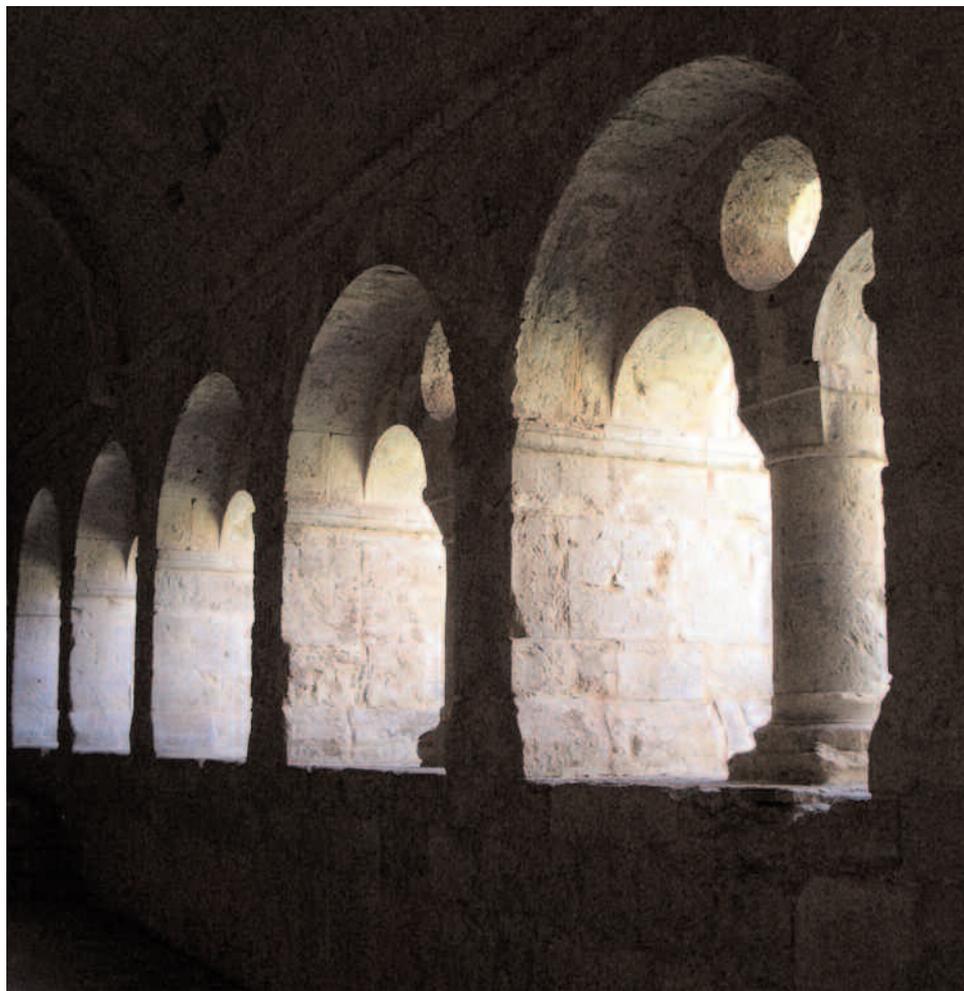


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*An Inter-Lutheran Journal  
for Practitioners and  
Teachers of Pastoral Care  
and Counseling*



# CARING CONNECTIONS

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# THE PURPOSE OF CARING CONNECTIONS

*Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling* is written by and for Lutheran practitioners and educators in the fields of pastoral care, counseling, and education. Seeking to promote both breadth and depth of reflection on the theology and practice of ministry in the Lutheran tradition, *Caring Connections* intends to be academically informed, yet readable; solidly grounded in the practice of ministry; and theologically probing.

*Caring Connections* seeks to reach a broad readership, including chaplains, pastoral counselors, seminary faculty and other teachers in academic settings, clinical educators, synod and district leaders, others in specialized ministries, and—not least—concerned congregational pastors and laity. *Caring Connections* also provides news and information about activities, events, and opportunities of interest to diverse constituencies in specialized ministries.

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**News, Announcements, Events:** E-mail items to Bryn Carlson at [bcarls@covcable.com](mailto:bcarls@covcable.com) or John Fale at [John.Fale@lcms.org](mailto:John.Fale@lcms.org)

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# Editorial

As a clinically trained and board certified professional spiritual care provider, I have been exposed to myriad modalities for providing care. I have been nurtured by a Rogerian approach. I have been challenged by paradoxical intention. I have been schooled in the pitfalls of projection, transference, extreme-transference, and counter-transference. I have been equipped to provide counseling that probes the depths of soul and psyche.

With such a background, one might suppose that the most dramatic memories I have of care provided include searching explorations into the depths of the personal lives of long term clients. The opposite is true. The most profound and dramatic memories I have of Pastoral Care involve delicate simple moments of few words but myriad meanings.

I was once requested to help a young man pour water from the Ganges River into the mouth and nose of his brother, killed in a car accident. The young man sang a song through sobs as his tears mingled with the water. He thanked me for helping him with the ritual, that it would give indescribable comfort to their parents that this ritual was performed.

I once gave Holy Communion to a woman on her 100th birthday. She was certain that this would be her last birthday and she wanted it to be very special with the presence of Christ. She was right about it being her last birthday, she died a few weeks later.

I once made the sign of the cross in ashes on the forehead of a sixteen year old girl with advanced cancer. She sat in a hospital bed with her mother by her side, both their eyes puffy from crying at the latest bad prognosis. She had requested to receive ashes on Ash Wednesday. I think I even asked her if she really wanted that. She did. As I pronounced the words, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return..." I felt horrible. But this young woman told her weeping mother, "This blessing reminds me how precious life is, and it will help me fight." She made a remarkable recovery and gave a speech at the next year's Cancer Survivors' Gathering.

Ritual has a profound capacity to provide pastoral care. Along with wise words of support and counsel, gesture and action in ritual deliver spiritual support in ways that can provide hope and healing.

This issue of *Caring Connections* is dedicated to the topic of Ritual and Pastoral Care. The writers explore this topic from a variety of perspectives.

Arthur Just presents a stirring portrayal of the Church's Word and Sacraments in a ritual centered community not merely talking about the Gospel and Christ's presence, but rather bold proclamations of the Gospel and participation in the bodily presence of Christ.

Susan Carole Roy explores a modality of ritual pastoral care through the bond shared between humans and animals.

Christine Iverson shares how ritual and memorial are of particular pastoral support to persons and communities affected by disaster.

In a new section of *Caring Connections*, entitled "Ministry Moments" we share concrete examples of ministry as portrayed through case study, personal reflection, and creative modalities. In this new section three writers share moving moments in ministry.

John Schumacher presents a program of bereavement support in his context that has brought healing to many.

Barbara Neumann shares her personal experience as a recipient of pastoral care by Chaplain David Baker. She shares an inspiring account of how ritual marked the most sensitive of moments in her family's life.

Craig Mueller presents a concrete example of a program of animal/human blessings similar to that introduced in Susan Carole Roy's piece.

*Caring Connections* can be read in two places, both in its own dedicated website [caringconnections.org](http://caringconnections.org) and also hosted on the Lutheran Services in America website. We plan to knit these sites together in exciting ways to create a rich resource and network for pastoral care providers. We are creating a resources center on the site. If you have any resources such as case studies, care plans, creative liturgies or any resource of interest to the pastoral care provider community, please share these with us for inclusion on the site.

If you have not already done so, we encourage you to subscribe online to *Caring Connections*. By subscribing, you assure that you will receive prompt notification when each issue of the journal appears on the *Caring Connections* website – no need to keep checking to see if a new issue is there. You will also help the editor and editorial board keep a clear idea of the level of interest our journal is generating. You can subscribe by clicking on the subscription link on [caringconnections.org](http://caringconnections.org) or by following the information appearing on the masthead (page 3) and also (in larger print) on page 21.

