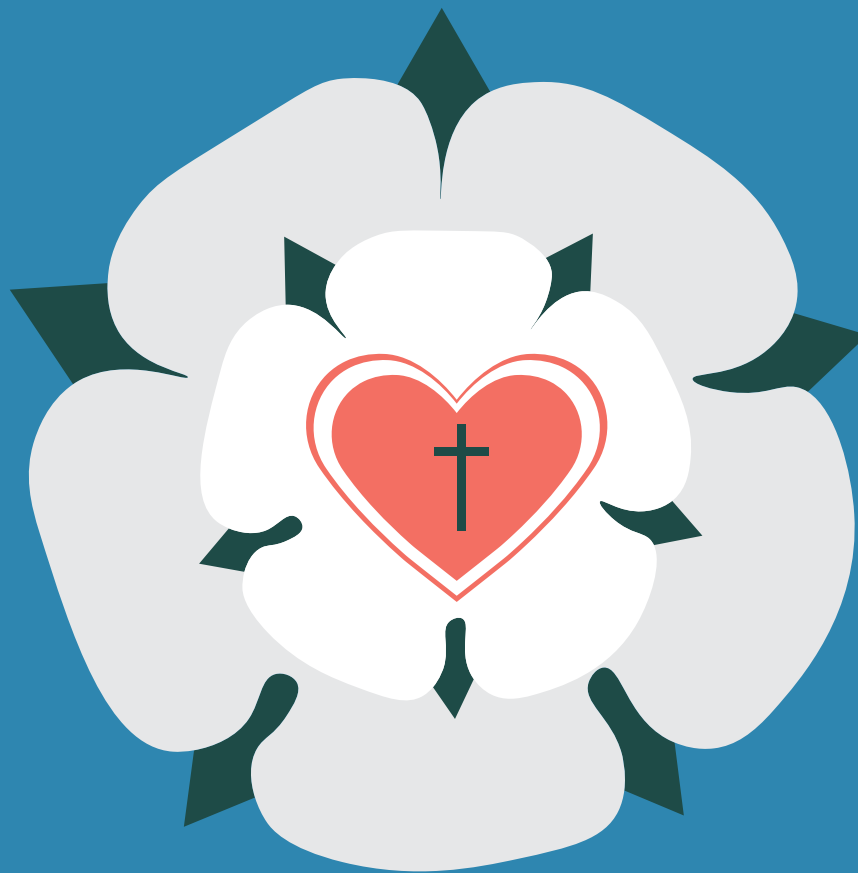


Caring Connections

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



Our Lutheran Identity in a Changing World

The Purpose of Caring Connections

Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling is written primarily by and for Lutheran practitioners and educators in the fields of pastoral care, counseling, and education. Seeking to promote both breadth and depth of reflection on the theology and practice of ministry in the Lutheran tradition, *Caring Connections* intends to be academically informed, yet readable, solidly grounded in the practice of ministry, and theologically probing. *Caring Connections* seeks to reach a broad readership, including chaplains, pastoral counselors, seminary faculty and other teachers in academic settings, clinical educators, synod and district leaders, others in specialized ministries and concerned congregational pastors and laity.

Caring Connections also provides news and information about activities, events and opportunities of interest to diverse constituencies in specialized ministries.

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Call for Articles

"THE USE AND EXPERIENCE OF MENTORING AND BEING MENTORED," THE NEXT ISSUE OF *CARING CONNECTIONS*.

Have you been or are you now a mentor – or a mentee? Share your use of mentoring and/or your experience of it for our next issue.

The American Psychological Association: "A *mentor* is an individual with expertise who can help develop the career of a mentee. A mentor often has two primary functions for the mentee. The career-related function establishes the mentor as a coach who provides advice to enhance the mentee's professional performance and development. The psychosocial function establishes the mentor as a role model and support system for the mentee. Both functions provide explicit and implicit lessons related to professional development as well as general work-life balance.

...Research has consistently found mentored individuals to be more satisfied and committed to their professions than non-mentored individuals (Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003). Furthermore, mentored individuals often earn higher performance evaluations, higher salaries, and faster career progress than non-mentored individuals. Mentors can also benefit from a successful mentoring relationship by deriving satisfaction from helping to develop the next generation of leaders, feeling rejuvenated in their own career development, learning how to use new technologies, or becoming aware of issues, methods, or perspectives that are important to their field." (*Introduction to Mentoring: A Guide for Mentors and Mentees*, accessed at apa.org/education-career/grad/mentoring)

Contact co-editor Bruce Hartung at hartungb@csl.edu or text/call him at 314-412-4911 to talk about your thoughts for an article. The editorial deadline is August 30, 2024.

Editorial

Diane Greve

BEING A LUTHERAN IN TODAY'S WORLD is one thing. Identifying as a Lutheran within a pluralistic, post-denominational ministry setting is another. What might that look like for chaplains, pastoral counselors and certified educators?

Is our identity based on how we engage in ministry or what underpins our ministry? Is our identity strengthened by what hymnal was use in worship or how often we worship in a Lutheran congregation?

Many of us attended Lutheran colleges, universities and seminaries. There was a time in the LCMS that many of the pre-seminary students would attend a Lutheran high school together, then go to a 2-year Lutheran college together and then to the Junior college in Ft Wayne and on to Concordia Seminary in St Louis. Not only were they bonded after struggling through Greek, German, Hebrew and Latin but they were deeply rooted in a Lutheran identity.

In my years as a chaplain, I worked with spiritual care providers of various Christian traditions as well as Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and Unitarian Universalists. We not only honored one another's beliefs and perspectives, but found common ground in our desire to provide the best spiritual care we could to people of a variety of faiths and those with none. After working in a multi-faith context, I would sometimes feel like the Sunday worship and theology at my ELCA congregation was foreign to me. I experienced it as parochial. I was not fed spiritually. I had come to draw from aspects of other faith traditions to create my own way of knowing God. I knew other chaplains who seldom attended worship.

Still, I remained loyal to my Lutheran identity and found it troubling when I saw churches and other parachurch organizations dropping the Lutheran name from their title. I attended rostered leader gatherings even when the content did not serve me in my ministry. I served on the synod council and worked with our bishop to support our chaplains. Yet I could feel a growing divide.

Most chaplains and certified educators work in large institutions, as I did, that puts a claim on their souls as that paycheck pays the bills. So, while many of us who are ELCA are called by the synod council, we are bound by the routine and expectations of the institutions in which we serve. Attending the synodical events often requires the use of our own vacation time and paying the travel and registration costs. Rostered leaders serving in the parishes usually have their expenses for these events paid by the congregation they serve. Their time spent at these events is seen as was part of their ministry not vacation. Neither the synod nor the institutions have budgets to

I served on the synod council and worked with our bishop to support our chaplains. Yet I could feel a growing divide.

support our attendance. This may be different for federal chaplains who usually have a call from Churchwide.

