

Caring Connections

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



Banes and Blessings of COVID-19

The Purpose of Caring Connections

Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling is written primarily by and for Lutheran practitioners and educators in the fields of pastoral care, counseling, and education. Seeking to promote both breadth and depth of reflection on the theology and practice of ministry in the Lutheran tradition, *Caring Connections* intends to be academically informed, yet readable; solidly grounded in the practice of ministry; and theologically probing. *Caring Connections* seeks to reach a broad readership, including chaplains, pastoral counselors, seminary faculty and other teachers in academic settings, clinical educators, synod and district leaders, others in specialized ministries and — not least — concerned congregational pastors and laity.

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

Scholarships

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

Applicants must:

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

Applicants must complete the Scholarship Application forms that are available from Ruth Hamilton [ELCA] or Bob Zagore [LCMS]. Consideration is given to scholarship requests after each application deadline. LCMS deadlines are April 1, July 1 and November 1, with awards generally made by the end of the month. ELCA deadline is December 31. Email items to Ruth Hamilton at ruth.hamilton@elca.org and to David Ficken ESC@lcms.org.

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News, Announcements, Events: E-mail items to Ruth Hamilton at ruth.hamilton@elca.org or David Ficken ESC@lcms.org.

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Contents

Editorial 1 <i>Diane Greve</i>	Mutual Care During COVID 24 <i>Cheryl Plummer</i>
The Coronavirus and the Creator: Cosmological Contributions from a Process Perspective 4 <i>Paul Sponheim</i>	First Responders—They wobble but they don't fall down 27 <i>Rick Malivuk</i>
Kierkegaard and Pandemics 9 <i>Andrés Albertsen</i>	Strawberries 29 <i>Amy Jo Jones Lightning</i>
Caring and Counseling in COVID-19 Times 11 <i>Robert C. Spilman</i>	COVID Gifts 35 <i>Ghislaine Cotnoir</i>
Learning during Totally Virtual Summer CPE 13 <i>Emily Werner</i>	Theological Reflections on Pastoral Ministry during the Pandemic 36 <i>Paul R. Hinlicky</i>
Driving and Restraining Forces for a CPE Group during COVID-19 15 <i>Anurag Mani</i>	In Memoriam 42 <i>Bruce Hartung</i>
Prison Ministry during COVID-19 18 <i>Don Sundene</i>	
Hope for Humanitarians: How COVID-19 affects LWF aid workers in the field. 21 <i>Cornelia Kästner</i>	

Call for Articles

Caring Connections seeks to provide Lutheran Pastoral Care Providers the opportunity to share expertise and insight with the wider community. We want to invite anyone interested in writing an article to please contact one of the co-editors, Diane Greve at dkgreve@gmail.com or Bruce Hartung at hartungb@csl.edu. Please consider writing an article for us. We sincerely want to hear from you!

2021.1 Specialized Ministries and Their Relationship to the Institutional Church and Its Structures

And, as always, if you haven't already done so, we hope you will subscribe online to *Caring Connections*. Remember, a subscription is free! By subscribing, you are assured that you will receive prompt notification when each issue of the journal appears on the *Caring Connections* website. This also helps the editors and the editorial board to get a sense of how much interest is being generated by each issue. We are delighted that the number of those who check in is increasing with each new issue. Please visit www.lutherservices.org/newsletters#cc and click on "Click here to subscribe to the *Caring Connections Journal*." to receive automatic notification of new issues.

Editorial

Diane Greve

*How long, O God? Will you forget us forever?
How long will you hide your face from us?
How long must I take counsel in my soul
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?
How long shall my enemy [this virus] be exalted over us?
(Psalm 13; 1–2 paraphrased)*

HOW LONG, O GOD? COVID fatigue is impacting so many of us in so many ways. My own grandchildren are looking at remote learning for the indefinite future. Many of our churches have found creative ways to worship online. For various reasons, our elderly and our Black and Indigenous neighbors are being affected most. In the midst of all of this, Christmas is coming and it seems unimaginable that the usual family gatherings and worship services will, most likely, take a very different form for many of us. In the midst of all of this, some of our citizens question the degree of danger the COVID-19 virus presents while others are taking thoughtful precautions. The whole pandemic has become quite partisan. Yet, we hear in the news that case numbers are on the rise and that hospitals are overflowing in some states. Healthcare providers have also fallen ill from this virus causing a shortage of professionals to staff the beds.

Michael T. Osterholm, PhD, MPH, an epidemiologist living in the Twin Cities, is frequently interviewed on national and local television and radio programs. He is the founder of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota (CIDRAP). As he is a member of Edina Lutheran Community Church, he has been asked to advise the Minneapolis Area Synod leaders on how to imagine ministry in the time of this pandemic. He warns us that the upcoming weeks and months will be the hardest time of the pandemic because people are moving indoors with colder weather, and that means more people will be in the same room breathing the same air. As a grandfather, he mourns the halt to family holiday gatherings. Dr. Osterholm has a weekly podcast on the pandemic which can be found at cidrap.umn.edu that I highly recommend. I just learned he has been appointed as one of 13 members of the Biden COVID-19 advisory panel.

This virus is smaller than a mustard seed, yet has disrupted our lives in so many ways. Still, the parable of the mustard seed reminds us that the small acts of kindness, of ministry, of connection can be a way that God is at work in the midst of this chaos bringing about creative transformation. Our ministries within the realm of Specialized Pastoral Ministry may seem compromised and minute in light of the huge

number of needs surrounding us. Hopefully, the accounts shared in this issue may help us see God at work in our world in the midst of this pandemic.

This issue is designed to touch your hearts and to stretch your minds. We have resourceful servants of Christ in our midst.

How do we make sense of all this death and disruption? We have two respected Lutheran theologians writing from their perspectives: Paul Sponheim from St Paul, Minnesota and Paul Hinlicky from Roanoke, Virginia. These essays bookend the more hands on ministry vignettes from our Lutheran chaplains, clergy and educators serving in various contexts: hospice, hospitals, long term care, prisons, with emergency responders and international humanitarians. Remember to pray for these and all our colleagues in such vital ministries in the midst of these COVID times.

- **Paul Sponheim** explores the *whence* and *whither* of this pandemic from the lens of process theology.
- **Andrés Albertsen** reflects briefly on suffering from the eyes of the Danish philosopher/theologian Søren Kierkegaard.
- **Robert Spilman** considers the experiences of his pastoral counseling colleagues.
- **Emily Werner** describes how learning still took place in a totally virtual summer CPE unit.
- **Anurag Mani** observed new dynamics in his virtual CPE group that may inform his supervision in the future.
- **Donald Sundene** asked the Lutheran prison ministry volunteers to comment on their current format for ministry.
- **Cornelia Kästner** offers us a window into the fatigue found among international humanitarians working through Lutheran World Federation.
- **Cheryl Plummer** finds days of discouragement and delight in her chaplaincy with hospice patients.
- **Rick Malivuk** facilitates retreats for first responders while aware of the need for caring in person with these caregivers.
- **John Schumacher** interviews a former mentee, **Amy Jo Jones Lightning**, about a poem she wrote uplifting a particularly meaningful patient visit.
- **Ghislaine Cotnoir** discovers the blessings that COVID restriction have had in the lives on the long-term care residents in her care.
- **Paul Hinlicky** urges us to speak with truth and purity to those yearning to hear the gospel.

In Memoriam

We reprint Bruce Hartung's tribute from *Concordia Journal* regarding the contributions of Peter Steinke who died in July 2020.

Also, Mark Anderson, a leader in CPE and in ministerial health, died in November 2020. We will have more about the contributions Mark made in our next issue.

Psalm 13:5–6 reminds us of our trust in God who does not fail us:

*But I trust in your unfailing love;
My heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing your praise, O God
For you have been good to me.*

The Coronavirus and the Creator: Cosmological Contributions from a Process Perspective

Paul Sponheim

While the focus in this issue is on the *practice* of ministry in this time of pandemic, I have been invited to offer some more specifically *theological* reflections from a process theology perspective. One of my regularly offered electives at Luther Seminary was “Process Thought and the Christian Faith,” deriving from my doctoral study at the University of Chicago with the “Bernards”—Loomer and Meland—and with others in the process stream such as John B. Cobb, Jr. and Marjorie Suchocki. The animating influence flowing through the process community is still the authorship of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947), mathematician and religious scholar. I don’t think Whitehead offers much help on every theological locus, but I do believe process thought offers contributions to the Christian trying to respond in thought and practice to the reality of COVID 19.

My crucial presupposition regarding the pandemic is that the coronavirus is a natural phenomenon. I like the statement Jim Hart, MD, (a member of our Twin Cities process planning team) quoted in a recent presentation:

The virus has no plan or desire. The simplest purposes of the cell’s life—to maintain the difference between what is inside the cell and what is outside, to move towards one chemical or away from another—are entirely beyond it. It copies itself in whatever way it can simply because it has copied itself that way before in other cells, other hosts (*The Economist*, August 22, 2020).