*Caring Connections* is the product of many partners. I would like to especially thank Chrissy Woelzlein and Greg Koenig for assistance with layout and publication. I would like to thank everyone at Lutheran Services in America, the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod St. Louis offices, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Chicago offices for their ongoing support and assistance with the journal.

## Call for Articles

*Caring Connections* seeks to provide Lutheran Pastoral Care Providers the opportunity to share expertise and insight with the wider community. We would like to invite anyone interested in writing an article to please contact the editor, Rev. Kevin Massey. We would like to specifically request articles for upcoming issues on the following themes.

### Summer 2006 "Ethics and Pastoral Care"

We are proud of the immense contributions Lutheran clergy, chaplains, pastoral counselors, and clinical pastoral educators make to the field of Ethics. We invite articles exploring any facet of Ethics and Pastoral Care, including clinical ethics, boundaries issues, confidentiality, organizational ethics and health care justice issues.

### Fall 2006 "Sabbath and Self-Care for Pastoral Care Providers"

This issue will highlight the immense importance of Sabbath and self-care for sustaining the challenging ministries of chaplaincy, clinical pastoral education, and pastoral counseling. We invite contributions that range from successful strategies for self-care to confronting the dangers of ignoring Sabbath.

# Liturgy and Ritual

In our worship, we repeat the same things Sunday in and Sunday out to learn the posture of forgiveness in daily life.

The historic liturgy is a ritual. Rituals are a good thing, and most of us could not survive in this world without rituals. Throughout our lives we engage in rituals. Some are short-term rituals that get us through the day; others are rituals that mark significant events in our own life or in our corporate life as church or nation. In every culture, people develop public rituals that identify what is important to them. In our culture in the United States, the great rituals of our society are sporting events, marked by pageantry and ceremony.

## A Functional Definition of Ritual

What then is ritual? Here is a functional definition of ritual.

Ritual is:

1. a pattern of formal, repetitive behavior
2. that communicates meaning symbolically (open to interpretation)
3. both verbally and non-verbally,
4. which are necessary for group relationships to operate
5. in order that the group may cohere and thus survive.<sup>1</sup>

A pattern of formal, repetitive behavior occurs in every ritual event. Without the patterns of the formal, repetitive behavior, there would be utter chaos, but within the structure of the ritual there is the opportunity for great joy that results from the surprise we experience when, within the ritual, things happen that we did not expect. This surprise is only possible if there is a pattern of formal, repetitive behavior.

Ritual communicates meaning, and this meaning is most effective when it occurs symbolically. Anthropologists make a distinction between signs and symbols. A sign conveys a single meaning, like a STOP sign. When one arrives at an intersection that says STOP, one does not ask “What does this mean?” There is only one meaning—STOP. Symbols, however, are more ambiguous. There are layers of meaning in symbols that give one room to enter into the full significance of the symbol. These meanings are not contradictory, but they are complex. For example, if one were to ask the meaning of a parament on the altar that had a lamb with a staff and a cut in its side from which flowed blood that emptied itself in a cup, what might that meaning be? This is the lamb who was slain and raised again, the conquering lamb who conquers through death and gives us life through the blood we receive in the cup of the Lord’s Supper. These meanings are complementary, not contradictory. As we contem-



plate that symbol, there is room for us to roam as we enter its more complex world and meditate on the richness of its meaning. This symbol does not produce a one word meaning, but encourages us to contemplate the layers of meaning embedded in the symbol.

*Ritual communicates meaning, and this meaning is most effective when it occurs symbolically.*

All symbolic communication is open to interpretation. The image of the lamb on the altar parament is an example of non-verbal communication. But we are a people of language, and words matter, especially in the church. But much of our language is symbolic. The Scriptures and liturgy are especially rich in images and metaphors that communicate meaning symbolically. Jesus himself uses symbolic language when he describes himself as the good shepherd, or as the vine and we the branches. For John the Baptist to declare that Jesus is the “Lamb

of God who takes away the sin of the world” is to make a symbolic statement that means Jesus is both humble and meek, both slaughtered for sin and dispenser of forgiveness.

Rituals cause communities to cohere as a group, and in many cases, that cohesion is the means by which the group is able to survive. Such survival is very true of religious rituals where not only identity is being formed, but where faith is handed down through the religious rites of the community. The history of both Jews and Christians is marked by times of persecution where their liturgical rituals helped them survive as a community.

Our historic liturgy, which we call the Divine Service, is a pattern of formal, repetitive behavior. In our worship, we repeat the same things Sunday in and Sunday out to learn the posture of forgiveness in daily life. This posture is formed in us through hearing his Word read, preached, and celebrated in a Sacrament of his body and blood, where God has bound himself to be present with his gifts.<sup>2</sup>

These two structures of Word and Sacrament communicate meaning symbolically. Liturgical scholars use the language of symbol in connection with the liturgy, not to suggest, for example, that the elements of bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper represent the body and blood, but to show that all liturgical language and action is open to interpretation by the community, *and that interpretation is always centered in Christ and his bodily presence among us*. The words of Jesus read in the Gospel make him present in our assemblies, and the words of consecration at the Lord’s Supper bring his body and blood to us in, with, and under bread and wine. Every word, action, or image used in our liturgical rituals must proclaim Christ and his salvific presence among us. So when one looks at the altar one sees a symbol that embodies Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary for the sins of the world as it is now offered to us in bread and wine. When one looks at the font one sees a symbol of rebirth and entrance into Christ’s eternal flesh.

These powerful, stable images communicate that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the initiating and sustaining events in the life of the church. Without these marks of the church and the profound, mysterious realities they communicate by their presence in the church as the stable cornerstones of our life, the church could not be what Christ called it to be. The historic liturgy is a pattern of formal, repetitive behavior that moves the community from font to altar as it journeys from entrance hymn to benediction, stopping to confess sins, sing hymns, hear the word of God read and preached, confess faith, pray, and then sup at his table on heavenly food. By this simple ritual of Word and Sacrament, with its surrounding structures of movement, communities are bound together as the body of Christ, his church.

This weekly ritual of patterned, repetitive behavior is the means God has given us by which we cohere as his people, his body. This is how he comes to us for our salvation—this is how he comes to us *bodily* through Scripture and Supper giving his gifts. The history of the church is the history of communities large and small, grand and humble, surviving empires and gross outbursts of

*We are more than our ears and the liturgy is more than simple words, even though words and hearing may be the most important aspects of ritual.*

persecution through the stable ritual of the historic liturgy. Survival is the key to most rituals, and the historic liturgy *as ritual* helps us survive in a world gone mad — to survive as Christians in a world that is hostile to Christ and his Gospel, and therefore to us.

When we gather for worship, we do not talk about the Gospel and the mystery of Christ’s bodily presence. We proclaim the Gospel and participate in Christ’s bodily presence by hearing his Word and eating and drinking his body and blood. Rituals do not explain in a didactic way, even though much may be learned during the ritual, but they engage the participant in a ritual process. In rituals you do not explain, you just do them. You experience rituals. You do not think about it, or even reflect on how you feel about it or how the ritual is affecting you. In the Divine Service you commune with Christ’s bodily presence, and your sins are forgiven, you are joined to his life that has no end, you are saved from your enemies.

Although “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Ro 10:17), we are more than our ears and the liturgy is more than simple words, even though words and hearing may be the most important aspects of ritual. Our other senses give us access to meaning that deepens and broadens our ritual experience. The sense of smell is a good example of how, without words, we may be transported to a different place or time. Music does this as well. Both access memory in a way that words do not. Perception brings ambiguity, but the kind of delicious ambiguity that makes life worth living. Unfortunately, since the Enlightenment, our church buildings and their liturgies have become temples to the rational mind, and we have eschewed the sensuousness of the ancient liturgies of the church.

When you enter the sacred space of the church, it should smell different, look different, and the sounds you hear should be unlike any other in the culture. You have entered into a foretaste of heaven, and your eyes, ears, nose, and mouth testify that you are able to see, hear, smell, and taste that the Lord is good. You have entered into a space

that has its own unique culture and its own distinctive story to tell.

