12 responses to suffering and in doing so makes the case that there is neither a “final solution” to the question, nor a consistent answer. With a professor’s dedication to thoroughness and a pastor’s compassionate heart he chapter by chapter explores each response. An introduction and conclusion provides the frame for 12 chapters in which he presents a “face” to suffering, selects one Bible passage that represents that response, does an extended commentary on the passage before concluding the chapter with “Reflections.” The reflections again and again emphasize the importance of discernment articulating the positives and the risks in using the response.

To emphasize that no “one-size-fits-all” Gregg uses the metaphor of a choir singing different parts with the melody line being “the good news of Jesus.” He makes his theological orientation clear in the introduction, “The reality is that the Bible doesn’t tell us everything we might wish to know about suffering. But it doesn’t set us adrift either. The Bible simply keeps God front and center. God knows about suffering. God cares about suffering. God is at work in the midst of suffering. God is

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at work against suffering. God reigns over suffering. God suffers. God will one day declare final victory over suffering.” P. 18

While Gregg does not claim to be comprehensive in his coverage of Scriptures that respond to suffering, three omissions are curious. In the chapter, “The Two Ways,” in which suffering is portrayed as a result of God carrying out justice for sins, he omits referencing Luke 13:1–5. In this passage Jesus mentions two recent events in Judea — a tower collapse in Soloam resulting in 18 fatalities and the state sponsored terrorist attack during which Galileans were murdered while sacrificing as an act of worship. The specific question “were these victims more sinful than their peers?” repeated twice, is answered by a warning that his listeners were equally at risk unless they repent. Admittedly, this is a very difficult passage because of the implication that repentance would provide protection from such disaster or terrorist attack.

The second omission is even more interesting. The imprecatory Psalms are not mentioned. These disturbing Psalms assume that God is open to the suggestion that the Psalmist’s enemies should receive the harshest of punishments. The response of the suffering victim-Psalms is to call upon God to punish the perpetrator in specific and horrible ways.

Finally there is no reference to the human proclivity toward *schadenfreude*, rejoicing at the suffering of another. Jesus forbids wishing evil upon one’s enemies. Jesus removes the tit for tat Old Testament law that says “eye for an eye...” St. Paul in Romans 12:14 specifically says “Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse.” Explicitly, Jesus commands his followers to pray for their enemies, even to wish them well.

Anyone who attempts to provide care for those who suffer will be much the poorer if they ignore the use of Scripture. The three omissions stated above notwithstanding, Brian Han Gregg’s book provides a useful overview of the wide range of responses to suffering in the Bible. For those who struggle with their faith because of suffering, whether the cause is loss, chronic illness, terrorist attack, domestic violence, mass shooting, natural disaster, or mental illness, familiarity with these approaches will usually find a response that “fits.” In the concluding chapter, Gregg offers five observations which easily translate into practical encouragements.

- Take the options seriously — we impoverish our response by ignoring the Bible.
- The necessity of discernment — consultation is often necessary.
- Embracing Mystery — no pat answers and often no answer.
- Accept the Process — it takes time.
- Renewing Hope — a reiteration that God is God.

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In spite of the topic and the approach adopted by Gregg, this book has at times an almost embarrassing intimacy. For anyone who has been on the carousel of life for more than thirty years, the portraits of the suffering faces at the beginning of each chapter will ring true. He is transparent about the suffering his wife and he went through with their infertility and the heartbreak of a lost pregnancy following an in vitro fertilization protocol.

This book would be helpful as a required basic text for students and care givers who want to have the resources of scripture available to them as they encounter suffering and the “why” questions in their care receivers.



