

Caring Connections

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



Endings, Blessings and Imaginings

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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Editorial

What are we losing with the ending of *Caring Connections*?

Diane Greve

AFTER SEVERAL LONG AND DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS, the *Caring Connections* Editorial Board decided it was time to end *Caring Connections* after 20 years of publication. This may seem radical and maybe it is. Still, it is the right decision.

Several contributors to this issue have written articles reflecting on *The Prophetic Imagination* by Walter Brueggemann. In many ways, this classic work speaks to our world today. And, currently, it is hard to imagine where the Lutheran world is headed. Brueggemann invites us to lament and grieve the loss of what has been and reminds us not to put God in a box but rather to allow God to be free to lead us into a new way. Imagine! Imagine new ways, new possibilities, with new people! Brueggemann suggests it is the role of the prophet to help the people to grieve the losses in our lives, in our community, in our churches, and in our world. Lament is critical to moving forward. We are asked to lament without knowing the future. Our imagination is our hope.

For some, it is the end of a time of collegiality with chaplains and certified educators across the Lutheran family. We have already lost the Lutheran Council USA (LCUSA), the Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee (ILCC), and the Zion Conferences. Now, with the ending of *Caring Connections*, we have lost a remaining space for Lutherans in specialized pastoral care to share insights, name concerns, and to find professional support. Friendships were formed and mutual respect was gained. We have lost this opportunity for us to share our perspectives within the larger Lutheran family. And, many of us lament this loss.

In *The Prophetic Imagination*, we are warned against yearning for what was. Instead, we are invited and encouraged to lament its loss. I will deeply miss the friendships that have been formed with the editorial board, editors, and contributors to the publication. I do lament the loss of the Zion Conference. I have fond memories of the deep collegiality that was formed as well as the celebration of Christus in Mundo awards during our banquets. We shared in the history of the specialized pastoral care movement among Lutherans as we heard stories from the recipients. Those days are gone. Much of the history is still found in past issues of *Caring Connections* that are still housed in the Chaplains' Network archive on the Lutheran Services in America website [Caring Connections Archive - Lutheran Services in America](#). We hope you will refer to those articles in the future.

Lament is critical to moving forward. We are asked to lament without knowing the future. Our imagination is our hope.

Christopher Otten, the endorser for the ELCA, sends newsletters to those on his mailing list. You may be included in receiving those by emailing him at Christopher.Otten@ELCA.org. Those in the LCMS may contact Brian Heller to stay connected to specialized ministry Brian.Heller@lcms.org.

In this last issue, you will find the articles that are addressing the thoughts of Brueggemann. The last article is a word of joy from Mel Jacob that ties in with the past issue and may lead us into a future with hope. Thank you for all of your contributions.

We end by recognizing the former editors, editorial board members and the writers. All have been volunteers. And we are grateful for you, our readers, who have given us reason to continue all these years. Most of the former editors have been able to comment on this transition. Thank them as you are able.

- **Karen Cherwein** - Prophetic Imagination: Reengaging, Reimaging, and Reclaiming Lutheran Identity in Ministry
- **Mark Whitsett** - When There are No Words: Perceiving the IS-NESS of God in Totalizing Circumstances
- **John Schumacher** - The Enduring Relevance of Prophetic Imagination
- **Philip Kuehnert** - Swan Song? Maybe not!
- **Anna Rudberg Speiser** - Making Way for New Possibilities
- **Alexandra George** - Reflecting on Prophetic Imagination
- **Mel Jacob** - Alleluia!

We conclude this issue with an announcement of the next recipient of the Christus in Mundo award. Don Stiger has been an amazing supporter of this publication from the beginning.

Since this is our last issue I hope that you will savor these articles. Read and re-read them. And then go back to the beginning and see what you may have missed in the earlier issues.

It is hard to say “good-bye” but it is time. Blessings on your prophetic imagination. From death comes new life.

Editorial

Saying Goodbye

Bruce Hartung

WHERE TO START AS WE END? I have generally found it hard to say “goodbye,” and even harder when it is a “goodbye” that I know will last forever. Of course, the ending of the publication of *Caring Connections* is not a momentous-in-my-life occurrence. But I do not wish to dismiss its significance.

Its title, *Caring Connections*, really speaks to the nature and meaning of this journal. Its function was to connect people in Lutheran specialized pastoral/spiritual care ministries, people whose ministries were distant from the traditional activities of congregational ministry and life.

There was a period when numerous opportunities existed for these connections. The Lutheran Church in the USA (LCUSA) facilitated our collaboration. The so-called Zion Conferences literally brought us physically into one place for sharing, learning, and growth in often very personal ways. This coming-together was all under the umbrella of all of us who were Lutheran. The 60s and early 70s were a time for that. But, as Robert Putnam points out in his groundbreaking book, *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*, this reached its highest point with President Kennedy’s inaugural speech, “Ask not what your country can do for you but rather ask what you can do for your country,” and perhaps its last gasp in President Johnson’s “Great Society.”

“Over the first six decades of the twentieth century America had become demonstrably – indeed measurably – a more “we” society. But then, ... as those who lived through that period know only too well, in the mid 1960’s the decades long upswing in our shared economic, political, social, and cultural life abruptly changed direction. America suddenly found itself in the midst of a clear downturn. Between the mid-1960’s and today – by scores of hard measures along multiple dimensions – we have been experiencing *declining* economic equality, the *deterioration* of compromise in the public square, a *fraying* social fabric, and a *descent* into cultural narcissism. As the 1960s moved into the 1970s, 1980s, and beyond, we re-created the socioeconomic chasm of the last Gilded Age at an accelerated pace. ... Over the past five decades America has become demonstrably – indeed measurably – a more ‘I’ society.” (pp. 11-12)

Its title, *Caring Connections*, really speaks to the nature and meaning of this journal.

As the move to independence and personal autonomy developed, so also developed like-me groups, communities governed by echo chambers, conformity

and identity politics grew. The “I” continued to develop, and it did so by associating increasingly with “others like me” gatherings and groups, and inclusion, hospitality, diversity, and equity became less valued.

Still, during this time, attempts were made to keep Lutherans, especially those in caring and non-parish ministries, such as chaplains in the armed services as well as hospitals, and pastoral counselors connected. The attempts connected me, as a pastoral counselor at the Pastoral Psychotherapy Institute at Lutheran General Hospital, Park Ridge, Illinois, and later at the Onondaga Pastoral Counseling Center in Syracuse, New York, with other Lutherans who were in the clinical fields. It connected me to those with a similar theological, spiritual, and vocational base. When I was called to the International Center of the LCMS as its first Director of Ministerial Health/Health and Healing Ministries I (and Craig Settlage of the ELCA) founded the Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness, using a similar Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee on specialized ministry as our model. And I joined the National Council of Churches’ leadership group that brought together staff from various other denominations in the United States who were in similar positions in their denominations as I was. These were very rich and nourishing connections.

But common work and caring connections grew harder and harder. The cultural wheel was turning and the descent into the “I” rather than the “we” world was proceeding at a rapid pace. While my LCMS denomination continued to proclaim itself counter-cultural, it was, in fact, behaving in lockstep with the rest of American culture in this descent.