Viruses find their place within the reality of what we purposing human beings find to be cosmologically given. Moral considerations come powerfully into play in human responses to this natural reality, for good or ill. Later I will speak of how moral evil is revealed and spread in the human response to the virus. But, as the virus enters the cell and replicates itself, a natural process is taking place. Christians do speak of a purpose at work in creation for they confess a faith in God the Creator, the maker of heaven and earth. The virus puts them on notice to speak to how faith in God the Creator fits with the dreaded threat of the fully natural virus. If nature exists by the will of God, is the virus the Creator’s gift to us? How is such a God worthy of worship?

Viruses find their place within the reality of what we purposing human beings find to be cosmologically given.

Whitehead subtitled his magnum opus *Process and Reality*, “An Essay in Cosmology.” An adequate cosmological description must account for the virus and the

suffering and death it causes. I will explore how process cosmology helps us respond specifically to two questions: (1) the Whence?: How did we get into this mess? And (2) the Whither?: How do we get out of it? I will appeal to both the “original” creation theme and to faith in God as the continuing Creator. W and W are difficult questions and what helps on either of them may seem problematic in relation to the other. We do well to proceed with humility, heeding how our epidemiologists regularly emphasize how much they do *not* know about the virus. We’ll be glad for what fragments of a unified view may emerge.

W and W are difficult questions and what helps on either of them may seem problematic in relation to the other.

The Whence

The announcements of our local Process and Faith connection group often carry the phrase “process-relational.” Reality is a process in which relationships are constitutive of reality. Whitehead flat out says of every entity that “its ‘being’ is constituted by its ‘becoming.’ It’s the simple yet complex flow of relationships that is constitutive in that becoming. For Christians the quest to fathom ultimate origins will have to go to God and in that journey, one comes early and late to the reality of relationships within God. Eberhard Jüngel is bold enough to find the link to creation in the relational reality of the Trinity:

In the eternal Son of God, who himself was not created, but comes eternally from God the Father, in this Son of God coming *eternally* from God, God aims at the man [sic] who *temporally* comes from God.

Whitehead, writing as an empirical philosopher of religion, does not make any such Trinitarian point. Yet he does write of how the theologians, “associated with Alexandria and Antioch,” made a decisive advance on Plato in speaking “of a multiplicity in the nature of God, each component being unqualifiedly Divine.” In their doctrine of “divine immanence in the divine nature” a Christian might well be inspired to find a comparably relational character in the creatures made in the divine image. Process thought extends that deep relationality to *all* the creatures.

That brings us to the quest to understand how we got in this pandemic dilemma. Theologians have routinely appealed to the gift of freedom, inherent in a true relationship, as ground zero for the whence of moral evil. Process thought adds a “free process” dimension to the “free will” defense. Anglican physicist-theologian John Polkinghorne puts it so:

The created order looks like a package deal. Exactly the same biochemical processes that enable cells to mutate, making evolution possible, are those that enable cells to become cancerous and generate tumors. You can’t have one without the other. In other words, the possibility of disease is not gratuitous, it’s the necessary cost of life.

Process theologians debate among themselves as to whether creativity and God function as two ultimates or whether one stretches to speak in effect of God creating creativity *ex nihilo*. In any case, the creatures are not *now* nothing. In that creaturely mix great suffering occurs unquestionably. Attending to evolutionary science, one arrives at a best-or-only-way view of natural suffering finding place in the Creator's work. In *The Groaning of Creation* Christopher Southgate has provided an admirably thorough analysis of the various ways this understanding has been cast, citing Robert John Russell, Ted Peters, Nils Gregersen, Gerard Manley Hopkins, John Haught, Philip Clayton, Arthur Peacocke, Holmes Rolston, III and others. They come together to say that "... pain, suffering, death, and extinction ... are intrinsic to a creation evolving... [which] gives rise to the sort of beauty, diversity, sentience, and sophistication of creatures that the biosphere now contains." So, an asteroid strikes the earth and the dinosaurs perish. And a human being contracts the Coronavirus in a cross-species transmission and hundreds of thousand Americans lead a global death toll into the millions.

Attending to evolutionary science, one arrives at a best-or-only-way view of natural suffering finding place in the Creator's work.

The Whither

So, how do we get out of this mess? Is there any hope in a time of pandemic and if there is, what is our human calling in that hope? Have process thinkers learned anything from their own imperiled experience of the time of pandemic? If change is the basic nature of reality, we might be somewhat more open to learning from the interruption the pandemic brings. For example, could the inequality in the "spread" of COVID 19 open us to consider that racism does not reside merely in individuals' intentional cruelty toward people of color but roots systemically in the white privilege that white people enjoy, consciously or not? If we believe that reality is characterized by a *nisus* toward novelty, we might not clamor so eagerly for a return to "the normal" and be more prepared to recognize the inequality that was resident in the life some people think they miss so much. But perhaps the learning would not simply walk the way of judgment. May we have learned something about how the Christian community's togetherness does not disappear when the church door is locked? What of the human community? The creaturely community?

In his theses for the Heidelberg Disputation Martin Luther spoke of how a theologian of the cross does not mis-use words like "good" and "evil" but "calls the thing what it actually is." If the virus is indeed part of God's good creation, we will not demonize this natural happening. But will we not also be able to name the horrendous suffering our human mis-management of this health challenge has caused? We will not rob people of their rational fear of COVID-19. We will not disrespect the deep grieving going on in so many homes and communities. Christians

have the Pauline imperative to “rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.” (Rom. 12:15) In a process perspective the believer is not alone in this weeping, for perhaps Whitehead’s most quoted description of God is this: “God is the great companion—the fellow-sufferer who understands.” This is not a “Wish me luck” afterthought tacked onto a grim narrative complete in itself. That God receives into God’s self the flow of every moment of the universe is precisely a cosmological assertion applying universally. Following Whitehead, this is even spoken of as God’s “consequent” nature, paralleling a comparable creaturely reception of every past becoming.

Moreover, every entity is dipolar, having a receptive phase and an originative phase. In this sense God is not “an exception to all metaphysical principles, invoked to save their collapse. He [sic!] is their chief exemplification.” There is, though,

a key difference, known as “the reversal of the poles.” Whitehead writes that “[For] God the conceptual [or “mental”] is prior to the physical, for the World the physical poles are prior to the conceptual poles.” All non-divine happenings are first of all receptive or “physical” in Whitehead’s terms, and most occasions essentially pass on what comes together in them, offering a relatively negligible mental pole. In human life we find enough togetherness in the stream of happenings to yield some genuine novelty in the becoming of continuity. With God the poles are reversed. He speaks of the divine mental or “conceptual” pole as the “primordial” nature of God. To speak of God as “the primordial actual entity” is to speak of a God ordering possibilities in a moment of “envisagement,” yielding a decisiveness that bears consequences for God and the universe. One can picture the primordial nature abstractly as God “alone with himself [sic!]”. One could put it concretely by speaking of a God hungry for a cosmos. It begins to sound a little like Jünger, doesn’t it?

This reversal of the poles is one of the places where Whitehead approaches what Christian theologians’ image as a creation out of nothing. Indeed, he speaks of God’s conceptual actuality as not only exemplifying, but even as “establishing” “the categorical conditions.” More to my point here, the reversal is the basis for some hopefulness as we return to the Whither. In God’s primordial decisiveness there is an aiming that becomes the guiding principle for a rich notion of God as “continuing Creator.” So, in every moment of becoming, God gives the “initial phase” of a subjective aim for how the many are to become one in this moment. The aim can be resisted, but an updated calling will be back in the next moment. I’ve liked to say that in this aiming God gets up early and stays up late. What is that aim? Whitehead writes that “[T]he teleology of the Universe is directed to the production of Beauty.” He warns against boredom (too much order; not enough contrasting novelty) and chaos (too little order; not enough synthesizing harmony). We are invited to

Christians have the Pauline imperative to “rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.” (Rom. 12:15)

consider how, in this pandemic, we may work for and experience beauty. Is that too challenging? As we begin, God is aiming *in* us. Is there not hope in that?

Is there anything more? In this reversal of the poles one senses a qualitative difference that plays out in such a churchly matter as intercessory prayer. That suffering one, that rebellious one for whom I want to pray I may not be able to reach, but God is present in every moment of that person's life. Marjorie Suchocki writes of how prayer can "give God new stuff for the weaving." It is Suchocki who has pondered creatively how eschatological hope might be understood. Whitehead certainly would have us understand how "perpetual perishing" constantly characterizes every process of becoming. But he himself pondered the possibility of other "cosmic epochs." Indeed, he even writes that we can actually "discern the defining characteristic of a vast nexus extending far beyond our immediate cosmic epoch." Suchocki writes of some kind of existence one might call "triple transcendence": "first a transcendence of seriality ..., second a transcendence of selfhood ... and third and most deeply, a transcendence of selves into the Selfhood of God."

Such talk stands on tip-toe to imagine what may lie ahead ultimately. May such imagining offer the Christian a way of grieving with the hope that "whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's?" (Rom. 14:8) Meanwhile we live with the pandemic, following the fact-driven science of peer-reviewed journals and three stage double blind trials of vaccines. But as we ask of Whence and Whither, we may find some help in a mathematician who could write "Seek simplicity and distrust it."