Some years ago, the ELCA and LCMS had strong national church support for chaplains and other SPM. While the Zion Conferences began as a grassroots movement among the Lutherans, the churchbodies provided some leadership and support. (Zion Conferences were triennial gatherings of LCMS and ELCA chaplains, pastoral counselors and certified educators.) Those days are gone. In the ELCA we are told that the Synod issues the call so the Synod needs to be providing support to the chaplains. And the synodical bishops' staffs around the country are stretched to support the congregations. Through all of this, *Caring Connections* has become the sole remaining platform to provide dialogue among the Lutheran chaplains, pastoral counselors and certified educators.

Might we be having a Lutheran identity crisis? Is the concept of denominations dead or dying? How do you (or don't you) bridge the chasm between the demands of the military, the institution, the counseling office where you are immersed daily and the Lutheran church?

Six of our peers have ventured into this question and are sharing their thoughts with us in this issue. Their experiences vary as does their theology. I am grateful to each of them for engaging this matter.

The last piece in this issue is a recognition of Brian McCaffrey, a former member of the *Caring Connections* editorial board, who died in May. Some of you may remember him.

- **Kevin Massey** calls to mind the role of Lutheran endorsement in our professional identity and competence.
- **Aaron Fuller** believes that the decline in the number of people identifying as Lutheran has an impact on our own Lutheran identity.
- **Andy Nelson** draws on the image of the tree roots to stay grounded in his Lutheran heritage.
- **David Gunderson** recalls his chaplain experience during a deployment to Afghanistan and what it meant to be a Lutheran chaplain in that context.
- **Gretchen Cohan** reflects on the Lutheran paradox of chaplaincy in her everyday hospital ministry.
- **David Ficken** claims his LCMS identity in his community ministry and his desire to openly share the gospel.

How do you (or don't you) bridge the chasm between the demands of the military, the institution, the counseling office where you are immersed daily and the Lutheran church?

As you read, I hope you will consider how your Lutheran identity informs your ministry in whatever setting you serve. Do you feel you belong in the Lutheran world today? How do you feel connected to your Lutheran church body? How has your own theology and faith practice evolved over the past years? There is a lot to ponder as we consider the future of Lutherans in chaplaincy.

We would welcome your reflections and comments on this topic. Readers may email me at dkgreve@gmail.com.

Is Ecclesiastical Endorsement Obsolete in a Post-Denominational World?

Kevin Massey

I AM GRATEFUL TO THE EDITORS of *Caring Connections* for the kind invitation to share thoughts for this issue of the journal. As one of the editors in the history of *Caring Connections*, I am proud that we exchange thoughts and opinions to continue to bolster our profession.

In this piece I am sharing thoughts about the place of Ecclesiastical Endorsement in our profession. Anecdotally, over many years in this profession. I have worked with chaplains from numerous diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds and perspectives. I have met and worked with chaplains who have an Ecclesiastical Endorsement from a recognized Endorsing Agency. I have met and worked with chaplains who do not, and in some cases, cannot have an Ecclesiastical Endorsement from a recognized Endorsing Agency. I have not found in my own history that having an Ecclesiastical Endorsement is a guaranteed hallmark of quality and suitability for the work of chaplaincy. I will suggest that the process and practice of Ecclesiastical Endorsement in a post-denominational world is no longer providing any benefit to the profession of chaplaincy.

Adair Lummis, a sociologist of religion, wrote, “The reality of the “post-denominational age,” where people stay or change congregations for reasons other than denominational affiliation, is fueling national church efforts to strive more extensive education about the history, polity, beliefs and practices of the denomination among its members, develop some standards and consistency in worship, and achieve better public press generally including the use of paid TV spots.”¹

More than twenty years from when she wrote these thoughts, even the idea of a post-denominational age has become anachronistic. The percentage of Christians in the US is dropping rapidly. “Self-identified Christians make up 63% of the U.S. population in 2021, down from 75% a decade ago.”² The results of this survey themselves seem prone to socially desirable response bias as it is hard to find 63% of the United States’ 333 million people anywhere in our churches.

Alongside the diminishment of denominational identity in America is an observable transformation of denominational identity of institutions of the church.

I have not found in my own history that having an Ecclesiastical Endorsement is a guaranteed hallmark of quality and suitability for the work of chaplaincy.

1 Lummis Adair T. “Brand Name Identity in a Post-Denominational Age: Regional Leaders’ Perspectives On Its Importance for Churches.” A paper delivered at The Annual Meetings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Columbus, Ohio. October, 2001.

2 Smith Gregory A. “About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults are now Religiously Unaffiliated.” *Pew Research*, December 14th, 2021.

Dr. Ruth Reko and I wrote, “At the same time that denominations appear to be losing impact, the health care and social service institutions that had been created and perhaps flourished during the early to middle years of the twentieth century have been growing individually and in partnership with other similar institutions. Identifying a tie to a denominational founder or sponsor might be seen as a negative that could communicate exclusivity or a doctrinal bias to services provided.”³

But in the midst of this cultural transition in America, the place of chaplains has curiously persisted if not grown.

“The pandemic has thrown into sharp relief a shift in American religious life. Growing numbers of Americans, especially under the age of 30, are not religiously affiliated or involved with spiritual or religious organizations. They do not have local religious leaders to call in a crisis like their grandparents did. Instead, in moments of great need, many are turning to chaplains and spiritual-care providers.

Religious congregations have been slowly yet steadily declining over the past 20 years as the number of people engaging with chaplains and spiritual-care providers is on the rise. In a national survey conducted last year, 21 percent of Americans reported having contact with a chaplain in the previous two years, mostly through health-care organizations.”⁴

As this cultural transformation deepens, I believe chaplains will emerge as the sole connection many people have to a spiritual care-giver. People will encounter chaplains during difficult times, such as being away from home in military service, to experiencing a health crisis in themselves or a loved one. Chaplain will be needed more and more as fewer and fewer people have their own connection to a faith community. Thus these chaplains will have to be well prepared for this increasingly post-denominational world.

Turning then to the question of Ecclesiastical Endorsement for chaplains, one should note that Ecclesiastical Endorsement itself is showing signs of these post-denominational trends. I am not going to name specific faith groups or endorsing agencies, but I refer the reader to review the current list⁵ of approved endorsement bodies to conclude that many are not religious denominations at all. Some are not associated with any actual worshipping community of any faith group and some seem to be organized solely for the purpose of providing an Ecclesiastical Endorsement for people seeking one for chaplaincy in federal contexts or for Board Certification.