Thus, here we are in 2025 saying “goodbye” to *Caring Connections*, a casualty of these factors so ably identified by Putnam. My colleagues who write in this issue generally take a less dark tone. I do think their contributions are quite strong and wonderful, and there are few things that would be more appropriate than Alexandra George using David Hankins’ summary of Walter Brueggemann’s *Prophetic Imagination* model: “prophetic imagination proceeds through these basic steps: 1) it refuses denial and penetrates despair with honest cries over pain and loss that result from social injustices; 2) it overcomes amnesia by drawing on ancient, artistic traditions that energize the community to imagine and live into a more just order; and, 3) it ends in hope and gratitude for the surprising gift of an emancipated future.” Be sure to read her article, as well as the others in this, the last issue. My hope is that they are correct.

For me, I lament the loss of the journal – both for its own sake and also for the characteristics of the society that brings it about. I rejoice in what it has been and the

I lament the loss of the journal – both for its own sake and also for the characteristics of the society that brings it about. I rejoice in what it has been and the connections it has made between all of us in specialized ministry and beyond.

connections it has made between all of us in specialized ministry and beyond. I relish the memory of the energized conversations of the Editorial Board during its monthly meetings. I hope the upswing Putnam suggests could come as we hit bottom on the “I” swing and begin to move up toward the “we,” despite the fact that current federal actions are, in my judgment, so “I” that they are actually evil.

I think of the hymn: “Lord, dismiss us with your blessing, Fill our hearts with joy and peace; let us each, your love possessing, triumph in redeeming grace. Oh, refresh us; oh, refresh us, traveling through this wilderness.” (*LBW* 259)

I pray the prayer: “Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. (*LSB Pastoral Care Companion*, p, 338)

And I say “good-bye” to *Caring Connections*, but not yet to my colleagues on the Editorial Board whom I will continue to hold in deep respect and connection.

We have each written our individual thoughts and now we would like to join in giving thanks for Lutheran Services in America (LSA) who have housed *Caring Connections* on their website for 20 years. They have kept a list of subscribers and sent emails to them when a new issue of *Caring Connections* is posted. They have managed our financial resources and disbursed the checks to pay for our limited expenses. Many Lutheran chaplains, pastoral counselors and certified clinical educators have worked and continue to work with agencies that are included in the Lutheran Services in America family of organizations. We are deeply grateful to LSA and truly wish the organization and their staff God’s richest blessing in the days ahead.

—**Diane Greve and Bruce Hartung, Co-editors**

Musing from Past Editors. . .

Several of our past editors were able to reflect on their responses to the ending of Caring Connections.

AS I NOTED in the Twentieth Anniversary edition of *Caring Connections*, this publication grew out of a newsletter generated from the office of Serge Castigliano, Director of the ELCA Churchwide Office of Ministries in Chaplaincy, Pastoral Counseling and Clinical Education from 1984 to 1994. There was an article in it with the title, “Stress, Spiritual Outlook and Health.” It was so helpful to me that I have always kept it around and often reread it for personal reflection. That article motivated me to suggest to Craig Carlson, Chair of the National Steering Committee of the LSA Chaplains’ Network, that we might explore development of a journal for specialized ministers with help from the specialized ministry leadership of the ELCA and LCMS.

What followed those early conversations leaves me with a deep sense of wonder and gratitude for all that has followed. The effort almost died following the first print issue! The result was effective, but the cost was prohibitive. We explored the idea in the editorial board of moving to a volunteer editor and going online. A staff member at LCMS International Center assisted with putting it together and the present approach was born.

At this moment I want to celebrate all those who have poured their energy into creating this journal and kept in going over more than twenty years. Thanks to all those who participated in the editorial boards and gave attention to working with editors in the development of relevant themes. A big “thank you” to all of those who have served as editors of *Caring Connections* and have kept this project moving forward. The move to co-editors helped keep perspectives from both church bodies continually present. Thanks to Lutheran Services in America for their continuing support and for providing a place where issues remain available on their website.

In preparations for these musings, I was invited to reflect a bit on Walter Brueggemann’s classic, *The Prophetic Imagination*. What an incredible read!. It is so relevant for facing the events we are living through today. And, I found it to be a helpful partner to a book our congregation read and discussed during Advent and Epiphany entitled, *We Survived the End of the World: Lessons from Native America on Apocalypse and Hope*” by Steven Charleston. This book shares information from the lives of four Native American prophets who provided a way to hope as they traversed an apocalypse over the past 500 years. These pages that we read from Brueggemann serve us well as we engage with the issues we now face.

As *Caring Connections* takes this pause in publishing, I hope that in some surprising and unexpected ways what has been accomplished over these years will continue to serve us. I also hope that one day soon a spark will ignite and invite

another chapter in this journey of communication around important issues for the those of us who serve in the specialized ministries of the churches.

—**Bruce Pederson**, editor of the predecessor newsletter

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“A Very Good Run”

FOR SEVERAL YEARS I worked at the Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith, and Ethics. The Center engaged in grant-funded research, publication, education, and consultation. Early in 2002, we learned that our parent healthcare organization was “refocusing” our mission to address its internal needs. The Center we knew was going away after 20-plus years of existence.

I recall lamenting this turn of events to a well-known healthcare ethicist who lived near me. He nodded as I spoke, then said, “Well, you’ve had a good run.” I had hoped for a little more commiseration! Only later could I appreciate the point he was making.

I was shocked and saddened to read that publication of *Caring Connections* was coming to an end. Why, just a year ago the journal was celebrating 20 years and seemed to be doing fine! Then, as I recalled my 2002 experience, the shock and some of the sadness softened. The journal *has* had a good run. It has always faced some inter- and intra-denominational and financial headwinds, yet has been resilient and has persevered as a beacon of inter-Lutheran collaboration.

Moreover, the on-line “product” has been consistently worthwhile: nicely varied and of high quality, pleasing to the eye with interesting, thoughtfully written articles—and rarely so “Lutheran” as to lose this non-Lutheran reader’s interest. I will miss it, and am glad that the archive is there. The journal has persistently fulfilled its mission.

One sadness is that this journal won’t be there in real time as our nation enters a period of profound political and socio-cultural upheaval, perhaps even Isaiah’s “deep darkness.” How might pastoral/spiritual care, counseling, spiritual direction, teaching, and other specialized ministries change as we undergo this time of testing? In my field of special interest, how will healthcare ministries need to evolve if they are to respond faithfully in this time? What would *Caring Connection* authors have taught us from their ongoing experience and reflection?

But in this regard the *Caring Connections* team gives us a final gift. This issue’s focus on Walter Brueggemann’s “prophetic imagination” could not be more timely. Among other things, it seems to me that in this moment we are already tempted to a new version of the “numbness” and “despair” that Brueggemann aptly names.¹ I wait

¹ For me, Brueggemann’s personal reflections on these themes in ministry generally are especially poignant and evocative (see chapter 7, *A Note on the Practice of Ministry*).

eagerly to see how the authors interpret and “apply” Brueggemann’s perspectives to the ministry situations they experience or anticipate today.

Finally, a suggestion to *Caring Connections* readers: even after real-time publication ceases, dig into the *Caring Connections* archive on the LSA website from time to time. And don’t disregard the older back issues. There were some excellent, still-relevant articles in the early years. One I will commend to you is directly relevant to “prophetic imagination,” and well worth a read: Bruce Hartung’s 2005 piece, “The Pastor/Chaplain/Counselor as Organizational Prophet.”² In two pages, it offers ample food for thought, even today.

Well done, all of you who have served as *Caring Connections* authors, editors, and board members. This non-Lutheran is glad and grateful for what you’ve given us and the legacy you leave.