Paul Sponheim is a 1957 graduate of Luther Seminary, in St. Paul. He has taught at Concordia College, Moorhead, MN, Gettysburg Seminary, Gettysburg, PA, and for forty years at Luther Seminary, where he is emeritus professor of Systematic Theology. He is the author of ten books and the co-author of Christian Dogmatics. During his Luther years he served in various terms as "theologian in residence" at several hospitals as a consultant for CPE groups. He is a member of the planning committee for the Twin Cities Process and Faith connection.

Kierkegaard and Pandemics

Andrés Albertsen

OF COURSE, Kierkegaard did not face our contemporary crisis as he lived in Denmark from 1813–1855. But he wrote about suffering.

Suffering was an integral part of the life of the first Christians. Some preachers today compare the sufferings of the first Christians to the suffering we are experiencing now because of the COVID-19 pandemic and exhort their listeners to endure it with patience, without forgetting to rejoice in hope and to persevere in prayer.

Søren Kierkegaard, however, would say that it is wrong to compare the sufferings of the first Christians to our suffering during this pandemic. To him, suffering caused by the pandemic belongs to the type of sufferings that can occur to any human being and, in the particular case of the COVID-19, to the whole of humanity. It is serious, and it is causing an outrageous number of deaths. But it is *not* a kind of suffering that defines who we are as human beings and as Christians. It is *not* a kind of suffering that can question our identity as Children of God, chosen, holy and beloved. Kierkegaard does not ponder upon the origin of these kinds of sufferings. He considers that they are just abhorrent facts.

The sufferings that the first Christians had to endure were the sufferings that resulted from their encounter with the God of Christ, that is, the God of love. That encounter creates commitments, attitudes, and practices that annoy those who put their trust in other gods, or who believe that life is mere survival and that they can live without anchoring their lives in God. According to Kierkegaard, we are not just who we are. We become who we are in the relationship we establish with ourselves, with our fellow human beings, and with God. It does not happen without struggle and effort, and it is not a process that can be completed once and for all. Shaped by these encounters we have a means to face the pandemic.

If we follow Kierkegaard's approach to pandemic-like suffering, we cannot say that is an ordeal God is subjecting us to, and we cannot predict that we will avoid the ordeal if our faith is strong enough. We have to rely, as everyone else, on the fragmentary knowledge of the scientific community, and this is something that bothers some believers and non-believers alike.

Kierkegaard says that “to defraud oneself of love is the most terrible, is an eternal loss, for which there is no compensation either in time or in eternity.” I understand it to mean that, although our capacities of agency are different depending on our

We become who we are in the relationship we establish with ourselves, with our fellow human beings, and with God.

circumstances, we have the promise that no act of kindness and mercy will ever be lost, and that no gesture of love will ever be lost, precisely because they bear the mark of the eternal.



Andrés Albertsen is a pastor with Vinje Lutheran Church and interim pastor for Iglesia Paz y Esperanza, a Hispanic Lutheran community, both in Willmar, Minnesota. He has studied Kierkegaard in great depth during his pursuit of a PhD in systemic theology through Luther Seminary. Willmar has two meat packing plants nearby where many workers were diagnosed with COVID-19.

Andres grew up in a Danish community in Argentina where he prepared for ordained ministry. He was ordained in Denmark and later served a Lutheran church in Buenos Aires for 20 years. This article first appeared in the May 2020 issue of the Danish Pioneer.

Caring and Counseling in COVID-19 Times

Robert C. Spilman

HOW HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC affected the ministry of pastoral counselors in their work with persons in crisis? It was mid-March 2020 when life changed in our world. Because of an unknown, fast-spreading virus, human contact became hazardous to our health. Questions abounded. What would minimizing direct human contact mean for those who work closely with others? And, in ministry, how would pastors and pastoral counselors continue to offer God’s grace and challenge to persons in need?

Before recently retiring from my role as a CPE supervisor, I directed a Congregation-Based Clinical Pastoral Education program at the Samaritan Counseling Center (SCC) in Western New York. For over twenty years, I have consulted with SCC pastoral counselors and observed deep connections develop between my colleagues and their counselees. With the onset of COVID-19, my colleagues have had to adjust their work with people—sometimes in unexpected ways. What are they learning?

One counseling client reflected, “During this pandemic I was glad that I could continue to communicate with my counselor by telephone conferencing. This experience was great. But when I felt isolated, I really needed to talk face to face.” This comment highlights a two-fold mature perspective in crisis: (1) the importance of relationships with others in times of struggle; and (2), the challenge to know boundaries and work thoughtfully toward goals in those relationships. The client raised questions for counselors and all of us. When crises come, how do we learn in relationship with others, and how do we do it in responsible ways? How do we stay thoughtful and grounded when fear takes hold of the world? And, what does faith in God in Christ have to do with this?

With these questions as a backdrop, here are some reflections from our counselors in COVID-19 times. Some were initially hesitant to use an online counseling format as it seemed distant and less engaging. Yet, it surprised them how their own resistance faded when they got going. This also seemed true for most of their clients. Younger counselees adjusted more easily to the technology, but most clients adapted while some waited to resume in-person counseling when our service locations reopened. Online and phone options offered new flexibility and became more acceptable. Most new clients welcomed these choices in an uncertain world.

One counselor spoke of changes in the “working connection” with her counselees, “There are some clients who seem to need that real presence in order to take a break, make eye contact, and collect their thoughts.” Connecting through technology

When crises come, how do we learn in relationship with others, and how do we do it in responsible ways?

seemed, paradoxically, to inhibit boundaries in some counseling relationships. With other clients, the opposite occurred as they adapted and worked toward their goals. The point may be that people simply are different, even creative, as they manage the challenges of the day.

One retired counselor spoke of a turnaround in a relationship with a former client brought on by the current distress in the world. After COVID-19 began, his former counselee called to check on his life situation and express appreciation for their relationship. Reflecting on how God offers grace in life's twists and turns, this counselor said, "I think our roles reversed. He sees himself as my caretaker now."

What are we learning in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic in our counseling ministry? The following stands out: flexibility in the midst of fear, resilience in human relationships, and clarity in our principles and goals. Most of all, we can point to what has gotten us this far in life: the presence of a God who leads us from darkness into light.



The Rev. Robert C. Spilman, MDiv., retired ACPE Educator, is an ordained pastor of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. He serves on the staff of the Samaritan Counseling Center in Western New York and as an interim pastor in the Buffalo area. He directed a program of Congregation-Based Clinical Pastoral Education in Western New York from 1988 to 2017 with a focus on Bowen family systems theory applied to church life. He is married with four adult children and six grandchildren.

Learning during Totally Virtual Summer CPE

Emily Werner

THIS SUMMER I was able to experience two “firsts” in my work as a CPE Certified Educator Candidate. This was the first unit where I had an active role as an assistant-educator, and it was the first all-virtual tele-chaplaincy unit I’ve ever seen. Due to COVID restrictions, our group of interns was not allowed on-premises at the hospitals where they were assigned. Instead, they attended virtual orientation over Zoom and they made visits through phone calls and iPads. CPE group and individual supervision also happened strictly over Zoom. In order to pull off such a challenging change, the entire Spiritual Health team came together to make the unit work. They established new procedures for charting off-site and for conducting tele-chaplaincy while still protecting patient’s privacy. Students met virtually with their clinical coordinators each day to determine who would be appropriate for phone or computer visits. Then, the students went about the work of CPE — providing spiritual care to people hospitalized in the extraordinary circumstances of a pandemic.

Due to COVID, our interns missed out on some of the usual experiences of CPE. They didn’t feel the adrenaline rush of a 2 AM pager ring, or the disorientation of a Code Blue crisis. They didn’t get to be a part of the hustle of the day-to-day rhythm of hospital staff and bump elbows with nurses and social workers at the charting stations. Most noticeably, they missed the experience of being a physical presence in someone’s room. They could not hold hands, make eye contact or read facial expressions and body language. They struggled when language failed them but they still wanted to convey a caring presence in the midst of silence and suffering. We had several conversations about how we could convey such a presence on the phone, and whether or not it was meaningful. They were also spared from the strain of wearing PPE all day and wondering, despite it all, if they had been exposed to a dangerous virus.

We had several conversations about how we could convey such a presence on the phone, and whether or not it was meaningful.

Even though the students did not have a “typical” summer internship experience, the basic action-reflection-action work of CPE still happened. As the students got into a routine with phone visits, they began to face challenges in their spiritual care conversations that they wrote up in verbatims and brought to our group discussion and individual supervision. True to the nature of CPE, students began to notice the gifts they bring to spiritual care-giving relationships while also noticing their struggles or growing edges. We celebrated as they accomplished their goals and their learning objectives for the unit. Overall, the students were both disappointed by the limitations of virtual

chaplaincy and surprised by the power of a caring connection, even when it happened over the phone.

Our “new normal” was disrupted when George Floyd was killed by police not far from our homes and hospitals. Our summer group was comprised of white people, and we took the opportunity to pause and ask ourselves tough questions about our own experiences of race, power, privilege, and marginalization. These topics, while already integrated into the didactics of the unit, took on more significance as we could so clearly see the suffering caused by personal and systematic racism.