But in the midst of this cultural transition in America, the place of chaplains has curiously persisted if not grown.

3 Massey, Kevin and Reko, Dr. Ruth. “A Historical Snapshot of Lutheran Hospitals in the United States.” *Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly*. V. 95, N. 3, 2022. Pp 46–55.

4 Cadge, Wendy. “The Rise of the Chaplains.” *The Atlantic*, May 17, 2020.

5 patientcare.va.gov/chaplain/docs/EcclesiasticalEndorsing/Ecclesiastical-Endorsing-Organizations.pdf

Ecclesiastical Endorsement itself as we today know it emerged from the U.S. Military during World War I. The Veterans Administration provides a thorough definition of what Ecclesiastical Endorsement is intended to provide.

“Ecclesiastical endorsement is verification by an Ecclesiastical Endorsing Organization that an authorized minister or practitioner is in good standing, has gained the necessary qualifying education and experience, as well as being willing and capable of working collegially in a religiously and culturally pluralistic setting without prejudice.”⁶

The enduring problem with Ecclesiastical Endorsement is that it does not involve any objective verification that these qualities thus named are actually present, either in the practitioner or in the Ecclesiastical Endorsing

Organizations. Indeed, in order to be fair and inclusive to all religious and spiritual perspectives, the list of endorsing bodies has grown to include faith groups and bodies that were certainly not part of the process when it emerged in World War I. That is certainly as it should be. And at the same time, I suggest another way to objectively verify qualifying education and appropriateness to work in the religiously and culturally pluralistic settings of chaplains should be developed. Ecclesiastical Endorsement seems to me to be resting in the place of an actual objective demonstration of being a capable prepared chaplain. Something different is needed.

In my article “Surfing through a Sea Change: The Coming Transformation of Chaplaincy Training,”⁷ I noted the disconnect of chaplain training and objective capability. “The successful student would master the body of propositional knowledge and be able to capably demonstrate this mastery. One could envision a healthcare chaplain competencies test through which a chaplain candidate would demonstrate mastery of this propositional knowledge of chaplaincy intended effects.”

How do we verify or validate or measure if a chaplain actually has advanced competency in diverse spiritual and religious perspectives? How do we guarantee that a chaplain will work appropriately in a pluralistic context?

I believe specifically because we are living in a post-denominational world, that the profession of chaplaincy, in both federal and healthcare contexts, needs a unified objective examination and verification of competency and suitability for the work of chaplaincy, rather than the placeholder of that objective examination that Ecclesiastical Endorsement seems to be. In this way, regardless of spiritual or religious perspectives, we could trust the quality of care being provided.

I welcome a lively exchange of ideas on this topic. Obviously, the practice of Ecclesiastical Endorsement is well in place, and replacing it would require difficult

I believe our profession can undertake transformations to help the profession better batch the religious and cultural transformations of a post-denominational world.

⁶ patientcare.va.gov/chaplain/Ecclesiastical_Endorsement.asp

⁷ Massey, Kevin “Surfing through a Sea Change: The Coming Transformation of Chaplaincy Training.” *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry*. Vol. 34 pp 144–152. 2014.

work in developing a reliable alternative, but I believe our profession can undertake transformations to help the profession better batch the religious and cultural transformations of a post-denominational world.



Rev. Kevin Massey, BCC is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Kevin has worked in parish ministry, health care chaplaincy, disaster response, and chaplaincy leadership and administration. Kevin was an editor of Caring Connections from 2004 to 2012. Kevin and his wife Shari, a behavioral health therapist, live in Chicago with their cat Cosette.

My Lutheran Identity Today

Aaron Fuller

“DO YOU STILL FEEL LIKE A LUTHERAN?” Growing up in a Lutheran congregation and serving as a Lutheran pastor, one would think my answer would be an unequivocal “Yes!” At the same time, considering that most of my ministry has occurred in contexts that are not distinctly “Lutheran,” one might challenge my initial answer. While I still consider myself Lutheran, my “yes” has nuances that bear further reflection.

A Korean adoptee, I grew up in a dairy farming community in Central Minnesota. We attended Balsamlund Lutheran Church, a small congregation about half a mile from our family farm. Like many churches in those communities, it was never a large congregation, nor is it today. Most of its attendees were “blue collar” and farming families who lived in the area. Regarding a “Lutheran identity,” I don’t remember it being a big part of our congregational life. We used the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, a.k.a. the “green hymnal,” and on occasion, we would sing from the old “red hymnal,” a.k.a. *Lutheran Service Book and Hymnal*, when we couldn’t find a favorite song in the former. A few of the members would attend Lutheran Brotherhood (now Thrivent) meetings, but they would talk more about the free steak dinner than anything specifically Lutheran! When the ELCA merger happened in the late 1980s, I remember people’s enthusiasm was over the fact that as an “LCA” congregation, we would only have to paint an “E” on our existing sign and thus avoid spending money on a new one!

I did complete Lutheran confirmation, but I don’t recall many people at the church studying Martin Luther’s life, engaging in discussions about Lutheran theology, or even celebrating Reformation Sunday. At the same time, I have clear memories of the congregation doing things that I would call distinctly Lutheran. Their favorite hymns emphasized God’s providence for favorable weather, good harvests, and the land. My grandmother, who was also our Sunday School teacher, would take us through the Book of Job and other passages that reflected the struggle of faithfulness in times of suffering. Announcements were made during worship that a local family was in need and that, as a church, we would aid them through their difficult time. I remember hearing stories of people who were in open dispute during the week but then seeing them in worship together on Sunday, and afterward, they seemed to make amends.

While these saints and sinners could not articulate anything about Lutheranism, being Lutheran was central to their way of living.

I share these memories with the awareness that the congregation of my youth was far from perfect. While these saints and sinners could not articulate anything about Lutheranism, being Lutheran was central to their way of living. Recently,

Bishop Ann Svennungsen of the Minneapolis Area Synod wrote about the decrease in the number of persons pursuing calls as rostered leaders in the ELCA. Over a 14-year period, the ELCA has experienced a 50% reduction in enrollment in its seminaries. Similarly, from 2012 to 2022, the ELCA experienced a decrease of 26.5% in baptized membership and 37.0% in its active participants. Regarding the loss of Lutheran identity in a post-denominational context, I think we are really lamenting the loss of a dogmatic, cultural understanding of Lutheranism that gave its adherents substantial power and privilege in society. With that power and privilege waning as people move away from institutional forms of religious expression, it emphasizes that a Lutheran identity and tradition is a lived theological expression, not a cultural one. This insight helps us understand that the “decline” of Lutheranism should not lead us to conclude that a Lutheran identity and expression no longer matter. Instead, it invites us to notice those places and instances where our theological tradition is lived, even when it strays from the cultural and institutional structures we’ve branded as “Lutheran.”