To enter the liturgy of Word and Sacrament you must leave the world behind, with all its cultural baggage. Only then do you begin to perceive through your rational mind and your senses that Christ is present bodily to give you the gifts of heaven. Rituals are not a mirror that show us what reality might look like, *they are reality*, and by our participation in those rituals we enact reality. The Divine Service does not simply reflect what Christ is like, it enacts us in his flesh as his Word is *broken open* through preaching that reveals Christ to us as Christ was revealed to the Emmaus disciples in the breaking of the bread. To break open God's Word is to see Christ at its center. God's Word is first broken open for us in the liturgy of the Word so that we might be prepared in the Holy Supper to eat his body broken in death and his blood poured out for the remission of sins.

Christ the creator is present in his creation among the baptized working his new creation. This is real life — this is the way God created the world to be — this is divine normality. What stands at the center of the liturgy of the Lord's Supper is the cross where we feast on the body and blood of our host. Think of the ambiguity of this act of participating in a banquet of joy in which the food is the one who sacrificed himself in a humiliating, shameful, and scandalous death. It is hard to comprehend that through Christ's bodily presence, heaven itself is present with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven when we eat his body and drink his blood. What is it that we perceive here through our eyes, our ears, our nose, our mouths? Joy at our salvation at the heavenly feast? Horror that the violence of Calvary is in, with, and under what we consume into our bodies? Sadness that participating with us in Christ are all the saints who are no longer with us, including our closest relatives and friends? This ambiguity is perfectly captured in the words the disciples when Jesus appeared to them in the upper room — “they still disbelieved for joy” (Lk 24:41). It is too good to be true—Christ comes to us with the gift of himself in the flesh.<sup>3</sup>

Anthropologists have discovered that the highest moments of ritual activity occur at the crossing of a boundary or a threshold from one life status to another. They call this a “rite of passage” that involves *separation* from the old life, *transition* to a new life by means of some ritualized act, and then *incorporation* into a new life.<sup>4</sup> Crossing boundaries and thresholds in real life are often very tenuous, anxious, even frightening experiences, such as weddings and funerals. Not only do the main participants feel anxiety and fear, but everyone who participates in the rite of passage experiences some emotional response. These moments of passage are “in betwixt and in between” two different stages in life, marking the transition from one stage to another by what they say about this momentous event in the very ritual itself.

If the final goal of ritual is survival, then this is why, at these moments of great change where emotions are charged and people are on edge, our natural tendency is to create ritual to help us negotiate these significant boundaries. During these moments of passage ritual is intense, formal, even rigid, so that those crossing the boundary may survive the process. If we think of our baptism, confirmation, wedding, and funeral rites—all of which are significant rites of passage that take us across boundaries—we may recall how these moments tend to be very ritualized, with liturgical traditions handed down from generation to generation as a way of saying through the liturgical event: “This is what we believe as the church of Jesus Christ about entrance into life in Christ, about becoming a Christian adult, about marriage, about death.” The liturgical traditions at these significant rites of passage proclaim how Christ has changed the way we look at such things as life and death. They proclaim the faith of the church at these critical moments of passage.

The most significant boundary we cross every week is the threshold between heaven and earth in the Divine Service where they come together through the bodily presence of Christ. This is truly a moment in which we are “in betwixt and in

*During these moments of passage ritual is intense, formal, even rigid, so that those crossing the boundry may survive the process.*

between” heaven and earth, as we move from our mundane lives of work and family into a space that is charged by the presence of the Creator who comes to us in both his divine and human natures as the crucified and resurrected Lord. As heaven and earth were joined together in Jesus on the mount of transfiguration as his earthly disciples gather alongside Moses and Elijah, so even now in Jesus heaven and earth are joined in our liturgy.

For the language of liturgy is heavenly even though it happens here on earth. As Moses and Elijah broke in from heaven at the transfiguration, they were engaged in a heavenly conversation which, as the evangelist St. Luke records it, concerned Jesus' exodus he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem. This exodus is none other than Jesus' journey from heaven to earth and back to heaven through suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension. As Moses and Elijah appear on the mount with Jesus and the disciples, their conversation from their heavenly place does not stop. They continue on the mount the conversation of heaven which, in the words of St. John's Apocalypse, is about the Lamb who was slain and raised again. This heavenly conversation of Moses and Elijah takes place around the eternal banquet table where a messianic feast celebrating the Lamb's atonement and eternal victory is ongoing. What John says in Revelation of the saints

applies to Moses and Elijah and all who have died and risen in Christ, that is, that these are the ones whose names have been written “before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain” (Rev 13:8).

Even now we pray to our Father that he “gather us together from the ends of the earth to celebrate with all the faithful the marriage feast of the Lamb in his kingdom, which has no end.” This ongoing *liturgy* is both in word and supper, where Christ is host and we are guests, and a lavish banquet of aged wine and choice marrow is spread out before us (Is 25:6). And our participation even now in this liturgical feast is a participation in the ongoing proclamation of heaven that the Lamb is Worthy of the New Song he has given us to sing.

New millennia come and go, but the church goes on and on celebrating the Creator’s re-creating presence through the ritual of the historic liturgy—in betwixt and in between heaven and earth—as it waits for his final return.

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## Notes

1. This definition comes from class notes on 27 September 1983 at Yale Divinity School in Aidan Kavanagh’s seminar on “An Anthropology of Ritual Behavior.”

2. A. Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite*, 28 makes the following comments on the “elementary rule of liturgical usage” entitled “Repetition and rhythm in the liturgy are to be fostered.”

No rule is more frequently violated by the highly educated and well-meaning, who seem to think that never having to repeat anything is a mark of effective communication. Yet rhythm, which organizes repetition, makes things memorable, as in music, poetry, rhetoric, architecture, and the plastic arts no less than in liturgical worship. Rhythm constantly insinuates, as propagandists know. It constantly reasserts, as good teachers know. It constantly forms individuals into units, as demagogues and cheerleaders know. It both shrouds and bares meaning which escapes mere words, as poets know. It fuses people to their values and forges them to common purpose, as orators such as Cato, Churchill, and Martin Luther King knew. It frees from sound and offers vision for those who yearn for it, as the preacher in the Sermon on the Mount knew. Liturgical ministers who are irreparably arhythmic should be restrained from ministering in the liturgy.

3. This section was inspired from class notes on 4 October 1983 at Yale Divinity School in Aidan Kavanagh’s seminar on “An Anthropology of Ritual Behavior.”

4. The concept of “rite of passage” comes from A. Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960), who applies this concept in his own work in cultural anthropology. Although it is possible to push these three stages too far in applying them to the Christian faith, they can provide a taxonomy that helps explain the highly ritualized moment of Baptism, where one crosses a boundary from death to life, from time to eternity.

# Unleashing Theology: Ritual and Pastoral Care in the Human-Animal Bond

Pastoral Care and ritual are venues to healing for individuals and faith communities who seek to live in mutual relationship with the vast variety of God's creatures.

As a human companion living with companion animals I routinely integrate the joys and concerns of the human-animal bond in my ministry practice. The stories of ministry with people and animals tell of the fluidity between ritual as a venue to pastoral care and pastoral care as a venue for ritual. "Stories and ritual are a basic way by which we construct reality and make meaning."<sup>1</sup> "The origins of the word "ritual" in the Greek "rheo," means "to flow, run, rush, or stream."<sup>2</sup> Stories and ritual flow through the human-animal-divine bond. "Our storytelling and ritual making can become life-giving when they point beyond themselves to larger and transcendent narratives: when they open us to the all-embracing story of God."<sup>3</sup>

## *The Church has Gone to the Dogs*

Blessings of the Animals, often held around October 4th to commemorate St. Francis' Feast day, have become a growing means by which people experience ritual, liturgy and prayer in relationship with companion animals. Increasing resources for these blessings provide scripture suggestions, stories of the saints, prayers, readings, liturgies, blessings and ideas for using visuals like candles and pictures.<sup>4</sup> A theme may be appropriate. In October 2005 images of humans carrying animals through floodwaters in New Orleans reminded those gathered of the enduring spirit of the human-animal bond, and, of a God who saved two of each kind of animal on the Ark. A candle was lit for humans and animals separated from each other, dead, lost, or looking for new homes.