*Philip Kuehnert is a retired pastor/pastoral counselor living in Williamsburg, VA. Before retiring, his forty years of ministry included parishes in New Orleans, Atlanta and Fairbanks and clinical work at Care and Counseling in Atlanta and the Samaritan Counseling Center in Fairbanks. An unpublished essayist, Philip is currently working on his memoir, Confessions of a Failed Conversionist. For the past two years he has written a weekly “Monday Morning Encouragement” for Stephen Ministers and other care givers. He and his wife Judy have four children and seven grandchildren.*

# List of Past Issues of *Caring Connections*

compiled by Charles Weinrich

FALL, 2004	“God and Human Suffering”
SUMMER, 2005	“Spiritual Care of the Organization”
FALL, 2005	“Spiritual Care in a Diverse World”
SPRING, 2006	“Ritual and Pastoral Care”
SUMMER, 2006	“Ethics and Pastoral Care”
FALL, 2006	“Sabbath and Self-Care for Pastoral Care Providers”
SPRING, 2007	“Zion XIII—Biblical Metaphors & Lutheran Tradition”
SUMMER, 2007	“Topics on Pastoral Counseling”
FALL, 2007	“Pastoral Care Among Returning Veterans”
SPRING, 2008	“Spiritual Care and Pandemic Flu”
SUMMER, 2008	“Topics in Clinical Pastoral Education”
FALL, 2008	“Spiritual Care in Long Term Care and Rehabilitation”
SPRING, 2009	“Serving the Suffering; Serving the Servant”
SUMMER, 2009	“Disaster Response and Pastoral Care”
FALL, 2009	“Forgiveness and Pastoral Care”
WINTER, 2010	“Lutheran Endorsement Process for Specialized Ministries”
SPRING, 2010	“Pastoral Care and Dementia”
SUMMER, 2010	“Pastoral Care and Parish Nursing”
FALL, 2010	“Pastoral Care and Addictions”
SPRING, 2011	“Zion XIV—Firm Foundations”
SUMMER, 2011	“Intentional Interim Ministry”
FALL, 2011	“Sacred Spaces in Diverse Cultural Settings”
WINTER, 2012	“Pastoral Care and Criminal Justice”
FALL, 2012	“Pastoral Care and Suicide”
WINTER, 2013 (NO. 1)	“Light in the Darkness: Hope, Resilience and Moral Injury”
SPRING, 2013 (NO.2)	“Violating Boundaries: Improprieties in Ministry”
SUMMER, 2013 (NO. 3)	“Torn Apart: Pastoral Care Responses to Community Violence”

FALL, 2013 (NO. 4)	“Pastoral Responses to Family Violence”
2014, # 1	“Zion XV—Conversation in Community”
2014, # 2	“Advance Directives”
2014, # 3	“Ministry with People in the Second Half of Life – Part I”
2014, # 4	“Ministry with People in the Second Half of Life – Part 2”
2015, # 1	“ <i>Christus in Mundo</i> Awards”
2015, # 2	“A Brief History of Lutheran Ministries in Chaplaincy, Pastoral Counseling and Clinical Education – Part 1”
2016, # 1	“A Brief History – Part 2”
2016, # 2	“The Future of Lutheran Specialized Ministries”
2016, # 3	“Ministries of Management and Leadership”
2016, # 4	“Prayer”
2017, # 1	“Zion XVI—Lutheran Accents in Specialized Pastoral Ministries”
2017, # 2	“Migration—Ministry—Mutuality”
2017, # 3	“A Ministry of Accompaniment with the Dying”
2017, # 4	“Pediatric Care and Consolation”
2018, # 1	“Ministry in the Time of Disaster”

## News, Announcements, Events

### Upcoming 2019 Zion Conference

The next triennial Zion Conference will be held at St Mary’s Seminary and Retreat Center in Mundelein, Illinois. Confirmed dates are September 26–29 for 2019. Zion Conference has been a tradition for many years as Lutheran chaplains, pastoral counselors and clinical educators join for prayer, camaraderie, education and renewal. The ELCA and LCMS have continued to be supportive of this joint event. The last event in 2016 was held near St Louis and was planned by the LCMS. This year, the conference is being planned by the ELCA with the leadership of David Kylo. Watch for more details to come.