There were times during the summer when I lamented the loss of life — and CPE — as usual. But more than I lamented what we were missing, I celebrated what we were experiencing together. I was surprised by how well Zoom worked for the CPE group. We were able to build a cohesive group, and the students thrived as they supported, encouraged, and challenged one another. As a part of that group, I felt joy and purpose that brought balance to the grief and stress I was experiencing in my clinical work at a long-term care facility. I got to practice using my theory and it was exciting to see the pieces start coming together on this new part of my CPE journey. Like all of life during COVID times, we found a new normal.



Emily Werner, an ELCA minister of word and sacrament, serves as the director of Spiritual Health Services at Aurora on France in Edina, Minnesota where she serves as a chaplain in a facility with assisted living, memory care, and a transitional care center for people coming out of the hospital, on hospice and/or not yet ready to return home. She is an ACPE certified educator candidate with the Fairview CPE Center in Minneapolis.

Emily is married to Aaron, associate pastor at Mount Calvary Lutheran Church in Excelsior, Minnesota. They have 2 children in elementary school and two quarantine-purchased parakeets. They live in Chanhassen, Minnesota, near Lake Riley, where she enjoys paddling and splashing around with her kids.

Driving and Restraining Forces for a CPE Group during COVID-19

Anurag Mani

I WAS FACILITATING THE SPRING CPE intern group earlier this year when I received an urgent message from the Director for an impromptu faculty meeting. Though not surprised by the immediacy of the message, I felt a surge of anxious energy run throughout my body. I took some breaths and centered myself as I gave the group a short break while I attended the meeting that was being held through videoconferencing. The message was harder for me to share with the CPE interns than I had thought. Visibly shaken and with emotion I shared that the hospital cannot have interns anymore in the building, and we cannot meet for classes in person. The group shared their own emotional responses and exchanged messages of support, anxiety, fear, and uncertainty. Within minutes I was sitting alone in my office staring at the wall, feeling somewhat hopeless, exhausted, and concerned for the interns and the future of CPE.

It is almost November 2020 and I am finishing a mid-unit CPE week with the incoming group of seven residents with whom I will journey for the next year. In the last half-year, it appears that a lot has changed and a lot of it remains the same. *I have changed*. Pre-COVID I would have closed my personal system boundaries to any suggestion of conducting a CPE learning group primarily through videoconferencing. Necessity demands action and action leads to changes. For me as an educator the changes have been a great learning experience. In this reflection I would like to highlight some ways the pandemic has created driving and restraining forces as I observe the group work in CPE.

For my understanding of group process, I rely heavily on System Centered Theory that offers me a very structured way of looking at my context through the lenses of theory. Few months back I facilitated a Summer CPE group that met entirely through Zoom teleconferencing. The six interns and I never met in person. The group bonded throughout the Summer over the Zoom meetings and wondered if they could meet together outside the hospital and CPE context as a group once the unit was over. After deciding on a time and place, the group met while taking the necessary safety and social distancing precautions. It was interesting to see the change in the group's interaction with each other as they finally got to see each other physically and completely and not just through the eyes of the computer camera lens.

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What surprised me the most was how the group started to comment on the physical attributes of each other. There were surprises and laughter around how short or tall the other person was or how the other person looked different in camera. What caught my attention was the curiosities that lingered around our physical personas, and how we often subgroup stereotypically based on these outside realities of self.

Looking from the Systems Centered Therapy (SCT) lenses, as a group is forming there is a lot of anxious energy that quickly moves into stereotypical subgrouping based on race, gender, age, years of work experience, or personal physical attributes. This is a restraining force towards group development and growth. To lower this restraining force, I as a group facilitator teach the students the method of functional subgrouping which allows the energy and communication to travel among all group members without being restrained by the noise of stereotypical subgrouping.

My goal in the groups that have met in person is to find ways to lower the restraining forces of stereotypical subgrouping among members.

My goal in the groups that have met in person is to find ways to lower the restraining forces of stereotypical subgrouping among members. For most groups this takes a significant time, energy, and attention both from me as a facilitator and from the CPE interns/residents.

Videoconferencing restricts the ability of the group members to see each other fully in terms of one's physical presence. It also reduces the space one occupies through their physical presence. It somehow blurs the divisions that we have learned to create based on how we look physically, the color of our skin, the number of degrees we possess, the number of years of our work experience, etc. These are important aspects of one's self yet this also creates noise and slows the group maturity and learning process if the group is not willing to look beyond these outward aspects and join each other in a level playing field of group members willing to learn together.

What I am discovering is that video conferencing as a way of conducting the group learning process in CPE is actually a driving force for me as an Educator who desires to create a learning group of interns and residents willing to functionally subgroup and invest energy in exploration and learning of their needs in the here and now of the learning process.

Videoconferencing as I have experienced it thus far has not restrained the ability of the group to meet each other fully in terms of emotions, feelings, and thoughts. I currently supervise a group that has 5 residents around the Central Florida Region and 2 Residents in Kansas City. The biggest restraining force is that as human beings we desire connection and even though video conferencing has allowed us to connect and learn it does not satisfy our longing for a physical human contact.

And, because of COVID-19, I can envision CPE (post-COVID) as a blended program where we can offer this transformational learning to students in diverse locations while also bringing the students together for mid and final evaluations in person to complete the circle of group bonding, learning and work!



Dr. Anurag Mani is an ACPE Certified Educator, an APC Board Certified Chaplain and is a member of the CPE faculty at Advent Health Orlando Center for Pastoral Education. He is a minister of Word and Service with the ELCA with a Master of Arts degree in Theological Studies from Reformed Theological Seminary, FL and a Doctor of Ministry degree in Pastoral Care and Counseling from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, KY. He can be reached at Anurag.mani@adventhealth.com.

Prison Ministry during COVID-19

Don Sundene

Then the Lord said, “If My people want to know where they are needed, tell them they are needed in the streets, the hospitals, the missions, and the prisons. When they come there, they will find Me and the next move of My Spirit.”

“I was in prison, and you came to me.” (Matthew 25:36, paraphrase)

SERVING IN PRISON MINISTRY brings glory to God. Over two million Americans live behind bars today. Reaching inmates or residents (which many prefer to be called) with the Gospel will change their lives.

Today, due to COVID-19, most of the jails and prisons are locked down. Chaplains and volunteers are not allowed any visitation or to hold Bible classes. Not being able to visit, many are reaching in through e-mail, FaceTime, Zoom, mailings and cell phones. To explain the effect, I thought it preferable that you hear from some of the many of those directly involved in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s Prison Ministry.

“The Montana State men’s prison (and likely the women’s) has shut down all outside entities from coming in to minister to the inmates until further notice,” wrote Fred Lewis, Deer Lodge, Montana.

David Solum serving in Michigan City, Indiana, offered, “As a pastor and volunteer chaplain, I serve a handful of inmates at the Indiana State Prison in Michigan City, a level four maximum security prison. During normal times I would be making a prison visit about once a week. I would pray, catechize, counsel and, one of them, I’d commune. Our church sends them catechisms, the *Treasury of Daily Prayer*, and *Portals of Prayer*. We also send cards for holidays and remember them by name in our prayers in the Divine Service.

“During the pandemic I have not been allowed to make any visitations. I send letters and emails and the church sends cards, but they need in-person visitations. Facing the consequence of one’s sins and surrounded by some of the worst criminals in the state day in and day out can spiral even the strongest Christians into depression. In their warped world, suicide attempts, fights, and stabbings are an everyday reality. Normally when I visit them, they come into the

“During the pandemic I have not been allowed to make any visitations. I send letters and emails and the church sends cards, but they need in-person visitations.”

1 Quote from Bill Yount in the prophecy behind Christian Ministry Volunteers

visiting room weary, discouraged, depressed, or angry, but when I preach the Gospel, I can see the peace of God returning to them. These men, some of whom have spent more of their lives in prison than on the outside, thirst for a message of hope in every visit. I was in the middle of catechizing a man on death row. Now that is all on hold for a man who has little time to spare. All I can do is send little messages in emails and encourage them to read their Scriptures and Catechism and pray.”

“I was in the middle of catechizing a man on death row. Now that is all on hold for a man who has little time to spare.”

Rev. Ron Friedrich who serves Christ Lutheran Church of the Deaf in Silver Spring, Maryland and volunteers at the prison, shared, “Life in prison during the coronavirus pandemic has been very difficult. Many institutions are on constant lockdown. Too often, residents must spend their entire day in the cells with little or nothing to do. Some are able to watch TV or listen to the radio. They may be allowed out of their cells, a few at time, to take a shower or use the telephone. Inmates in old overcrowded facilities that have poor ventilation are at greatest risk of exposure to the virus.

“The Maryland facility which houses the state’s deaf and hard of hearing population had an alarming spike in cases in July — 148 tested positive. As of this writing, all have recovered, except one, who is well on the way to recovery. In the entire Maryland prison system, 659 inmates tested positive, 630 have recovered, and 8 with complicating conditions have died.”

