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**ZION 12  
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It is an honor for me to be invited to speak at a Zion conference. This event has had a long and honorable history and purpose. I know of no other Christian denomination that regularly gathers people in specialized ministries for mutual encouragement and common study. An examination of the topics for Zion since the beginning would be an interesting way to study the development of specialized ministries of care in the Lutheran Church over the last decades. We would discover, I suspect, that some themes are constant while others have changed. We might also learn something of the evolution of pastoral care in the Lutheran tradition.

I did not fully grasp the consequence of accepting an invitation at the end of a professional career in pastoral care to “rethink the care of souls.” It has turned out to be a retrospective journey, a review of my work, examining how my mind has changed or not changed, and the major themes that have been constant throughout my career. I am very grateful for this opportunity to think through where we are going by looking at where we have been. I was most fortunate to have parish pastoral experience before teaching in a seminary and now again after teaching for 31 years, to have had an opportunity to do pastoral care in an Episcopal Cathedral for three years. And then to be invited to teach pastoral care and counseling at Yale Divinity School next year is just a lovely capstone. I will finally be able to teach the introduction to pastoral care for the 50th time next year. That is a roundabout way of saying that the process of preparation has produced more than you may either want or need to hear from me. It was good to do it for myself. I hope you will find support for your ministry or clarification for your struggles in what follows. You are free to use any or all of the material as seems appropriate to you. I am sorry that it has taken so long to do a simple revision but as an unreconstructed perfectionist, it is difficult for me to send out something that is not nearly perfect. Since I was with you in San Antonio, my life has taken another turn as my wife, Phyllis Anderson, has been elected President of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. I suspect some of you have had unexpected changes in your life as well.

Here is how I propose that we proceed. I hope we can be flexible enough to make adjustments according to issues that emerge. **1)** We begin with some reflection on the theme itself. **2)** Then a brief look at our general cultural context and the specific contexts of the health care. **3)** After we have some clarity about the context, I want explore with you the question ‘what does Lutheran theology have to contribute to rethink-

ing the care of souls in the light of the present context?’ That should finish us up this morning. **4)** We will begin tomorrow by looking at the questions you have identified that keep you awake at night that in turn will have kept me up tonight. **5)** Then a brief look at the social statement on health care and healing produced by the ELCA. Since I was Chair of the Task Force and Don Stiger was also on the Task Force, it seemed prudent as least to think for a while about how you might use it in your contexts. **6)** Of the four modes of care identified years ago by Clebsch and Jaekle in *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*. I will propose that reconciliation needs to become a dominant part of soul-care in the future because honoring diversity and living with pluralism will inevitably lead to more conflict and because, since we have not yet learned to live with diversity, there is an epidemic of violence around the world. **7)** Finally, I will propose that in the practice of pastoral ministry after Christendom, the formation of Christian character will be more important than role definition. We are increasingly aware that authenticity matters more than role status or institutional power. We will need women and men for ministry in this time who understand that the Christian life is ‘a song not scored for breathing’, to borrow a line from Roland Bainton. We may not finish all of that. The care of souls requires flexibility. Our talk about soulcare should be flexible as well.

## **About Rethinking**

Rethinking is part of our heritage as Lutherans. The church is reformed and always reforming. It is an agent of change that must also change itself. Re-imagining theology or re-envisioning mission strategy or reordering patterns of worship and organizational structure or rethinking the care of souls are a necessary part of faithful Christian living. We make ordinary, ongoing change difficult, however, when we insist that the possibility of reform requires repenting of what has been done before. For some people, that’s the only way change is possible. A new approach to pastoral care is only acceptable if it can be established that the old way was in some way inferior or outdated and needing reform. When reformation follows from repenting outmoded ways, the process of rethinking presumes that the new way is always better.

Sometimes, however, the change that is proposed is simply another alternative to present thought or practice, not necessarily better. In such instances, rethinking requires the ability to live with paradox in which two ideas seem contradictory but in fact both true. In a book entitled *The Age of Paradox*, Robert Handy says that paradox is at the heart of things. If Handy were not English, I would have thought him to be Lutheran. His goal is not to eliminate paradox but accept it and learn to manage paradox. We manage paradox best of all, Handy says, by developing what he calls *second curve thinking*. Before an old program or product or approach to pastoral care peters out, even when things are going well, we need to start something new, a new curve. So, for example, before the appeal of Starbuck’s coffee faded, they added ice cream to their offerings. Without eliminating hamburgers, healthy salads became part of the menu at McDonalds. This kind of rethinking is also good for marriages and church programs and religious movements. If it ain’t broke, break it. “A good life,” Handy says, “is a succession of second curves, started before the first curve fades.” Keeping two curves going means that two ideas or practices might both be true or functional at the same time.

**Our theme for these days - “rethinking the care of souls” - not only embodies the traditional principle of ongoing reformation, it recognizes that paradox must be at the center of pastoral theology if soulcare is to remain effective in a rapidly changing society.** We return to the theme of paradox later.

So, for example, we may discover in the process of our rethinking that there is another alternative to specialized pastoral care that needs to be added alongside present practices. For example, are pastoral care and spiritual care different enough so they should exist side by side as separate ministries in a hospital or therapeutic or congregational context? Should hospital chaplaincy today be more like chaplaincy in the workplace in which the employees and the institutional concerns of the company (i.e. health care delivery system) are the primary focus of chaplaincy? As ethical choices at the end of life care become more and more complex and unavoidable, should chaplains be equipped for moral guidance or assistance with ethical decision-making as much as supportive care? Should increased outpatient treatment mean the development of chaplaincy in doctor’s clinics? That was the proposal of Larry Holst some years ago in a book entitled *Ministry to Outpatients*. Chaplains should be in large doctor’s clinics where medical treatment now happens. My question in that same volume was on what grounds would we decide it was more important to have chaplains in medical clinics than in day care centers or health clubs or in a corporate complex or in clusters of congregations. In a way, the parish nurse movement is a form of second curve thinking in response to the aging of America and outpatient care. The increase in outpatient treatment at the same time that more and more people who live alone is an unhappy combination. The parish nurse movement is an indication how important it is to attend to the growing number of people who are overwhelmed by the complexity of outpatient medical practice. I told a terrible Sven and Ole joke at the first and only conference on ‘outpatient ministry’ that illustrates so clearly the dilemma many people face. [JOKE] Most of us will know what a specimen is but figuring out how and when to take all your medications or which specialist you see on Thursday is a huge challenge for many people. We are changing in ways we may not even be aware.

Rethinking does not always lead to reform; nor does it necessarily imply starting another program or activity of equal worth; it may simply be a thoughtful exercise that examines present practice in the light of the past in order to deepen or strengthen, but not necessarily change, the way things are done for the future. This third way of rethinking does not imply repentance leading to reformation nor does it necessarily lead to *second curve thinking*. The aim for these presentations is more benign. It is open inquiry into the care of souls particularly as it is carried through specialized ministry of care and counseling. Change may be the result of our mulling but it is not the aim. What I hope for in our time together is creative mulling. That is what I hope for in this time together.

## **About the Care of Souls**

The second theme is the title of the conference – Care of Souls – warrants some preliminary reflection as well. It is also something old and something new. You have in your packet an essay published in *Word and World* under the title “Whatever Happened to Seelsorge?” You might use it as bedtime reading if you have some difficulty falling

asleep. I should be clear that I am not promoting a return to the German word but I am using an old-fashioned, outdated, unusable, traditionally Lutheran word to help us rediscover our central heritage for the ministry of care.

In their classic work on *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective*, Clebsch and Jaekle defined seelsorge in the following way: *The ministry of the cure of souls, or pastoral care, consists of helping acts, done by representative Christian persons, directed toward the healing, guiding, sustaining, and reconciling of troubled persons whose troubles arise in the context of ultimate meanings and concerns.* Although that classic definition is insufficient for our time, it does provide a framework for asking many of the crucial questions about the history of care or cure of souls and modern pastoral care. I propose that we recover soul as the context of ultimate meanings and concerns and soulcare as the descriptive term that connects the present pastoral care movement with its roots. In hospital visitation or in the sunroom in the nursing home or in pastoral counseling or in pastoral conversation over coffee after morning worship, our intent is the same for all our different contexts: to give our full attention and steadfast care to troubled or anxious souls or grieving souls and through that listening incarnate the presence of a gracious God.

It is necessary, I believe, to reclaim the “soul” in the care of souls because soul is the metaphor that reminds us most clearly that we come from God and are destined for God. Soul deepens the experience of being a unique and whole creature, simultaneously at one with God and with all creation. One of the critical questions for our rethinking the care of souls concerns our theological anthropology. What is the meaning of being human? And what metaphor most aptly describes the human one in creation and before God? For a time, we were careful about using the language of soul because we did not want to return to the old body-soul dualism. We were drawn to other important metaphors for the human one like psyche or self or person and, more recently, spirit. I propose that soul is the most comprehensive metaphor of the human one before God because it captures the bio-psycho-social-spiritual unity of each person connected simultaneously to the whole of creation and to God. Our anthropology is theological when images of the human one link us to God as well as to the earth.

Thomas Moore’s popular book *Care of the Soul* included a wonderful image that captures for me a paradoxical understanding of human life as soul. “It takes a broad vision,” he said, “to know that a piece of sky and a chunk of the earth lie lodged in the heart of every human being and that if we are going to care for the heart we will have to know the sky and earth as well as human behavior.” Images of the person linked with *spirit*, *ego*, or *psyche* identify specific dimensions of the human person, but none has the capacity of the soul to hold “earth and sky” in paradox. The Hebrew word frequently translated *soul* (*nephesh*) points to the integral and inseparable “core” of who we are. And the bio-psycho-social-spiritual unity of the human person is preserved when we remember that kidneys rejoice (Proverbs 23:16), the soul thirsts and hungers. (Ps. 42:2), and souls long for the Lord (Ps. 84:2a).

Soul is from God and for God. Soul is from the earth and returns to the earth. Both are true. That is the existential paradox that soul invites us into. The recovery of soul and rethinking the care of souls is therefore at the same time a retrieval of the transcendent in human life – without losing our earthy connection. Human beings are

out of nature and hopelessly in it. A little lower than the angels and worms and food for worms. Or to borrow a very descriptive phrase from Ernest Becker, **we are gods who shit**. Later on, I want to return we will explore some of the implications for ministry of this paradoxical perspective on the human one.

In a curious way, we are challenged by people writing from outside the Christian religious tradition to rethink the language of soul in the work of care. People not writing out of a religious tradition may have less difficulty with the language of soul because they do not have the terrible history of dualism to worry about. William J. Doherty, a widely respected family therapist, has described the contemporary psychotherapist as “**the doctor of the rootless modern soul**.” That might be an image particularly used for pastoral counselors: “doctor of the restless modern soul.” Bruce Bartlow, a physician who describes himself as spiritual but not religious, has written a book about end-of-life care entitled *Medical Care of the Soul*. He connects souls with the loftiest of human longings for God and the eternal **and** that which is most physical and shadowy in ourselves. “Soul doesn’t deal in straight lines, simple opposites, or pat answers. Its workroom is full of mirrors.” (183) I think we would all agree that the individual is a bio-psycho-social-spiritual unity. We are whole creatures who cannot be divided. We do not agree, however, on the best metaphor to describe that unity. My preference for soul is because 1) it implies we are both embodied souls and soul-filled bodies; 2) suggests that the human one is both from God and for God, and 3) invites us to rediscover the paradoxical mysteries of human nature.

As long as soul troubles have been understood in psychological language, the care of souls has been linked to the methods and diagnostic categories of psychotherapy or even medical practice and not the traditions of soulcare. The recovery of soul in our work of care not only links us with the ancient tradition: it also guards against dualistic thinking of any kind and reaffirms the place of mystery and transcendence in the human journey to God. The holy work of soulcare is more art than science because it is the application of poetics to everyday life. With the recovery of soul, we have new freedom to develop theological categories of modern maladies that correspond with psychological descriptions of the human struggle. Soulless existence is the malady of modern time. If we put soul at the center of our life and work, then perhaps we can understand more clearly how people are trapped in a soulless existence and why it is so difficult to keep the soul alive.

## **A Personal Review by Decades**

I am very grateful for this opportunity in a structured way to assess how far we have come over the last decades in this remarkable movement of pastoral care – in order to be clearer about where we need to be going. This invitation also comes at the end of my professional career so that it becomes an opportunity for me to review of my own thinking about pastoral care since I began teaching in 1969. I will spare you all the details of those 35 years. However, review by decades of some significant moments since I first took CPE in 1960 might be a catalyst for your own review as well. In a moment, I will invite you to be in conversation about your own questions about the future of the care of souls.

I did my first quarter of CPE (it was actually still the Institute of Pastoral Care) **in 1960** at Minneapolis General Hospital. David Belgum believed we should spend time in the library because there was theological content to pastoral care. I also learned painfully in that first clinical experience how difficult it is to attend carefully to a human soul, especially those who do not live by the same piety with which I had been raised. Learning about my own vulnerability would come later because the old Institute of Pastoral Care was less focused on self-reflection than the Council for Clinical Training.

**In 1970**, I was struggling to teach pastoral care to people who did not always want to learn it. Pastoral Counseling had begun to emerge as a significant dimension of the pastoral care movement. So it is not surprising that I was asked to give a brief paper at the Eastern Region of AAPC in 1970 in response to the question “Is Pastoral Counseling a Credible Alternative in Ministry?” Specialized ministries were struggling then for recognition both in the therapeutic and clinical worlds **and** in the church world. For me, there was a prior question: “credible to whom?” The pastoral care movement in the last decades of the 20th century spent most of its time and energy becoming credible to the therapeutic and health care worlds.

**In 1980**, I did a survey for the North Central Region of ACPE on the relationship between seminaries and Clinical Pastoral Education. It was fascinating to read that report again. 80% of the students expected “personal growth in self-understanding.” Faculty continued to have misgivings about the preoccupation with personal introspection and the lack of theological integration.

**By 1990**, a shift away from pastoral care had already begun, at least in the seminaries in Chicago where I worked. Twice as many courses were taught in spirituality or spiritual direction as in pastoral care in all the seminaries in Chicago by 1995. Ten years before, the ratio had been reversed. What was also distinctive in the 1990’s is that “pastoral leader” became the dominant image for ministry and preaching was back. Being an enabler was not enough for ministry in this time.

**In 2000**, it was my privilege to edit the 20th Anniversary Symposium for the *Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry*. “In order to minister faithfully in a rapidly changing world,” I wrote, “we need bold visions that will empower us to fashion new patterns of attending to the human story and new ways of learning the art of care.” (9) The critical questions raised in that volume that will continue to be part of our conversation about pastoral care for the future.