—**David McCurdy**, Editor 2004-2005

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AMIDST THE SWIRL OF EMOTIONS and thoughts I have had since learning that our timely and—in a way—timeless publication, *Caring Connections* was coming to a close, here are a few thoughts that might be worth sharing with the Editorial Board and readers in this final issue.

One is the awareness of how important it was for me personally to get involved with the publication of *Caring Connections*. When I retired from active chaplaincy in Milwaukee in 2005 and moved to Florida, I had no expectation of further work other than driving to the beach or the local pool, but when John Fale called and asked me to be The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s co-editor of *Caring Connections*, I realized there was more that I could do and would be happy to do. Over the years that followed, I was privileged to stay connected with dear colleagues and develop relationships with new acquaintances in both the ELCA and the LCMS. I also continued to learn about aspects of ministry with which I had little or no familiarity before.

A second awareness came as I thought of my decision to develop and maintain two Indexes [Basic and Topical] for all the volumes of *Caring Connections*. This decision meant that I would need to read every article contained in those volumes! What a treasure those articles have turned out to be! I hope all of you will find the Indexes helpful for your ministries and also for your own edification... and, yes, enjoyment!

A final note: I’m aware that I have often regarded *Caring Connections* as a critical and perhaps singular link between the LCMS and the ELCA. That has caused

² “The Pastor/Chaplain/Counselor as Organizational Prophet: Reflections on the Role and Function of Pastoral Care in an Organizational Culture,” vol. 2, no. 1 (Summer 2005).

me grief as I think now of it no longer performing that bridge-like function. What other formal and/or informal linkages are there? Well, further thought and some discussion has helped me recognize some possible candidates. *Caring Connections* is not the only such linkage. Some focus on both church bodies focusing on issues of a more practical, clinical manner: the Lutheran Diaconal Association, linkages within ACPE and other pastoral care organizations (pan-Lutheran breakfasts at national meetings, etc.) Others focus on concerns of a more academic manner, such as American Lutheran Publicity Bureau and Lutheran Forum. You can probably think of others. All of this comforts me. God finds multiple means of keeping God's Church supportive of one another. I hope this helps us all be able to let go of our little e-magazine more easily.

So long, beloved co-workers in Specialized Ministries... it's been good to work with you and for you. God bless us, everyone.

—**Chuck Weinrich**, Co-editor 2008-2017

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MY MOST CHERISHED FEATURE of our Lutheran theology is found in the phrase “Simul Justus et Peccator,” that is, at the same we are saint and sinner. It gives me license to claim other juxtaposed things at the same time. As I reflect on the conclusion of our cherished journal *Caring Connections*, I feel fervently, and at the same time, both grief and joy.

I feel grief for what will be an absence. An absence of relationships. An absence of inter-relation among traditions that have lost other ways of inter-relating. I feel grief that our avocation will lose a place to share ideas and learnings that have nurtured me and so many others for so many years.

I feel joy for what has been. My joy is in great pride that we did something utterly unique together inside our pastoral care avocation, we sustained a prized publication through volunteer effort for over twenty years. I am grateful to the leadership of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for the considerable in-kind contributions that they gave toward sustaining the effort over many years.

Through the journal, I met countless people, readers, writers and contributors, editorial board members, who have all enriched my life personally and professionally. I feel joy for all that has happened over that time. I am grateful to have been a small part of the effort, and will always hold all of you as cherished colleagues and friends.

—**Kevin Massey**, Editor/Co-editor 2005-2012

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I RECEIVED THE NEWS that *Caring Connections* will soon cease publication with deep sadness but no surprise. I feel privileged to have been part of *Caring Connections* from its beginning, first serving on the editorial board and later for a couple years as a co-editor with Diane Greve. Both of these experiences helped me appreciate the hard work that goes into producing a professional journal that is both substantive and readable. They also helped keep me connected in a special way to my many Lutheran colleagues in specialized pastoral ministry.

When I became a co-editor, I was professionally challenged and stretched in ways that were humbling, stimulating, and rewarding. I'm grateful for the patience and partnership of everyone who submitted articles upon my request when I was co-editor. It was the source of great pride when I finally saw the final product appear online. I would be remiss if I didn't single out Chrissy Thomas for her masterful work in putting the finishing touches on each issue. Thanks also to Bruce Hartung, my seminary classmate and friend, for assuming the role of co-editor when it was time for me to step down.

I completely understand and affirm the reasons Diane and Bruce cite for why *Caring Connections* will no longer be published, but such understanding is accompanied with considerable sadness. I'm personally grateful to the current editorial board members and all those who served in that capacity throughout its distinguished history. With much gratitude...

—**Lee Joesten**, Co-editor 2018-2020

Prophetic Imagination: Reengaging, Reimagining, and Reclaiming Lutheran Identity in Ministry

Karen Martinson Cherwien

EVERYTHING IS CHANGING. Those of us in ministry, whether we serve as chaplains, academics, congregational clergy, or in a myriad of other roles, can easily affirm this statement. The ways we work with patients, families, students, and congregants have adapted much in recent days. We work with an increasingly religiously unaffiliated population. Many of our neighbors face a myriad of challenges and threats to their health, safety, and well-being. We know that change frequently cultivates fear within us, especially facing an uncertain future. When our patients, families, students, congregants, or community members experience a crisis, we often have an opportunity to journey with them for a time, to help them begin to discern and forge a pathway in a new reality. But, given the currently uncertain nature of the future, whether personally or professionally, we may do well to both return to our roots as Lutherans and to engage more fully what Walter Brueggemann describes as “the prophetic imagination.”¹

The question lies before us. What does it mean to be a Lutheran minister in a world strewn with change and uncertainty? As Lutherans, we are rooted in a tradition that began with a genuine reimagining of and reengagement with Christianity. Luther and others took the stagnant, rigid practices of their time and context, and reinvigorated them so that they spoke in new ways. They engaged prophetic imagination, envisioning a new future for the church, even amid trepidation and fear in the face of threat. Our current endeavor remains remarkably similar: to imagine and reimagine what it means to be Lutheran today.

“It is the task of prophetic ministry and imagination,” writes Brueggemann, “to bring people to engage their experiences of suffering to death.”² Through this process, through sharing these stories, particularly with facilitation by a clergy member or spiritual care provider, people can begin to identify the parts of their story that keep them stuck, which they have not yet fully explored or reconciled, and work to rewire them.³ Today, our experiences of suffering and death vary greatly, and are disproportionately experienced by those who do not neatly fit into the cishet, white, Christian human category. Our Lutheran

They engaged prophetic imagination, envisioning a new future for the church, even amid trepidation and fear in the face of threat.

1 Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989).

2 Ibid, 46.

3 Karen Martinson Cherwien, “Pneumaplasticity: Rewiring the Human Soul,” *Journal of Pastoral Care Counseling* 70, no. 2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1542305016647741>, 143.

identity calls us to utilize words and rituals from our tradition that speak life and healing; “to reactivate out of our historical past symbols that always have been vehicles for redemptive honesty.”⁴ We are called to imagine and reimagine how these words may best speak to the world today, to offer a doorway into the “alternative consciousness”⁵ Brueggeman describes.