Chaplain Tim Johnson, Lutheran Ministry Services NW, is serving the King County Jail in Seattle, Washington, where he is leads Spiritual Care. At this time, due the pandemic, he is the only clergy allowed in the Institution.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply altered the landscape of our personal well-being across the board. That is true for our personal lives, interpersonal relationships and occupations. It is no less true for the inmate population at the King County Jail. Early in the Pandemic (March–April) inmates voiced feelings of anxiety, uncertainty and fear. They worried that they would not be adequately protected from the virus or expressed fears for their families. As the epidemic wore on, those feelings became less pronounced, but different feelings of isolation, hopelessness and depression replaced them. Opportunities for worship and Bible study have been eliminated, and inmates have fewer in person contacts with each other.

“My visits are often the only Christian connection they have. Inmates have recently made comments such as: ‘I’m glad you came today, I’ve had a rough week trying to stay positive;’ ‘The hardest thing is the isolation, I have to constantly fight against a feeling of hopelessness;’ ‘Having you visit is the highlight of my week, we

need human contact; we need relationships.’ As a chaplain, of course, I provide more than human contact.

“Through the Word of God, I am able.”

Chaplain Ted Wuerffel, St Louis, Missouri commented, “Here we have not been able to visit the Correctional Center south of St Louis at Farmington, Missouri since the COVID virus got bad. The prisoner we see has contracted the virus, so he is quarantined, which will put him behind in his final months of programs before release. Since the prison is closed to visitors, I hear from my prisoner via emails now (a new and helpful option). I think their social life is VERY limited. It must be rough there day after day. The fellow I visit is to be released in October after nearly 20 years in prison—so he’s been ‘around the block’ in the Missouri system and had many ‘cellies’ (roommates).”

Pastor Ed Brandt in Meridian, Idaho has a different way of engaging with those he is serving. “My approach to prison ministry involves every three-week mailing of sermons and devotions to a list of about 80 contacts, as well as providing access for free phone calls and email messages. Since I focus on individual contact with referred individuals rather than going in to do services or classes, my ministry didn’t change that much. Being unable to visit in person in the local county jail meant more focus on doing video visits. I noted that many inmates were quite concerned about the virus in early months. For quite a while there were no cases in Idaho prisons and jails, but that has changed in the past two months.

He went on to reflect, “Those who’ve been released seem to have struggled more than in the past. Recently I spoke with one who returned to a county jail. She had done well for 13 months after release but relapsed during the shutdown which deprived her of the AA meetings and volunteer work she counted on. Court appearances and movement from jails to prison were repeatedly delayed, adding to the stress and frustration of those incarcerated. I’ve received words of appreciation for the Portals of Prayer devotional books I send or pass to inmates and hear that some share them and the mailings and use them in group studies. The gospel of forgiveness in Christ works powerfully to touch lives in these times of adversity.”

Remember those who are in prison as though you are in prison with them.

Hebrews 13:3a



Don Sundene serves as the Executive Director of Lutheran Ministry Services Northwest (LMSN). In addition, Don serves as Coordinator for Prison Ministry for the Northwest District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and is Contract Coordinator for Prison Ministry for the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. If you would like to be included in this Prison Ministry Network, email him with your contact information at LCMSPrisonMinistry@lcms.org

Hope for Humanitarians: How COVID-19 affects LWF aid workers in the field

Cornelia Kästner

“A CATASTROPHE WITHIN THE CATASTROPHE,” that’s what Sophia Gebreyes, country representative in Ethiopia for the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), calls the COVID pandemic. The virus has hit people in already challenging circumstances. For years, Ethiopians have been feeling the effects of climate change, with frequent droughts followed by floods. Because of frequently failed harvests, people have used up all savings. “The people don’t have anything left to fall back on,” Gebreyes says. Since the beginning of 2020, the country has experienced civil unrest. In the summer, biblical swarms of locusts raided the fields and pastures. The next generation of insects is already breeding and expected to descend on the farmers in December. And then there is COVID-19.

Ethiopia is but one example. COVID-19 has hit the poorest of the poor hardest. Daily laborers lose their livelihood when a lockdown confines them to their homes. People who have fled war and natural disaster are again facing an overwhelming catastrophe, which threatens their lives and their loved ones.

Aid workers are right next to them. What has never been a nine-to-five job has now become even harder and more challenging, says Maria Immonen, director of LWF World Service, the humanitarian and development arm of the LWF. “We have seen cases of stress, anxiety and burn-out among our staff,” Immonen said on the occasion of World Humanitarian Day on 20 August.

Put yourself Last

The 9,200 LWF field staff are not the only ones: Social media traffic on World Mental Health Day (10th October) showed that the situation affects all humanitarian organizations. More than in previous years, aid workers shared about their situation and the need to take care of themselves. COVID-19 might have brought to light a situation which is often down played, because the self-understanding of helping others means putting one’s own needs last.

Contrary to public belief of white ex-pat humanitarians flying in to save the day, many aid workers now come from the countries and communities they work in. LWF, among its more than 9,000 field staff, counts only 50 ex-pats. “Almost all of our colleagues, including the international staff, stayed,” Immonen says.



LWF staff in the Za’atari refugee camp, Jordan, have adapted their work to the new restrictions. Photo: LWF/ M. Hariri

This commitment comes often at great personal cost. Because of closed borders, many colleagues are not able to take much-needed breaks and vacation (Rest & Rehabilitation, R&R) which are usual for humanitarian staff in hardship locations. “Some have been in the field for six months or longer,” Immonen says. In addition, counselling and supervision are rarely set up for local implementing partners and incentive staff, who are also at high risk of being infected, stressed and traumatized.

In some countries, aid workers have been accused of importing and spreading the Coronavirus. They were met with mistrust and open hostility by those whom they intended to support. Humanitarian staff are also more exposed to possible infection. In the densely populated refugee camps, proper hygiene and social distancing are difficult to manage. Water supply is often limited, as are soap and disinfectant. Medical services are basic, and not equipped to deal with severe COVID cases.



Children demonstrate hand washing at Kakuma refugee camp; Kenya. LWF is the main implementer of education in the camp; awareness-raising on hygiene is part of that work. LWF has reinforced hygiene education to prevent a spread of COVID-19 in the camp. Photo: LWF/P. Omagwa

Work hard, work harder

The worst for many however is the feeling of helplessness or seeing how the virus — or the measures taken to contain it — destroy the achievements of the past years.

Abdelkader Karim has been working with LWF in Ethiopia for 34 years. He coordinates livelihood projects for refugees and their host communities in the Somali border region. Karim is a seasoned aid worker and used to stress and anxiety. He has worked in Eritrea, has been shot at, detained, and threatened by militia.

“Working this closely with the people means that we experience their problems first-hand”, he says. “We understand their lives, we experience what they go through. We hope and fear with them.” This closeness is a big source of motivation, but also equally frustrating. “I invest time and energy to improve their lives. It is frustrating to see how little we can do sometimes. The scope of the problem often outweighs our ability to support.”

To compensate for the ever-growing needs, many humanitarians work even harder. “Staff have put themselves and their families on the back burner to support the communities we serve,” LWF Ethiopia country representative Gebreyes says with dismay.

Support systems needed

LWF World Service director Immonen is worried about the long-term impact of the crisis on the resilience of communities and colleagues. “This crisis will be with us for three or four years, at least,” Immonen says. “We need to talk about mental health.”

LWF as many other organizations expanded counselling and supervision for staff in hardship locations. Many colleagues are using these offers, Immonen says. She has also seen how faith can be a source of resilience. “We see that people rooted in faith sometimes find it easier to deal with the extremes of human life: loss, trauma, and death. This can help to share the pain, provide comfort, or seek help,” Immonen says. “Faith also gives a deep perspective of hope in the face of hopelessness that helps us to carry on.”

The LWF World Service director calls upon donors and partners to provide the resources for staff safety and mental well-being also for local and incentive staff. “In difficult times like these, we need to make sure we support all our field colleagues in the best way possible.”



Cornelia Kästner is a Senior Communication Officer with the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva. She grew up in Berlin, studied in Leipzig (Germany) and Zagreb (Croatia), and after a career as freelance journalist and press officer, joined the LWF in 2014. She believes that working with LWF and specifically LWF World Service has given her valuable insights into realities around the globe, the complexity of simple solutions, and the strength and resilience of those we tend to see as weak and poor.

Mutual Care During COVID

Cheryl Plummer

Earlier in the pandemic

As a hospice chaplain I am still at the bedsides of those near the end of their lives offering spiritual comfort and support, religious rituals, and connection to loved ones in the hospital, extended care facilities and private homes. The hospitals are a somewhat eerie and different place during this COVID pandemic, the hallways are empty, no visitors and no routine procedures, but the units themselves are overflowing and busy with lonely patients.

For patients who have the COVID virus my ministry has become one of praying in the hallways into the nurse's phones into the isolation rooms and comforting and reassuring their loved ones by phone.

Our hospice patients in the hospital, who do not have the virus are allowed one visitor at a time so visits are sometimes long as I wait as each family member is allowed in to the hospital to have their turn to pray and say their goodbyes.