I also officiate at Blessings beyond the parish for humane societies or rescue groups such as the Greyhound Pets of America (GPA). The GPA Blessing marks the official beginning of the rescue's annual reunion. After the corporate service, there are often fifty individual blessings while the DJ plays on, food is shared, dogs play, Greyhounds arrive from racetracks as far away as Florida seeking foster families and permanent adoption, and the festivities of the picnic swing into full gear. It's 11 AM on a Sunday morning in May and the church has gone to the dogs and their human companions. Inviting the story of the human and the animal and the blessing that they seek is a pastoral act that may prove a venue to ritual. On one occasion, a woman asked for a blessing for the collar and tags, physical



memories of her greyhound who had died and whom I had blessed the year before. That collar and those tags, universal symbols to anyone who has ever shared their life with a member of the canine species, were also vehicles of, and, to ritual. Not only did they symbolize years of daily rituals, such as walks, car rides, and feeding, they were also physical, tangible symbols of a life no longer physically present but present in the memories that the physical collar and tags elicit.

*Blessings of the Animals have become a growing means by which people experience ritual, liturgy and prayer in relationship with companion animals.*

Pastoral Care creates a safe environment in which people may share stories that have not yet found a venue for expression and thus potential healing. That was the case with Armoni's humans. When I inquired about Armoni, his humans started telling me about the death of a previous greyhound. As they recounted the story of this beloved animal, their tears began to flow. I was moved by the sacred moment at the same time that Armoni, perhaps desiring to participate in this flow of bodily fluids, or perhaps desiring to make his mark on my stole

depicting the story of Noah and the animals, was moved to lift his leg on me. The sacred and the ordinary collided in a moment of humor and embarrassment, in the ordinary and in the incarnational.

#### *Wake Up and Sniff the Catnip*

While the growth of services celebrating the Blessing of the Animals is encouraging, consistent pastoral and ritual nourishment is needed, that address everyday issues of living with companion animals. Stories of relevance to the human-animal bond need to find expression in preaching and religious programming. “The Christian religion asks us to put our trust not in ideas, and certainly not in ideologies, but in a God who was vulnerable enough to become human and die, and who desires to be present to us in our everyday circumstances. And because we are human it is in the realm of the daily and the mundane that we must find our way to God.”<sup>5</sup>

A ritual proper is a relatively formalized, corporate, symbolic act of ritualization. “Ritualization is a much wider phenomenon, including all the aspects of our biosocial behavior that are patterned, repetitive, conventionalized.”<sup>6</sup> Ritualization is about the ordering of experience and the creating of meaning. Ritual helps us to create order, discern meaning, bond with community, address ambivalence and encounter mystery. Toys, dishes, leashes, identification tags, bedding, crates, obedience training, catnip and medications are all reminders of rituals emerging from daily routines with companion animals. The ordinary routines associated with caring for companion animals may become a venue to the sacred.

“Listen to the animals and they will teach you.” (Job 12:7-10) Carter Heyward, in her book, *flying Changes* suggests that one of the spiritual lessons that God teaches us through animals is one of mutuality. “God pleads with us to recognize holiness as the yearning for right relation: mutuality, not sameness.”<sup>7</sup> How do we live faithfully in relationship to animals?

Pastoral and ritual nourishment in the everyday allows for the same during times of crisis. “The wish for some ceremonial acknowledgement of what is happening arises in people at times of crisis, when spiritual help is needed to transform the situation or to face fate. This is when people want to receive the sacraments, or create a ritual for themselves and invite grace or healing to enter.”<sup>8</sup> When assisting people with the death of a companion animal, pastoral care and ritual play an important role. Pastoral Care may include stories of God’s concern for animals.<sup>9</sup> Memory boxes containing clay or ink impressions of a pet’s paw print, a cutting of a pet’s hair, and special belongings, allow the human companion a visible, tangible reminder of an animal. Grief and loss support groups and support hotlines provide venues for reminiscing about a companion animal. The activity level and social connectedness of both the human and the animal may affect the

opportunities for story and ritual that aid healing during grief. An active family may plant a tree in memory of an animal. Someone living in an urban area may put flowers in a window where a cat enjoyed sleeping. An animal may also serve a strong psychological connection with people and places that are no longer part of our lives which can complicate grief but be aided in part by the use of creative ritual. Friends may gather for a service of remembrance, enjoy pictures of an animal’s life and

### *When assisting people with the death of a companion animal, pastoral care and ritual play an important role.*

interactions with others, and contribute something to a service such as a candle, picture, poem, significant symbol from nature, or a reading. An animal may have had a job visiting nursing homes or played a particular role in the family which can be acknowledged. Writing an animal’s obituary may also be a meaningful ritual which can serve to acknowledge the fullness of their life.

Some stories about animals and the human-animal bond are sad. Studies document the connection between forms of violence, such as domestic abuse, child abuse, and elder abuse.<sup>10</sup> Safe Havens for pets are increasing so that all members of the family can safely leave abusive situations.<sup>11</sup> Sad stories involving animals need to find expression if healing is to occur.

#### *Unleashing Theology*

To speak at all about prayers, rituals, liturgies and pastoral care for people and animals begs mention of some restricting theological chains. Andrew Linzey, in his book, *Animal Rites: Liturgies of Animal Care* suggests four reasons for what he calls a liturgically empty cupboard. They include an emphasis on rationality as a human attribute, an avoidance of incarnational theology, a fear that any inclusion of animals in worship would lead to idolatry, and a threat to human supremacy.<sup>12</sup> Douglas John Hall offers a theologically sound discussion on what it means to be created in the image of God.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Transformative Power*

Ritual, liturgy, and prayer are powerful means of transformation. “Liturgy can do certain things that the other spheres of activity cannot. Specifically, there are some insights that require liturgical support in order to flourish at all. We learn our faith through liturgy, that is, through the regular recital of words and the performance of actions which focus our deepest beliefs. To leave animals out of liturgy is to take them out of our spiritual cognizance of the world.”<sup>14</sup> Linzey’s *Animal Rites* is a rich resource including a ritual for naming an animal<sup>15</sup>, recommitting to living in a covenantal relationship, Eucharistic prayers, and blessings.

In her book, *Prayers for Animals*, Carol Adams speaks about the transforming power of prayer: "People who care about other animals' suffering often feel powerless; prayer transforms powerlessness."<sup>16</sup> "Prayer does not solely seek transformation; prayer is an act of transformation."<sup>17</sup> Praying for a greater openness to the welfare of people and animals is one means of transforming a narrow understanding of our relationship with animals.

"A final transformation in attitude comes not only in recognizing that the self-communication of God is an everyday occurrence in the liturgy of the world but in admitting that the rituals we instinctively employ in that world are vehicles for divine revelation. For Christians this means that Jesus is not only present in baptism, church weddings, or the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper but in the bathing rituals between mother and child, the sexual intimacy of marital partners, and the ordinary meals that punctuate our existence."<sup>18</sup> The same can be said of the ordinary rituals of living with companion animals: playing ball, changing litter boxes, filling water bowls, administering medications, walking on a summer evening or in the winter snow, surviving puppy hood, learning methods of positive reinforcement for training, and quiet times are all vehicles for Divine revelation.

#### *Confession and Forgiveness*

Pastoral Care that gives voice to stories of abuse, guilt, regret or omission is another venue to ritual. Human companions may experience feelings of guilt when an animal in their care dies. Guilt may be real or imagined but ignored can become debilitating.