Regarding the loss of Lutheran identity in a post-denominational context, I think we are really lamenting the loss of a dogmatic, cultural understanding of Lutheranism that gave its adherents substantial power and privilege in society.

In writing this article, I was asked, “Do you still feel like you’re drawing on your Lutheran identity as you serve an international congregation and as a chaplain in the Navy Reserve?” and “Most chaplains serve in a multi-faith context and sometimes their link or loyalty to their church body wanes. How is that for you?” In response to the first question, in both settings those I minister to do not identify as Lutheran and most have very faint, if any, background in Lutheranism. Yet, I find that what keeps people engaged includes the experience of unmerited grace, the freedom to share their sufferings without judgment, and the proclamation that allows them to discern their vocation in the world as a response to God’s unconditional love. People find not just welcome but also safety and a sense of dignity regardless of their background. Furthermore, people have appreciated that in a world that is deeply divided along partisan lines of social and political issues, they can talk freely and debate the issues, knowing they will be treated with dignity and respect. In short, it’s not what we believe that unites us but how we live faithfully with each other as a response to Christ’s saving grace. As a theological expression of how I live a life serving the Triune God, my Lutheran identity is a constant source of strength and transformation as I carry out ministry in the world.

In response to the second question, I still feel called to serve in congregations. When at their best, congregations are agents of God’s grace that transform the local communities they are situated in. I also serve on my Synod’s candidacy committee and enjoy accompanying those on their journey toward rostered leadership in the church. These are just a few ways I consciously try to stay connected to the

institutional church body. Yet I do so, not hoping my synod or churchwide will recognize my ministry or obtain status within our institutional structure, but because my Lutheran identity helps me identify those settings and opportunities where I can serve and minister with integrity. Regardless of the setting or opportunity, I serve where I feel called to accompany God's people who desire to be Christ's suffering community, caring for one another, and living out our vocations with grace and conviction. As a living expression of my faith in Christ alone, I can't think of anything more Lutheran than this, even if it doesn't bear the conventional marks of what it means to be "Lutheran!"



Rev. Aaron Fuller, DMin, is a bi-vocational pastor in the ELCA. He is currently serving as pastor to Bratislava International Church, Slovakia, as an ELCA Service and Justice Missionary. He also serves as a Chaplain in the Navy Reserve. He is married to Kelly Schumacher Fuller and they have a lovable pup, Winnie!

Rooted in Lutheran Tradition

Andy Nelson

THERE IS AN EXHIBIT AT THE NATURE CENTER near my home in Sioux City, IA that teaches about bur oak trees – a common species on the prairie here. The display shows that a bur oak’s massive buried root system nearly mirrors – in depth, breadth, and shape – the trunk and branches of the tree itself. What one can *see* of any given bur oak is impressive in its own right, but even more, it is anchored by something equally vast. For a long time I have kept a picture of such a tree taped to the wall in my office near my desk.

This image of a profoundly rooted tree occurred to me as I considered my Lutheran identity as a chaplain in two post-denominational ministry contexts: a small private university and an Air National Guard unit. They remind me to continually ask the questions: How do I hold my Lutheran identity in a way that anchors, informs, and shapes my ministry without it being too much the focus of that ministry? How do I hold that identity in a way that *serves* rather than *hinders* the welcoming, inconclusive, and supportive presence I am called to be in each of the places I minister?

The Air Force Chaplain Corps identifies a specific set of core capabilities for its chaplains – religious accommodation, spiritual fitness, and leadership advisement. While we function within limits set by our ecclesiastical endorsing bodies (in my case the ELCA), our role is to serve all airmen and their families – regardless of their religious background – by providing and *providing for* religious worship and rites, pastoral care, unit engagement, counseling, and spiritual care.

In my civilian ministry, though I do serve at a denominationally-affiliated university (in my case, United Methodist), my role is defined very similarly: to provide students with opportunities for worship, fellowship, exploring faith, and service; relate to students, faculty, and staff of all Christian and other faith perspectives from a broad ecumenical and nondenominational perspective; provide pastoral care, counseling, spiritual direction, and grief support to the community at times of personal or community crisis or loss. In each of these contexts I get to explore how being rooted in my particular Lutheran identity can serve the purpose of caring in all these ways for my students and our university community and for the airmen and families of my guard unit.

Experience has taught me that Christian faith as expressed in the Lutheran theological tradition has crucial things to say to the people in my contexts.

Experience has taught me that Christian faith as expressed in the Lutheran theological tradition has crucial things to say to the people in my contexts. In a world that craves a certain kind of absolute, but continually reveals its complexities and

multiplicities, Lutheran tradition not only makes room for us to grasp seemingly contradictory truths without collapsing into one or the other, but actually insists upon it. Yielding briefly to some insider language, we are wholly saint and wholly sinner. We are wholly free and wholly bound in service to our neighbor. In the sacraments we experience the presence of an unbounded God in things bound to the earth, in water, bread, and wine. Looking around us at a world marked by both exquisite beauty and crushing brutality, we need not and must not choose between the truth of either...nor between acknowledging our *own* beauty and our *own* brutality.

In the world and in ourselves, our theology insists that we contend with the reality of both.

What is more, we contend with these realities not chronologically (I was a sinner, now I am saint), but concurrently (I am sinner and saint, you know, *simultaneously*). I deeply love the people I serve. I want them to be able to live in this world – with its beauty and its ugliness, with its signs of life and its signs of death – in reconciled relationship with God, without fear and without despair. Christian faith as expressed in the Lutheran tradition openly acknowledges that our life of faith does not bring an end to pain in our world. We need not pretend that it does, nor that it brings an end to the immediate effects of sin and brokenness. We still hurt. We still grieve. We still contend with death. But our faith nonetheless shapes us in ways that mean we can serve one another in openness and honesty; it opens a way for us to see and experience fear and despair being transformed into hope and meaning; it lays a foundation for deep humility before God and in relationship with others.

In these ways I draw upon the roots of my tradition as I serve in my various contexts, most certainly *open* to others who share those roots or who wish to grow in similar ways, but also not *focused* on creating more denominational kin. When I work with students at Morningside, I get to be honest and welcoming about the presence – both in our campus community and our wider world – of multiple Christianities as well the many religious and philosophical traditions beyond Christianity. We talk about the differences between them, we acknowledge the gifts and values that derive from those traditions, and share how they might help us grow more deeply in our relationship with God and learn to more faithfully serve their neighbors.