Then I retired and **in 2001** became a practicing pastor again, attending to human and divine stories became my daily work again. It has been a rich privilege at the end of my ministerial career to come back to being a pastor again. I have become painfully aware that walking along with someone who is dying or in despair or floundering in their faith or fearful of love is always more complex than our best theories. What has been most difficult in a parish context is to make tangible the connections between care and education and preaching and worship. Even when we have been clear about a wholistic view of the human person, we have had a compartmentalized view of ministry.

Each of you will have your own critical moments and stories to tell that bring you to the present. I hope that there will take time in informal conversation with friends and colleagues with whom you have been on this journey to mark out some of the critical changes that have occurred in your understanding of pastoral care in the last decades.

To get that reflective process started, I invite you to identify one change that has occurred in your understanding of pastoral care in the last two or three or four decades, depending on how long your memory is. It might help you to identify, as I just did, some marker moments around which to think about the changes that have occurred. **Take a few moments quietly to identify these critical changes and then have a conversation with the person to your right/left.** Those of you who are spouses have watched the changes happen and so you will have your own observations.

With these reflections in view, identify one or two or three questions about the future of pastoral care or care of souls that keep you awake at night. If you don't have trouble sleeping because all is well, what are the changes that you believe promise a bright future for the care of souls or that might impede the future of pastoral care? What troubles you about the future of pastoral care because of a change that has occurred in your work situation? Has the shift to spiritual care strengthened or compromised the care of souls? Or some other question that you believe we should be thinking about as we rethink the care of souls. **Take a few minutes to write these concerns or questions on the paper provided. Reading these will keep me awake tonight and provide some focus for our conversations tomorrow. They could also be useful for the leadership of specialized ministry in planning future events.**

## Reading the Signs of the Times

In order to understand the forces in our context that makes rethinking pastoral care necessary, we need to discern the 'signs of the times', to borrow a phrase from Reinhold Niebuhr. The Second Vatican Council used a similar phrase to describe the purpose of the Christian community in the world; it is "to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served." To carry out this task, the church has the "duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel." (*Gaudium et Spes*, 3-4) According to Vatican II, reading the signs of the times means "to recognize and understand the world in which we live, its expectations, its longings and its often dramatic characteristics." It is necessary to understand what is happening in the world in which we minister so that our witness to the gospel will be both faithful and relevant. Therefore good pastoral theology starts with the questions that emerge in our time both in the larger culture and from the particular medical or therapeutic contexts in which we work. To do it well, we could spend the rest of the time identifying the changes and challenges from the culture and from the workplace that in mandate ongoing rethinking the care of souls.

There is a second reason why "reading the signs of the times" is so critical for the work of care and counseling. *The human soul is a permeable reality.* The cultural air I breathe affects my inner soul. What is outside is inside and what is inside my soul affects the outer reality. I am as lonely as the loneliness in the culture. When the cultural air I breathe is dominated by fear and cynicism, it is hard not to be fearful and cynical. Some years ago, Richard Shweder at the University of Chicago developed what he called "cultural psychology" in which he argued that "culture and psyche make each other up." Certainly we need to maintain boundaries between the inner and outer world but we also need to be cognizant of the soul's permeability.

In a similar way, the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has suggested modern societies are becoming more diverse and more porous at the same time. The image of a porous society means that we are less protected from “stuff” out there coming inside. And the more porous the society, the more vulnerable we become. Even without porous societies we are susceptible to being wounded by the air we breathe, the water we drink, the mail we receive, the phone calls we get, the sun that shines, and maybe even the people we make love to. And then there are situations in our lives and in our ministries like an unhappy marriage or problematic children or an unbalanced checking account or the death of a friend or ugly rumors in the parish that also make us vulnerable. Moreover, the kind of compassion that makes for good ministers also makes one susceptible to being wounded. The goal cannot be to become invulnerable. Rather we need to live with the awareness of our vulnerability without being overwhelmed by it. It is part of the soul of ministry.

J.M. Coetzee, a South African novelist, has written an engaging story about Mrs. Curren, a retired classics teacher dying of cancer, who takes into her home a derelict who had been living in an alley by her garage. He is unwashed and unable to speak intelligently. “I am trying to keep a soul alive,” Mrs. Curren explains when asked why she took in the man, “in times not hospitable to the soul.” Keeping a soul alive in times not hospitable to the soul is an apt description of our own struggles to keep faith in the work of ministry that also reflects the work we do. We need to keep our own soul alive while we tend the souls of others. Preparation for ministry today requires attending to the process of fashioning ministerial souls durable enough for ministry in difficult times. *For many of us, our daily soul work with the people in our care is precisely that: keeping souls alive in times not hospitable to the soul.*

Each of us will have our favorite images or metaphors to describe the inhospitality of the world in which we live. And these metaphors change even if the maladies do not. We have used words like narcissism or alienation or greed to describe the dominant ethos of a particular time in this society. When I began my pastoral ministry in 1962, we were still thinking about anxiety as a descriptive of the prevailing cultural malaise, what the poet W. H. Auden had labeled the “Age of Anxiety.” The fear was vague – about things that go bump in the night and about the long shadow of a nuclear threat. Now we know that “things that go bump in the night” could be driven by shootings or car bombs. And we have orange alert. Anxiety is not the word for our time. Terror is. Our response to acts of violence and terror has been to increase security however we can. The dilemma is that the more security we seek, the more alarm systems we install, the more lives are ensnared with fear. Or terror we are afraid to share with anyone. Take just five minutes with one person next to you and talk about a word or a phrase you use to characterize our time. **How do you describe the inhospitality of the world that makes it difficult to keep souls alive?**

## **The Vulnerable Soul**

The dramatic increase in seemingly random violence and irrational suffering has increased our awareness of vulnerability and contingency and fragility in human life. The ability of modern technology to bring that violence into our living room has made public

violence a personal experience. That is what has changed. Watching the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001 at home on television provided an opportunity for us as a society to acknowledge the kind of vulnerability other people have lived with for centuries. In a book entitled *Suffering and Hope* (1986), New Testament scholar A. Christiaan Beker reminds us that our time does not have a special corner on suffering. Long before 9/11, Becker made this observation: in contrast to former times, *“modern technology and the media bring world events and their attendant suffering into the inner sanctuaries of our homes. In other words, the proximity to us of all world events is a new feature of our time.”* Because we can watch bodies fly and buildings crumble and children burn on television, suffering anywhere in the world invades our homes and becomes our own. As a result, the scope and intensity of irrational suffering is simultaneously pervasive and personal.

The irrational suffering that is everywhere in the world comes into our living rooms and troubles the permeable and sometimes fragile human soul. It is the proximity of the world’s suffering that is the new feature of our time. As a result, distinctions between public and private grief are less and less clear. The public tragedy of Princess Diana’s death evoked a global outpouring of personal grief that transcended by far the tragedy of her death. But there is more. “The eclipse of hope and the triumph of irrational suffering,” as Beker describes our time, presents everyone with a double dilemma: “when hope has no ground, false hopes will blind us; when suffering has no purpose, blind suffering triumphs.” (p 16-17) Death always challenges our assumptions of an ordered universe and a provident God. Violent death in particular undermines our notions of invulnerability. We are fragile, finite, contingent creatures who are uncomfortable with vulnerability. What makes the world inhospitable to the soul is not just the increase in violence and irrational suffering around the globe. It is the unwillingness to acknowledge vulnerability and fragility as part of the human condition.

Being vulnerable simply means that we are susceptible to being physically injured or emotionally wounded. Vulnerability quite literally means “susceptible to being wounded.” It is not something we can avoid. It is part of being human. Being vulnerable is part of being human. Without fangs or claws, without fur or venom, the human creature is born dependent and susceptible to being wounded. As a result, humans need care and protection at the beginning of life much longer than other creatures. Eventually, humans make tools and weapons for protection in order to survive without built-in armor. We also develop character armor to protect our person from emotional injury or to avoid thinking about death. No one is invulnerable. All human beings are susceptible to wounding because we are finite creatures who get sick and die. We are particularly susceptible to being wounded when we are isolated and lonely or when we are powerless and afraid. We may also feel vulnerable when more information or stimuli or expectations are coming at us than we can manage or ignore. Invulnerability is not only a human impossibility, it is an undesirable human quality. Acknowledging vulnerability is a reminder that we cannot make it alone without the presence of God and others in our lives.

Six years ago, I was diagnosed with prostate cancer. I became aware after the diagnosis of prostate cancer of the close connection between potency or power and vulnerability in male anatomy. Except perhaps for the act of bearing children, women have been wrongly perceived to be powerless or even helpless, needing male power for protection. Even when women have gained personal, social and physical power,

they still live with a constant consciousness of their vulnerability. By contrast, men have mistakenly presumed power without susceptibility to wounding. Prostate cancer is emotionally unsettling for men precisely because we are vulnerable at the source of our potency. Whenever men presume to be invulnerable in the exercise of power, men find it is easy to treat with disdain what cannot wound them. Invulnerability also prompts self-sufficiency and isolation. Learning to acknowledge male human vulnerability will not lead necessarily to impotence if it is balanced with an appropriate sense of power. I believe that the lives of men would be enhanced and society would be safer if men lived with a greater awareness of the close link between power and vulnerability. The millions and millions of dollars being spent on drugs to diminish erectile dysfunction or enhance sexual performance in men suggests to me that we are still working more on increasing power than on living with vulnerability.

Cancer is only one dramatic sign that human beings are vulnerable to attack from forces outside their control. Environments in which we live are full of contaminants that threaten our physical health and emotional well-being. The inability to acknowledge vulnerability diminishes the human soul. The presumption that we can construct an invulnerable life is a dangerous myth because it impedes full living. Gated communities and elaborate security systems are only two instances of efforts to create places of safety invulnerable to attack. Although human ingenuity continues to search for danger-free havens or a permanent summer resort far from the madding crowds, we know that is more and more a romantic illusion. We will stand and fall together, not because we are walled off from one another in secure enclaves but because we have learned to live with contingency and we have created communities of vulnerable ones.

In a book I wholeheartedly recommend entitled *Death and Life*, Arthur McGill described the Christian life as “resting in neediness.” The idea is a challenge for everyone who has difficulty needing someone else. “In the kingdom of Jesus,” McGill writes, “in the new kind of identity which he brings, where we are constantly receiving and never holding and possessing, here human life is *resting-in-neediness*.” The birth of Jesus is the story of God’s vulnerability. No defense system is foolproof enough to protect us from being vulnerable, so promises of invulnerability are always fraudulent. The unarmed carpenter’s son from Galilee made vulnerability the norm for humankind. Of all the marks of Christian faithfulness, this may be the most difficult challenge for many people. For that reason, it is important to practice neediness with people we trust and whom we believe will not violate vulnerability.

There is a Sufi saying that two veils separate us from the divine – health and security. When we lose our health and must face the insecurity of needing help, we encounter deeper human questions about dependency and neediness and frailty. If we have thought that frailty drains life of its fullness, then we are ill-equipped to live with frailty or even care for those who are frail and we are likely to flee from vulnerability. Listen to these wonderful words from an 86 year old woman who tells how severe arthritis brought her “kicking and screaming” into the domain of her own soul. On the extreme edges of vulnerability, we are clear what needs to be done. The deterioration of our bodies may not be preventable, but the meaning of frailty can be changed.

*One morning, I was sitting at my kitchen table [sic], staring into space. It was one of those windy days when the sun keeps coming out and going in. All of a sudden,*

*a sunbeam crossed my kitchen table and lit up my crystal salt shaker. There were all kinds of colors and sparkles. It was one of the most beautiful sights I'd ever seen. But you know, that very same salt shaker had been on that table for over fifty years. Surely there must have been other mornings when the sun crossed the table like that, but I was just too busy getting things done to see it. I wondered how much else I'd missed. This was it, this was grace. I needed crippled hands before I could sit still. Sometimes you have to be stopped right there in your tracks before you can see that all the beauty in life is right in front of you.*

For a brief while, be in conversation with the person nearby about this question: **What makes it hard or easy for you to share your frailty and vulnerability with another human being?** Wendy Lustbader, a geriatric social worker in Seattle, asked the question in a slightly different way in a workshop last Saturday. Who will take care of me if I got sick? Putting the question of care in times of sickness or frailty at the center of our lives changes everything. Making a life rich with generosity and kindness becomes more desirable than any other kind of fortune. Archie Ruprecht is an 82 year old psychiatrist I know who has spent his work life and his retired life looking after others. He is now in the hospital with a broken neck he sustained playing squash. There are armies of people waiting to care for Archie. That is a good thing. He may be disabled for the rest of his life. (Note: Archie died during the Conference.) He dreaded the thought of being dependent. Unless he makes a dramatic recovery, he is paralyzed for life. I don't like to be sick or dependent either. It is a real struggle for me to ask someone for help even when it is perfectly clear that I cannot get by without help. Those of us who are caregivers are often the hardest to care for. That may also mean, I suspect, that we miss some of the fears and misgivings people have that keep them from asking for our help. I wish I could say I have sustained my admission of vulnerability that came with the diagnosis of prostate cancer – but I haven't. We need to keep asking ourselves what makes it easier or harder to acknowledge our frailty to one another. Who would take care of you if you got sick?

The minister's soul is regularly endangered by temptations to power and pretense. We are tempted to pretense whenever we fear exposure or when the ordinary posture of faith as 'resting-in-neediness' is too dependent. Being a soul is living with nakedness before God. For that reason, the enemy of soul is deception. As people of faith, we are free to live without pretense because we believe that the human soul is ultimately hidden in God whose graciousness touches everything with mercy – even the minister's soul. We are tempted by the power of our role and by the nature of our work. When our ministry is primarily with the troubled and the powerless, it is easy to overlook our own powerlessness by comparison. Because of the fragility and vulnerability of the human soul as a whole being, I do not go lightly from someone who has held my soul. When someone holds my soul, I only hope they do not break it. It is durable and very fragile.

## **The Workplace and Soulcare**

There are many ways in which the social context of your work affects soulcare. You know better than I the tension between the demands of the health care market and the work of soulcare. In a moment, I will invite you to identify how the healthcare system

in which you work makes it difficult even to rethink the care of souls. Let me suggest two areas that I am aware of that I suspect have an impact on the care of souls. 1) *We live in a culture obsessed with health.* In an article entitled “The New Gospel of Health,” philosopher Ronald Dworkin identified what he called “the healthy life style movement” that starts with the idea that sickness is avoidable with proper attention to diet, regular exercise, not smoking, and less alcohol. “In a secular culture, there needs to be a way of pretending that sickness and suffering are optional, and that as long as safe habits are adhered to, the healthy will continue to occupy that part of the world where God has no control.” Followers of the new gods of health believe that illnesses are caused by poor life-style choices and, by contrast, that good health is totally within our power. Then these troubling words from Dworkin: “Like traditional religion (and unlike traditional medicine), the lifestyle movement is designed not merely to save lives but to put the entire human condition in perspective so as to give psychological support to the healthy.” (from *Public Interest*, Fall, 2000, Issue 141.)