Confession and forgiveness is also a venue for all humanity seeking faithful living in relationship to all God's creation for "...my part in exploiting, using, destroying, paving over, polluting, poisoning Your Creation, forgive me."<sup>19</sup>

"Prayer allows us to accept our contradictions, the best we desire yet the jealousies we harbor and the selfishness that limits us. It is often in relationships with other animals that these contradictions are palpable."<sup>20</sup> These contradictions lead Jay McDaniel to speak of the spiritual schizophrenia that Christians who love animals often experience in relationship with the traditions of their faith.<sup>21</sup> Pastoral Care and ritual are venues to healing for individuals and faith communities who seek to live in mutual relationship with the vast variety of God's creatures.

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#### *Notes*

1. Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories and Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 21.
2. Elaine Ramshaw, *Ritual and Pastoral Care*, Don S. Browning, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 23.
3. Anderson and Foley, 38.
4. See Carol Adams, *Prayers for Animals*; Andrew Linzey, *Animal Rites: Liturgies of Animal Care*; Linzey and Regan, *Love the Animals: Meditations and Prayers*
5. Kathleen Norris. *The Quotidian Mysteries: Laundry, Liturgy and "Women's Work."* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 69.
6. Elaine Ramshaw. *Ritual and Pastoral Care* Don S. Browning, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 23.
7. Carter Heyward, *flying Changes: Horses as Spiritual Teachers* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005), 14.
8. Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., *Close to the Bone: Life-Threatening Illness and the Search for Meaning.* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 14.
9. See Psalm 36:6; Romans 8; Jonah 4:11. For a discussion about animals and religion see Linzey, McDaniel, Kowalski *Good-Bye, My Friend* and *The Souls of Animals*, Stephen Webb, *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals*
10. See Ascione, Frank R. and Phil Arkow, eds. *Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse: Linking the Circles of Compassion for Prevention and Intervention.* West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1999; Lockwood, Randall and Frank R. Ascione, eds. *Cruelty to Animals and Interpersonal Violence: Readings in Research and Application.* West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1998.
11. See HSUS website for a listing of Safe Havens
12. Andrew Linzey, *Animal Rites: Liturgies of Animal Care* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1999), 8.
13. John Douglas Hall. *Imagining God: Dominion as Stewardship* Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company and New York: Friendship Press, 1986.
14. Linzey, 13.
15. For a discussion on the importance of naming animals see Vicki Hearne. *Adam's Task: Calling Animals by Name.* The Akadine Press, 2000.
16. Carol Adams, *Prayers for Animals* (New York: Continuum International, 2004), 11.
17. *Ibid.*, 14.
18. Anderson and Foley, 163.
19. Adams, 117.
20. *Ibid.*, 14
21. Jay McDaniel, "A God Who Loves Animals and a Church that Does the Same," (in Charles Pinches and Jay B. McDaniel, *Good News for Animals? Christian Approaches to Animal Well-Being*, [New York: Orbis Books, 1993], 75).

# Worship in the Midst of Disaster

One of the reasons that community faith-based response is so visible and so vital is that other organizations leave in progression beginning very soon after the disaster. It is the churches that stay and care for the long haul.

I was sitting in the motel lobby about eleven o'clock in the evening one year after the bombing in Oklahoma City. I had been in town, working to support LSS/LDR staff (Lutheran Social Service /Lutheran Disaster Response) and survivors for several days and had more to go. It had been a day unlike any other, filled with moments both holy and painful and hard work. Unlike usual, there were several people sitting in the lobby, loathe to be alone.

Two businessmen walked in and up to the desk to register. One of them turned and asked, "What's going on in this town? It's been strange all day." The other man nodded in agreement. The rest of us sat stunned. How could they not know, with all the publicity, signs and billboards, the newspapers, television local and national news all focused on the anniversary? The whole city had literally been involved in the day's emotions and events from early morning to night including interfaith, ecumenical, and congregational worship services throughout the day and in the evening. Worship resources had been prepared and distributed by some of the denominational entities. Some of the responding agencies and churches remained open as safe havens for survivors and family members away from the overwhelming media presence.

The Oklahoma City bombing is an example of how the impact of an event can affect not only a large city but also the nation. Disaster (natural or man-made) affects individuals and the entire community. However, although local and outside groups (first responders, National Guard, FEMA and VOAD -Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster - members) respond, the response itself occurs one person or family at a time. The exceptions to this are community meetings, which tend to be informational in content (such as Crisis Management Briefings). However, worship that is shaped as response to the disaster becomes a communal response.

When a community is affected by disaster, worship becomes an important and effective way to gather people together in healing and caring ways. Worship that names the disaster and intentionally includes those affected by and responding to the disaster, gives the assurance that they still belong. This speaks to a deep and basic human need. As David Bolton writes (*When a Community Weeps*, Ed. by Ellen Zinner and Mary Beth Williams): "If, on the other hand, within the context of a major tragic experience, several or all of our belongings are dis-



rupted or destroyed, then we become like refugees in our own community. ...and we feel we are no longer part of the whole."

Leaders of faith communities not only risk seeming irrelevant in the face of disaster by omitting it from worship, but this also can increase the loss and isolation felt by those affected.

People remember for years whether or not their pastor mentioned their community's disaster in worship. I have heard countless stories from those whose reaction varied from increased feelings of isolation from God and church, anger, to feeling abandoned. On the other hand, I have heard many stories from those who reconnected or connected for

*People remember for years whether or not their pastor mentioned their community's disaster in worship.*

the first time to a faith community because they were included and received messages of hope.

Teaching disaster preparedness, I have heard many pastors tell me that they can't imagine having the resources to form "disaster worship" at the time. That's realistic. Formal worship formed around the community's experience is more usual and helpful at such later times as marking the anniversary. What is helpful in the immediate first begins by the

decision to gather for worship even if books, organ, and building are damaged or destroyed. It may be as simple as taking time at the beginning to express care and concern and ask for information on the whereabouts of members and their losses followed by including those concerns in the prayers. Some pastors reshape their sermons while others have just taken the time to have pastoral dialogue with the congregation. What happens in those early services isn't as important as acknowledging the disaster and its impact on the community.

Once, I was asked to go into a community that had experienced flooding three days before (the water was gone and the rescue phase was over). I had never been in the area before. I had been there less than 24 hours when I met with a local pastor to inquire about needs and offer resources. He calmly reported that it was nice that I came but they didn't need anything. "None of my people were affected", was his response. I then told him that I already knew of 3 families that self-identified with his congregation that had been significantly affected by the floods. Unfortunately, this kind of exchange has been frequent over the years.

Pastors and other faith leaders lose a tremendous opportunity to reach out and strengthen individual faith and community when they chose to opt out of response either because 'none of their people have been affected' or because 'disaster response isn't in their call'. However, disaster is not the time to begin evangelism. Just as worship and faithful response has great power to heal after disaster, using faith in the wrong way has great power to cause additional injury, especially to those made more fragile. The faith community has been working hard to counter the damage done after 9/11 by affiliated and unaffiliated "spiritual care providers" who came on scene to evangelize and pass judgment. (See, "Pastoral Crisis Intervention: A Word of Caution", George S. Everly, Jr., *International Journal of Emergency Mental Health*, Vo. 6, Number 4.) This dichotomy of power to harm or heal was seen recently in response to Hurricane Katrina and the rupture of the levees in New Orleans which was pronounced by some as God's judgment upon evilness and by others, as a sign of God's blessing that the ruptures happened after the storm, saving thousands of lives.

The faith issues normal to any grieving process, such as feeling abandoned by God, questioning one's faith and God are often magnified and intensified by the chaos and scope of a disaster. While other responders work to rescue and bring resources for recover, the faith-based community is uniquely gifted: we have the power to bring hope. Chaos does not win in the end. Where people feel separated from God by their anger and/or isolation, healing can begin by normalizing these spiritual reactions to trauma. The psalms can provide both example and insight into feelings of anger and abandonment toward God (i.e. Psalms 13, 22, 69) and assurance of

God's presence (i.e. Psalm 46...). Worship in the midst of disaster becomes an active and powerful way to do spiritual care within one's faith community and the community at large.