Simultaneously, remaining rooted in our Lutheran identity, we also must remain in relationship with others, particularly those who may not share our exact perspectives or experiences. We might consider the ways we are already interconnected, much like the roots of giant redwoods or aspen trees. Truly listening to the stories of others, we continue to learn how much we have in common. As we facilitate public expressions of fear and terror that have been previously denied or suppressed,⁶ this interconnection becomes increasingly apparent. Imagination, especially prophetic imagination, is both dangerous⁷ and necessary in these times. “It is the vocation of the prophet to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on conjuring and proposing alternative futures to the single one [those in power want] to urge as the only thinkable one. Indeed, poetic imagination is the last way left in which to challenge and conflict the dominant reality.”⁸ Having trustworthy relationships and community can and must be a protective and stabilizing factor for creative people speaking truth, because “every totalitarian regime is frightened of the artist.”⁹

We might consider the ways we are already interconnected, much like the roots of giant redwoods or aspen trees. Truly listening to the stories of others, we continue to learn how much we have in common.

As Lutherans, our invitation to reengage and reimagine our roots also invites us to reclaim our identity. The new future we continue to imagine emerges in process and may include some occasional missteps. However, as we meet people where they are at, in their current realities, and engage with them, we can help them to utilize their pneumaplasticity¹⁰ to reimagine and rewire pathways that have become broken or corroded.

We begin with grief for much that has been lost. Brueggeman observed, “because we have neglected the lament pieces, we are ill-equipped for the loss that we are facing in our society. We keep pretending and denying that that’s not happening to us.”¹¹ Creating space for and facilitating lament offers people the ability to begin to adapt their story to their current experience, and to utilize skills they have developed

4 Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 49.

5 *Ibid.*, 44.

6 *Ibid.*, 50.

7 *Ibid.*, 45.

8 *Ibid.*, 45.

9 *Ibid.*, 45.

10 K. M. Cherwien, “Pneumaplasticity,” 143.

11 “Walter Brueggeman: The Prophetic Imagination,” *On Being* with Krista Tippett, accessed 18 January 2025, <https://onbeing.org/programs/walter-brueggemann-the-prophetic-imagination-dec2018/>.

to help them not only cope, but to forge new and healthy pathways for themselves. “[The] task is reframing so that we can re-experience the social realities that are right in front of us from a different angle,”¹² Brueggemann states. Poetry, metaphor, and creative expression of all kinds are the doorways that continuously open¹³ and deepen pathways to new and renewed imagination. As we empower people to share their stories, and imagine or reimagine new pathways for themselves, we also empower them to imagine and claim (or reclaim) the metaphors; to write the songs that open and transform their hearts. Susan Palo Cherwien accurately described this. One of the great gifts of hymns is their capacity for ambiguity, for many layers of meaning—which allow each worshiper, each singer of the hymn, to find one’s own place, one’s own particular meaning, in the hymn’s metaphors and images.¹⁴

In each situation, in each experience of pain, suffering, and death, our tradition reminds us that new life also emerges.¹⁵ As Lutheran leaders, we are called to speak truth both metaphorically and concretely “about the real deathliness that hovers over us and gnaws within us...with the candor born of anguish and passion,”¹⁶ and “about hope [and]...the real newness that comes to us and redefines our situation.”¹⁷ Acknowledging and embracing the mystery and fear that continue to emerge, may we both remain rooted as Lutherans and also be open to the ways that prophetic imagination can help us to discern anew and rewire the best pathways forward, as ministers, as leaders, as neighbors, as God’s beloved, all.



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12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Susan Palo Cherwien, “Embraced into the vine,” *The Christian Century* (April, 2015), accessed 11 January 2025, <https://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2015-04/embraced-vine>.

15 e.g., *simul justus et peccator*.

16 Brueggeman, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 50.

17 Ibid, 69.

When There are No Words: Perceiving the IS-NESS of God in Totalizing Circumstances

Mark Whitsett

HERE IS AN IRONY! I've known, for months, that there would be a moment in time when I would have to sit down and reflect, try to make sense of, share feelings, engage the topic, use words to describe my sense of ... and there it is, no words! No words except, really two, ... "Stirred up." No irony in that. But, if you consult an online thesaurus, the search claims there are 1,480 other possible synonyms for being stirred up! And yet why no words for me?

I was first aware of being 'stirred up' when it was recommended that the *Caring Connections* Editorial Board use Walter Bruggemann's book, *The Prophetic Imagination*,¹ as a foil for evaluating the present and future of *Caring Connections*. The stirring up came not at the suggestion of referencing the book but came in the middle of the night when, once again, sleeplessness was asserting itself. My solution? Begin reading Bruggemann's book! My certain logic was that an academic, theological treatise would be just the thing for insomnia. Was I wrong!

I was stirred up. Why? At first, I was a bit miffed at a lot of jargon but then I realized that this unique set of terms were ways of filling out what was more of a perception, an undefined sense of the reality of the Divine/human transaction ... in this case, with God, Moses, Pharaoh and the Hebrew people (and me/us too). The prophetic Moses carries not merely words on behalf of God but a way of imaging the Divine character and mindset as counter to the royal and populist culture of Egypt and as counter to the "normal" enslaved way of life for the Hebrew people.

They too had, not words, but a cry of anguish into a universe that seems to hold nothing for them. Yet that lament was received by God even though these were a people who knew little to nothing about this God. Their cry was an entry point for the Divine to reveal the false claims of Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt over and against the substantive reality of the God who is eternally acting, overcoming, always present and is achieving freedom for broken people. This is the I AM God, the ONLY God, the One.

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Now, my point is not to give a reflective summary of *The Prophetic Imagination*. Really, the stirring up is about discovering in Bruggemann's descriptions a vocabulary. These are words that identify and give a set of conceptual hooks to

1 Bruggemann, Walter, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987.

describe the encounter with the One True God as the basis for hope and a way of life rooted in God's imaginative love for the Hebrew people, and ultimately for the world, as revealed in the Gospel. This is no mere academic, intellectual or theological description but a concrete, ongoing present reality. Bruggemann posits these descriptions as simply what the biblical texts unfold over and over again throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and into the New Testament accounts.

But how is this stirring, exciting, activating, discomfiting, troubling and also hope-filling? How is it the kind of stuff that is NOT a prescription for insomnia but a powerful cosmic/Spirit-directed alternative for the community of Israel, the church and humans in every space and time? For me, lights come on and things begin agitating when

Bruggemann starts talking about "totalism." Now, those who may have read the book *The Prophetic Imagination* might say, "I don't remember such a reference." You are technically accurate. In the original work Bruggemann identifies the phenomenon of the *royal consciousness* as characterized in the all-captivating, cultural ways of acting and thinking found in the regime of Pharaoh but also in the life of Israel both in Egypt and post-exodus. However, in the 40th anniversary edition of his book, Bruggeman writes this postscript:

I used the phrase "royal consciousness" to refer to the socio-ideological context in which Israel's ancient prophets performed. I would now alter "royal consciousness" to "totalism," thus making the reference more readily transferable to other contexts... The term "totalism" refers to a socio-ideological arrangement in which hegemonic ideology takes up all the social space and allows for no alternative possibility. Its claim is "total"! ²

Totalism in this sense is the human propensity to exert authority and power over others with a mindset that *overrules all other possibilities*. For the Hebrew people in Egypt, totalism was the notion that the Hebrew's place was servitude to the house of Pharaoh. They had no memory of Joseph's contribution to the economic, political and even spiritual stability in Egypt for centuries. Totalism in this sense is the reality of an all-encompassing *bondage* (sin, death and the devil) that is not only the experience of the Hebrew people but also of the Egyptians who have no sense of the God who IS (I AM) and is the ONLY ONE ultimately at work.