2) The second factor that complicates our understanding of health in this *culture is radical individualism* and the primacy of the rights-bearing individual to choose for him or herself. Joel Shuman and Keith Meador, in a relatively new book entitled *Heal Thyself: Spirituality, Medicine, and the Distortion of Christianity*, argue that in a culture “obsessed with youthfulness, self-empowerment, and individual health, religion is increasingly advocated as a means of achieving or maintaining mental and physical wellness.” (9) This commitment (if not obsession) with health is sustained by the unspoken belief that science and medical technology will one day deliver us from sickness and death. The social statement of the ELCA we will look at briefly tomorrow suggests that caring for health is a shared endeavor. I personally would say it even stronger. Health is a shared endeavor. Fred Gaiser from Luther Seminary was on the Task Force that wrote the statement and regularly quoted a saying from Zimbabwe. **I am well if you are well.** Our understanding of health is driven by a free-market economy. In this culture, health is a private commodity that is often sold with the promises of specialists and then purchased and consumed by vulnerable individuals.

Nobody wants to be sick. We all want to be healthy. And indeed we should seek to live in ways that make for health. One of the places of the greatest debate in the ELCA Task Force on health and health care was about health as an end – or health as a means to an end. It is good to be healthy in and of itself **and** we are healthy in order to love God and serve the neighbor. Both are true. But health is also a relative term. I have found a definition by James Lapsley in his book *Salvation and Health* to be helpful. Here is what Lapsley says. “Health generically refers to the relatively active potential for appropriate functioning which any individual possesses at any given time....Health refers to the individual’s potential *at any given time*. ...A person may have a good potential for appropriate functioning and at the same time be quite ill - with pneumonia, for example. Penicillin will bring about his recovery in a matter of days, but for the time being his degree of health, and hence his potential for functioning, is quite low.” (71-73) Some years, when I was going through a bad patch in my life, I saw a psychiatrist at the University of Chicago Hospitals. In order to get to his office, I had to slap a purple sticker on that said in big words OUTPATIENT. One day, after a particularly bad session, I left the hospital, got on bicycle and riding around in Hyde Park in Chicago with a badge on

that said OUTPATIENT. The truth of that moment for me was that we are all outpatients in one way or another. That reality keeps my longing for health from becoming idolatrous. All human beings have their hearts set somewhere. For Christians, our hearts are set on God. Everything else, including health, is pen-ultimate. That belief, I submit, would also give us a framework for helping people make the very agonizing decisions they need to make about doing one more medical procedure. If we cannot set limits ourselves on our demands for medical care in order to be more healthy, limits will be set for us.

There are changes in the business of healthcare that I suspect make it more and more difficult to practice the care of souls in the way we would like. Every healthcare facility seeks to be driven by values consistent with the mission of the organization. There is, in my judgment, a dark side to the wonderful ways in which chaplaincies and spiritual care providers have been assimilated into the healthcare system. To be a vice-president for religion and health or spirituality and health means that chaplains are at the table where decisions are made that shape the future of healthcare. It is an awesome thing. And, I believe, it comes with a price. If we are an integral part of the health care team, then our work must be measured by the same utilitarian standards that others are measured by. I recently had access to a document entitled “Measures of Chaplain Performance and Productivity” prepared for 65 hospitals in the Roman Catholic Church. The critical term is “adding value.” What is it that chaplains do that is perceived as “adding value” to the distinctive culture of a healthcare institution. Here is one of the recommendations in the report after 18 months of study. “Engage colleagues from other disciplines within your MBO to help you and your chaplains articulate performance expectations (outcome measures) in a behavioral, common language.” **What kind of rethinking of the care of souls is called for in order work within that kind of framework?**

### **The Professional Minister and Care**

This perspective has implications for how we think about the minister as professional. Over the last decades, there has been an emphasis on ministry as a profession and the consequent need for competence in the practice of ministry. Certainly the mission of the church has been enhanced by increased competence among its ministers. And when the status of ministry declined in an increasingly secular society, ministers sought to bolster our role with more professionalism. As a result, there was also a greater emphasis on specialization which further professionalized the work of ministry which in turn fostered fragmentation in the practice of ministry. The professional self of the minister fits fine but it would be slightly incongruous to speak of the professional soul of the minister. We need to reclaim ministry as calling without losing the emphasis on competence that has been the significant contribution of the professionalization of ministry.

Some years ago, a sociologist at DePaul University in Chicago wrote a fascinating paper on “The Impact of a Commercial Civilization on the Ethos of American Clergy.” Because the United States society is entrepreneurial at its core, it should not surprise us when market strategies dominate our conversations about evangelism. The minister easily becomes an entrepreneur in the spiritual marketplace. I would not wish to return

to an earlier time when incompetence was covered over by clerical authority. Nor can we totally escape thinking about how we package and market the Gospel treasure or a church's services to the community. However, the price-tag of being a professional has been that we are measured by standards of success drawn from the marketplace and insisted on by the bank presidents and company managers on church boards. We are and we are not professionals. The church has always been part of the ministry of healing and yet in a sense the care of souls does not easily fit in a framework of highly skilled technicians working to restore someone who is ill. We are to be in that world but we are never of that world. That is the paradox. And it is crucial for the soul of ministry that we keep that paradox alive.

The reciprocity between culture and soul that affects all of us in our effort to keep the soul alive also applies to the workplace and our efforts at soulcare. There are changes taking place in the culture of hospitals and nursing homes and in the field of healthcare in general that have a direct impact on our work. You know this better than I. I will suggest just a couple of changes that I would imagine has complicated or at least changed your work of soulcare. Then I want to invite you into conversation with one another around this question: **What in your workplace environment makes it difficult for you to do the ministry of soulcare? Where are the tensions in your workplace between what you are expected to do or who you are expected to be and your own self-identify?**

I do not work where you work with the same kind of pressures to demonstrate usefulness or measure your added value to the culture of healthcare. When you are praised for being useful in getting people better, it is easy to lose track of focus. Michael Ramsey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, had a strong word in *The Charismatic Christ* that is applicable to the struggles of chaplain to maintain the soul of ministry in a context driven by alien values. "Amid the clinical trends in contemporary pastoral guidance, [the minister] will need to keep alive the permanent issues of sin and forgiveness. To be health and to be whole [and I would add to be competent] is no substitute for being penitent, forgiven and holy." If we remember Martin Luther's link between health and forgiveness, healing and saving, these words from Ramsey have special significance.

Once we have at least a partial understanding of the "signs of the times," we can be clearer about what questions we must bring to the tradition in order to strengthen our ministry in this time and the time ahead – insofar as we can anticipate the future. In particular, I propose that we ask a pastoral theological question in this way: "what does Lutheran theology have to contribute to rethinking soulcare?" By that, I do **not** mean to ask just about the Lutheran tradition of soulcare, about the mutual consolation of the brothers and sisters. Rather I invite us to explore Lutheran theology more broadly in order to identify theological themes that might strengthen our ministries of care and counseling. It is important that we have a theology or if you prefer a hermeneutic of soulcare so we are clear about the pre-understandings we bring to our work. Being clear about how we have internalized the tradition also becomes our contribution to the larger ecumenical and interfaith conversations we have about the work we do. This shift from "of" to "for" created new freedom for my approach to pastoral theology.

In a culture in which transcendence has become an interior thing and the human spirit too often equated with the Holy Spirit, Lutherans have an important counter-cul-

tural contribution to make if we can get better at linking the human and divine stories. In the book I wrote with Ed Foley entitled *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals*, we offered this definition of pastoral care. **“The primary aim of pastoral care is to assist people in weaving the stories of their lives and God’s stories as mediated through the community into a transformative narrative that will liberate them from confining beliefs, confirm their sense of belonging, and strengthen them to live responsibly as disciples in the world....The task of pastoral care is to help people expand their own narrative in ways that recognize and accept God as an active agent in our personal narrative.”**(p 48) In our pastoral work of soulcare, we need to help people make connections between their very human stories and the story of God. It is confirming and comforting to find ourselves in the divine narrative. I was looking at a very old verbatim from my files a week ago in a class I am teaching at Fuller Seminary in Seattle about an 80 year old African-American man who is dying. His name was Mr. Bates. He told the chaplain he was a little scared now and then when he thought about dying. But Rev. Lloyd, he said, had been telling him about the man in the Bible who worried. I don’t know about what, Mr. Bates said, but he said that even in the Bible men worried. I figure if they can worry some, so can I.”

The centrality of Scripture for the life of faith is a hallmark of Lutheran theology. I believe we would have a great deal to contribute to modern care of the souls if Lutherans could learn to take the human story a little more seriously without, at the same time, losing sight of the centrality of the Scriptures. If we understand the linkage between the human and divine stories more clearly, we will be able to make the connection between my story and every other human story. Before God, we are all on a level playing field. The quality and sameness of humanity before God means that we are free to say with the ancient philosopher Cicero “because I am human, nothing that is human is foreign to me.” There is another implication of intentionally weaving the human and divine stories. We will understand more clearly that we interpret human situations with the same hermeneutic that we read the Bible or the morning paper.

### **The Paradox Perspective: A Lutheran Contribution**

I would like to return to the idea of PARADOX because it is, I believe, at the center of Lutheran theology and it is THE contribution we have to make to the shape of pastoral theology and pastoral care in the future. It is also, I believe, essential for the future of humanity. The inability to live with ambiguity is source of much that ails our world and terrifies the human soul. Because religious and ethnic diversity in my neighborhood means that ambiguity and contradiction are daily possibilities, what is fundamental Christian truth is now also a human necessity. The reverse is also true. What is human, that is, living with contradiction, is also Christian. When, however, our world is expanded, clarity is diminished. That is a fundamental paradox of life and faith. The more clarity we have, the less inclusive our vision and the more we have divided between US and THEM. The greater the inclusivity, the more ambiguous life becomes.

It was my uncle with a sense of humor - and I only had one uncle with a sense of humor because I am Swedish - it was my uncle who would say “when you come to a fork in the road take it.” It may have been that he heard it from Yogi Berra but I doubt

it. He often said that when someone insisted on only one way to plant oats. Taking the fork in the road is like living with contradictions. I think my uncle knew in ways I am still learning that it is only by living the paradox that we discover and sustain life in its fullest. I believe my uncle had it right. When you come to a fork in the road, take it. We have to go both ways at the same time to get there. That is the paradox. As in the case of my uncle's maxim, a paradox is more than a seeming contradiction. It is the juxtaposition of two things that cannot both be true but nonetheless are true in a deeper sense. The three words from Eric Wahlstrom, my New Testament professor, have remained for me an unattainable motto for living. BOTH ARE TRUE. The widespread growth of fundamentalism is a self-defeating scheme to eliminate paradox by absolutizing one thing or another.

Contradictions are not accidental. Nor are they new. They are inherent in human nature, in human community, in the circumstances of life like going to my uncle's farm, and in our theology. The philosopher Jacob Needleman said it this way. God has placed the deepest and most fundamental contradictions in human life "not to be resolved but to be lived in the full consciousness of their contradictoriness." Families, I have said as often as I can, are likely to get in trouble if they cannot live paradox. The same is true of churches and nations. Whenever we are inclined to polarize alternatives - that things are this way OR that way - we are at risk of intensifying division. It is not surprising, from that perspective, that many of us were raised to believe that difference is dangerous. A thinker without paradox, Soren Kierkegaard is reported as saying, is like a lover without feeling. One of the gifts of this time of burgeoning diversity may very well be the rediscovery of paradox as a source of passionate thought.

The Lutheran understanding of the Christian life as *simul justus et peccator* puts paradox at the center of Lutheran theology. We are simultaneously sinners, worthy of God's judgment and saints, justified by God's Grace. It is a guard against the threat of despair from the one side and the danger of false security or arrogance from the other. We are wonderfully and terribly equal before God. Our righteousness, Luther insisted, does not arise from our nature nor from our moral achievements but from the graciousness of God in Jesus Christ. Even though as forgiven sinners we share in Christ's righteousness, we do not rest secure. Although our sin is forgiven, each day we contend anew against the power of sin that is still lodged in our being. We are never careless about grace even though we would not endure without it. God's loyalty is always promised and always a surprise. Divine good can never be taken for granted even though it is always and forever abounding. **That is paradox.**

Seward Hiltner once made a similar paradoxical observation about the nature of humanness. "To take the situation as genuinely paradoxical is, on the one hand, to be prepared to live with its tension, but it is, on the other hand, to strive for untangling at any point where that is possible. There is active seeking without, however, the illusion that the search will ever break the tension." (3) The capacity to think paradoxically without being immobilized into passivity is what makes it possible to strive to achieve an unrealizable goal. The ability to think paradoxically is also a healthy corrective to any inclination to think one-dimensionally about the human person. It also provides us with a way enter the end of life without ceasing to live. Mary Needham is 85, lives alone on a meager pension, and now struggles with congestive heart failure. The heart specialist

told her last week that without surgery, she had a year to live. Surgery is possible and risky. So, she said to me, if I do the surgery I need to be prepared to die and enter the surgery with every confidence that I will be able to recover and live more fully until I die. Mary is a longtime Episcopalian who has not forgotten her Lutheran roots. She understands ambiguity and it is a wonderful for her at this moment in her life.

I am indebted to Parker Palmer for introducing me to the necessity of paradox in his little book *The Promise of Paradox*. "To walk the way of the cross, to allow one's life to be torn by contradiction and swallowed up in paradox, is to live in the reality of the resurrection, in the sign of Jonah. For the cross overcomes all contradictions...And the cross speaks of the greatest paradox of all - that to live we have to die." The symbol of the cross is therefore a sign of hope because the crossing point is the point of transformation. We find life by losing it. We are ready for life and yet we are born consenting to death. That contradiction prompted the great Roman Catholic mystic to observe that, like the prophet Jonah, we travel towards our destiny in the belly of a paradox. From our baptism, when we are signed with a cross, we were destined for paradoxical living. "The last shall be first," "the meek will inherit the earth" or if you try to save your life, you will lose it." It is the way of the Cross.