I am also honest about why I practice ministry in the way that I do; demonstrating that it is possible to hold with integrity beliefs and traditions that differ from our peers, friends, teammates, colleagues while maintaining a relationship of mutual care and respect. This ecumenism is inherent in my ministry in the Guard since I work alongside several other chaplains, each from their own branch of the Christian family tree (and within a wider Chaplain Corps whose

I want them to be able to live in this world – with its beauty and its ugliness, with its signs of life and its signs of death – in reconciled relationship with God, without fear and without despair.

members come from a host of traditions other than Christianity). We get to regularly demonstrate for the airmen of our unit our ability to work toward the common goal of our core capabilities even as we do so while quietly drawing from the values of our distinctive traditions.

Even as I spend my ministry life in a post-denominational context, my family and I are members of a Lutheran congregation and regularly participate in its life of worship, community, and service. My involvement there helps keep me rooted in our liturgy, our theology, and a wider community of believers who sing the Gospel in a Lutheran key.

As it feeds me in these ways, it also challenges me to reflect on how I might translate what I am hearing, seeing, and experiencing into language and experiences more accessible to those in my ministry contexts. It is also my hope that this learning goes in the opposite direction! That our congregations learn from the chaplains who minister *out* of their shared theological traditions (but perhaps not *to* their denominational members). Can we learn from our chaplains to take the core beliefs that we share and the distinctive ways we practice them, and *show them* to our neighbors who neither know or need to understand what a *Lutheran* is, but surely need to feel that they are beloved, know that they are made free, and be invited to serve and be served by a God who makes all things new.



Andy Nelson is the Campus Chaplain/Director of Campus Ministry & Community Service at Morningside University in Sioux City, IA. He is also a chaplain at the 185th Air Refueling Wing of the Iowa Air National Guard. Ordained in 2009, he has served calls in the parish and in Lutheran Campus Ministry at the University of South Dakota. He and his wife, Jessica, and their four children have made their home in Sioux City since 2012.

You're in the Lord's Army Now!

David Gunderson

IT WAS A DARK AND SNOWY NIGHT at Fort Dix, New Jersey as I sat alone in my tent pondering my future as a Chaplain in the U.S. Army. Earlier in the day, I along with about a hundred other men and women performed various training exercises that included land navigation skills, entering a gas chamber to test our gas masks, and finishing the day by low crawling through muddy terrain while live ammo was fired over our heads. These training exercises combined with dozens of other training modules are parts of the basic training for all Soldiers. By enduring this training, we as chaplains are equipped to meet the qualifications the Army requires in order for us to minister to all Soldiers. In the Army, chaplains go where the Soldiers are. If a Soldier is in a fox hole, or sitting in the mess hall, or at the firing range, the chaplain is expected to be there to minister to all Soldiers.

I stress the fact that military chaplains are there for “ALL” soldiers, because a chaplain is not selected to only minister to members of his or her “faith” group. In a parish setting, the minister or pastor mainly serves members who share the same teachings and practices of the pastor. However, in the military a chaplain is called to do ministry in a pluralistic environment because the military is made up of people from a diversity of backgrounds. This diversity includes people with a variety of religious beliefs. The Soldier’s rights to practice their religious or spiritual beliefs do not disappear because they put on a military uniform. Their religious rights are protected and for that reason, a chaplain is to be there to serve all the members of unit.

However, there are some limitations to what a chaplain can do in caring for the soldier’s spiritual needs. Those limitations are connected to the chaplain’s ecclesiastical endorsement. The ecclesiastical endorsement basically means that an individual is representing and supported by a particular faith group. Without the ecclesiastical endorsement, a person cannot be a chaplain. The ecclesiastical endorsement requires the chaplain to follow the teachings and practices of the religious body that is endorsing the chaplain. At the same time the endorsement will limit what a chaplain can and cannot do in the military. To go against the teachings or practices of the endorsing agent can result in the chaplain losing his or her endorsement, and without that endorsement the chaplain is forced out of the military.

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As a pastor on the roster of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), I needed an endorsement from the LCMS. (The LCMS has had a long history of

chaplains in the military, and one chaplain, Rev. Hyatt, was even the Army Chief of chaplains.) With my LCMS endorsement, I was able to serve faithfully as a protestant chaplain in the Army. Some of my duties included: visiting and counseling soldiers, teaching classes, attending staff meetings, participating in the training for all soldiers, leading suicide prevention classes, and leading memorial services. As a Protestant chaplain, I also conducted a general Protestant worship service which would include hymns, prayers, scripture readings, and a sermon or message. However, if I led a general Protestant service, I did not celebrate the Lord's supper. Other Protestant chaplains might celebrate the Lord's Supper, but in such cases I did not participate due to the LCMS teaching on the practice of "close communion."

However, as an LCMS chaplain, I had the freedom to lead a Lutheran worship service that often included the celebration of the Lord's supper. During my deployment to Afghanistan, I did conduct a liturgical service which was based on the Divine Service found in my synod's hymnal. In the area of the Lord's supper, the LCMS recognizes that in the military, especially during deployment, the LCMS chaplain maybe the only "Lutheran" chaplain available and for that reason members of other Lutheran denominations could be welcomed to the Lord's table. The decision on "who was allowed to the Lord's table" rested with the LCMS chaplain, which in my opinion was the appropriate way.

I earlier stated that an Army chaplain is there to minister to all the soldiers in the unit regardless of their religious beliefs, yet the chaplain needs to stay faithful to his or her endorsing agencies beliefs and practices. In order to minister to all the soldiers, chaplains practice what is called, "Perform and Provide." As a Protestant chaplain I could perform General Protestant services, but I could not perform a Roman Catholic Mass because that requires one to be a Roman Catholic priest. In order to "provide" care for those of the Roman Catholic faith, a chaplain needs to provide a Roman Catholic priest to come and conduct a Roman Catholic mass.

During my deployment, the chaplains worked together to make sure the religious needs of all the soldiers were being met. Thankfully, on my base camp we had a chaplain who was a Roman Catholic priest, a Southern Baptist chaplain who was a gifted musician and me. After the priest returned to the States, my job was to make sure another Roman Catholic chaplain on a nearby camp came to visit each Sunday. In this way I was "providing" for those of a different faith group.

On Camp Phoenix Afghanistan, we had a female soldier who belonged to the Wicca religious group. To provide for her and others of others of her religious teaching, she became a faith group leader. (Faith group leaders do not meet the standards for being a chaplain, but have been certified by the military to perform

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these duties under the care of the chaplain corp.) Every week she would have time at the chapel for her worship services.