Even though our hospice patients can have one visitor at a time, sometimes due to their families being elderly, or having underlying health conditions, or due to them having small children their loved ones may not be able to be at their bedside as they are dying. So, we have been doing our best to help all those who are sick and dying to connect with those they need to hear from, the voices that will comfort them the most. Even if someone is near the end of life and no longer responsive, we will help their family to see their dying loved one's face, share in prayer together, and say those things they need to say to them, the things that person needs to hear, that they are loved and will be missed, but it is alright to go be in God's embrace.

Last week I sat at the bedside of a dying patient and just held the phone while his daughter and then his son and then his wife each called and said their goodbyes, telling him what a good father and husband he is, and that it was alright, that they would take care of one another and his rescue dog, and that they loved him. I comforted each of them as they grieved from afar, with me as their presence for him, close enough to hear their loved one breathe. He died the next day.

When I am allowed into extended care facilities and senior living, the patients just soak up the love and attention due to COVID-19 visit restrictions. Sometimes I help with window visits. I've even helped coordinate a window birthday party between a patient and family. They are allowing some outdoor visits with family

We have been doing our best to help all those who are sick and dying to connect with those they need to hear from, the voices that will comfort them the most.

at this time which brings them and their families so much joy. They all like to hold my hand and look into my eyes that have to smile for me now that a mask covers my smiles. During these somewhat tumultuous and isolating days, I feel honored and uplifted as people trust me with their beloved memories, reflections of a gentler time in our history. As I try to share God's love for these dear ones, I receive so many professions of "I love you" that will carry me through the coming days.

I made an encouraging video, including prayers, for patients who are in facilities I cannot go into. It's on YouTube and the recreational therapists and hospice nurses show it to my patients. I have also become quite adept at finding ways to perform phone and video videos with isolated patients.

One of the hardest things is that this is usually a ministry of touch and hugs. So, I have learned that one can hug and express caring using an extra compassionate word or prayer.

We in hospice all have our moments of doubt and exhaustion and degrees of fear during this crisis. A huge part of my ministry is supporting the rest of the hospice, hospital and nursing facility teams. I've cried a lot but then go on and put one foot in front of the other to provide spiritual care for our hospice patients and their loved ones for another day.

They all like to hold my hand and look into my eyes that have to smile for me now that a mask covers my smiles.



Several months into the pandemic

I was having one of those weeks. So many of my people were feeling afraid to die or upset God was not allowing them to go to heaven sooner. Those are the days when I struggle and pray for the right words to say and yet I know that bringing God's presence is the most important thing I can do.

Then God blessed me with my favorite kind of day.

My first patient was 103 and my second patient was 105. Both of these centenarians are of quite sound mind. They love having a chaplain visit and love to sing and pray.

Then I went to a nursing facility where the younger ones, only in their 90s, were. They just soak up love and attention due to COVID-19 visitation restrictions. They are doing outdoor visits with family at this time which brings them and their families so much joy. They all like to hold my hand and look into my eyes, eyes that have to smile for me now that a mask covers my smiles. It was a day filled with people trusting me with their beloved memories, reflections of a gentler time in our history.

I received so many professions of “I love you” that day to carry me through the coming days when I may have to try to be the one to bring God’s love into much sadder and angrier encounters.

Thank you for that lovely day God. You must have known I needed it!



Deacon Cheryl Plummer received her BA degrees in theology and psychology from Valparaiso University. She is a consecrated deaconess of the LDA in Valparaiso, Indiana, and is a rostered Word and Service minister with the SE Michigan Synod of the ELCA. In recent years Cheryl has done graduate theological studies through the Ecumenical Theological Seminary in Detroit. She has been a chaplain for Beaumont Health System in Detroit for over 29 years and has specialized in Trauma, Oncology, Maternal Child Health and Pediatrics. For the past 15 years Cheryl has worked for Beaumont Hospice. She likes to travel and spend time with her husband, their four children and two grandchildren.

First Responders—They wobble but they don't fall down

Rick Malivuk

MINISTRY WITH FIRST RESPONDERS during a pandemic is, in a word, frustrating. I lead a stress management retreat for first responders. We have to consider social distancing, disinfectant requirements, food safety, masks (and mumbling). Plus add another word: cancelled. Yet, life goes on, particularly with those who serve on the front line as law enforcement, fire-rescue and emergency medical services.

Normalizing reactions and perceptions of abnormal and traumatic events is a task of stress management. Ideally, this occurs in person but when that is not possible, we utilize different tools. Technology has provided a number of creative options for electronic communication, voice and video. So, maintaining contact with those for whom retreats were cancelled became a new task.

We all understand that effective chaplaincy is truly a ministry of presence. In military or paramilitary environments this means *being with* the troops. It also means identifying a shared experience. Due to my combat experience (Vietnam) and 20 plus years volunteering with the local first responders' Critical Incident Team, I am able to be with them as I speak the language. On their part, admitting a need for this retreat also admits a vulnerability and a strong desire for someone to "have their back." Thus, maintaining contact in spite of cancellations and delays is a requirement for an effective ministry.

The uncertainties of this pandemic have only added to the list of uncertainties first responders encounter in their careers. The longer the career, the longer the list: shift changes, mandatory overtime, missed family events, punitive transfers, delayed or postponed vacations, and of course the threat to life and limb. The pandemic seems to have intensified a cynical worldview. For example, several first responders have expressed frustration with those who "work the system" by the declaration of "COVID!" This requires their suiting up and taking the individual to "three squares and a cot," (shelter, a bed and a meal in a hospital), only to be repeated several days or a week later by the same individuals. Little thought is given in an attempt to understand any causes that would contribute to the formation of vulnerable segments of a community (for that matter, alternative responses).

Following appropriate guidelines, we have recently completed an in-person retreat. According to the evaluations, it was a beneficial experience. It was effective in improving communication, helping them find words for feelings rather than

The uncertainties of this pandemic have only added to the list of uncertainties first responders encounter in their careers.

reactions. It was effective in helping participants meet their personal goals. It was effective in helping them learn strategies for building resilience. Remember *Weebles*? They wobble but they don't fall down!

And the retreat was effective in helping participants find their sense of humor. Since I had done a bit of clowning in the past, I shared my supply of clown noses. It's difficult taking things too personally when imagining a complainer with a big red clown nose. Food seems to have received the most praise from the retreat, and if I'm honest, much of my daily step count has been to the kitchen during this period of self-isolation. We all seem to find ways to self-sooth.



Rick is a retired ELCA pastor, a father (of 4), grandfather (9), widowed (after 48 years) and remarried (to a retired pastor) for 2 years. He is a volunteer chaplain for a federal agency and leads a stress management retreat for first responders in the Tampa Bay area of Florida. For most of his career he has served on his denomination's professional preparation committee, assisting those discerning careers in church leadership.



The following poem is a musing in light of a patient visit by a hospice chaplain during COVID. John Schumacher interviewed Amy and that interview is found following the poem.

Strawberries

Amy Jo Jones Lightning

There were so many layers,
so many barriers,
so many distractions.

I felt like I was having to sign over
my proverbial first born
before I could visit this beloved woman.

Sign in.

Provide phone number.

Create a PIN.

Get temperature taken.

Go to the wash station.

Wash my hands in warm water, soap,
and dry with a paper towel.

Don a mask.

Put on the face shield.

So many layers to move through
before being able to visit
a beloved.

COVID 19 was beginning to irritate me.

It was beginning to make me
feel on edge about everything.

Being afraid to touch anything.

Or even breathe deeply.

It was like feeling the paranoia of the universe
just to enter an assisted living facility.

I was aware of all this,
breathed,

and I calmed myself

as best I could

before visiting this beloved.

The whole process had taken fifteen minutes.

When I arrived,

I was greeted warmly

by caregivers and family.
Her daughter stepped into the next room
and gave her mother the privacy needed
to speak to me.

As I reflect on this woman's life,
she had lived a beautiful life.
She had worked as a nurse,
part of that being in public health.
She asked me what it was like,
being a chaplain
during this pandemic.
The pandemic seemed to be
the raging topic anywhere I turned.
I think she could read my eyes
and the frustration
I was trying to contain
and not show.
Apparently that wasn't working well...
and she saw this
and opened her compassionate heart.
And I opened mine.
We began to engage
about her own experiences in health care
while she continued to show her own
empathetic and nursing side
to all that was going on.
I believe her work as a caregiver
never ended.

She knew what was going on.
She, in her own strange way,
lifted me up out of the doldrums
by acknowledging what everyone
was going through.
Sometimes you just have to name the elephant in the room.
This time the elephant's name was COVID-19...not death.

She had a gastric tube
going down her throat,
into her stomach.
"I didn't even know I was sick.
I've been healthy all of my life."

Here she was,
in her late nineties,
processing the shock of a
terminal diagnosis.

She processed what it was like
to be in the hospital
and receive this kind of sudden prognosis,
only to be sent to her apartment
to die.

She had lived a full life.

She had sold her home in another state
so as to move close to her children.

She just wasn't expecting this kind of prognosis
to be in her life.

She was expecting more years.

More time with grandchildren and great grandchildren.

She had not been able to eat or drink anything.

She processed all of this with me.

"All I really want to taste is another strawberry.

They are so decadent.

I love the Hoods.

And they are just coming in."

I could see how she was imagining
the taste and the joy of the simplest of things.

As we closed out our visit,
she gave me some sage advice.