In the best of all possible worlds, living and thinking paradoxically is we can grow into. James Fowler identifies **conjunctive faith** as the fourth stage of faith development. For Fowler, conjunctive faith, that includes the ability to embrace paradox, ordinarily occurs in early mid-life or beyond. And if paradoxically is a development reality, then we need to acknowledge that some people may never get there. If my suggestion that Lutheran theology has paradox at the center, then we can begin to understand why Lutheranism will never make the top 10 in church growth. The longing for absolutes and the desire to live without contradictions will prompt people to find other expressions of the Christian faith more appealing. For those who at least understand the contradictions of living in this time, however, Lutheran theology is a useful theological framework for living with the ambiguities of this age.

John Gaden was a brilliant Anglican theologian from Australia who died much too young. After his death, his widow Janet wrote him a letter after his sudden and untimely death in which she said this: "Christians give lip service to paradox, to the life-giving power of dying, of self-emptying, of surrender to the love of God. Yet Christian terror of these things has been painfully clear to both of us....But the God I desire is the self-emptying, self-limiting, silent and silenced God I see on the Cross in Jesus and in the coffin you are in. I fear this self-emptying as much as I desire it....The trick is, you used to say, to absorb it; that is, to be utterly vulnerable. The buck stops at the Cross." When we are empty, resting-in-neediness, when we can taste death in the remembrance of our baptism, then there is nothing to stand in the way of life and faith.

Romney Moseley was an Anglican priest from the Caribbean who died much too young. In his book *Becoming a Self before God*, Moseley insists that paradox is at the center of Christian belief and transformed living. Moseley, the paradox of *kenosis and plerosis*, of power and powerlessness, fulfillment and struggle, brokenness and wholeness is a way of challenging triumphalistic or elitest certainty or arrogance on the one side and immobilizing pessimism on the other. The hardest part of living contemporaneously with Christ, he said, "is to let God's self-emptying love in Christ become for us a

way of loving God and one another.” (131) Following Moseley’s line of thinking, it just may be easier to understand at this time when progressivism or scientific positivism is on the decline and we are more aware of the limits, or at least the costliness, of unbridled progress. There is a Scandinavian proverb that suggests that “faith is like a bird who feels the dawn breaking but sings while it is still dark.” **That is paradox.** Where is your life are you most aware of paradox and how do you live with it?

## **IMPLICATIONS OF PARADOX FOR RETHINKING PASTORAL CARE**

What might it mean for rethinking the care of souls if we understood that our ministry occurs in the belly of a paradox, to paraphrase Merton? I have five suggestions to begin our thinking, some of which we have already addressed. 1) Our anthropology will be intentionally paradoxical because we have learned to make distinctions without those distinctions becoming separations. 2) Soulcare is liminal work where earth and sky meet, where the stuff of this world and the life of the soul mix. 3) Seeing both the mythic and the parabolic is a biblical perspective that will strengthen our understanding of paradox. 4) In our ministry, we need to keep a healthy balance between boundaries and compassion that transcends boundaries. 5) Paradox is the best way to understand the experience of death. 6) If truth is more than one, we need to develop a pastoral style of **saying the other side.**

**ONE: A Paradoxical Anthropology** If the deeper truths of life and faith are expressed in paradox, then we need to find a way to retrieve the paradoxical mysteries of human nature. We have for centuries in the church promoted dualisms of one form or another that have set one aspect of being human (like being a body) against another aspect of being human (like being soul or spirit). The recovery of soul, I believe, is a way to the recovery of paradox in our theological anthropology, our understanding of the nature of human nature. The paradoxical mystery is best recovered by keeping connecting soul-bodies or body-souls. Insisting on the soul’s paradox will not eliminate dualistic impulses or modify absolutizing tendencies. The recovery of soul might, however, provide us with a metaphor that is deep enough and broad enough to express the complexity of the human struggle today. Faith, someone said to me recently, is entering into the deep realm of soul in which paradox humbly abides. The task of ministry, understood as soulcare, is to empower people to embrace paradox, see clearly the contingencies of living, acknowledge the inevitability of being vulnerable, and so learn to live as a trapeze artist with both feet firmly planted in midair.

**TWO: The Liminality of Ministry** The second implication of thinking paradoxically is about the pastoral role. Pastoral ministers, like shamans, are bridge people, linking two worlds. The pastoral person knows two worlds fully and deeply. In a book written many years ago entitled *Priest in Community*, Urban Holmes suggested that a pastoral person is like a good shaman: an earthy creature who knows that humility has its roots in the *humus* of the earth. “To be a priest,” Holmes wrote, “is by necessity to share deeply in the antistructural dimensions of people’s lives, to face the erotic realities both in their demonic and angelic forms, and to discern what makes whole and what destroys.” (78)

At the same time, the pastoral person, like the shaman, is a **theotokos**, one who bears God to humankind. To be a living symbol, suggests Holmes, the priest makes

a bridge between two realities: humanity and the mystery from which God speaks. In order to join the mystery of God's abyss to the everyday world of people, the pastoral person must know the language God speaks and be a specialist in the human soul. Cardinal Joseph Bernadin, in an address to priests in the Archdiocese a year before he died, made this same connection with the role of shaman and then coupled this image of bearers of the mystery of God with being doctors of the soul. "The primary function of the bearer of the mystery is to hold up to the people of God the great images, stories and pictures of salvation that lie at the heart of the Christian tradition." In order to be an effective mediator between the all-embracing, ever-elusive mystery of Being Itself and the ordinary stuff of human life, we need to be in habitual contact with the mystery of God while at the same time standing in the midst of human pain and struggle.

The paradox of pastoral ministry is this: we are familiar with the stuff of life; we know fully and deeply the stories that come from our very messy human struggles; and at the same time we are bearers of the mysteries of God. The effectiveness of pastoral leadership at the end of Christendom will depend, I suspect, on attentiveness to both realities. Being a pastoral person is liminal work. We are attentive to both sides equally because each side needs the other. That is why it is so important for us to learn the art of weaving human and divine stories. The tendency in the practice of pastoral care over the last decades has been to listen more carefully to the human story than to the stories of God. Obviously we need to tell them both. Double listening and bimodal thinking are at the center of soulcare.

**THREE: Myth and Parable** If understanding the ambiguity of life and communicating that understanding to others are the reasons why we form stories or fashion narratives, then it is important to reflect on what form of story will most adequately convey our understanding. Biblical scholar John Dominic Crossan suggests in *The Dark Interval* that all narration is related to two opposites – myth and parable. The purpose of myth is to assure us that everything will be all right. Myth refers to story forms that emphasize mediation and reconciliation. Moreover, when we tell a story with mythic overtones, we believe in the permanent possibility of reconciliation. All things do work together for good to those who love God.

Parables contradict our mythic assumptions. In fact, parable creates irreconcilability where before there was reconciliation. Whenever Jesus says, you have heard it said, but I say to you, Jesus is replacing a mythic view with a parabolic one. When Ed Foley and I first began working on the material that is included in *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals*, we were insisting that the parabolic way is the only way to follow Jesus. We were particularly determined to eliminate mythic weddings. The expectation that a picture perfect wedding will be a prelude to a picture perfect marriage is a dangerous myth that cannot be sustained. What we learned in the process is that human beings need myths. "Mythic narrations comfort us and assure us that everything is going to be all right; parables challenge and dispute the reconciliation that our myths have created. Myths allow us to dream and to believe in a future better than the present; parables disallow us from living in a dream world, call us to confront the present, and deter us from trusting in any hope that does not face the hard reality of the present. The irony, of course, is that those are complementary narrative forms, and human beings need both of them." (15)

**FOUR: Boundaries and Compassion** The third implication of paradoxical thinking for pastoral ministry has to do with boundaries and compassion. The Gospel story of feeding the 5000 as recorded in Matthew 14 illustrates this modern dilemma of bonds and boundaries. Large crowds had followed Jesus even though his intent was to be alone some place. As always, the Gospel writers give us a picture of the compassion of Jesus who is moved by the needs of the people who follow him. The disciples are protective of Jesus and want to set clear boundaries. Jesus ought not to feel responsible to feed these people who trailed after him. They can get food in the villages. They have to be responsible for themselves, you might imagine modern versions of the twelve saying to Jesus. That story and the two very different styles of ministry represented by Jesus and the twelve embody two absolutely essential and equally significant dimensions of pastoral ministry for our time: compassionate bonds and clear boundaries. We must have both for effective ministry. That is another paradox. And a very tricky one at that.

If we start with boundaries, which we must do because we live in a porous society in which each of us (and particularly those in pastoral ministry) is vulnerable, that is susceptible to being wounded, if we start with boundaries, then we must keep asking how to nurture within us Jesus-like compassion that is moved by the needs of others. We will keep asking how to nurture the kind of pastoral bond that itself has the potential for healing - *lest we do no good*. If we start with generating mutuality or if self-sacrificing generosity in the mode of Jesus is our aim or if compassion is our thing, then we must keep asking about respecting boundaries - *lest we do harm*. Boundaries are a legal and structural necessity in order to prevent violence. In themselves, however, boundaries do not foster compassion and respect for the other which nourishes the bonds that are the soul of [ministry].

I heard a delightful presentation last Saturday by a geriatric social worker who described how easy it is for us to violate the privacy of elders we care for **when we mean to do good**. If we believe that an elderly person is not taking medication or paying her bills or answering her mail, we will check the medicine cabinet or look in her checkbook or rummage through her mail in order to be helpful. When we take away privacy, we violate the dignity of an individual. This is complicated by the fact that ill or frail people want us to know what they need without asking. When we run out of empathy or get impatient with always having to imagine their needs, we may snoop a little or violate their privacy in order to determine what they need without asking. We may do the same with our children for similar reasons of helping. Boundaries help us honor the dignity of another. Compassion keeps us caring even when we don't know what they need. Several of you commented on new rules or procedures in the workplace that make soulcare more difficult. For example, the clash between "the privacy act" and access to patients challenges us to think about ways of doing ministry while at the same time honoring individual integrity.

**FIVE: The Paradox of Dying** Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner has provided the framework for exploring all the ways in which we experience the paradox of dying. In a book *On The Theology of Death*, Rahner suggests that a "irreducible, dialectical unity" is the hidden character of death. "Death appears as both act and fate, a end and fulfillment, as willed and suffered, as plenitude and emptiness." Death often comes

like a thief in the night to take life away in the midst of its fullness. We experience death as a blow or fate that reminds of what we seek to ignore most of the time – that our lives are contingent and very, very fragile. Death is a sudden rupture of a life we expect will go on forever. Sometimes people will say “death took” a person as if death itself is an agent, alien to life as we know it without crabgrass or deformed teeth or wrinkles behind the legs and other forms of decay that are signs of finitude and death.

But, says Rahner, death is also an act of completion, something I do, a final act of self-completion. We know this best when Jesus used the words “it is finished” to describe his act of completeness. In this vision of death, we say more naturally that “Martha died” as something she did. Here is the description of a death that was sent to me last Friday from someone at the Cathedral that will be familiar particularly to those of you who are nursing home chaplains. ‘My father died a peaceful death yesterday at Evergreen Hospice surrounded by his family. He had been asleep for four days and hadn’t communicated with anyone. Literally, at the moment of death, he opened his eyes as if he saw something. He pulled slightly forward, closed his eyes and died. It was profound for all of us and certainly a gift from Dad.’ Mr. Frederick died. It was a human act. This is the paradox of death according to Rahner. “This simultaneity of fulfillment and emptiness, of actively achieved and passively suffered end, of full self-possession and of being completely dispossessed of self” is a description of the permanent contradiction of death as we experience it. There are other ways in which we say two things about death, both of which are true. Death is a moment and a process that begins with birth. It is natural and unnatural. It is a problem to be solved and a mystery to be experienced. It is friend and enemy. Both are true even though one truth about death may dominate at one particular moment.

This paradoxical perspective on death and dying will help us with those situations in ministry people ask you to pray for death or when they seem to have lost all hope of recovering and are simply tired of the struggle. Often the family has difficulty letting go of someone they love. It will help us to remember in those moments that at many points in the human journey, loving does mean letting go more than holding on. Sometimes the staff is unwilling to accept the patient’s desire to be finished with the struggle. Before we can help people who are seriously ill or dying find hope again for their living, we need to confirm our understanding and acceptance of their weariness and desire to be done with the struggle. It is a struggle for caregivers and patients alike to learn to live with finitude and accept despite the suffering that comes with it.

**SIX: Saying the Other Side** If the deeper truths of our lives need contradiction for full expression and if it is true that we are not likely to choose paradox if we can avoid it, then perhaps part of our pastoral task is to “say the other side” in order to keep the paradox alive. We should, as Thomas Merton once observed, explore the other side of everything. It is the way to deepen the contradictions by which we live. It is a kind of reframing for the sake of a deeper vision. It is precisely because of our inclination to absolutize alternatives or polarize options that we need to develop a ministry that carefully keeps “saying the other side.”

By *saying the other side* I mean something like inviting individuals and communities of faith to examine what they believe or how to interpret an event and how to teach from a different, and maybe even contradictory perspective. **Saying the other side** is

necessary so that the silent voices are heard and the marginalized ones are included. Or it may be necessary in a family dispute in which one person dominates to make sure that others are heard. Or it could mean interpreting the beliefs and behavior of a stranger in our community in order that we might practice presuming to respect the other. Or it may be helping individuals or families or communities of faith challenge or reinterpret belief systems that are self destructive. It is a way or avoid absolutizing. In the face of so much fear and uncertainty - so much senseless suffering - so much diversity - so much change and flux, there is the human tendency to look for absolutes. For that reason, **idolatry stalks the same terrain as anxiety.**

“Saying the other side” also applies to ourselves for the sake of a deeper paradox. The discipline of soulcare stands in two worlds. We are in the world but not defined by the world’s categories, to paraphrase a biblical truth. If indeed paradox is as central for pastoral theology as it is for all of human living, I believe we in a time in which “saying the other side” now means listening more carefully to the tradition of the church in which we stand. Not as immutable truth that again must be applied to present spiritual needs but as one of the voices we listen to as we seek to discern the purposes of God for our time. We cannot lose what we have gained for the last several decades. For that reason we must continue to be totally attentive to the voices of living human documents. And then remember our roots and the traditions from which we come.