It took revelation of the Divine Word (in the burning Bush), encounters of power (plagues), and Divine demands to free a people and their spiritual mindset the status quo (i.e. of a subjugating human nature and the false hope in gods who were no gods at all) was broken. This is ALL at the instigation of the Divine Imagination and

Bruggemann posits these descriptions as simply what the biblical texts unfold over and over again throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and into the New Testament accounts.

2 Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*, 40th Anniversary Edition. Fortress Press. Kindle Edition. (location 2600)

communicated by Moses in word and action as a counter to Pharaoh, all of Egypt and to the supposed normal state of the Hebrew people.

We know this story, yet we do not. Why is this? I think it is because of the propensity “to long for the flesh pots of Egypt.” It is to have the mindset that certain ways of doing things, certain ways of thinking, certain kinds of leaders and certain kinds of followers will assure a more stable way of life. At least that is the hope. And there is the crux of the matter i.e., the thing we cling to in HOPE!

The Hebrew Scriptures continuously identify this problem of people putting their hope in objects that they imagine to give well-being. But these are really human inventions and have no life in them at all. People forget, or are simply ignorant, of where they come from and from Whom they have come and Who holds all things together. This is a totalism, a bondage that is broken and replaced in the freedom of God offered and given in the Gospel of Christ (Cross, Resurrection, Ascension, and Return).

The Hebrew Scriptures continuously identify this problem of people putting their hope in objects that they imagine to give well-being. But these are really human inventions and have no life in them at all.

So, what meaning does this have for the season we have known in *Caring Connections*, a Journal for Chaplains, Pastoral Counselors and Caregivers with a perspective rooted in Lutheran heritage and theology? I think that there is a remembered sense of well-being as we have learned from each other and an appreciation of the fellowship encountered. There is a gratitude for the common ground that was and is included in the hundreds of writings and reflections offered over the years. There is a sense that *Caring Connections* was and is more than a mere human invention or imagination but has come from the Revelation of Word and Sacrament to announce liberty to those in bondage (including ourselves!) providing a “way out,” an Exodus that is found in Christ.

Then why bring this season to a close if *Caring Connections* has and is doing these good things? Well, if we do live (and die!) in seasons, then it is a reminder that ultimately, we are not the ones who have the kingdom, the power and the glory. The Divine Imagination, the way God visions the cosmos, the creation of the human world, and the Divine liberty that engages humans with peace/faith/hope/love in Christ, does. You, me, journals as human works do not continue, at least not in the same way. To preserve a particular way of doing things was never the intent.

But, there is still the need for the prophetic word/imagination to break into our thoughts and actions, to remind us of and renew in us the reality of the Divine Imagination. This imagination is always present, always at work and always seeking people out where they are and breaking the bonds that would totally overcome us. These are encounters that can, and do, break into the stuck-ness, the helplessness, to the point that people will cry out from the heart for the freedom and hope that God provides, especially in Christ. For it “does not yet appear what we shall be.” (1 Jn 3:2);

God is able/willing to do more than we think/imagine or ask (Eph 3:20); And, “we have no continuing City” (Heb. 13:14).

Yet, we do always have a place in the ONE who IS.



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The Enduring Relevance of Prophetic Imagination

John Schumacher

LIKE MANY OF MY “BOOMER” PEERS I am beginning to recognize that my future housing options may not include dedicated space for a study. Slowly, I have begun the process of downsizing my library, but I am quickly learning that no one wants books. Not seminaries. Not libraries. Not congregations. I was directed to an organization which collects textbooks for overseas seminaries and learned it was not interested in textbooks published or purchased while I was in seminary. Too old. Sadly, that parameter excludes a number of valuable resources from my library including many volumes in the excellent critical/historical commentary series, *Hermeneia*, the Tillich three-volume we all read, E. Clifford Nelson’s Lutheran histories, the first volumes of *Luther’s Works* I purchased, and Walter Brueggemann’s *The Prophetic Imagination*, published my graduation year, 1978.

I can appreciate the practical reality. As we “Boomers” retire, there is no place in this digital world for all the volumes we have acquired over forty or fifty years in ministry. As much as we love our books, we must face the certainty that they, like us, will soon be just so much landfill. However, there is double irony in including *The Prophetic Imagination* among these unwanted and soon to be forgotten books.

First, central to Brueggemann’s argument is that prophetic imagination is necessary exactly when the community has forgotten its past. Moses, the prophet par excellence, through the Exodus experience evokes for the community an alternate reality which stands over against the royal reality of the Egyptians. The Egyptian religion of static triumphalism, a worship of gods who were “no gods,” justified the hierarchical social order with the Pharaoh on top, and enabled a political system of oppression and exploitation which assured that “kings did prosper and bricks did get made.” (Brueggemann, p. 17)

However, evolving under David and achieving full expression under Solomon, the community had abandoned its memory of the political and religious revolution Moses sustained, and embraced the model seen in its neighbors, a pre-Mosaic imperialism. The dynamic religion of God’s freedom and the politics of human justice which resulted from the radical criticism and dismantling of the Egyptian empire was no more. Forgetting promoted the rise of prophetic voices — Jeremiah, Amos, Isaiah, Jesus. “The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of dominant culture around us.” (Brueggemann, p. 13)

Evolving under David and achieving full expression under Solomon, the community had abandoned its memory of the political and religious revolution Moses sustained, and embraced the model seen in its neighbors, a pre-Mosaic imperialism.

Those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it.

The second irony in excluding Brueggemann from our libraries is in the absolute timeliness of this work. As I write, our country is experiencing the first week of a national administration which embodies many characteristics of an imperialistic reality. Its vision is shaped by:

- An economics of affluence which assures the most well-off receive greatest benefit from the system and those below the top 1% are sufficiently satiated that they are rendered deaf to the cries of the poor.
- A politics of oppression which dismisses the cries of those at the margins as the voices of radicals and socialists and sees the oppressors as the “defenders” of the “truly deserving.”
- A religion of imminence and accessibility which sees God as close at hand and manipulable to justify and defend the established social order.

This vision makes clear the need for a prophetic voice which can both challenge the dominant reality and offer a sufficiently creative and imaginative vision to energize the community to again see and champion an alternate future rooted in the Mosaic revolution.

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On Tuesday, January 21, 2025, a prophet spoke from the Mosaic vision of reality, a vision of compassion and humility, to those coming to power in the government of the United States of America. The Right Reverend Mariann Edgar Budde, Episcopal Bishop of Washington, DC, spoke to all of us, but specifically to the new President and his administration during the National Prayer Service at the Washington National Cathedral. She began her homily with

“My warm welcome to all... As a country we have gathered this morning to pray for unity as a people and a nation, not for agreement, political or otherwise, but for the kind of unity that fosters community across diversity and division, a unity that serves the common good.”

Addressing the President directly, the Bishop asked:

“In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now. There are gay, lesbian, and transgendered children in Democratic, Republican, and independent families, some who fear for their lives. And the people – the people who pick our crops, and clean our office buildings, who labor in poultry farms and meat-packing plants, who wash the dishes after we eat in restaurants, and work the night shifts in hospitals – they may not be

citizens, or have the proper documentation, but the vast majority of immigrants are not criminals. They pay taxes and are good neighbors.”

The Bishop concluded her homily,

“Our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were all once strangers in this land. May God grant us the strength and courage to honor the dignity of every human being, to speak the truth to one another in love and walk humbly with each other and our God, for the good of all people in this nation and the world. Amen.”

The response from those embracing an imperial vision was strong and immediate. The President-elect called the Right Reverend Budde a “radical left hard line Trump hater.” Many demanded an apology, and one member of Congress suggested the bishop be deported. (She was born in New Jersey.)