"Please enjoy your life!

You stay safe and well!

Live a full life!"

She had no regrets.

Nothing unfinished.

She was ready...

except that she wanted

her last taste and experience to be

a Hood strawberry.

May she rest in peace.

JOHN Let me ask you about *Strawberries*. What was it about this patient encounter that moved you to memorialize it in a poem?

AMY I do a lot of creative poetry writing for self-care. I think what struck me about this woman was her depth of understanding about where we were coming from as a staff with the COVID virus. It was the sage advice of “please enjoy your life” that struck me. It was uplifting. So, I wanted to remember her that way, and also be reminded of what is important — you know, the simple things of life, the simple pleasure of eating — she couldn’t do that anymore. The Hood strawberries out here, they don’t have a good shelf life, they don’t ship well. They are one of the sweetest strawberries you’ll ever taste, so it was just one of those poignant moments of being reminded of the simple things of life.

JOHN Your conversation struck me as being a mutual ministry.

AMY Yes, it was. I tend to have the boundaries of “it’s not about me, it’s about you.” “Don’t ask me anything about myself because I will change the subject or turn it around back around to you because it’s not about me, it’s about you” — and she was wiser than that. So, it was just basically a sharing — just sharing, and very mutual. A very relaxed environment that felt like it was supposed to be.

JOHN Have you often had this kind of experience during the pandemic?

AMY I’m used to wearing a mask and a face shield and sometimes I gown up. If it’s a droplet precaution of any kind I might have to wear a N95 mask which makes breathing much more miserable. Sometimes I have to wear latex gloves, just have the whole nine yards of PPE on. It takes about ten minutes to put all that stuff on before you go into a patient’s home or facility, so I think with the COVID pandemic, it’s learning to work through all the barriers and also not being able to touch, you hold can’t hands — it’s gone out the window. It’s been a challenge but you have to learn to work with it.

JOHN So, I hear your biggest frustration during the pandemic probably has been the layer of separation.

AMY The layer of separation, yeah. It’s not about whether or not I’m feeling safe. I had to move past all that. Probably in March or April I had to move through all that. So... it’s keep going out into the homes — and COVID not being the raging topic of conversation — in order to get to what’s really concerning people.

JOHN Are you feeling safe?

AMY Well, I'm on vacation right now, so yeah. Pretty much. I've learned I have to think twice before I go into a grocery store, a box store, and be safe and masked. Oregon has a universal masking law so everyone is masked or face-shielded out here. Everybody's taking precautions and socially distancing. It's turned into the new normal.

JOHN In your patient care, too, you're also feeling safe?

AMY I had to get used to wearing a face mask because a lot of times if people are hard of hearing they read lips, and they can't do that. I've learned to speak up and speak slowly or I do more listening than talking.

JOHN Do you think the pandemic is going to change chaplaincy?

AMY I think it already has. I don't know much about the hospital settings, I can't speak to that, but I think with hospice chaplaincy I've had to be more cognizant of what's going on with team members and hospice aides especially, that do the direct care. I've been more cognizant of leadership's ability to respond and create an environment of assurance and support. I think overall the approach to pastoral care changed overnight. I had to learn how to use electronics, like Zoom meetings. I've had probably a handful of Zoom meetings with patients and the conversation has always been about changes in technology. The technology itself is a barrier to providing care — but it's learning to assess the ones that are the most comfortable with being able to use the technology and being able to just have a phone conversation face-to-face. I think with things in the background in people's homes I miss cues because I don't see the entire body — I don't see body language. I have to learn how to assess for pain differently.

JOHN I hadn't thought about that... so how do you assess for pain now?

AMY The thing is asking them to be descriptive. I noticed in a couple of different cases that I was a part of, I went into the patient's home right after there had been a nursing visit done by way of Zoom and there were a lot of things that were missed in terms of symptom management. I see it can be a blessing to have video visits but they're not as thorough. You miss things just because you don't see, touch, feel body temperature. You miss the subtle movements of whether there are some major pain management issues. You miss the opportunity for education of family — understanding what to look for and how to administer medications.

JOHN I've known from my own hospice career that people who work with hospice patients and families are, at some level, also dealing with their own mortality. So, going back to the poem "Strawberries," what would be that "last thing" for you?

AMY In terms of my own mortality? You know, I live out here in Oregon and there's this place called the Tillamook Cheese Factory, and their ice cream is out of this world, so give me a spoon and a half a gallon of Tillamook Mudslide ice cream and I'll be fine. Just send me out to the woods.

JOHN That does sound great.

AMY I often tell patients, if they're cognizant to pick up on humor, I hope my last words are, "Watch what happens when I try this!" I think in hospice, if I'm not in touch with my own mortality, I lose my effectiveness because I can't be empathetic.

JOHN Moving forward ... 2021, 2022, whatever the trajectory is — what do you hope for, as we move through and beyond the pandemic, in terms of chaplaincy and pastoral care?

AMY That's a good question. I think I've seen our profession growing in its value because of the pandemic. Also, I think with all the tensions regarding race that have been in the media — that's been one of the boiling topics out here in Portland — we have the potential to be mediators, to be the non-anxious presence to treat each person with equanimity. And kindness. And that goes a long way. I think we have the capacity to remind people of their original goodness and their precious nature, tap back into that instead of being so attached to ideas that divide. It goes beyond health care, goes beyond chaplaincy.

JOHN It's a hopeful and a challenging vision. Thank you.



AMY JO JONES LIGHTNING, MM, MDiv, BCC served as a church musician and congregational pastor before completing her clinical training in 2003 and turning to end-of-life care. Amy Jo has worked for hospices in Illinois, Montana, and Oregon and is currently called as a staff chaplain with Brighton Hospice in Portland, Oregon. She is rostered with the United Church of Christ.



JOHN E SCHUMACHER, MDiv, BCC was Amy Jo's clinical mentor for her CPE residency assignment to Rainbow Hospice and Palliative Care in metro Chicago. He serves as a member of the editorial board for Caring Connections and is a retired ELCA roster minister of word and sacrament.

COVID Gifts

Ghislaine Cotnoir

PROBABLY NONE OF US expected that an international pandemic would make us into media experts! Prior to March, like most of our residents and a fair number of our families [associate with The Artman Home & The Hearth at Drexel], I had never used FaceTime, Skype or Zoom!!! It became obvious pretty quickly though, that if in-person visits from family and friends couldn't happen, we would need to find other ways to keep our residents connected with their loved ones. What is it they say, "Necessity is the mother of invention?"

Everyone went to work to figure it out. We all shared ideas, equipment and time so that connections could happen. While I know that we all agreed that in-person visits are deeply missed and personal contact with touch is hugely important, we've none the less seen some wonderful and inspiring virtual visits!

So, I am asked, "Are their blessings received from this time?" Well, here are a few. Residents have Zoomed with relatives they have not seen or talked to in many years. Imagine the smile of a resident talking via Zoom with a brother he hasn't talked to since having a stroke. Now they see each other and the laughter is priceless. Birthday, anniversaries and other events and even a few weddings have continued to be celebrated. In some cases, residents pre-COVID would have missed these events. Because of what we have learned over the past few months, they have called in and seen every minute! Children and pets who wiggle their way into Zoom and Facetime calls have brought smiles and giggles. One resident who moved in just as everything shut down, gave a wonderful video tour of her room with the ease of a seasoned realtor! And, from the perspective of anxious family members, just having a visual and hearing a voice makes days of separation more bearable.

My job as chaplain is to offer spiritual support. Usually that means planning worship and prayer groups, singing hymns, and talking about faith. During this COVID time, I have been reminded of how deeply spiritual it is to be connected to those we love. Being part of the team who make these connections continue, albeit in new and different ways, continues the joint ministry and mission of caring for body *and* spirit! Who knew that a phone and an iPad would become such important tools for offering spiritual care!



Ghislaine Cotnoir is Director of Pastoral Care at The Artman Home and The Hearth at Drexel outside Philadelphia. She is a word and sacrament rostered minister of the ELCA who served for several years on the Caring Connections editorial board. She can be reached at gcotnoir@libertylutheran.org

Theological Reflections on Pastoral Ministry during the Pandemic

Paul R. Hinlicky

2020 HAS BEEN DIFFICULT. So will 2021. It is now evident that there is little prospect of “going back to normal,” no matter who wins the election (I am finishing this essay three days before election day.) Protracted difficulties may rather signal the end of American optimism, a death knell for American dreams, including raging wildfires in the West, multiple hurricanes in the southeast, episodes of police brutality and urban rioting in the cities and electoral uncertainty. How does one minister in an impending “winter of doom,” harbinger not merely of the stubbornly persisting pandemic, but of an empire at its sunset, \$27+ trillion in debt and counting?

We might begin by rereading our Augustine, who ministered during the fall of the Roman Empire by interpreting its downfall as the just judgment of God on its pride. Ministers need such theological fortification to learn again in our present winter of doom how Christian hope is not human optimism based upon a rational projection of future trends, but hope against hope coming to the aid of the disillusioned — indeed *only* to the aid of the disillusioned. But that ministering of Christian hope also means that ministers must allow the disillusionment to proceed apace doing its incisive divine work of judgment. As Luther counseled at the onset of a deadly plague,¹ the minister is to be present in compassionate solidarity with the afflicted in the precise knowledge that the affliction works divine disillusionment in order to prepare its new and superior hope in the ultimate “redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23).