As a result of the pastoral care movement, we are attentive to the human story in all its rich diversity and its darkness. That is about being in the world. We listen to individual stories and collective myths. We have recently become more aware how carefully we must attend to the contexts that affect our well-being. We listen to the voices of living human documents individually and collectively who share with us their joys and pains and we respond in ways that validate their struggle to live faithful and fulfilling lives. We eschew simple moralisms because we know the complexity of the human person and human communities. We are cautious about admonishing people with normative visions who are indeed trying to do the best they know how. One side of the pastoral theology paradox is this ministry of standing by that is characterized by compassion and empathy. We have done this half of the paradox well. The other side is listening for a word from God, being attentive to the liberating and transforming power of God acting in our lives. I find it fascinating that in the last two decades, spiritual direction or companionship has gained in prominence as pastoral care has declined. At the heart of spiritual direction are questions about God: how do you understand God at work in your life? What is God calling you to do and be? Jean Stairs, a Canadian Pastoral theologian, has tried to bring these two together in a book entitled *Listening for the Soul*. She calls it “soulful pastoral care.” Soulful pastoral care, she suggests, “seeks to uncover the presence of God in everyday events, but also affirms and enables our human capacities to cooperate with the creative work of God and to orient life God-ward.” (11) By using the phrase “soulful pastoral care” she seeks to connect the work of pastoral caregivers, pastoral counselors, spiritual directors and lay caregivers. By using soulful to modify pastoral care, she implies that some pastoral care is not soulful. That may in fact be the case but it is not the ideal. I believe soulcare is a simpler and clearer term.

“Saying the other side” obviously must be done respectfully and gently. It must be preceded by respect and empathy. No one individual or no group will consider an al-

ternative vision unless they are convinced that the position they hold has been heard and understood. Moreover, the absolutizing instinct may be the only defense some people think they have against chaos. We should take them from them. Paradoxical truth is not a virtue to be used as a weapon but as an understanding that deepens faithful living. Moreover, any challenge to our own particular rendition of our life situation is likely to be experienced as confrontation. **Saying the other side** also presumes that the pastoral task is not necessarily to resolve contradiction but to learn to live in it. I understand this mode of “saying the other side” as a pastoral variation of developing a thick description of the story we are making and the stories we tell. It is predicated on the assumption that seeing more generally produces better seeing and seeing better will usually lead us to contradiction and paradox.

Most of us, I think it is fair to say, don't like paradox or contradiction. It is troublesome and messy and chaotic and too much like ambiguity or fuzzy-mindedness. We are likely to avoid contradictions when we can. It is awkward always having to say two things. It is like permanently walking a tightrope or speaking with forked tongue or straddling two roads. That is another way of saying what we know - that dualisms die hard. We would rather believe that things are this way or that way but not both ways. If democracy is good, other forms of governance are bad. If capitalism is right, then other economic forms are wrong. If heterosexuality is healthy, then homosexuality must be unhealthy. If two parent families are best, others are not good. If Christianity is true, then other religious expressions are false. Because thinking paradoxically is difficult, we risk overlooking the deeper truths of life and faith because of our inclination to eliminate contradiction where we can or absolutize ideologies or canonize one way of planting oats or polarize theological options.

When we decide to entertain paradoxes, they are not difficult to find. Consolation is to be found where our wounds hurt most. That is a paradox. We are stronger in the broken places. Families get in trouble when they emphasize community at the expense of autonomy or when separateness is more important than togetherness. The vitality of family living itself depends on keeping paradox “of being separate together” alive. Belief systems become ideologies when one side is absolutized. The impulse towards the universal easily translates into the suppression of difference, and the impulse towards the particular just as easily courts fragmentation and disintegration of the whole. Which is to say that the mysterious reign of God and the practice of soulcare cannot be associated with any one program or ideology – not even mine.

### **About the ELCA Social Statement on Health Care and Healing**

It was a resolution from the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA in 1999 that created this Task Force with this mandate: **To request that the Division of Church in Society undertake the development of a social statement on health and ethical challenges to health care for possible presentation and adoption by the 2003 Churchwide Assembly.** We were to do four things: present a biblical and theological background for health, healing and health care; address the moral dilemma of access and equity to health care; take a fresh look at the church (elca) and its health care institutions; examine the place of congregational health ministries in the

church's ministries. Those four foci were the both the framework and the parameter of our work. There were a number of dialectics that we struggled with: health as individual responsibility and community responsibility; health as gift and work; health as an end and a means to an end; health as private and public; health as rooted in the doctrine of creation and as the work of salvation. We worried about being bold enough to challenge people to think in new ways and yet write a document that will pass a voting assembly. We worried about be general enough not to be redundant before we finished and yet concrete enough so it has some bite in its applicability. We struggled with making it relevant for parish pastors and hospital chaplains/pastoral counselors. It was Fred Gaiser who kept asking the question "what do we know as church?" Which was quickly followed by the second question: "How is what we know as church connected to what the world knows about health and healing?"

The Christian vocation to care for the health of all God's creation is clear. That vocation not only includes faithfully exercising our own ministries of health and healing but working for a just society in all people are treated with the dignity that comes from being created in the image of God. There is, however, no biblical mandate for a particular economic or political healthcare system. Therefore Christian people will differ about how this vocation shall be exercised. In the Lutheran ethical tradition, such discussion falls into the realm of practical reason. In order to be sure that all people will be cared for, it is incumbent on the Church and her ministers to give special attention to the marginalized and the poor and others who do not have access to power, wealth and the health institutions of society.

Three themes in particular from the Lutheran tradition inform this social statement. I presume these are themes that are part of your ministry of soulcare as well. FIRST, God the creator works through human wisdom and skilled hands to heal and to promote health. We are therefore free to welcome these gifts with thanksgiving and partner with others to foster health care for everyone. SECONDLY, because Lutheran theology links healing with the forgiveness of sins, health and healing are connected to our relationship to God. "Paradox" is the THIRD theme from our tradition which also brings us back to an earlier discussion. This means that health is both gift and responsibility, both personal and communal, both public and private. We are both sinners and saints, both ill and healers, simultaneously sick and whole, God's outpatients. Birth and death are both part of the creation that God called good. Our struggle is to acknowledge that health is limited and partial because life is finite even as we live in the promise of ultimate wholeness in the company of God.

### **Rethinking the Modes of Pastoral Care**

When Clebsch and Jaekle identified healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling as the four modes of the care of souls practiced throughout the centuries, they were clear that of these were operative all the time but one tended to dominate at a particular period of history. So sustaining might have dominated the church's soulcare during the time of persecution but healing, guiding, and reconciling were also present. When John McNeill traced the history of the cure of souls in a book by that name, he followed the practice of reconciliation as the principle way the church has engaged in the care

of souls. In outlining the operations of ministry in which the shepherding perspective predominated, Seward Hiltner omitted reconciling because he linked it more with church discipline rather than care. In *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care*, Don Browning revived guidance as the mode of care needed for modern times.

If you read Howard Clinebell a long time ago in *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, you may remember that he added **nurturing** as another pastoral care function consistent with his emphasis on growth and enrichment. “The aim of nurturing, he said, is to enable people to develop their God-given potentialities, throughout the life journey with all its valleys, peaks, and plateaus.” (43) He linked nurturing with sanctification, consistent with his Wesleyan roots. In a chapter in a wonderful book entitled *The Arts of Ministry*, Kadi Billman’s introduces another governing image of the care of souls. The caregiver is one who **conspires and collaborates** with people in the midst of the tensions of life. The pastor as caregiver is “one who conspires and collaborates with others in the struggle to bring forth new life and hope from the creative tensions on the “boundary.”” Billman’s aim is to present an approach to the care of souls that is attentive to the situations in which oppression prevails. I have done this quick review to make the simple point that the modes of care keep changing.

In the concluding chapter of *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals*, Ed Foley and I explored the meaning of reconciliation as it relates to stories and rituals. I introduce it here as part of our rethinking pastoral care because we live in a time desperately needing the ministry of reconciliation. Because the diversity in our midst cannot be ignored and because our commitment to honoring difference will lead to more rubbing and conflict, we need to learn to practice the art of reconciliation as a matter of course in our ministry. Because we live in a time of so much irrational suffering, as we have noted before, when violence is so lethal that will be little opportunity to work toward reconciliation after a moment devastating violence, reconciling is no longer an option for living in this time. The escalation of indiscriminate violence means that we have learn to live a reconciling way of life to avoid the need for reconciliation. If reconciliation is needed, it may be too late. Propose that reconciling needs to be added as a mode of pastoral care for our time.

ELCA document on Specialized Pastoral and Clinical Education suggests that specialized pastoral care ministries “seek to extend the love of God in Jesus Christ to persons – any and all person – at the point of their deepest need in the midst of everyday settings of life.” Then this important observation is added. “The nature and design of (SPC) ministry varies with the specialty and setting of human care.” It is that latter caveat that may help to understand the speed with which pastoral care has been replaced by spiritual care in medical settings across the country. Both the context of work and the environment in which we live require that soulcare changes to attend to the particular need of people in a particular context.

Reconciliation, by definition is never easy. Conflicts that divide are often old and emotionally loaded. Sometimes the people being excluded are only tangentially related to the originating conflict. The original victims are long gone. People members may not even know why they are not to speak to others in the family but they do know clearly who will be offended by transgressing old barriers. At other times, the people we regard as responsible for pain incurred in my life are inescapably present. Such reconciliation cannot be hurried. Even our best rituals cannot eliminate conflict or remove hurt over-

night. It takes a very long time to make room in our world for people we believe have offended us. Sometimes, however, ritual moments like weddings and funerals become face-saving occasions to begin a process of reconciliation. Family members who have not spoken to one another for years meet on the common ground of the baptism of the first great-grandchild in the family and the enmity is broken.

Reconciliation is finally not the result of forgetting or bargaining because it is finally the work of God. Strategies are necessary in order to create truth-telling communities in which we might experience the grace of reconciliation, and in that reconciliation discover what God has already done. But our strategies do not effect reconciliation. The heart of Christian belief is that the world has already been reconciled in the work of Christ. Although repentance and forgiveness are necessary responses to shattered relationships in human life, they are the consequence of, rather than the condition for reconciliation. The complexity of human life and the pervasiveness of human conflict is a further reminder that reconciliation requires more than human effort. It can only be the work of God within us.

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There is more to reconciliation than empathy but hearing the other's story as fully and as accurately as possible is a necessary beginning. Reconciliation is possible only when the truth is told and clearly heard. It is essential, therefore, that we learn how to include the alienating event as part of the process of reconciliation. In order to do that, we will need to alter our expectations of who or what we must be. Self-righteousness is an impediment to reconciliation. So is blaming. On the other hand, the acknowledgment of responsibility is a necessary part of the process. Restitution without revenge or some effort at restoration may also be necessary for a broken relationship to be repaired because it demonstrates that the offender takes the consequences of the sin seriously.

Reconciliation is many things. It is the work of God we discover in moments of victimization or vulnerability that enables us to locate our story in a larger narrative.

For the Christian, this means that the difficult memories of the past and painful experiences of the present are transformed by being placed in the story of Christ's passion and death. Reconciliation is also something that we do. It is our response to abuse and violence in our lives. Although we often think of reconciliation as overcoming alienation for the sake of returning to a previously known peaceable state, Christian reconciliation does not reconstitute things as they were before. Rather, reconciliation takes us to a new place. (Schreiter, 1992, p. 56) Whatever expression reconciliation might take, it is always something more than forgetting or bargaining or revenge. It is a process with many moments that allows time for repair and enables us to heal the hurt without forgetting the harm. Reconciliation is about a new creation in which "our struggles are yoked to God's design for the world." (Schreiter)

The spirit of reconciliation which enables us to enter a world of contradiction is the same disposition that allows us to embrace paradox without needing to resolve it. This is a spirituality that thrives only in paradox, between the mythic and parabolic, around the human and the divine story, and in the tension of the individual and communal. It is a spirituality that is fed through the ambiguity of mighty stories and dangerous rituals. This experience of ambiguity is inevitable because pluralistic living is a permanent part of contemporary human society. Thus, if we are to flourish in this society, we need to learn how to tolerate opposite forces, both within and without.

We may experience the 'other' as dangerous and encounters with difference may continue to be challenging but the presence of the other is also unsettling because I am reminded that I too am a stranger. When I walk an unfamiliar neighborhood, turn off the freeway too early, or walk into the wrong meeting room, I discover that the stranger is myself. The experience of the other, or myself as other in unfamiliar settings also reminds me that sometimes I am a stranger to family and friends, an outsider to my own home or place of work. Ultimately, of course, this experience of the stranger rehearses at close range that sometimes I am a stranger even to myself. Thus we sometimes find ourselves feeling what St. Paul writes, "I do not understand my own action, for I do not do what I want but I do the very things I hate" [Rom. 7:15].

In order to embody a spirituality of reconciliation, we need the courage to be surprised. If we are willing to live toward reconciliation as victims of violence or abuse, we will find instances of healing grace in unlikely places from unlikely people. When we experience ourselves being forgiven, we will in turn be surprised by the ways God works forgiveness in the lives of others. Our stories and God's stories intersect unexpectedly. Ultimately it is in the stories we tell and the rituals we enact that the great paradox is exposed: to live we have to die. In the meantime, we look for enough courage to love the questions and live the contradictions of the stories and rituals that bring them to life. To do so in a spirit of reconciliation does not demand resolution but allows transformation as we never imagined it and grace where we least expect it.

## **Ministry After Christendom**

For the church, one of the crises for our time is the demise of Christendom. I am inclined use the phrase "after Christendom" rather than post-modernity because it is a theological metaphor around which to gather of wide variety of changes that have

been and are occurring today. By “after Christendom,” I mean the decline of dominance or sovereignty of Christianity in the known world. We assume the end of Christendom whenever we wonder what it will mean to be Church or be Christian when Christian values no longer dominate society. Admittedly, the end of Christendom is a presumption more than a fact. Christendom, as a fact, began in the 4th century of the common era under the reign of Constantine. Christianity, which had been a maligned and persecuted movement, suddenly became the official *cultus* of the Empire. Now, it would seem, we are at the other end of the process. Some suggest that this process of the dissolution of Christendom has already been going on for a century or two. However, because the ending of Christian dominance is gradual and inconspicuous, and may not yet be happening everywhere, plenty of people argue that Christendom is still alive and set out to build large Christian fortresses or mega-churches to prove it. Hence, although I believe the end of Christendom is a reality, it must remain an interpretation of the present situation of the church in the world.

Those who argue against the demise of Christendom will suggest that the mainstream Protestant churches are failing because these Churches have been liberal and wishy-washy. There is truth to the critique. Protestant churches sometimes seem like trumpets giving off a very uncertain sound. Building a biblical fortress against an increasingly secular world, however, is a false response to the demise of Christendom. On the liberal side it is equally false to welcome the culture’s diversity inside, all the while criticizing middle-class Christianity as homophobic, patriarchal, ethnocentric and exclusive. When that is the strategy, it is possible for the Christian community to lose track of its theological foundations in search of relevance. The only way out of this dilemma is to conclude that God is at work in the humiliation of Christianity. That is the point Douglas John Hall makes in a provocative little book entitled *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*. The gift at the end of Christendom, he says, is humility and a recognition of the necessity of interdependence rather than domination. Here is how Hall says it. “Presumption upon the past power and glory of Christendom is perhaps the greatest deterrent to faith’s real confession in our present historical moment.” (3) The dis-establishment of the church is gift because it might enable churches to develop genuine community, uncompromised theology, and a more honest engagement with the larger culture. It will be easier after Christendom, suggests Hall, to understand the implications of the “theology of the cross” for faithful Christian living. That is the gift at the end of Christendom.