### *The faith-based community is uniquely gifted: we have the power to bring hope.*

The anniversary of a disaster also is an important time for faith-based leaders to be intentional in worship creation and participation. Be aware that anniversary reactions can take place days or weeks before and after the event date and plan ahead. (A good resource is: "The Anniversary Dilemma", Jeffery T. Mitchell, ICISF.) Some guidelines for anniversary worship:

- In newsletters/bulletins put articles that talk about reactions especially for parents of children. Also include information on resources available for survivors. Use all avenues of church access to publicize *current* information of recovery information and resources all through the recovery period. Note that this information changes often as programs open and close.
- Remind people that media may (depending on scope of disaster) focus on replaying scenes of the disaster. Encourage people (especially parents) to take a break from television and to create peaceful environments at home and at church.
- Remember that not everyone is in the same place of recovery. Provide for thanksgiving and for grieving; assurance of God's faithful presence in the face of brokenness and God's healing. Especially be aware of this when part of civic or community sponsored commemorations who often just want to celebrate and get past the event. (See Summary, *When a Community Weeps*.) This dissonance can often be heard in the conversations over what to call such an event (civic or faith-based). Some of the terms I have heard used are: celebration, commemoration, thanksgiving, tribute, remembrance, and memorial.
- Because of the hierarchy of needs (food, shelter, safety, etc...), some people may just now be at the place to voice faith issues brought on by the trauma.
- When worship is done cooperatively by the faith-based groups of a community, effort must be made to include all faiths represented in the community. It is important to reach beyond those churches traditionally involved in the ministerial alliance or inter-faith group and extend an intentional invitation.
- At the same time, be sensitive to those colleagues whose organizational structure may prevent them from certain kinds of participation. You still need to work together in other areas of response.
- Include prayers for victims and survivors of the disaster. Be sensitive and take care in speaking to

families and survivors before asking them to take part in any communal event. Be clear about whose need is being fulfilled in having them “up front”.

- Include prayers for those who responded to the disaster and those who continue in the recovery.
- There are disaster worship resources available through: Lutheran Disaster Response, Church World Service Emergency Response, United Methodist Committee on Relief (UM-COR), and others. Begin with your own denominational or faith organization.

By now, everyone is in agreement that disaster response works better with pre-planning and training. The same goes for faith-based response. Faith-based communities have a great strength in disaster response in that you are part of the community, present before, during, and long after the disaster. Knowing each other, and your community well is a tremendous asset. One of the reasons that community faith-based response is so visible and so vital is that other organizations leave in a progression beginning very soon after the disaster. It is the churches that stay and care for the long haul. Long after the media has gone away and people are complaining, “aren’t you done yet?”, people need to know that God still cares and brings hope.

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# Ministry Moments

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In Ministry Moments, Caring Connections presents personal reflections, poetry, case studies and other resources of interest to pastoral care providers.

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## What I Learned Planting Trees

John Schumacher

*(Author's note: Over the past decade the Spiritual Care & Healing Arts staff at Rainbow Hospice has developed a series of four seasonally-themed Interfaith Memorial Services which are offered for the families and care-givers of its patients as well as for participants in the various adult grief groups facilitated by the bereavement staff. The centerpiece of each Service is a ritual in which the names of the persons memorialized are read and a symbol/transitional object is presented to each family. The symbol for the autumn service is a quilted cloth maple leaf. The leaves, approximately 5-6 inches long, are prepared by a volunteer and are made in bright autumn colors. During the service the leaves are displayed on a large tree branch set up at the front of the gathering. As the names are read, a leaf is given to each family present. The sermon below was preached at the first Service the leaves were used as a symbol.)*

It seems we have been growing a tradition of offering theme-related gifts at our quarterly memorial. In January for the Winter Service, we gather acknowledging the darkness of the season and the darkness in our spirits – and we light and carry candles home.

In April at the Spring Service, we gather longing for the experience of new life and we distribute new evergreen shoots which can be planted in memory of our loved ones. One year, a hospice volunteer provided the symbol of new life for that Service. She donated “amur” maple whips. I don’t know what is unique about “amur”, but I certainly came to understand what a whip is. It’s a long skinny, scrawny stick with a few leaves on top and a few roots on bottom. It was a wonderful symbol of the fragility of life. We were glad to receive the whips and glad to distribute them to the families present. Our donor was so generous that there were more than enough whips to go around. And so, several of our staff members and volunteers also each took a tree to plant.

My wife and I were new home-owners at the time and I was just getting into gardening. So I took a tree and without saying it out loud, realized I was taking it to plant in memory of a friend who had died the previous month from complications related to her breast cancer. With the enthusiasm of a novice gardener, I dug a proper hole, planted, packed in the soil, mulched, watered, and staked and tied the fragile trunk. I was going to make this tree grow.

However, the spring we distributed the whips was followed by a summer that was brutally hot. Several hundred people died from the heat in Chicago. It seemed nothing was meant to grow that year.

Yet, I was insistent that not only would this little tree survive, it was going to flourish. So, each afternoon when I returned home from work, the first thing I did was to check my tree. I watered frequently and the tree survived.

But one afternoon as I was returning home, I could tell, even before I got out of my car, that something wrong with my tree. When I walked to the tree, I found the trunk was bent and cracked. I don’t know how it happened – a rabbit, a squirrel, the neighborhood kids. It didn’t matter. I was going to take care of this tree. I splinted the trunk with a piece of wood, wrapped tape around it, and continued to water. Every night I continued to check it. I wasn’t going to let this tree die. Somewhere deep down inside we might each know what the ultimate outcome is going to be, but still we work as hard as we can to preserve life—the life of something or someone we love.

The leaves on the tree turned a muddy brown. However, they were still soft. There was moisture in them. I was hopeful—or in denial. The tree was not dead. I continued to water. But then the leaves turned brittle and fell off. I knew I had lost. Despite my best efforts, the tree was dead. I thought I had done everything I could—but it wasn’t enough.

For the longest time I didn’t do anything about the tree. Didn’t feel like doing anything. I think we all know what that feels like. For the longest time there was a bare stick forlornly poking from the ground in the backyard.

But then, for no better reason than the fact Frank’s Nursery was having a Labor Day Sale, I bought another tree. This one was an “autumn flame” maple tree. I dug out the dead tree and planted the new – mulched and watered, and staked and tied the trunk. All the things I thought I was supposed to do. The tree seemed to do well throughout September into October, but then suddenly, all the leaves dropped. I wasn’t sure what was going on. Was this simply the normal rhythm of the seasons—or was I dealing with another dead tree. There seemed to be budding on the branches. I wasn’t certain. All winter I waited.

I came home from work on a warm, rainy day in April and again, before I got out of the car, I knew something had happened. The buds were opening.

The tree survived. I was so excited, I dragged my exasperated wife out in the rain to see my tree.

The tree did well through the year. Leaves opened. The tree survived the summer heat. In October the leaves fell again, but this time I wasn't worried. This time, before the leaves fell, they turned the most gorgeous, eye-catching "autumn flame" red. It was a sign that what I was witnessing was not death, but the rhythm of life. Because the leaves had turned red, I was certain the tree would burst forth with life again the spring.

Some times we who mourn long for a sign. We long for an assurance that what we experience now in our grief is not the final word—that the guilt or the anger or the sadness or the loneliness or the numbness will not hold us forever. We long to know that death is not the eternal victor. We long to know that laughter and love and life are still a possibility. We long to believe that spring will come again – not necessarily in six months at the end of this now-approaching winter—but at some season in each of our lives.

In a few minutes the name of the person you love will be read. I invite you come forward at that time to receive one of these red autumn leaves. Keep it as a reminder of this day. With it, picture the "autumn flame" maple tree. May it help you remember that death is not the final word. Spring will come again to each of us who mourn.