Brueggemann notes in his conclusion that among the responsibilities of prophetic ministry are two interconnected tasks – to penetrate our numbness so that we recognize the death in which we are caught, and the second, to penetrate our despair which destroys our hope for the future. The first task requires that we name and lament our experience of death. We are moved to acknowledge the losses we have experienced in this election. The second requires energy and imagination, the energy Bishop Budde brings in her vision of a community which holds compassion, dignity, justice, and humility as its guiding values. Prophetic imagination and hope are inseparable.

Finally, Brueggeman observes we all caught up in and stifled by our participation in the dominant vision. This is especially true of those who serve in parish settings where the responsibility for institutional success – or simply survival – may take priority over offering a prophetic and possibly divisive voice. Perhaps we who are retired, or serve outside parish settings, or find ourselves otherwise less encumbered will find greater freedom to bring prophetic imagination to the reality we now experience. Like Bishop Budde may we, given the opportunity, speak truth to power.



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Swan Song? Maybe not!

Philip Kuehnert

*Hamlet: Where Joy most revels, grief doth most lament
Grief joys, joy grieves, on slender accident.*

*Psalm 30:5 Weeping may spend the night,
But joy comes in the morning.*

A SWAN SONG? By all definitions this is a swan song: personally, professionally. It is a time to grieve and say, “that’s all, folks.” Brueggemann¹ says, “Not so quick.”

Since retiring in 2010, my role on the editorial board of *Caring Connections* has been my primary connection with the Lutheran specialized ministry community. After this issue *Caring Connections* will no longer be the living and vital publication that showcased the best in practice and in theory in the “specialized” discipline of pastoral care among Lutherans.

The demise of *Caring Connection* echoes the ending of so much of the infrastructure that previously supported pastoral counseling, clinical pastoral education and chaplaincy outside the parish.

We should not be surprised that there is an analogous situation in scripture, nor should we be surprised that the prophets would be, of all the voices of scripture, the ones who clearly not only articulate our present situation but also provide a path forward. What should surprise us is that almost fifty years ago, the Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann should have written a book that stunningly captures the present moment in the socioeconomic context of 5th and 6th century Israel and Judah. The ending of *Caring Connections* is only a micro event in the ubiquitous endings that have marked the world since Adam and Eve’s time in the garden.

It is a cycle that can be identified in every age and in every culture. In the hubris of humanity, there will always be the oppressor and the oppressed, but there will always be God’s intervention to give humanity a fresh start.

In Brueggemann’s reading of the prophets Jeremiah, Amos and Isaiah, God’s intervention was the covenant with Abraham, a covenant that was finally restored in apocalyptic fashion in the Exodus. There the covenant of human obligation was sealed on Sinai and forged in the wilderness. Purified and humiliated, the people of Israel occupy the promised land and are unable to keep their part of the covenant. They cried out to be like others, especially when it seemed that the burgeoning population presented the full panel of vicissitudes that come

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¹ Brueggemann, Walter, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978

with governance. The perceived wisdom of the people was that a King was needed. From Saul on, the Kings proved not be equal to the temptations of power. According to Brueggemann's reading, by the sixth century a *royal consciousness* and *imperial reality* had fossilized. Numb to the cry of the people and in denial about their fragility, the fog of *permeance* settled.

The accoutrements that absolute power bought were symbolized by Solomon's grand plans in building the temple and fortifying Jerusalem. For Brueggemann's analysis, the *imperial reality* and *royal consciousness* resulted in three institutions: the *economics of affluence*, the politics of oppression and the *religion of immanence*. Caught in this web of interlocking realities, the arrogance of *permanence* made it impossible to see the empty shell of once was. *The imperial reality* and *royal consciousness* of the established kingdom ignored God's intention for his people. Brueggemann construct of the "prophetic imagination" brings clarity but also the path forward.

Within this community we are invited to collectively allow our grief to be transformed into an alternate community yet to be imagined.

The prophet's first reaction is not to confront the powers that be, but to grieve. Jeremiah's plaintive cry provides the context for an *alternative reality* and an *alternative consciousness* resulting in a community that can imagine a future (the prophetic imagination) that is conceived in the freedom of God. This God stands in opposition to and in judgment of the *religion of immanence* which had put God in the box of the temple... a God that was NOT free but rather a God who served at the will of the *royal consciousness*, a God who was immutable.

The Editorial Board of *Caring Connections* dares an audacious appropriation of Brueggemann's analysis. All those who saw the infrastructure for Lutheran Specialized Ministry as somewhat permanent, are grieving what once was. Within this community we are invited to collectively allow our grief to be transformed into an alternate community yet to be imagined. This new community is defined by an alternative consciousness (against the cultural drift) and an alternative social reality (following the teachings and life of Jesus). The result is an energized community that embraces the unpredictability of the freedom of God. For all who grieve, the community lives in hope-filled amazement that celebrates the freedom of God.

Brueggemann states this hypothesis: *The royal consciousness leads people to despair about the power to move toward new life. It is the task of prophetic imagination to bring people to engage the promise of newness that is at work in our history with God.*²

The historian Timothy Snyder's most recent book *On Freedom*³ presents a remarkable analysis of the socio-political realities of our world. Snyder's analysis

2 Brueggeman, pp 59–60.

3 Snyder, Timothy. *On Freedom*. New York: Crown, 2024

seems to mirror Brueggemann's analysis of 5th and 6th century Israel. I think that the infrastructure that supported inter-Lutheran specialized ministry has collapsed in a way that corresponds to the collapse of the *imperial reality* and the *royal consciousness*.

What might the prophetic role be when there seems to be no future? According to Brueggemann's reading of Jeremiah, Amos and Isaiah, they saw no future. The prophetic role was to grieve, gather a community of those who were grieving and in the strength of the community to *imagine* an alternate reality. This would be an alternate consciousness that is defined by the freedom of God. God is free to be YHWH, whoever she/he wishes to be.

The second of Snyder's five pillars necessary for a people to be free is *unpredictability*. (The other pillars of his argument are *sovereignty*, *mobility*, *factuality* and *solidarity*.) The key connection is how Snyder's *unpredictability* parallels Brueggemann's *freedom of God*. This is where Brueggemann ends – the path forward will be something that we cannot imagine, but that we hope for.

After all, who could have imagined a century ago that a mentally ill pastor would see a need and an opportunity for pastoral care? A cloud of Spirit-filled people – many now sainted – caught the vision. After a small beginning, the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) and the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC) grew and provided education, collegial support and clinical training for chaplains and pastoral counselors. Now we grieve as these structures evolve. We know that the need and the opportunity will never go away. It is beyond our imagination how God's freedom will meet that need.



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Making Way for New Possibilities

Anna Rudberg Speiser

AS WE COME TO THE LAST EDITION of *Caring Connections*, I feel both sad and grateful. Sadness at the closing of a journal that has given me inspiration, challenge, and new knowledge, and a group of fellow chaplain board members that have been sources of wisdom, kindness, and many laughs— and so much gratefulness for the gifts they, and so many contributors and readers have shared with this journal. It strikes me as an apt task to reflect on the work of this journal and its impact through the lens of Walter Brueggemann’s notions of “prophetic voice.”¹ He emphasizes that prophets are not about predicting the future, they’re about lamenting, reflecting, advocating, and offering a hopeful vision for what could be— about holding power accountable while also imagining a new way forward. This journal has been a space for chaplains to build community, and to reflect and advocate for spiritual care in its richest form possible.