The disestablishment of the church is gift because it might enable churches to develop genuine community, uncompromised theology, respect for the gifts of the stranger, and a more honest engagement with the larger culture. It will be easier after Christendom, suggests Hall, to understand the implications of the theology of the Cross for faithful Christian living. It will also be easier to identify the soul of ministry after Christendom when the trappings of power and privilege are gone. I have sometimes used the word *habitus* to refer to the character of ministry I am here calling soul. I mean to point to the same reality. In his book *Theologia*, Edward Farley suggests that a pastoral *habitus* is “a disposition of the soul that integrates the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of the practice of ministry. I understand *habitus* to be an inner attitude formed from general spirituality, shaped by disciplined meditation and the study of Chris-

tian texts, and informed by the practical knowledge necessary for the work of ministry. It is not just thinking and it is more than skills. Forming a *pastoral habitus* is like learning how to do theology by heart. The *soul of ministry* is as close to us as breathing.

The acceptance of this as the reality for the churches is not easy because the privilege of power is a hard habit to break. One way past this resistance is to conclude that God is at work in the humiliation of Christianity. That is the point that Douglas John Hall makes in a provocative little book entitled *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*. Here is how Hall says it: "Presumption upon the past power and glory of Christendom is perhaps the greatest deterrent to faith's real confession in our present historical moment." (3) The gift at the end of Christendom is humility and the recognition of the necessity of interdependence rather than domination. The church is free to disestablish itself in order to become as Hall puts it "the disciple community described by the scriptures and treasured throughout the ages by prophetic minorities." (5) This gift of humility that governs our response to the world is equally appropriate for the church and its ministers.

One consequence of this changed context is that the *formation of Christian character is more important than role definition for the practice of pastoral ministry after Christendom*. In Christendom, ministry was more like civil service with ranks and privileges attached. Roles and hierarchical power mattered. However, when the church is more like subversive outposts than a mighty army, roles and rank are altered in the company of the faithful. Women have identified the irony of struggling up the walls of the church fortress that kept them out of ministry for so long only to discover once they could be ordained, the pastoral office no longer had the status or power that it once did. Certainly roles are still important. Therefore the development of a professional self necessarily includes role formation. We cannot live in community or be effective in ministry without clearly defined role. But clearly define roles (like bounded selves) are not enough for ministry in the church after Christendom. We need authentic and sturdy souls for the work of ministry. If the gift to the Church at the end of Christendom is humility, as Douglas John Hall puts it, then women and men will need to minister without privilege. Furthermore, patterns of ministry, developed when the remnants of Christendom were still in place or when vestiges of the Enlightenment still governed theology will also need to change.

### **Other Images for This Time of Change**

In addition to the presumption of the end of Christendom, there are three other images of change in our time: growing diversity in our neighborhoods and churches, increase in secularism, and a hemispheric shift in the locus of power and religion and economics, though that is not so certain at the moment. Diversity, of course is not new. What is new, however, is that human difference is no longer hidden by geographic distance or behind cultural and religious imperialism. Encounters with diversity that were once the province of missionaries, the adventurous, the open-minded, or those too poor to live where they wished are not an unavoidable and irreversible dimension of daily living for more and more people. And because diversity has come home - so to speak - we must learn to live with strangers. That is the intent of cultural pluralism and

that is the gift of diversity. Learning to live with the stranger as neighbor and partner is an inescapable agenda for our churches because diversity is nearby and domination is undesirable.

In order to regard diversity as a gift, we need some change in thinking about the primacy of unity. A former colleague of mine used to have a poster on his office door that read: "OUT OF MANY, ONE." Now, after extensive travel and teaching in India, Southwest Asia, and Papua New Guinea, he has another poster on his door which reads OUT OF ONE, MANY. It is a fundamental shift in attitude. Both posters are true and both are necessary. That is the paradoxical mode of thinking which is required in order to live with diversity. Amatai Etzioni, a leading communitarian sociologist in this culture, made a similar observation from a non-sectarian point of view. We need a vision of pluralism -within-unity that recognizes the necessity for a framework or glue that will hold a multi-racial, multi-ethnic mosaic together.

The challenge of this time is to regard diversity as a mystery to be experienced rather than a problem to be solved. Honoring the mystery of the other is not a new agenda for the human community but it is now unavoidable. As long as we could keep diversity sequestered behind ethnic or cultural walls, we could presume that honoring "other", even for Christians, was optional. We now know, however, thanks to the strangers in our neighborhoods and homes and churches, that everyone is "other." Recognizing the "otherness" of the other who is "not me" is both inescapably human and quintessentially Christian. If we are all strangers, difference seems less dangerous. That is the gift of diversity. We will return to the theme of diversity later in the lecture when we explore hospitality as a way for the church to respond to an increasingly pluralistic world.

## **Soulcare and Secularity**

Another image that is used to describe our present context is the rise of secularism. The end of Christendom may look like secularism but they are not the same. By secularism, I mean the alienation of culture from its religious roots. Although Christianity was foundational for the story of Western culture in general and the formation of the United States in particular, widespread ignorance now manifests itself in mistrust against Christianity as one of many ideologies in the common marketplace of ideas. Despite efforts of the evangelical right to preserve the political and social influence of their religious values, secularism grows. One only need to visit places like Australia or the Netherlands or Germany to discover the power of secularity. I assure you it is alive and well and thriving in the Pacific Northwest.

Wolfhart Pannenberg has made an interesting point recently about the relationship between Christianity and modern culture in an essay entitled "How to Think about Secularism." The lack of tolerance among Christians in the post-Reformation period, he says, is directly responsible for the rise of a secularist culture. Religious civil wars made it necessary to abandon an older idea that public culture *must* be based on religious unity. "The memory of the role of religion in the origins of modernity powerfully reinforces the contemporary prejudice that religion in the public square is divisive, intolerant, and destructive of civil society." (*First Things*, no 64, June/July 1996, p 30) What that

means concretely for the future of Christianity is that we need learn to practice tolerance not only of freedom but of truth itself if we expect to have a place in the public square. Without these changes that can only come from within the Christian community itself, it is quite **unlikely** that modern culture would **reconsider** the exclusion of Christianity from the public square. That is to say, we have to become better neighbors if we are to live without being divisive with others unlike us. The gift of pluralism is learning how to honor the “other.” The gift of secularism for the church is the practice of tolerance. More of that when we explore paradox under the theme “on taking the fork in the road” because at least two things are always true.

Growing secularity is coupled with a burgeoning of popular spirituality in the culture that is remarkable in its scope. It is, I would suggest, a religion-less spirituality uniquely suited to American culture because it is without transcendence and without community. Religion is regularly negative and spirituality is regularly positive. You have heard people in hospitals say – I don’t think of myself as a religious person but I believe I am spiritual. Institutional religion has been seriously tarnished by sexual scandals and scandalous sexuality and also by worldwide violence that is justifiably attributed to religious bigotry or tyranny. I have been planning a conference in the summer on the contributions of Ernest Becker to our care of the dying. Several chaplains on the committee made it perfectly clear that no one would come if religion was in the title of the conference. What is unmistakable in the power of this movement is that people are longing for something than the acquisition of wealth or power – something deeper than life without transcendence. It is equally clear, however, is most people want a feel-good spirituality that will not cost them anything.

For all these reasons and many more you can add. it seems to me there is a kind of urgency to rethinking pastoral care in order to respond effectively and faithfully to these challenges. I hope I am not invested in the outcome of our reflections but I am invested in thinking carefully and critically about the work we do in order to be prepared for an authentic ministry of care in the future. And particularly for those of us who are engaged in specialized ministry as Lutherans at the edge of culture, what vision of pastoral care shall we fashion that is both faithful to our heritage and response to the changing needs and contexts in which we work. When I began pastoral ministry in 1962, people were tumbling into the churches. Our task was to figure out how to preach well and do good pastoral care and pay the bills. It was simply and complex. We were to be enablers rather than directors in ministry. Now the dominant metaphor for ministry is leader.

One of the leading theologians of the mid-twentieth century, Daniel Day Williams, wrote a wonderful statement of this approach to ministry called *The Minister and the Care of Souls*. “To bring salvation to the human spirit is the goal of all Christian ministry and pastoral care,” Williams said. “The key to pastoral care lies in the Christological center of our faith, for we understand Christ as bringing the disclosure of our full humanity in its destiny under God.” (pp 11,13) Williams links the goal of pastoral care with an experience of transcendence when he suggests “that a goal of pastoral care is to lead toward the true valuation of each moment of time as having its destiny in eternity.” (142) In the end, Williams argues, the care of souls does not belong either to the Church or its ministers. “It is God in his supreme act of love in Jesus Christ who heals the human

spirit. The pastoral task, as it comes to every minister and every Christian, is to respond to the wonder of God's care for the soul and to share with others such knowledge as he has of God's healing power." (147)

Soulcare is of course first of all the work of God. When we enter a hospital room or begin a pastoral conversation, we enter God's care already in process. From another perspective, the Church as an incarnation of God in the world is the caring agent. Pastoral care is the church's response. The category of representative Christian persons" is general enough to include the ministry of the laity as well as clergy but it is particular in terms of the origin of our care. And it is general enough so that one could say that caregivers represent the church and they re-present the care of God in the midst of human need but it is particular enough so that we are clear our ministries of care are on God's behalf. Seward Hiltner once suggested that **pastoral** should mean tender solicitous concern. Hiltner's definition is broad enough so that anybody with warmhearted feelings could be pastoral. There are ways in which Hiltner's suggestion has informed a more inclusive way of thinking about soulcare so that no one is left out – except maybe God. When I was a hospital chaplain in Summit, New Jersey, my salary was paid by the local council of churches. It was very clear to me who I represented. I was free to exercise a prophetic ministry for the sake of soulcare. Lutheran process of certification is very important because it helps us be clear we are representative Christian person in the care of souls. Because who pays our salaries can have a profound influence on our self-identity, it is important for us to reaffirm from Clebsch and Jaekle that we are representative Christian persons when we engage in care of the souls.

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## **A Song Not Scored For Breathing**

Attending to the soul is about holiness as well as, and maybe even more than, tasks and competence in the work of ministry. Michael Ramsey, the former Archbishop of Canterbury, made this point well in a little book called *The Charismatic Christ*. "Amid the clinical trends in contemporary pastoral guidance, [the minister] will need to keep alive the permanent issues of sin and forgiveness. To be healthy and to be whole (and I would add competent) is no substitute for being penitent, forgiven and holy." Holiness is not something that Lutherans talk about easily. I have no intention of promoting works righteousness or the pursuit of perfection. Nor do we want to return to the restrictions living fully that marked asceticism or the pietism of my childhood. I have in mind a rather earthy view of holiness, something like Frederick Buechner's picture of the English hermit saint Godric. The earthiness of Godric was evident in his passion for life and his awareness of vulnerability. "Patterns of wholistic personal formation" is more than roles – it is about virtue or character. Focus on the soul of ministry is a way of rethinking the place of virtue in Christian and ministerial character.

**1) How much can I take in?** There are a number of ways to ask this question that make it particularly relevant for our time. How can I hear the different and sometimes conflicting of the world or of our congregations? Can I sit in the darkness long enough for the darkness to be clear? How much will I be able to receive of the different

ways of seeing the world? Even between men and women, how much of that difference can I take in? The focus is on receptivity or the sensible mode of being. A very simple illustration from grief ministry should make the point. Very often people will say to me that they wanted to go and visit a friend who was grieving or dying – *but they did not know what to say*. The faulty assumption is that our ministry with those who suffer is in the words we give rather than the pain we receive. Hospitality is the public act of this capacity to receive. For the future of the church in a pluralistic context, we will need women and men who are receptive. That is the first virtue of the soul of ministry.

I am greatly indebted to an American Episcopalian named Urban Holmes for introducing me to this emphasis on the receptive mode of ministry. In a book called *Priest in Community*, Holmes argues persuasively that the image of priest is best understood in terms of the 'receptive mode of knowing.' "It is not possible to understand what makes a priest "tick" if we are trapped in an action mode of thought." Holmes draws heavily on the study of shamans to make this argument. To be receptive or sensible, he suggests, **means being able to devour the whole experience, with all its contradictions, and to make a new whole meaning without leaving anything out.** (pp 72-73) Whatever authority I will have in pastoral ministry will be derived more from how much I receive than what I do. Moreover, ministry in a receptive mode is about wisdom and about being more than doing. "The power of the priests belongs to the priest not because of external authority, as in professional accreditation, but because the priestly image is rooted in the consciousness of the receptive mode of knowing." (125) Mission, understood in this way, is more than proclamation. And it is more than being in the world. It is about welcoming the 'other', whoever the 'other' is, and also being the stranger whom the 'other' welcomes. Both moves are necessary if we are to be partners and neighbors in a pluralistic, secular world.

**2) How much can I give away without expecting return?** At one level, this question presses us to consider how much we depend on positive feedback for what we do or how much we need the kind of recognition that is likely to elude us in future ministry. It is increasingly evident that congregations are more and more composed of needy people. As a consequence, it will be less and less likely that a pastoral person will get back from ministry as much as we invest. What we have sometimes called burn-out is probably the consequence of individuals in ministry giving away more than they had to give without getting much back. When those who are drawn to pastoral ministry are themselves seriously wounded. Chaplains feel empty because they are being asked by their institutions to do more and more with less and less. Enough is never enough. We cannot do ministry alone. And we cannot attend to the needs of others without attending to our own soul. "Every helping person needs a cuddle group," a wise family therapist once said. We need companions who will hold us when we are lonely or afraid and who will remind us when we are particularly vulnerable because "giving away more than we get back" will be one mark of ministry for this time.

Stinginess, preoccupation with the survival of self, self-protectiveness, all of these ways that aim at keeping the self safe, mean in the end that we will lose ourselves. The only way to keep the self is to give it away. Ironically, living in a time when there is less coming back is a gift for discipleship. There is no temptation to enter ministry for the wrong reasons. Women and men in ministry after Christendom will struggle if

they are not prepared to live the gospel life of self-poverty, The virtues of generosity and self-sacrifice that are near the center of the soul of ministry in the name of Jesus. We find life by losing it. To follow the crucified Christ is to be conjoined with the mystery of death for the sake of life.