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## **There Is a Time to Weep and a Time to Laugh**

**Barbara A. Neumann and David C. Baker**

A few days before my husband, Don, and I celebrated our 55th wedding anniversary in September of 2003, a new full time chaplain had arrived at Western Maryland Hospital Center in Hagerstown, Maryland. As he introduced himself, he asked the patients what their special spiritual needs and wishes might be. A substantial number requested a regular service of Holy Communion. This was established on a monthly basis, but when Don was unable to be taken out of his bed for the November service, Dr. Baker asked if he could bring the Communion

elements to him. I was delighted with his interest in Don and, of course, I agreed.

That same night about midnight, I felt a need to go to the hospital to be with Don, as I sensed the end of his life was drawing near. In the morning, the dialysis nurse requested permission not to give Don his dialysis treatment and slowly I agreed. About midday, Dr. Baker came to visit and suggested we have a special commendation service for the hospital and nursing staff and family. Of course, he wanted our own minister, Father Scott Bellows, an Episcopal priest, to share in the service. I'm not sure I fully realized the impact of what was happening.

Since 1979, Don had been giving me sterling silver crosses for Christmas. I had picked up the current one from the jeweler, but had not actually seen it, preferring to wait until Christmas morning. I brought the cross with me so Don could see or at least feel it and know his traditional gift had arrived. Following the beautiful brief commendation service with family, staff and even a few patients, I handed Dr. Baker the closed box and left the room. I heard him saying, "Don, this is your Christmas present to Barb," as he placed the cross in his hand. Then he returned it to the box and gave it to our son, Travis.

The next happening will remain with me forever for the peace that resulted. Dr. Baker leaned over Don with his hand on Don's head, saying, "Don, you can go home now. It's time to go." What a powerfully comforting message! Our son, Travis, spent the night, quietly singing praise and worship songs with his guitar and reading short meditations from Charles Spurgeon's *Beside Still Waters*. The next day, the entire family was there throughout the day. Many staff members and some patients visited. Late afternoon, both sons and their families went out to supper, giving me their cell phone numbers before they left.

There was a sense of that peace which passes all understanding in being with Don in the last hours. He was peaceful in appearance as he always was when napping, covered with his favorite nap blanket—one that featured a black and white "Dalmatian" print—and holding a small, clutchable, stuffed Dalmatian pup. We had been RVers for many years, and Pete, the stuffed pup, was the RV manufacturer's mascot—thus the blanket and the small Dalmatian pup. I watched the monitor as Don's breathing slowed, acknowledging my beloved was about to enter a new, greater life. When the moment came at 5:30 p.m., I called the families and Father Bellows.

Following the commendation service with Dr. Baker, I had turned to our son, Travis, and asked where his daughter, Julie, was. With great pride he said she had given birth to a son at 2:30 p.m. that afternoon. With that, there was a shout of joy and loving comments about the "Circle of Life".

During the funeral, Dr. Baker sat with me. His gentleness and spiritual support then and continuing

on have given me comfort through a difficult time. Today, months later, it is truly a privilege to be part of his volunteer pastoral care staff at the hospital.

As I started writing this story of comfort and peace on the second anniversary of Don's passing, I found myself crying like I had never really cried before—tears of sadness in Don's passing and tears of joy in baby Blake's arrival. There is a time to weep and a time to laugh. I have lived through many of these times and thank our Lord for bringing me through each one. It is great to have a God who walks with us always.

Following is the order of service used. It is a modification of the Commendation of the Dying service in *Occasional Services*, a companion to the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, published in 1982 by Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, MN.

## Service for the COMMENDATION OF THE DYING

**P:** *Pastor*                      **R:** *Others*

**P:** Hear the word of the Lord: "Open to me the gates of righteousness that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it." Psalm 118: 19-20.

"One thing I asked of the Lord, that I will seek after; to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple, I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. wait for the Lord, be strong, and let your hearts take courage; wait for the Lord!" Psalm 27: 4, 13-14

**P:** Almighty God, look on (*Name*), whom you made your child in Baptism, and comfort *him/her* with the promise of life with all your saints in your eternal kingdom, the promise made sure by the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**R:** Amen.

**P:** God the Father in heaven,  
**R:** have mercy on your servant.

**P:** God the Son, redeemer of the world,  
**R:** have mercy on your servant.

**P:** God the Holy Spirit,  
**R:** have mercy on your servant.

**P:** Holy Trinity, one God,  
**R:** have mercy on your servant.

**P:** From all sin, from all evil, from all suffering,  
**R:** good Lord, deliver *him/her*.

**P:** By your holy Incarnation, by your Cross and Passion, by your precious Death and Burial,  
**R:** good Lord, deliver *him/her*.

**P:** By your glorious Resurrection and Ascension, and by the coming of your Holy Spirit,  
**R:** good Lord, deliver *him/her*.

**P:** We sinners cry to you to hear us, Lord Christ; that it may please you to deliver your servant from the power of evil and from eternal death,  
**R:** we implore you to hear us, good Lord.

**P:** That you mercifully pardon all *his/her* sins,  
**R:** we implore you to hear us, good Lord.

**P:** That you grant *him/her* a place of refreshment and ever-lasting blessedness,  
**R:** we implore you to hear us, good Lord.

**P:** That you give *him/her* joy and gladness in your kingdom with your saints in light,  
**R:** we implore you to hear us, good Lord.

**P:** Jesus, Lamb of God,  
**R:** have mercy on *him/her*.

**P:** Jesus, bearer of our sins,  
**R:** have mercy on *him/her*.

**P:** Jesus, redeemer of the world,  
**R:** grant *him/her* your peace.

**P:** Lord, have mercy.  
**R:** Christ, have mercy.  
**P:** Lord, have mercy.

**P:** Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**ALL:** Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,  
and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

P: *(Name)*, our *brother/sister* in the faith, we entrust you to God who created you. May you return to the one who formed us out of the dust of the earth. Surrounded by the angels and triumphant saints, may Christ come to meet you as you go forth from this life.

Christ, the Lord of glory, who was crucified for you, bring you freedom and peace. Christ, the High Priest, who has forgiven all your sins, keep you among his people. Christ, the Son of God, who died for you, show you the glories of his eternal kingdom. Christ, the Good Shepherd, enfold you with his tender care. May you see your redeemer face to face and enjoy the sight of God forever.

**R: Amen.**

*The minister anoints with oil and lays his/her hand on the head of the dying:*

P: Child of God, go forth in the name of God the Father almighty who created you; in the name of Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, who redeemed you; in the name of the Holy Spirit who was poured out upon you. May you rest in peace and dwell forever in the paradise of God. Amen

P: Lord, now you let our servant go in peace; your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared in the sight of every people: a light to reveal you to the nations and the glory of your people Israel. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.

**R: Amen.**

P: Into your hands, O merciful Savior, we commend your servant, *(Name)*. Acknowledge, we humbly beseech you, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, a sinner of your own redeeming. Receive *him/her* into the arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the glorious company of the saints in light.

**R: Amen.**

P: And let us now look to the Lord for comfort and strength as we prepare to mourn the loss of *(Name)*.

Almighty God, from whom we come, and to whom our spirits return, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. You are our refuge and our strength, a very present help

in trouble. Grant us your blessing in this hour, and enable us to put our trust in you, that our spirits may grow calm and our hearts be comforted. Lift our eyes above the shadows of the earth, and help us to see the light of eternity. May we find grace and strength for this and every time of need; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

P: And now may God, the Father of all love who gives us eternal consolation and good hope through his grace, comfort your hearts and establish in you every good work. May Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, ✠ bless you now and forever.