While I and the rest of the Christian chaplains did not accept or agree with her religious beliefs, we all made sure she had time to use the chapel for her services. The same was true for the faith group leader who led the Jewish worship services every Friday night. Both of these individuals were always invited to attend our weekly chapel meeting, and they often did come. Those meetings usually began with a generic devotion. In the military we are always cautious about offending a particular religious group. While we had our differences in our beliefs, all of us did share the building we called “the chapel.” Interestingly, when we were blessed to have the Army Chief of Chaplains come to visit to our camp all of us including the Wicca leader, took time to clean, paint and decorate the chapel.

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On that same camp, we also had soldiers and government personnel who were of the Jewish faith. To meet their needs, we had a Jewish faith group leader conduct the services. During special times of the year, such as Passover and Hannukah, a chaplain who was of the Jewish faith was brought into the country to conduct services. Due to time restraints, the Passover was often held on one of the larger camps and military personnel of the Jewish faith were then transported to that camp in order to participate in the service. As the senior chaplain for the Kabul region, one of my duties was to make sure the visiting Jewish chaplain was transported and housed on the different camps. In this way, I provided for those of the Jewish faith, but did not perform any of their religious rites.

One interesting and powerful story concerned a Protestant chaplain who strived to make sure the Jewish members of his unit could get to the Passover. They encountered one obstacle after another and it appeared they would not be able to go. However, the chaplain managed to overcome those obstacles and get them to the service. As one of the soldiers was stepping off the bus he told the chaplain, “I can’t believe what you did for us. It gives me a whole new outlook on those who are Christians.” What that chaplain did was “provide” instead of perform, but his action of providing demonstrated the love of Christ to those individuals.

I believe as chaplains we are called to demonstrate the love of Christ in caring for all the soldiers. In the parable of the “Good Samaritan” the Samaritan did not concern himself with the wounded man’s political views, or social status, or even his religious beliefs. The Samaritan saw a man who was hurt and possibly dying. He cared for the man as best as he could. I believe that parable serves as a wonderful guide for any chaplain, military or civilian. We are called to demonstrate the love of Christ to others. I believe that is what Jesus did as he said, “*A new commandment I*

give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” (John 13:34)

In the LCMS, the ministry to the Armed Forces falls under the department of Missions. They see military chaplains as missionaries who are able to go where the parish pastor or lay person cannot go. I liked being considered a missionary, because a missionary is concerned with sharing Christ with others by their words and actions. In the traditional parish setting, I was surrounded by other LCMS pastors who may or may not agree with my theological views or practices. At times one wondered what they were thinking, but in chaplaincy I did not worry about such things. In the chaplaincy, my mission was clear: Serve Christ by caring for those He has called you to serve. At times it was challenging, but I truly loved and enjoyed my time as an Army chaplain because it allowed me to work with others who were centered around caring for others just as Christ has called all of us to do.



David Gunderson was born in Minnesota and graduated from Mound Westonka High school in 1974. In 1977 he graduated with a B.A. from Concordia College in St. Paul, Minnesota. He received his Master of Divinity degree in 1981 from Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. In 2022 David received his Master of Counseling degree from Sioux Falls Seminary and currently works for Lutheran Family Service.

David served as a parish pastor in South Dakota from 1981–2018. During his parish ministry in South Dakota, David also served in the South Dakota Army National Guard from 1989 through 2016. From May 2010–May 2011, David was deployed to Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom. Following deployment, David was promoted to rank of Colonel and served as the state chaplain for South Dakota until retiring in 2016.

In 1978, David married Connie Lee Larsen. They are blessed with two children, Kristen (married to Kapil Dua) and Jonathan (married to Amy Shortenhaus), plus six grandchildren Kaelyn Dua, Sage, Sawyer, Bodie, Finley, and Olive.

The Paradox of Lutheran Chaplaincy

Gretchen Cohan

WHEN I WAS OFFERED AN INVITATION to write about “the reality on the ground for a Lutheran chaplain in a post-denominational world,” my thoughts turned to font size. No, not baptismal font but type face.

When it was first installed, the sign at the urban Seattle congregation I attended proclaimed LUTHERAN in bold twelve-inch-high letters. Now, three decades, four signs and five pastors later, the letters are less than two inches high. Even if they could see the letters as they hurry past, the drivers on the busy arterial likely have many other things on their mind besides “what kind of a church is that?”

Diminishing font size of “Lutheran” is descriptive in terms of professional identity as well. I’ve served as a chaplain for over 20 years in the Pacific Northwest, mostly in small rural community hospitals. Rarely does it come up “what kind of a chaplain is that?” Also rarely do I inquire, at least at first, about a patient’s or family member’s denominational affiliation.

Chaplains are there, we regularly remind others, to engage and support people regardless of their faith tradition or lack of it, to meet them where they are and to help them explore resources for coping with their injury, illness or with the complexities of caring for an ill loved one.

We do not proselytize, attempt to convert, persuade, or preach. Our personal faith background informs but does not necessarily shape the care we provide or styles we use. Every professional chaplain I know approaches others’ faiths and denominations with respect and most devote time and effort to deepen knowledge and understanding across these lines.

As I stepped into full time chaplaincy, attending cluster meetings, text studies and Synod Assemblies gave way to Interdisciplinary Care Team Meetings and specialized in-services about medical practices. I was the only chaplain at my hospital and though I remained connected with Lutheran clergy colleagues, the ability to share joys and burdens, challenges and ideas with other chaplains grew more important; the shared work became more relevant than shared worship practices or articles of faith. I carried the Lutheran Occasional Services Book when rounding, but often it served more as an emblem, than a denominational resource. When I ran monthly reports for my manager, ‘none’s were always the biggest group that had requested and received a chaplain visit. This “faith affiliation” is well known and attested as the Pacific Northwest’s largest. (2014 Pew Religious Landscape Study notes 32% of

As I stepped into full time chaplaincy, attending cluster meetings, text studies and Synod Assemblies gave way to Interdisciplinary Care Team Meetings and specialized in-services about medical practices.

35,000 Washington respondents are “unaffiliated” or religious “nones.” [pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/database/state/washington/](https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/database/state/washington/))

In my first Spring as a new chaplain I approached my manager about attending the 2-day Synod Assembly. Though she was highly fluent in medical and organization terminology, she had had no history with communities of faith and the term synod was new to her. I explained about the church’s structure and polity and noted that “ecclesiastical endorsement” was included in my position’s requirements. She said she would arrange for me to take one of the days as vacation. The second year, I felt a bit of a triumph when she, in addition, agreed to submit my Assembly’s registration fee for partial compensation.

Early on at my first chaplaincy position I wore a cross (that had been an ordination gift). A nurse gestured me toward a Critical Care room. A family member was in the corridor, frustrated, and angry.