There is a wonderful story about the Mulla Nasrudin that illustrates this virtue of generosity. A Moslem priest with a huge turban on his head had fallen in a pond and was calling for help. A large crowd had gathered. People were saying "Give me your hand, Reverent!" But the priest paid no attention to their offer to rescue him. Instead he kept wrestling with the water and shouting for help. Finally the Mulla Nasrudin stepped forward. He stretched out his hand toward the priest and shouted. The lesson is obvious. The Mulla Nasrudin was willing to give his hand away without any assurance he would get it back. It is about care that does not calculate the cost. You can all remember times when you have said to someone "take my hand" and had very little to give away. You hoped it came back but there was not assurance. We have our life as a gift from God. It is not ours to keep or possess or hold on to. The words of Jesus about the cost of discipleship support this characteristic of generosity. It is many places in the gospels. I read from Matthew 10:39. "If you try to save your life you will lose it. But if you give it up for me, you will surely find it." Ministry is service without regard for acclaim.

**3) How much humility can I endure?** The gift at the end of Christendom, Douglas John Hall has said, is humility and the recognition of the necessity of interdependence rather than domination. Humility is a mark of ministry that aims to be partner and neighbor with people of other persuasions. We cannot dominate anymore - nor, I would submit, should we want to. We are not likely to be successful by the world's standards so it is not only futile but self-defeating to try. After he heard the news of the failed attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote this from his prison cell. "One must abandon every attempt to make something of oneself...This is what I mean by worldliness - taking life in one's stride, with all its duties and problems, successes and failures, its experiences and helplessness." (July 21, 1944) Ministry in a secular time when all the props are gone that gave prestige and power to ministry requires substantial ego strength lest humility lead to surplus powerlessness, diminished self-esteem, and intolerable vulnerability. Humility should never be confused with mediocrity. True humility is more like self-forgetfulness than self-modesty. Humility is essential for ministry that is collaborative. Such ministry is not for the fainthearted, but people who possess what John Chrysostom once described as a "robust and vigorous character."

Ernest Becker was an anthropologist, Jewish philosopher, social analyst, psychoanalytically oriented secular theologian who struggled to believe. He died too young of cancer in 1974 shortly after his book *The Denial of Death* was published. For a number of years, he maintained correspondence with Harvey Bates, a campus minister he met in Syracuse University when Becker taught there briefly. This letter, written to Bates from Vancouver Canada in 1972 speaks directly to the issue of humility in ministry. "The fact that the ministry in general tries to have it both ways (making it in the American dream *plus making it* in God's scheme) has always made it farcical to me...We all fail to be the persons we dreamed and wanted. This is the hardest thing to realize: each one suspects that he or she has failed but others have succeeded. What nonsense - ev-

everyone fails, but few admit it. Take some advice from an old and worn scholar: let go of life and live; or take it from Luther, "I say die, taste death.." and then, Becker adds, you won't have anything to stand in the way of life and of faith. That is humility. If humility of a minister's soul, then we will feel at home among the oppressed and the marginalized. We are them We are the strange ones.

4) What can I imagine? Imagination has not been thought to be essential for theology or ministry. It may be equated with intuition and discounted by our rational preferences. Or, imagination may be linked to fantasy or make-believe and therefore not taken seriously. However, imagination is necessary for the future of ministry in order to bring into being a kind of Christianity we have not previously known. Imagination is needed in order envision new possibilities when the old props of Christendom are gone or when old patterns of ministry may no longer work. We not only face a crisis of values today; we need to imagine new forms of human flourishing for the sake of our common future. Rebecca Chopp regards the reinvigoration of imagination as necessary preparation for the future of ministry so that we can envision new possibilities and new notions of desire and knowledge. "Today, when we face the crises of values, knowledge and power, what is required, at least in part, is a new aesthetic funding, a way of knowing that will be productive of new forms of human flourishing. This will include images and discourses of community, new visions of what it is to be human, new terms for relationships, history, freedom, God, and new notions of desire and knowledge." But imagination is more than a future thing.

- It takes imagination to see connections in our ministry or between the textual resources of the Christian tradition and the crises of modern living.
- It takes imagination to wait in the darkness until the darkness is clear.
- It takes imagination to hear a story of human struggle and despair and still hope.
- It takes imagination to help someone re-imagine their narrative in new and more constructive ways.
- It takes imagination to seen the new thing that God is doing in our lives.
- It takes imagination to believe that the end of Christendom is a gift for the church.
- It even takes some imagination to read the Gospel narratives. Over and over again, we need to be prepared, the way imagining prepares us, for the ways in which Jesus regularly turns our expectations of order existence upside down.

At the conclusion of his book *Imagination and Authority*, John E Thiel encourages the work of imagination as a means for appreciating and explaining the active but mysterious presence of the Holy Spirit in human history. "[T]hese very qualities of imagination can convey the often surprising, unpredictable, and mysterious ways in which the grace of God, God's very presence, is encountered in human experience." (213-4) We need to practice this kind of seeing so we can see more - and so we can dream dreams beyond what we see and so we can be open to the creative freedom of God's grace. And the ability to envision new combinations of old facts, the ability to envision new realities, is what generates hope. And hope keeps the soul of ministry alive.

**5) How much ambiguity can I embrace?** In a sense, one might say this is the most crucial virtue for the soul of ministry in the time after Christendom. Because of the complexity of these changing times, we need women and men in ministry with high

tolerance for ambiguity and who are capable, as the poet Keats once said, “of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason.” People who tolerate ambiguity are also able to respect difference, celebrate diversity, live questions that have no simple answers, and discover that most truth in life and faith is paradoxical. Learning to respect diversity, to enter into conversation with an ‘other’ with the presumption that their culture or perspective is of equal worth to mine, and maybe even to celebrate diversity as a gift from all requires handling ambiguity better than most of us do.

Perhaps the most difficult paradox for Christians must live with is this: we follow Jesus with single-minded devotion **and** with doubt and ambiguity. Or, to put it another way, the God whom we love without reservation is indeed holy but does not come prepackaged as certitude. The absence of certitude corresponds to our contemporary context of pluralism, our experience of dislocation and fragmentation in the world, and our intimate condition of liminality before God. Absolute certitude in matters of faith and morality is dangerous business. It not only makes for loudness. It makes for brutality. Anybody who equates his or her own program or vision of truth with the reality of God can be brutally shrill toward opponents.

In an essay on “Culture Wars and the Paradigms of Adult Faith,” James Fowler revisits his stages of faith development in the light of the revolutionary changes and paradoxical challenges of our time. Fowler reminds us that for this time of faith is that there are very few naked facts or truths. Everything is subject to interpretation. Not all interpretations will be the same. Nor will they all necessarily be true. But they need to be heard. Multiple perspectives must be taken into account including paradoxical or opposing perspectives. What is needed is CONJUNCTIVE FAITH, the capacity to embrace polarities in one’s life, and alertness to paradox, and the ability to hold multiple interpretations of reality in view. Here is how Fowler describes the kind of women and men the church needs for this time of transition and upheaval. We need leadership that can “stand firmly, yet flexibly enough in their own faith traditions, that they can affirm plurality and diversity in faith in the larger society as sources of strength to be celebrated.” (172-173) For ministry after Christendom, we will need, I believe, men and women of conjunctive faith who can hold two things to be true and who are psychologically able to live with ambiguity and ever-increasing complexity – people who can live the questions, as Rilke once said.

Another story from the Mulla Nasrudin will make this point. The Mulla was visited by a would-be disciple. The man, after many vicissitudes, arrived at the hut on the mountain where the Mulla was sitting. Knowing that every action of the sufi master was meaningful, the newcomer asked Nasrudin why he was blowing on his hands. “To warm myself from the cold,” Nasrudin replied. Shortly afterward Nasrudin poured out two bowls of soup, and blew on his own. “Why are you doing that, Master?” asked the would-be disciple. “To cool it, of course,” said the teacher. At that point the disciple left Nasrudin, unable to trust any longer a man who used the same process to cause different effects, heat and cold. Reciprocity and interdependence and contradiction are everywhere in culture and creation. So is paradox.

**6) Do I have courage enough to be as one and to be as a part?** This question comes from the timeless masterpiece by Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*. The courage

to be oneself is certainly a necessary part of the minister's soul. It should be clear now that ministry today requires a full self, aware of the interdependence of all life, actively receptive, and appropriately authoritative. We have learned from Edwin Friedman how important a differentiated self is if one is to be a leader. Ibsen once said that if you can't stand to be alone, you should not get married. The same is true for ministry. It is often a very lonely road. I think that sometimes pastoral behavior we have negatively described as the 'lone ranger syndrome' may simply be the consequence of a lifetime of loneliness in ministry. There is an important sense in which genuine courage to be one's self is particularly necessary virtue for the soul of ministry because of the strenuous nature of modern life. This focus on being a single one must, however, be balanced by the courage to be as a part. This participating with others includes a willingness to become committing person as a way of keeping faith with God who keep promises.

There are two critical variants of this perspective. One is the relationship of the whole and parts. It is important for the souls of ministry to conceive of the church – in our instance the Evangelical Lutheran Church – as a whole from the outside in and then to see our relation to the whole and then to see the relation of the parts to the whole. The danger is that we only look at the whole – the ELCA – from the perspective of our own part, from the inside out. Cynicism is born in the church and among its ministers when we work only from the inside out – always about what the church is doing or not doing from my own perspective. Both perspectives are necessary. It is difficult to keep the paradox. It is easier only to look out for my part or have the big picture. Soul is communal and particular. It is one with the angel's song and it rooted very specifically in the earth. It is single one and a part. Trouble begins when we get stuck on one side of that paradox.

The second variant of Tillich's insight into courage to be as a part and be as a whole is connected to the private and public dimensions of ministry. This is an increasing problem as more and more people who come to study for ministry have been nurtured in a culture that prizes privatism highly. When this is coupled with the number of introverts who are drawn to ministry, it is not surprising that people struggle with the public nature of ministry.

**7) How much awareness of vulnerability can we endure?** This question grows out of our awareness of human contingency and fragility, not about the fact of human vulnerability. Part of being human is to be vulnerable. By that I mean simply that we are susceptible to being wounded. The human creature does not come into the world with self-protecting parts like horns or venom or claws. We are of course never more vulnerable than at birth. Eventually we learn some self-protective skills but we never outgrow vulnerability. The danger is that in developing those self-protective devices or defensive maneuvers, we isolate ourselves from the world. People who live behind high security fences or doors with triple locks and alarms or ministers who distance themselves from people by desks or formal structures or excessive business may be safer, but they endanger the soul of ministry.

The minister's soul is regularly endangered by temptations to power and pretense. We are tempted to pretense whenever we fear exposure or when the ordinary posture of faith as resting-in-neediness is too dependent. Being a soul is living with nakedness before God. For that reason, the enemy of soul is deception. As people of

faith, we are free to live without pretense because we believe that the human soul is ultimately hidden in God whose graciousness touches everything with mercy – even the minister’s soul. Because of the fragility and vulnerability of the human soul, I do not go lightly from someone who has held my soul. When someone holds my soul, I only hope they do not break it. It is very fragile & durable.

The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has suggested modern societies are becoming more diverse and more porous at the same time. The image of a porous society means that we are less protected from “stuff” out there coming inside. And the more porous the society, the more vulnerable we become, that is sure. Even without porous societies we are susceptible to being wounded by the air we breathe, the water we drink, the mail we receive, the phone calls we get, the sun that shines, and maybe even the people we make love to. And then there are situations in our lives and in our ministries like an unhappy marriage or problematic children or an unbalanced checking account or the death of a friend or ugly rumors in the parish that also make us vulnerable. Moreover, the kind of compassion that makes for good ministers also makes one susceptible to being wounded. The goal cannot be to become invulnerable. Rather we need to live with the awareness of our vulnerability without being overwhelmed by it. It is part of the soul of ministry.

**8) Everything we have said so far about the *soul of ministry* and the complexity of human life before God – about the virtues of *soul* that invite us to embrace vulnerability and ambiguity, taste humility and imagine what is possible – **finds its expression in the church’s ministry of hospitality. The ministry of hospitality is about welcoming the stranger as someone with gifts to give.** When we offer hospitality to the stranger, we welcome something new, unfamiliar, and unknown into our lives that has the potential to expand our world and deepen our faith. Thomas Ogeltree has written about hospitality in this way: “Regard for the strangers in their vulnerability and delight in their offerings presupposes that we perceive them as equals, as persons who share our common humanity in its myriad variations.” Hospitality is about breaking down barriers that separate us. Ogeltree contends, and I agree, that hospitality is at the core of the moral life. However as our communities and families become more diverse, hospitality is more than a religious ideal; it is a human necessity. The Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama has suggested that “The only way to stop the violence of genocide in our world is by extending hospitality to strangers.” Doing so is not only the essence of the Gospel but essential for survival in a pluralistic world.**

The signs of hospitality in ministry and an hospitable community are deceptively simple. It is a context in which affirmation is unconditional and expectations are explicit. It is an environment in which there is freedom to differ and be different. It is a place that entertains ideas and dreams and welcomes gifts from unexpected people. In his Old Testament Theology, Walter Brueggemann uses a wonderful phrase “rehabilitative hospitality” to describe our action toward the weak, the poor, and the vulnerable. “Thus elementally, human obedience means to care for the community, to practice rehabilitative hospitality, to engage in responsible stewardship, and quite concretely to share your bread with the hungry, to bring the homeless poor into your house, and to cover the naked. (463-4) Hospitality may be simple but it is also dangerous. When we are genuine about welcoming the stranger, we will be changed in unexpected ways. When we

welcome the stranger into our home, it is no longer a private sphere; it becomes something common. When we welcome the stranger into our communities of faith, we give up control for the sake of a common space in which gifts are freely exchanged.

Hospitality is about how we make the church a sanctuary for childhood. Hospitality is about how we recognize the gifts of other denominations or faith traditions in this era of new ecumenism. Hospitality is about the willingness to be changed by the gifts we receive from the children born into our homes. Hospitality is about entertaining unorthodox theological ideas. Hospitality is about creating communities with permeable boundaries so that no one is immediately excluded from the fellowship of faith. Hospitality occurs when we make room in our hearts for the stories of others. Hospitality is embodied in our eucharistic practices – who is welcome to the table and how each participant finds gifts for meeting the hungers of the world. We discover the soul of ministry when we set aside our needs, allow ourselves to be empty for service and love toward others, and make room enough for the gifts of others and the gift of Christ. Such a posture of hospitality is as close as I can come to knowing what authenticity looks like in the practice of ministry.