Although I have not been a chaplain for nearly as many years as many of my fellow board members, many of whom carry a rich institutional memory of days gone by, I have been warmly welcomed into this space. And I have been struck again and again by my colleagues’ wise way of navigating both great dedication to this journal, as well as a clear-eyed vision of changing times and the realities of our current moment. It’s not always easy to avoid being bogged down by nostalgia or “how it used to be” but Brueggemann pushes us to find that balance between lament but also hope, looking back with sadness for what is gone, but always with a sense of hope for what may be. The many writers, contributors, and editors who have generously offered their time have been an invaluable part of fostering a Lutheran chaplain community, sharing hard-earned wisdom and important ideas and reflections. I am richer for what has been shared here.

A central idea for Brueggemann is that of lament. Time should be made for the important feelings of sadness, frustration, regret, and fond memories. Perhaps it is helpful to remember that in Brueggemann’s framework, lament isn’t just about expressing sorrow but about confronting injustice, calling attention to suffering, disrupting the status quo, and creating space for deeper reflection and transformation. Lament does not just acknowledge grief—it also exposes the brokenness of the world and invites a response. For Brueggemann, lament is not a passive act but a prophetic one, a means of resisting complacency and opening the door to hope, healing, and the possibility of renewal in the face of suffering. How can

Lament does not just acknowledge grief—it also exposes the brokenness of the world and invites a response.

1—Brueggemann, Walter, *The Prophetic Imagination*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978.

we use our own feelings of sadness about changes we see in our church, our work, our society to spur us to work for change and hope, especially for those most vulnerable? How can we use the sadness at the closing of this journal to inspire us toward building new relationships and communities that challenge us to use our work as chaplains for the greatest good? Brueggemann speaks to the need for an “alternative imagination.” Prophets do not just critique what is wrong—they help people see what is possible. At its best, *Caring Connections* and the many writers, editors, and contributors did the same, offering new ways to think about spiritual care, ethical dilemmas, and patient well-being. How can each of us continue to seek ways to share innovative ideas, challenges, and hopes?

Finally, Brueggemann’s vision of the prophetic voice is not just about lament. Even in loss, there’s the possibility of new beginnings. The closing of *Caring Connections* does not have to mean the end of deep conversations about chaplaincy, but simply that they must now take new forms. Our Christian call is to a God who is not just Creator but always creating, and a Lutheran tradition that we see as not just reformed but always reforming. The key is to keep speaking, keep imagining, and keep challenging ourselves and others. Brueggemann’s work reminds us that the prophetic voice often thrives both inside but also outside of institutions. The prophetic mission continues—always needing new ways to be heard. Even as one platform disappears, the call for justice, compassion and hope will find new ways to break through.

The “cloud of witnesses” who have been involved in this publication through writing, editing, reading, and supporting have and will continue to inspire and challenge me. I pray that the voices, insights, and prophetic challenges which were shared through this journal will not be lost. And I do not doubt that they will continue to live on in the chaplains and caregivers who were shaped by the community’s reflected and wisdom shared here. Just as the prophetic tradition endures beyond any single institution, the wisdom shared in the journal remains part of the ongoing spiritual and ethical discourse in healthcare. The closing of one chapter does not mean the end of the story—it simply means the legacy must find new expressions.



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Reflecting on Prophetic Imagination

Alexandra George

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN'S BOOK, *The Prophetic Imagination*, is not a quick read. I spent quite a bit of time dwelling in the Foreword and Brueggemann's Prefaces to the first and second editions before I moved into the first chapter. I will focus my reflection on the Foreword and Prefaces.

In the Foreword to the 40th Anniversary edition, Davis Hankins, reviews Brueggemann's main paradigm, namely that prophetic imagination proceeds through these basic steps:

1. it refuses denial and penetrates despair with honest cries over pain and loss that result from social injustices;
2. it overcomes amnesia by drawing on ancient, artistic traditions that energize the community to imagine and live into a more just order; and,
3. it ends in hope and gratitude for the surprising gift of an emancipated future.

Prophetic imagination is a process that requires humans to work in concert with our Creator, God. When humans err and cause extreme harm through war, chaos, greed, dominance over others, we are incompatible with God's paradigm of grace and mercy. God brings the world into balance and nudges us in the direction of justice and peace. "This world, no more shadow of ideas in an upper sphere, is real, but not absolute; the world's reality contingent upon compatibility with God." (Flannery O'Connor) We are created by God to be on this journey with God.

Throughout human history there have been examples of imbalance in the world. There are many examples of God restoring balance in the world by sending prophets and inspired leaders to offer hope. In Chapter 1, Brueggemann retells the story of Moses through the eyes of prophetic imagination. God, through Moses, "dismantles the politics of oppression and exploitation" and counters it with a "politics of justice and compassion." It is a "new social community to match the vision of God's freedom." In parting the Red Sea, God dramatically broke through 200 years of oppression and created a new freedom. The oppressive government was broken by God and the oppressed were made free. A new paradigm was created in the world. Prophetic imagination invites us to live into a new vision, not yet realized so that we are prepared when the new paradigm emerges.

I paused my reading at this point to reflect on the role of prophetic imagination in my own history as an African American woman. African Americans were ripped

God brings the world into balance and nudges us in the direction of justice and peace.

from thriving communities in Africa and forced into slavery in America starting in the 17th Century.

African Americans were able to survive because they looked forward to freedom and saw a world for them that was better than where they were at that time. God's breaking in came in several times in history to bring us where we are today.

My ancestors from Africa survived in America because they had a strong memory of the traditions from their homeland. Slaves wrote music, spoken word, and expressions of art pointed to hope and freedom. The enslaved chose to live inside "God's imagination" (Brueggemann) as that was where they could find freedom which was intangible to them in that moment. Prophetic imagination gave the community hope to overcome unbearable obstacles and a strong will to persevere because a new life was on the horizon.

"The fact is that we in American society too easily live 'inside this imagination' when prophetic imagination can enable us to live inside "God's imagination" Clearly human transformative activity depends upon a transformed imagination. (Brueggemann)

Prophetic imagination gave the community hope to overcome unbearable obstacles and a strong will to persevere because a new life was on the horizon.

God hears the silent cries of all the oppressed in North America and around the world. This worldly imagination is one side of the scale and God's imagination offers a timely calibration to move the scale towards grace and compassion. Prophetic imagination reminds us that we have a responsibility to do our best to create a just and peaceful world and we must rely on God to help us move mountains when situations seem impossible.

For many years the Lutheran Chaplain publication, *Caring Connections*, offered a platform for Lutheran Chaplains to review and discuss chaplain issues through a Lutheran lens. Recently, the *Caring Connections* Editorial Committee made the difficult decision to end production of this resource. The reasons are many, but one primary reason is that we are in a new paradigm. This new paradigm indicates that we accomplished our goal and now it is time for the next group of Lutheran Chaplains to sustain community and to develop communication in a new paradigm.

I encourage you to add *The Prophetic Imagination* to your reading list as it will help you view life with new eyes. Prophetic voices will always be one step ahead of us. "God can raise up prophets and authorize prophetic voices and deeds in the fullness of God's own freedom, anywhere, anytime, in any circumstance." God continues to break in through new leaders, new voices to balance the scale. God will deliver the new prophetic voice through new leaders that will be very different from Moses, Martin Luther King, Jr., or Maya Angelou, for example. Amanda Gorman started writing poetry at a young age and may be one of those new prophetic voices as she inspires us to live in hope for a new world and for each of us to be an agent of change.