I started to introduce myself and she promptly and loudly replied. “I don’t want a chaplain, I didn’t ask for a chaplain, why are you here.” etc. At some point in her monologue, she took my cross and pulled me towards her while she continued to push me away with her words. Paradox. Lutherans are good at paradoxes: saint/sinner, lord of all/servant of all, already/not yet, law/gospel, slave/free. My familiarity and training with paradox helped me stay in this tension and in the ambiguity of being pushed away and pulled toward at the same time.

Chaplains dwell in paradox in all sorts of ways, and when I think of “what’s the reality on the ground” the early and continual exposure to paradox from my theology and education—well perhaps that’s the enduring gift of Lutheran identity.

In my current setting, a diaspora of clinics and two small hospitals in a rural community tucked into mountainous national, state, and regional wilderness areas, Lutheran clergy colleagues are scattered too far away for regular gatherings. Our interactions have been limited to a handful of Zoom meetings. My days now are shaped according to the rhythms of inpatient care and collaborations with ambulatory care teams. As the designated chaplain for our palliative medicine team, I coordinate palliative care consultations, guide and teach medical students about serious illness conversation methods and often continue a pastoral relationship throughout a patient’s journey with their diagnosis, care, decisions and treatments.

Of course, paradox is stitched into this work. I reflect especially on these two examples.

Already and not yet. In eschatology and soteriology these words carry soaring meaning for Christians—proclaiming the pledge and promise of Christ’s victory over the grave and that it is beyond human experiences of linear time. You and I need not *only* await, but even now affirm and experience abundant life in Christ.

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Every day in any hospital corridor this tension may play out in yet new forms—waiting for the doctor, the MRI results, the latest labs, discharge, for the pain to subside, for a visitor. So much of patient experience is cast toward the future. And yet, the chaplain enters a room to companion *that moment*. Certainly, the future hope and expectation, the fear perhaps or dread rolls itself into that moment. And we trust in the presence and stirring of the divine, that strangers meeting as chaplain and patient may both experience something of the sacred in the encounter.

Galatians 5 explores the type of liberty that is to be found in such a moment; it is free from human conceptions of cause-effect. Stand fast, Paul exhorts, because God’s working through love is going on within and around you. Regardless or perhaps beyond the language of someone’s spiritual belief or practice (or the absence of it), the immediacy of being “already beloved” may be made true even as we wait in a hospital bed, at a bedside or in an Intensive Care waiting room.

Simil justis et peccator and the healing power of confession and absolution. Lutherans get this because the paradox *simultaneously saint and sinner* is so centrally located in worship, in hymnody and in theology.

Simil justis et peccator and the healing power of confession and absolution. Lutherans get this because the paradox *simultaneously saint and sinner* is so centrally located in worship, in hymnody and in theology. Many worship services begin with John the Epistolarian’s words: “if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us...” and in that honesty, we become open to receive grace in a new way, and so we continue, “if we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” The presider’s words of absolution ring out: “Almighty God in his mercy has given his Son to die for us, and for his sake forgives us all our sins....”

Sometimes a hospitalization forces a tough realization. Sometimes consequences of past behavior erupt into physical problems. Sometimes the need for forgiveness for self or for another is the biggest thing in the room. The chaplain, familiar with this tension from deeply knowing her own sinfulness and just as deeply knowing her own forgiveness, finds words. They may be quite different from the ones from Sunday morning—but ones that nevertheless carry transporting power.

Simil justis et peccator. When Luther used this phrase, he was reworking Augustine’s thoughts about freeing people from false teaching and living with joy before God. Luther’s meditations on the book of Romans, especially chapters four and seven (Paul’s laments “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.” Romans 7:19) led to his stringing these words together that have become an anthropology of sorts. Not all Christians, but most of us in the Reformation heritage agree, that to be human is to be intrinsically both *peccator* and *justis*. And, this double action, that my sin is carried by Jesus and his righteousness is imputed to me, is the heart of the Gospel.

The chart note, if it is relevant to the patient’s course of care, might read: “Patient welcomed opportunity to explore past burdens and regrets and appeared to experience relief. Welcomed prayer.” These words seem thin and tinny as I write this for chaplain and clergy colleagues who have surely been there, found such words and have felt the grace and power of forgiveness. Medical charts, however are meant to be read quickly for determining care, not for the poetry and depths of human transformation that might, paradoxically, also be a part of it all.



Gretchen Cohan has been a chaplain in the Pacific Northwest for more than 20 years and currently is serving as Palliative Chaplain with Providence Healthcare in rural Northeast Washington. She attended Lutheran School of Theology and is ordained in Word and Sacrament ministry in the ELCA. She enjoys learning about and exploring Washington's interesting geology and vast forest lands.

Serving as a Lutheran in a Post-Denominational Environment

David Ficken

SOME NEW CPE STUDENTS have expressed that their view is that the concept of denominations is “old school.” So, the following questions have been posed for Chaplains working in this post-denominational era:

- Is it critical to maintain our Lutheran identity or not?
- What might that look like?
- What are the challenges, joys and opportunities?
- What is the benefit of having a Lutheran identity when we are working in a multi-faith, post-denominational world?

I am writing this article to address the above questions as a full time LCMS Pastor in the parish and a volunteer Police and Fire Chaplain in our community as well as Disaster Response Chaplain for the LCMS.

As a LCMS Pastor, I hold to our sacramental beliefs in the Lord’s Supper and Holy Baptism. If people come to our LCMS church and are interested in joining, we go through our LCMS doctrine and those that stay are fully on board with what we teach and confess. This goes for the older person and the younger person. This is indeterminate of age. They are ok with the denominational perspective because this fits them. Those who stay within the LCMS tradition are looking for the doctrine of the LCMS church. Those who do not share this doctrine are encouraged to find the church family (prayerfully Christian) that does fit with their belief system.

As pastor and chaplain who mingles with and walks beside people in the community, typically there is call to use a sacrament but it is always my prayer for the opportunity to share the Gospel of Christ crucified and risen. For example, I hold chapel services at local nursing homes and those that come are a mix of Protestant and Catholic. Given the history between the two, it is usually the older Catholics that ask what kind of chapel service this will be, to which they are told, “Christian.” They will hear the Invocation, Scripture readings, sing common songs like Amazing Grace and How Great Thou Art, interact with me on a short message, pray the Lord’s Prayer, recite the Apostles’ Creed and receive the Benediction. You can call this Lutheran but some other church bodies incorporate those aspects of worship too.

Those who do not share this doctrine are encouraged to find the church family (prayerfully Christian) that does fit with their belief system.