All guests who present themselves, the Rule of St. Benedict says, are to be welcomed as Christ. It is difficult to imagine the impact on this culture if every Christian community was a guest house where the gifts all displaced strangers (members and non-members alike) are honored. In this time after Christendom when there is also a major shift in the dominant hemisphere from the north to the southern hemisphere, we will learn hospitality from the poor. Hospitality, suggests Robert Schreier, “will become increasingly important as a sign of the presence of the reign of God. Our schooling [in hospitality] will come from a poor church, for it is one thing to be hospitable in a culture of abundance and another to be hospitable in a culture of poverty.”(11) Hospitality, particularly the hospitality of the poor, is a gift to the church at the end of Christendom. We are back again to the gift of humility which characterizes the Christian church in this time. It is not only a dimension of the soul of each believer – it is a characteristic of Christian community as a whole. In humility, all guests are welcomed as Christ.

## **Ministry Without Props**

Luther was confronted with a dilemma that is familiar to us. How are we to be Christian in the world without the old props? For us, I am suggesting, at the end of Christendom, the props we have lost are privilege and power. For Luther, as Roland Bainton recounts it, all the medieval patterns for being Christian in or on the edge of the world were gone. The clerical theocracy was gone because the pope was not infallible and clergy were not more spiritually superior or more competent than laity. Moreover, Luther makes the point over and over again that there is nothing we can do to contribute to our salvation. That is God’s gift. Nonetheless, Bainton argues, perfection is binding on all and attainable by none because God commands the impossible. Furthermore, the ideal is recessive. Every attainment raises the level of demand. *“The Christian life is a song not scored for breathing.”* (52)

I hope that the title of this lecture is now clear. In response to the challenges of this time at the end of Christendom of diminished power without any diminishment of

need for the Gospel message, the church needs women and men whose patterns of wholistic personal formation will enable them to bring into being forms of Christianity not yet known. That is a necessary vision and an impossible ideal. In that sense, the life and work of a Christian minister is like a song not scored for breathing. It is impossible to sing a song not scored for breathing, at least if you try to sing it alone. Hence an impossible ideal. Ministry depends on the same grace of God that everyone else needs.

But of course there is another side. We do not sing alone. The song we sing is the Church's song. Because there are many voices able to sing the Church's song, we can stagger our breathing. Still the demands of modern living and the ongoing discouragement in ministry make it difficult to sing the church's song even with others. Furthermore, the individualism that is so deeply embedded in western societies like the United States does not encourage group singing. Ministerial integrity as the goal of integration is an ongoing achievement. We will continue to work very hard to develop new models of pastoral leadership for a changed situation. And yet fashioning new patterns of wholistic personal formation for women and men in ministry does not and cannot happen quickly. Moreover, like a song not scored for breathing, what we work for is an impossible ideal and a gift of grace. For that, I am grateful.

PRESENTATIONS END HERE.

### **Questions for discussion around the theme "A Song not Scored for Breathing"**

1. How much can I take in? How much can I hear of the different and sometimes conflicting voices of the world? How much will I be able to receive of the different ways of seeing the world?
2. How much can I give away without expecting return? Are not generosity and self-sacrifice near to the center of the soul of ministry in the name of Jesus?
3. How much humility can I endure? Is not humility the gift at the end of Christendom that invites us to move toward interdependence rather than domination?
4. What can I imagine? Is the reinvigoration of imagination a necessary prelude to the future of ministry?
5. How much ambiguity can I embrace? Can we live in uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts without any irritably reaching after fact or reason?
6. Do I have courage enough to be as one and as a part? How might we balance agency and community, separateness and togetherness, autonomy and belonging?
7. How much awareness of vulnerability can I tolerate? Can we live with an awareness of being vulnerable without being overwhelmed by it?
8. Can I be hospitable enough to welcome the stranger and make room to receive the unexpected gifts of others.

### **QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS (Anderson's response in italics)**

- 1) How can those in the ministry of pastoral care renew the ministry of the church for all

the people of God? There is sadness about growing disinterest in the churches for the ministry of care compared to “mission outreach” or self-preservation.

*Survival is a powerful motivator. When I began parish ministry in 1962, the people just came. All that was needed was to organize the community and provide good pastoral care. The ‘program’ approach to congregational life presumes that community is built around shared activities more than shared relationships of care.*

2) How can we preserve the quality of soulcare when people engaged in spiritual care have less training and fewer credentials beyond their person spirituality? If people value pastoral care, why is our CPE program struggling for lack of funds?

*When so many contexts are struggling financially and when hospitals are always looking for cost-cutting measures, it is easy to understand of appeal of finding less costly people to do the work of spiritual care. The decision by ACPE to substitute the term ‘spiritual care’ for the term ‘pastoral care’ in their mission statement provides the opening for hospitals to support this shift. It may be that the change in nomenclature is necessary to be more inclusive of interfaith practice. We cannot know yet whether this name change is also a paradigm shift in the field of pastoral theology.*

3) Who will come after me? As the current company of chaplains, supervisors, pastoral counselors age, where will our replacements come from? For example, there are not very many young people at this gathering. Training is financially costly and draining on marriage and family life. How can we invite younger people into specialized care? What can be done to strategize this recruitment?

*Those are important questions. We probably also need to ask whether there are new alternatives for recruitment as well as new criteria for training for a new time.*

4) Where do the durable images come from for the language of pastoral care in a secular, religiously pluralistic culture? Does being inclusive of other faiths water down or compromise the Christian faith? How do we redefine our ministry in the shift away from Christian culture?

*We have already noted Douglas John Hall’s observation that humility is the gift to the Church at the end of Christendom. We will need to learn how to live as partners with respect and hospitality with people with whom we disagree.*

5) A mission statement like ‘Christian caring, enhancing lives through a commitment to individualized care in a place empowered by God’s love makes a great place to give and receive soulcare.

6) The pressure of time in the workplace is a serious problem. I am highly trained and have a lot of knowledge and skill but these are most useful when there is time to get deeper, but not when people want a quick fix, a pill or a sound-bite and the institutional demands are overwhelming. I have a two or three minute window with each person, time enough for me to say “I’ll pray for you” even though I don’t time to pray with you.

*In Larry Dossy’s world in which prayer works, no matter who is being prayed to, we are in danger of making prayer magic and diminishing the significance of personal,*

*pastoral conversation as a necessary dimension of care. In a pragmatic culture that is also entranced by technology and instrumental reason, making prayer into another technique is a ongoing temptation. On the other side, we may need to recover the significance of intercessory prayer as a significant dimension of ministry. That is a way of being present even when we are absent. To have a service of intercessory prayer in the hospital chapel at designated times might provide us with an opportunity keep prayer within a framework with a rich history.*

7) How do we reclaim soulcare from secularization? There are a variety of practices that advertise themselves as having to do with spirituality but they are focused on relaxation techniques or getting in touch with the inner self more than anything to do with transcendence.

*Transcendence is an issue in the culture as well as the church. George Stroup, in a new book entitled **Before God**, suggests that we are experiencing an eclipse of transcendence. Others might argue that we simply have a shift in the locus of transcendence from outside to inside. In a way, we could understand the history of theology as an ongoing struggle to maintain a balance between God's immanence and God's transcendence. Both are true and both are necessary for the vitality of faith and life. The present insistence on the nearness of God may be a necessary corrective to Barth's view of God's as Wholly Other.*

8) The change that troubles me is from quality to quantity in pastoral care – which often feels like 'bean counting' than care. We are being pressed over and over again to do more with less but more is not always better.

9) There is a lack of understanding on the part of the church about what a chaplain is or does. In my experience, the church does not get it.

*One of the strengths of the Lutheran tradition is its emphasis on the congregation. As a result, it is not easy for some to imagine pastoral activity outside the congregation. One response has been to make chaplaincy and other ministries of care more and more and more an entrepreneurial activity that has its origins outside the structures of the church. The difficulty is to find support for a particular vision or dream for a particular ministry. Another alternative might be to work more and more from the congregation. The growth of parish nursing suggests to me that the focus on health ministry may have shifted from the hospital to the congregation.*

10) How can spiritual direction be more part of the long term care and assisted living complex with both staff and residents? How can we develop uniform spiritual care assessments as well as assessments in spirituality?

*We need a much longer conversation about the relationship between spiritual direction or guidance and pastoral care. Jean Stairs, in her book **Listening for the Soul: Pastoral Care and Spiritual Direction**, has introduced an alternative way of thinking that does not put these two modes of care in conflict. "To listen for the soul again means helping people to connect with God, live in the image of God, and discern how best to participate in God's ongoing creative and redemptive work in communities and in the*

world.” (p 10) However, *Stairs* is convinced that we have overlooked the soul in pastoral care. Here is how she begins the book. “Those of us who are privileged to carry out the ministry of pastoral care are becoming increasingly aware that we have neglected to listen to the soul.” (1)

The second part of the question introduces one of the dilemmas about the emerging practice of spiritual care. Since spirituality is a highly personal matter, it is difficult to make distinctions between good spiritualities and bad spiritualities. It would seem to me, however, that criteria for spiritual care should be governed by the principles of care that have developed over the last several decades. In a way, it would be useful to look at more general books such as Willard Gaylin **On Caring** to provide principles for care that are neither Christian specific or limited to the clerical paradigm. Establishing to criteria needs urgently to be done. The issue is deeper than preserving a particular role. It is about insuring that the quality of care we have come to expect will continue as we move away from well-trained professionals to volunteers in spiritual care for whom the depth of spirituality is the primary criteria for effective caregiving.

11) Loneliness and isolation are often a troubling part of the experience of people in specialized ministries. One of the greatest enemies of ministry is the loneliness of the pastoral caregivers that undermines the durability of the ‘ministerial soul.’ Loneliness is everywhere. 50% of the residents in my nursing home have never had a visitor. Because of the unique role of the chaplain, it is also a lonely vocation.

12) How do we interpret pastoral care for people of other faiths in ways that are non-threatening to their faith?

*We need to be clearer about the connection between care and witness. When the work of pastoral care has been understood as “preaching one to one” (Turneyson) or when the effectiveness of pastoral care depends on ‘witnessing to Christ,’ (evangelical perspective) then one can understand how easy it is for people of other faiths to be cautious about the work of pastoral or spiritual care. It would help if we are clear that the work of care is enabling people to listen to God – rather than hear God through us. That emphasis might lessen the fear that the filtering process of the listener will modify what is heard and said and would certainly keep pastoral caregivers attentive to their own pre-understandings.*

13) How will pastoral care and pastoral counseling continue to have meaning when the majority of people are not grounded in religious communities?

*Part of the dilemma is self-understanding. In earlier times, the chaplain was “in stead of”- filling in for the sustaining presence of the patient’s faith community. There was also a common language. When patients have no faith community, the chaplain has a different, and perhaps weightier role and must find a common language to speak with the patient while listening to their story.*

14) How can chaplains help people with unresolved grief issues that impact their care of others?

*This question has a couple of angles. Whenever we can, it is important to help*

*caregivers get past old grief that is impeding the effectiveness of their ministry. In my experience the first task is to convince people what the old grief in their lives is impeding their ministry. Everybody has old grief. For some it has been resolved and does not interfere in the present. Whenever we encounter someone who is experiencing new grief, it is important to ask about 'old grief' and how it might connect to this new experience of loss.*

15) What is the “added value” of chaplaincy?

*This is a difficult question for what it implies. If there is the basic value medical care to which we add value, we are always in the position of proving worth or as someone named it, “the pressure to measure.” What chaplains do is not an ‘added value’ but a different value. For example, we can say that death is a problem to be solved through the wisdom and skills of medicine; but death is also a mystery to be experienced for which there is no solution. Both are true. Neither one is added value to the other. Our task is to lift of the mystery of life and death as yet another dimension that is to be lived without needing to solve it.*

*The greater task is to establish that each role or focus has equal validity – even in the midst of a hospital in which the technology seeks to eliminate mystery.*

*The changing culture of healthcare and its implications for chaplaincy was reported by many who responded. This included ‘dictates’ from JACHO, etc that push a more scientific analysis which becomes a distraction away from the work of soulcare. The absence of recognition and appreciation is clearly demoralizing for the work of chaplaincy. All of these pressures require that we ask difficult questions about the aim of chaplaincy. We are most demoralized when we lose sight of the purpose of our being in a hospital.*

16) Are there ways to limit our hours of work and do more self-care, especially when we are fearful of being marginalized further? It is harder and harder to do soulcare as hospitals become more and more focused on business. The ‘bottom line’ almost always trumps much heralded company values. In order to do the work of soulcare in a large impersonal medical center, I must overcome physical distance, downsizing or the fear of it, and walls of hierarchy. How do we raise questions about these ethical dilemmas in the corporate healthcare world when our salaries are paid by that same corporate healthcare world? **Critical question.**

17) Will there be money in the future to pay for pastoral care in hospitals? Where will it come from?

*This is a question that connects to several others that were asked about role and status in the hospital. If chaplains can continue to establish that they add value to the hospital culture, then perhaps support will continue. Congregations and denominations continue to have a shortfall of funds. As health care costs continue to rise, congregations will be less and less able to support a full-time pastor needing pension and healthcare benefits. It may be that the primary locus for chaplaincy in the future may shift from the hospital to the congregation in consort with medical clinics or day care centers or some other focus of care for people **in extremis**. It is at least important that we begin now to think creatively about new alternatives for the ministries of care for the future.*

18) What special preparation is needed as we anticipate an aging population. How shall we attend to the growing number of people who lived alone and who live in institutions but still in isolation?

*Related to this question is the need for a larger discussion about theological anthropology. The Genome Project and modern brain research have identified hitherto unknown dimensions of the human person. Chaplains are on the frontline dealing with issues at points of birth and death that introduce serious questions about the nature of human nature.*

*There was also a question about shame and its impact on introspection. Believing that God's creation, including humankind, is good does not always move us to look inward to discover what we have done with what God has created. One would hope, on our better days, that the Lutheran emphasis on the promise of grace encourages us to explore our demons without fear knowing (or at least believing) that whatever we find within will not separate us from the love of God. On this matter, I think our theology is better than our practice.*

19) Has the "peak" of pastoral care ministries passed as the "movement" became an organization preoccupied with guild or institutional survival? **Good Question!**

20) How is soulcare different from pastoral counseling or chaplaincy or even spiritual direction? What is the meaning of the shift from pastoral care to spiritual care? [There were several other questions about spiritual care marginalizing the role of chaplains or the difficulty in maintaining quality control.]

*Spiritual direction has a history in the Roman Catholic Church that can be defined and connected to ancient practices of faith. When spiritual is an adjective modifying care, the meaning is less clear. Dietrich Bonhoeffer links spiritual care to the church's ministry of proclamation. It is not about building character or gaining competence but it is God's work that evokes a deeper awareness of God's presence in human life. So the first question we need to ask is whether our use of spiritual points us beyond the human. Secondly, does it press us to look outside ourselves to wider communities and transcending realities. The aim of spiritual care should be the creation of genuine community.*