**R: Amen.**

*Barbara Neumann and her late husband, Don, met as veterans on the G.I. Bill in February 1948. They married in September that year; raised four sons, and through a variety of experiences celebrated a 55th anniversary in 2003.*

*Don had been recalled to the Air Force in 1953, becoming a career officer while Barbara became a military wife. During these years she conducted Cub Scouts, taught Sunday School and started what became a teaching career in elementary schools. Barbara began volunteering at Western Maryland Hospital Center when Don became ill in 2002. She came to know other patients, their families and their challenges. She continues to serve there as a volunteer on the Chaplain's staff.*

*The Rev. David C. Baker, Ph.D., is the Director of Pastoral Care Services at Western Maryland Hospital Center where he has served since 2003. Prior to this, he oversaw a program of pastoral care and education at a large Lutheran continuing care facility near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.*

*Dr. Baker graduated with his M.Div. degree from the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and was ordained in the Lutheran Church in America in 1978. In 1988, he was awarded a Ph.D. in human development and family science from Texas Tech University at Lubbock, Texas. In 1996, he received a certificate in Geriatric Pastoral Care from the Center for Aging, Religion and Spirituality at St. Paul, MN, and is a Board Certified Chaplain with the Association of Professional Chaplains.*

## BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS

**Craig M. Mueller**

Each time I have participated in a blessing of pets liturgy the animals may not have grasped the significance of the occasion, but the humans present have been deeply touched. One former colleague said that

to live with animals in our home is like having some primal energy of the natural world inhabit our dwelling. We look into the eyes of our pets and see not only their unique personalities, but the spark of all creatures great and small.

Many people become very attached to their animal companions and consider them part of their family. Folks return to home each day to find a furry creature greeting them, and many seniors benefit from having a purring pet in their lap. To offer a ritual blessing of pets is to honor the role of these creatures in our day to lives. It is pastoral care in the sense that though the animal is the one receiving the blessing, the human caretaker is the one who receives a new awareness of the spiritual connection to their pet. They are likely to feel a renewed sense of gratitude both for the animal and the Creator of all creatures great and small.

Many congregations hold a blessing of animals or near October 4, the commemoration of St. Francis of Assisi. Francis is remembered for his love of creation and there are stories of him preaching to the birds and taming a wolf. His canticle of creation is the basis for the hymn, “All Creatures of Our God and King.” Francis called the animals his brothers and sisters.

I have experienced a blessing of pets in a several ways. For a number of years my congregation conducted the service in our church garden on the first Saturday morning in October. We had a sign out in front of the church for several weeks which did attract some neighborhood people and even some people passing by that morning. At least once the weather was cold and we needed to have the blessing indoors. In any case, we provided water for dogs and pet treats for refreshments following the liturgy. Another congregation offered a similar service on the first Sunday afternoon in October, gathering in the church gymnasium.

The more daring idea is to have the pet blessing in the Sunday morning liturgy (normally the first Sunday in October). The first time I tried this I didn't sleep the night before. I dreamed that the animals barked loudly at each other and no one heard my sermon. Each time we've done it on Sunday morning, though, we have been amazed at the sense of reverence and quiet that actually occurs. It's almost as if the animals know they are in sacred space and they quickly settle into that awareness. Of course there are some barks at interesting times and a few dogs join in the singing of the hymns. But I have often said that the animals were actually quieter than the children!

Some members of the congregation who don't have pets were a bit hesitant whether the presence of the animals would overshadow the whole service, but they were among the ones most touched by the liturgy. The pets sat with their caretakers in the pews and came up after the sermon for the blessing. As my associate and I blessed the animals individually, the congregation sang “All Things Bright and Beautiful.” We did have some emergency clean-up

towels at the back of the church, but I'm not sure they were needed. Of course some animals came up for communion—they couldn't be left in the pew—but we didn't go so far as handing out dog biscuits at that point!

Clearly dogs are in the majority at a service like this. Cats in carriers are the next highest attendance, but they clearly don't enjoy the occasion much! Lizards, birds, stuffed animals and even horses may also show up for such a service, depending on your setting.

Many of us in urban settings are not as connected to the earth and its cycles and rhythms. The blessing of animals is one way to deepen our ties to the wonders of creation and the God we praise.

*Rev. Craig Mueller attended Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota. He majored in music, which has been a significant strand running throughout his life. For two years he served as a Minister of Music and Education at church in Indianapolis. He attended seminary at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, and he and his brother were ordained together as ELCA pastors in 1988. He serves as pastor Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Chicago.*

*From an early age he had a special interest in liturgy, and values worship that is both traditional and creative, that honors the mystery of God, as well as the presence of the sacred in human life.*

## New and noteworthy

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### **“Give Something Back” Scholarships**

This year will mark the inaugural distribution of “Give Something Back” Scholarship funds. The “Give Something Back” endowment fund began as a three-year campaign in 1992. Funds raised for the endowment were to provide financial assistance to recipients seeking clinical educational preparation for service in ministries of Chaplaincy, Pastoral Counseling, and Clinical Supervision. In addition, the endowment created an opportunity for those who had received financial assistance for their own education to “give something back” by helping others with similar needs.

The Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee for Ministries in Chaplaincy, Pastoral Counseling, and Clinical Education (ILCC-MCPCCE) has appointed a scholarship committee and has designed an application process that will enable it to begin awarding \$6,000 in scholarships per year.

The “Give Something Back” endowment will make a very limited number of financial awards available to individuals seeking ecclesiastical endorsement and certification/credentialing in ministries of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and clinical education. Applicants must:

- ✓ Have completed one (1) unit of CPE.
- ✓ Be rostered or eligible for active roster status in the ELCA/LCMS.
- ✓ Not already be receiving funds from the ELCA/LCMS national MCPCCE offices.
- ✓ Submit an application with a financial data form for committee review.

Applicants must complete the Scholarship Application and Financial Data forms that are available from ELCA and LCMS Offices for Ministries in Chaplaincy, Pastoral Counseling, and Clinical Education. Contact information, including web links that provide further information about ELCA and LCMS ministries of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and clinical education, is provided below.

#### ELCA

Theresa Duty  
Administrative Assistant  
Theresa.duty@elca.org  
www.elca.org/chaplains  
800-638-3522, ext. 2417

#### LCMS

Judy Ladage  
Administrative Assistant  
Judy.Ladage@lcms.org  
www.lcms.org/spm  
800-248-1930, ext. 1388

*Application deadline in 2006 will be August 15, with awards made in November.*

### **February 8th to 11th, 2007, Zion XIII Conference will be held in San Antonio**

Zion XIII will be held at the Oblate Renewal Center in San Antonio, TX, during the dates of 8-11 2007. Dr. Arthur A. Just of Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, IN, and Dr Diane Jacobson of Lutheran Seminary in St. Paul, MN, will be plenary speakers. Reserve those dates and look for registration and more details in the near future.

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## Recent and upcoming events

## How to Subscribe

### Inter-Lutheran

- April 25-26 Lutheran Services in America (LSA) Chaplains' Network Pre-Conference is held in Seattle.
- April 26-28 LSA holds its annual conference in Seattle. (For further information: [www.lutheranservices.org/Conference2006.asp](http://www.lutheranservices.org/Conference2006.asp))
- Nov 13-14 Emergency Services Chaplaincy Conference is held in St. Louis.
- Feb 8-11, 2007 The Zion XIII Conference is held in San Antonio.

### Ecumenical/Interfaith

- April 27-30 American Association of Pastoral Counselors holds its annual conference is held in Louisville.
- May 6-10 Association of Professional Chaplains Conference is held in Atlanta.
- July 10-14 International Conference of Police Chaplains Training takes place in Indianapolis.
- Oct 22-26 Federation of Fire Chaplains Conference is held in St. Joseph, MO.

Subscribers to future issues of *Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling* will be notified by e-mail when each issue is published. We hope you will subscribe. The process is simple: go to [www.lutheranservices.org](http://www.lutheranservices.org), select *Networks*, then select *Affinity Networks*, then select *Chaplains' Network*, then select *Resources*, then select *Caring Connections* and register on that page. You will need to provide your name, your organization's name, your e-mail address, and your ZIP code. Subscribers and nonsubscribers alike will also be able to access this issue of *Caring Connections* electronically by visiting the LSA website.

*Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling* welcomes your submissions of news germane to specialized ministries as well as announcements of forthcoming events. You may e-mail news items and announcements to one of the *Caring Connections* news editors: John Fale at [John.Fale@lcms.org](mailto:John.Fale@lcms.org) or Bryn Carlson at [bcarls@covcable.com](mailto:bcarls@covcable.com)