It is interesting that the reason for this article came out of a need to address new CPE students/future chaplains. I write that with the open question to them that

they respond with their thoughts on what it means to be part of a denomination or not and what is old-school. The rise of the “non-denom” church is in response to this anti-tradition movement in society/Christendom. Yet, this movement is curious to me because there is a doctrine being taught in word and practice at the non-denominational church that most often reflects that of the teachings of the Baptist church (example: infant dedication rather than baptism). It is not really non-denominational. It is also curious because I have heard from the local Catholic university center that young people are interested in the traditions of the Catholic church and the associated practices of their faith.

Is a Chaplain supposed to be all things to all people?

Is a Chaplain supposed to be all things to all people? My understanding from a few Chaplains is that their goal is to help the person in distress move to a better place than they were before meeting the Chaplain. This can mean dealing with suffering, pain, loss and grief, fear, sharing their joys, etc. As a Chaplain (to those in hospital, disaster, emergency services or general community in distress), I hope to be able to walk with people through their current situation and the distress/trauma they are facing (hospital, hospice, death, accident, injustice etc), with the prayer for the opportunity to share Jesus with them. This is not aggressive proselytizing if one gets their permission.

The following is for Pastors *and* Lay people. Greg Finke offered up the question, “who’s carrying that with you,” as a way to take the conversation past the weather and into the spiritual realm, leading to the point where they ask you/me the same thing in return. We/I then get to share our Christian hope in Christ! We then get to talk about the Christian (yes Lutheran) view on suffering. We can still honor the person and their belief system (or none) while we do this. No strings attached. We are not pushing a denomination. We are simply sharing the love of Christ who rose from the dead and says, “peace be with you.” Certainly, if they are interested and serious about connecting with a local church, I will walk with them or I will pass them on to a local pastor. This of course, is dependent on what they have shared about their faith and beliefs. I am not going to force them in any doctrinal direction. Is it critical to maintain a Lutheran identity or not? I do not shy away from being connected to the LCMS.

The joys come in any opportunity to have a conversation with someone about their beliefs. Any conversation now-a-days that does not end up in an argument is a success. It is even more rewarding when it becomes apparent that we are on the same Biblical page. I am thankful for any instance when someone can see that the Lutheran denomination is Biblically uplifting, and the Pastor and people are normal people that want to humbly worship Christ. These conversations are like Jesus with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, opening up Himself to them through the Scriptures, or Philip sharing Jesus through Isaiah to the Ethiopian Eunuch.

There are some differences among Lutheran denominations and Chaplaincy.

WELS does not have Chaplains, including Military, because they do not want the Chaplain getting caught in pluralistic situations whereby the Chaplain would be pressured to deny Christ and be “all things to all people.”

While the LCMS supports Chaplains, some have concerns with chaplaincy because of the importance of the Sacraments, namely Holy Communion. We, like WELS and the Catholic Church, believe in closed Communion. We could not then offer it in a mixed setting or to people we do not know without having had further discussion on discerning the Body and Blood of Christ.

ELCA is in full communion fellowship with multiple non-Lutheran denominations. Communion is open to all. Women and LGBTQ+ clergy are Ordained.

This reminds me of a time when I was entering Costco and a gentleman on his way out exclaimed, upon seeing my clerical shirt, “top of the morning to you Padre!” As a male in a clergy shirt, most often I am referred to as “father,” assuming that I am a Catholic Priest. This, to some, is a denominational cue. If I’m going to be spending time with a person at the hospital, I will gently tell them I’m Lutheran which is received warmly with no further discussion needed. When I am called out to a home after the death of a loved one in our community, I do offer “Lutheran” Last Rites when asked by a Catholic family. We all smile and they appreciate my support in their time of immense grief.

Note: Trinitarian Baptism is Christian Baptism. Some people add their denomination by saying “I was baptized Catholic (or Lutheran)” because the denomination uses it as a mark of church membership rather than being made a child of God. As a hospital chaplain, working in the NICU, I would baptize an infant if the parent(s) desired it. If their baby died, I would also follow up with the parent(s) to support them in their grief and faith journey. This would not make that child or family instant members of my congregation. I wonder if a Baptist Chaplain would baptize that family’s baby.

In conclusion, I believe a chaplain can offer non-denominational support but only to the point when people ask for specific support according to their claimed denomination. In those cases, I attempt to find a chaplain or pastor/priest that will serve the needs of the family. I have to add here that I am hugely thankful to organizations that support the Chaplaincy because they recognize that their employees or members have spiritual needs and those needs are important to their overall well-being.



Dave Ficken is a third career pastor with his first career as a Field Rep for GE Aircraft Engines and second career as a Financial Rep for Thrivent Financial. He attended Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, graduating in 2007 and has been a Pastor at Beautiful Savior LCMS in Plover, WI ever since. He is married and has 3 children and enjoys projects around their home and going to their children’s events. He is an EMS chaplain and a member of the Caring Connections editorial board.



Brian McCaffrey, a former member of the *Caring Connections* Editorial Board, died on May 3, 2024, in St Paul, Minnesota, at the age of 70.

He grew up in the Twin Cities, studied at Concordia College, Morehead, Minnesota, attend Luther Seminary in St Paul, and was ordained to serve as a pastor at Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church on

Washington Island in Door County, Wisconsin. He was their pastor from 1985–88. After that Brian spent time learning and serving with the Chaplains Department at the University of Minnesota Hospital and Clinics in Minneapolis from 1988–91.

He was director of pastoral care at Parmly Senior Services in Chisago City, Minnesota, from 1992–1999. Brian then worked with Mel Kimble at the Center for Aging, Religion and Spirituality (CARS) at Luther Seminary. In 2006, he accepted a call to serve as chaplain at Lutheran Care Ministries Network in Clinton, New York. He retired from that ministry in 2015 and returned to the Twin Cities.

He was involved in numerous ways with the aging community nationally and internationally throughout his ministry. He stayed knowledgeable of the most current resources on healthy aging and advocated for elders in numerous ways. Brian organized the National Forum on Spirituality and Aging, a loose ecumenical coalition of those involved in second-half-of-life ministry. He also became interested in racial justice and was serving on several committees at University Lutheran Church of Hope in Minneapolis.

With the help of friends, Brian was in the process of purchasing a new computer to allow him to engage with the world through Zoom from his room at Lyngblomsten Care Center in St Paul. Although he lived with significant visual limitations and other health challenges, he had an indomitable free spirit, was full of ideas and remained active to the end. The evening before his death, he attended *La Boheme* with a group from Lyngblomsten. Clearly, he was an example of vibrant aging.

To read his contributions to *Caring Connections*, you may go to the archive [Caring Connections Archive - Lutheran Services in America](#) and look at Vol 6.1, Vol 10 .1, Vol 11.3 and Vol 11.4.