Where there is a voice pointing us toward hope and God's imagination we need to pay attention and join with those on that path.



Rev. M. Alexandra George was ordained as a Lutheran (ELCA) pastor in 1999. She served at Zion Lutheran Church in Minneapolis and at the church's non-profit ZOOM House. She followed her passion for chaplaincy and began her residency at United Hospital, St. Paul, MN in 2005. After completing her training, George worked on-call and part-time at Twin Cities hospitals, including pediatric settings. George became a staff chaplain position at Mercy Hospital in 2012 and was Board Certified by the Association of Professional Chaplains in 2013. In 2015 she accepted a full-time pediatric chaplain position at Children's Minnesota, St. Paul campus. She retired in 2024 from her position as manager of spiritual care at Hennepin Health, Minneapolis and is now a part-time chaplain at Children's Minnesota in Minneapolis. She is a member of the Caring Connections Editorial Board.

Alleluia!

Mel Jacob

EARLIER THIS SUMMER, our pastor at Peace Lutheran, West Seattle, Washington, asked if I could pulpit supply on September 8th. “Sure,” I said and then added, “That is the 50th anniversary date of my ordination.”

”That’ll be great,” he responded. Later, we communicated around his desire to lift up the ordination and my desire that it not be the Sunday worship focus. We agreed the Children’s Message might be a bridge.

On display during the Children’s Message was an ordination gift I had received from my parents, a festival stole designed by the Sisters of O’Fallon northwest of St. Louis (pictured here). It was mostly closeted for fifty years with only occasional use for installations or festival worship services in which I was involved.

Eight elementary kids gathered for the Children’s Message. These young worshippers seemed eager to answer my question: “What makes birthday celebrations so special?”

“GIFTS!” was their immediate response.

In turn, I showed them the stole that was my special gift from my parents on my “ordination birth-day.” I asked them to share what they saw on this gift that was given to me at the beginning of my ministry.

Not knowing what to expect, I prepared that someone would identify the symbols. Silly me! Immediately, instead, they pointed out the word “Alleluia” and the bright colors. Unexpected energy unfolded. How could I not squelch it and, yet, lift up God’s Trinitarian presence as Creator, Savior, & Renewing Spirit?

Suddenly I had an “ah-ha” and shifted to an on-the-spot goal, postponing until “another time” my crafted words on the Trinity’s symbols. The children’s responses in the moment focused on what brought meaning to them. Now, the goal became an opportunity to share a loving God who brings sunshine and Alleluias.

As I ended with a thanks for being with them, a 10-year-old girl asked, “What about a prayer?” Yes! Then came a prayer for our time together as God’s children...learning and connecting about God’s love as we all were.

Since that worship service, I’ve been reflecting on my 50th...especially what I gleaned from the children. “Alleluia” became their message to *me*... a special 50th Ordination birthday gift. “Alleluia” is a word filled with deep significance. As



Now, the goal became an opportunity to share a loving God who brings sunshine and Alleluias.

I reflected on the most recent topic of *Caring Connections*, I recognized that the children became my mentors.

With 50 years of memories I am made aware that often, even with Alleluias, it may not be easy to give back. Yet it is so important! Relationships over fifty years that have touched my heart have come into focus again, and I realize how much these relationships have been (re)creative, redemptive, and breezing in the spirit of grace.

Alleluia moments are most often, like the children's response, unplanned and unexpected!

“Alleluia!”



Mel Jacob graduated from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis in 1973. He completed one year of CPE in Atlanta and was ordained on September 8, 1974. Later, he earned a D.Min. degree at LTSS, Columbia, South Carolina. Prior to his retirement, he served as a parish pastor, Army Reserve and VA Chaplain, and developed an AAPC grounded, grace based Social Ministry Organization (SMO) alongside Recognized Service Organization (RSO) in Central Florida: Lutheran Counseling Services. In 2016 Mel received the Christos in Mundo award and has been a past contributor to Caring Connections.

Christus in Mundo 2025



It is with great enthusiasm that we announce **Don Stiger** as the next recipient of Christus in Mundo award. The date and location for the presentation is to be determined. We know that scores of chaplains, clinical educators, health care professionals, church leaders, and care recipients would endorse this recommendation.

Don has served the Church, healthcare ministry, and the disciplines of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and clinical education ably and energetically for nearly 50 years.

In his ministry, Don has experienced the breadth of health care chaplaincy, as resident and supervisor-in-training, chaplain, clinical educator, manager, church-wide executive, and healthcare corporation senior executive.

As an executive in the Division for Ministry of the ELCA, Don worked ceaselessly to make chaplaincy visible to the entire Church as a significant sign of the Church's ministry in the world. He was a true partner with colleagues in the LCMS through the Inter-Lutheran Committee on Specialized Pastoral Care and an ecumenical partner through his work with the Association of Professional Chaplains, the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, and the American Association of Pastoral Counselors as the ELCA endorser.

It is worth noting that he was “in the room where it happened” when the concept of *Caring Connections* was born. He also served as one of the volunteer co-editors from 2013–16. Above all, Don has been a tireless advocate, counselor, and friend to those who serve in ministries of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and clinical education. We all owe him a debt of gratitude.

Editors/Co-editors

- David McCurdy 2004–2005
- Kevin Massey 2005–2012
- Chuck Weinrich 2008–2017
- Don Stiger 2013–2016
- Diane Greve 2017–2025
- Lee Joesten 2018–2020
- Bruce Hartung 2020–2025

Editorial Board Members Over the Years

Over these 20 years, *Caring Connections* has been fortunate to have Editorial Board members who have contribute in so many ways. They have identified themes, writers and have been writers for many articles as well. Without these colleagues, *Caring Connections* could not have provided the spectrum to articles we have seen. Thank you!

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|------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| ▪ Heather Bumstead | ▪ Charles Keogh | ▪ John Schumacher |
| ▪ Anne Burton | ▪ Philip Kuehnert | ▪ Lorinda Schwarz |
| ▪ Bryn Carlson | ▪ BJ Larson | ▪ Judith Simonson |
| ▪ Ghislaine Cotnoir | ▪ Brian McCaffrey | ▪ Anna Rudberg Speiser |
| ▪ John Fale | ▪ David McCurdy | ▪ Don Stiger |
| ▪ David Ficken | ▪ Jim McDaniels | ▪ Dick Tetzloff |
| ▪ M. Alexandra “Alex” George | ▪ Jeff McPike | ▪ Chuck Weinrich |
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| ▪ Mark Holman | ▪ Dorothy Prybylski | ▪ Nancy Wigdahl |
| ▪ Larry Holst | ▪ Christopher Otten | ▪ James Wind |
| ▪ Lee Joesten | ▪ Janet Ramsey | ▪ David Wurster |
| | ▪ Dana Schroeder | ▪ Joe Varsanyi |

Authors of Articles for 20 Years of *Caring Connections*

Over the course of the 20 years of publication, approximately 325 individuals have written 530 articles; some have written several articles over this time. Thank you to each for sharing their thoughts and experiences in specialized ministries. The full archive and index can be found at: <https://lutheranservices.org/caring-connections-archive>

Achtenberg, Chelsea; Albertsen, Andres; Almen, Lowell G.; Amari, Therese; Anderson, Chris; Anderson, Darryl; Anderson, Herbert; Anderson, Karl; Armstrong, Rick [Interview]; Arnold, Steve; Asmelash, Alemseged “Alem”

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