The alternatives available culturally to such salutary disillusionment further commend this ministry of hope. The spiritual alternatives are the cynicism and/or nihilism that increasingly captures hearts and minds, especially of the younger generation who see their futures disappearing in an epochal diminishing of expectations. Nihilism dulls the pain by begetting apathy, the self-protection of resignation; cynicism, seething with resentment, breaks out in rage mindlessly to destroy a system that has lied and failed. But true knowledge of our common sinfulness teaches instead how underlying envy, greed or coveting have filled the vacuum in the human soul vacated of true fear, love and trust in God our Creator. True knowledge of sinfulness thus illuminates the collapsing house of cards built

But true knowledge of our common sinfulness teaches instead how underlying envy, greed or coveting have filled the vacuum in the human soul vacated of true fear, love and trust in God our Creator.

¹ See our podcast on Luther’s counsel: www.queenofthesciences.com/e/2020-bonus-episode-1-whether-one-may-flee-from-a-deadly-plague/

upon Gordon Geko's "greed is good" mantra, undermined by the pandemic in all its lethal, including economically lethal, dimensions.

Greedy Consumerism

While the boogie-man term that arose in the 1980s was so-called "neoconservatism," the far more accurate designator, "neoliberalism," has since emerged to designate contemporary culture in which the market exceeds the marketplace and comes to dominate all aspects of human life so that nothing is sacred and everything has a price. The old liberalism represented by figures like John Locke and Adam Smith sought the freedom of entrepreneurship in open markets no longer under the thumb of royal prerogative, excessive taxation and ecclesiastical proscriptions. A potent critique of serfdom and slavery was part and parcel of this old liberalism, since it valued labor economically as worthy of its wage; this liberation of the laboring classes from serfdom fostered political democracy and a general rise in the wealth of nations up through the epoch of industrialization – though not without painful costs of massive social dislocation and suffering in tandem with emergent forms of domination in foreign colonial exploitation and domestic wage slavery of the uprooted masses. Supplementing the reformist response of democratic regimes to the crisis of capitalism in the Great Depression in the face of Fascist and Bolshevik alternatives, an intellectual movement pioneered by the Austrian Friedrich Hayek arose among mid-20th century economists arguing that the unlimited market was the most efficient processor of information and thus should be allowed to replace the political role of the modern state in regulating markets for social purposes. Although originally opposed to National Socialism, in the postwar Hayek's theory developed into "neoliberalism."² Neoliberalism is the very air we breathe nowadays and so it has penetrated also the churches which seek niches to market their own brand of religion for spiritual consumers. Yet neoliberalism can claim deep roots in the Enlightenment project of Euro-American modernity.

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The late Jean Bethke Elshtain's final book, *Sovereignty: God, State and Self*,³ is a contemporary restatement of Augustine's interpretation of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. It develops an innovative and penetrating critique of our culture of "excarnation," the opposite trajectory of Christian belief in divine incarnation promising the ultimate redemption of the body (cf. Romans 8: 23). Her point is that the modern dream of the domination of "extended things" by "thinking things" initiated in Descartes' pioneering modern philosophy has brought us to a point where

2 Philip Mirowski and Edward Nik-Khah, *The Knowledge We Have Lost in Information: The History of Information in Modern Economics* (Oxford University Press: 2017).

3 Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Sovereignty: God, State and Self: the Gifford Lectures* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

our greedy “lust for domination” (Augustine) has turned against the human body itself, which we increasingly regard as nothing but an accidental and burdensome vehicle of the true self (i.e. the “thinking thing,” consciousness), infinitely malleable, putty to be manipulated by never satisfied egoism.

Of course the body, which we are, is fragile and vulnerable: from dust we were taken to dust we return. But the truth is that the thinking things which are our brains are also embedded in the ecology of physical and living things beginning in our bodies and our not some transcendent exception to this physical ecology. Against the anthropological dualism of modern culture of excarnation, Christian faith affirms our bodily state of creatureliness in all its vulnerability as something precious, not a liability to be overcome or even left behind by technology but a precious gift to be stewarded in hope of redemption. For the body is our availability to others, our avenue to sociality. It is as bodies that we will enter the beloved community of God.

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Another testimony to be added to the diagnosis of this lethal culture of excarnation is Johann Hari, *Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression — And the Unexpected Solutions*.⁴ Hari argues against the contemporary pharmacological tendency to separate the depressed condition of the thinking thing, the brain, from extended things, the predatory social and polluted physical environment of the “greed is good” mantra. We medicate brains in pain rather than recognize their manifold broken connections to God, to neighbors, to nature and to hope. As a college professor, let me add in corroboration of Hari’s thesis, that I have watched in sad amazement in the last twenty years as a generation of young people has descended into a fog of anxiety and depression all the while striving to maintain the real utopianism of the modern self with its inflated ambitions, utterly disregarding all the negative signals they are getting from their own bodies.

What is God doing to us to allow this vicious contagion to undermine our way of life? I ask the reader to reflect on the thesis that our greedy individualism is not only the spiritual source of our culture of excarnation but it is the chief reason why we have also become so religiously allergic to the utterly biblical motif of the wrath of God manifesting in catastrophic events like famine and pestilence, when our ecological sins and economic exploitations are visited back upon us as God hands us over to the consequences of our own sinful desires. Note well: I ask of the reader in this connection for theological reflection, *not* preaching rhetoric or pastoral counsel as such.⁵

Indiscriminate rhetoric against “blaming the victim” — even when the inevitable consequences of socially irresponsible behavior befall us — keeps us pastorally

4 Johann Hari, *Lost Connections: Uncovering the Real Causes of Depression — And the Unexpected Solutions* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).

5 See our podcast: www.queenofthesciences.com/e/the-wrath-of-god-1590354092/

tongue-tied when in fact theological interpretation of disaster like the current one matters immensely — and not for the cheesy purpose of defending God or for the vicious purpose of scapegoating. The meaningfulness of suffering with openness to an alternative in hope is what is at stake in this theological reflection, while the alternative accounts of nihilism and cynicism (not to mention a defiant secular faith that science and technology will save us from our own sinful greed) are ready at hand, ultimately to execute the radical implications of excarnation by the sacrifice of life deemed unworthy of living. When it is clear on the level of individual life that there is perpetrator and victim, it is, *of course*, morally obtuse to blame the victim for victimization. But an epidemic only strikes on the level of individual life because first of all it operates through the intercourse of social life operating by trans-individual forces. And this is the level on which the doctrine of Original Sin operates and enables prophetic discernment.

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So it is true that as an individual I do not get coronavirus because God is picking me out for special punishment; God is not Zeus casting thunderbolts upon the individuals who offend his ego. We have it on no less authority than Jesus according to whom the heavenly Father causes his rain to fall upon the just and the unjust alike, who rebuked those who asked who sinned that the tower should have collapsed and killed them. Yet the Lord added to this rebuke to would-be friends of Job the admonition, “unless you repent you will all likewise perish!”

The deeper truth which we learn from Old Testament Scripture, as Jesus here sums up the prophets, is that, precisely as individuals, we do not exist solely or simply as individuals, but we flourish or decline individually as members bound organically to one another in the common body of creatures of the earth made for community, not isolation. The coronavirus contagion is a negative witness to the ineradicable social-organic bond of us embodied earthlings; it speaks painfully against the widespread American fantasy that I am an island, a sovereign self who makes his own destiny, who can and must live alone, for “me, myself and I.” Now the virus forces us into quarantine to live out this excarnation fantasy of living alone for self alone to show us how little this idol is really to be trusted, let alone desired. With the prophets of Israel, to promote such a serious social self-examination along these lines to reopen the hope of beloved community.

The correlate of the wrath of God theologically is the doctrine of Original Sin which articulates a social or corporate understanding of sinfulness,⁶ i.e. which does not focus exclusively or disproportionately on individual culpability but on sin as a power that has universally overtaken humanity such that our best civil or legal

6 I have argued this thesis extensively in my systematic theology, *Beloved Community: Critical Dogmatics after Christendom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Erdman's, 2015) 206–221

righteousness falls short of the glory of God. This corporate focus on sinfulness as a state of captivated being likewise recalibrates liberated personal virtue as *social* responsibility, i.e. not oriented exclusively or disproportionately toward cultivating the moral excellence of the individual but rather fostering humble and loving service even of those undeserving of loving service

It is Theology 101 to point out that you cannot have a resurrection without first a death, nor justification without first judgment, nor merciful grace without first divine wrath. Why then are contemporary religionists so allergic to the notion? Is it not precisely the officially optimistic religion accompanying the individualistic and consumerist mentality of excarnation which, misunderstanding the embodied human being as essentially bound to others, misunderstands also the social nature of sinfulness and consequently of the social reality of divine wrath?

Given the American fact of fundamentalist/revivalist fire-and-brimstone preaching, let me point out how this individualistic misunderstanding has aided and abetted those who purpose to terrorize individuals into the kingdom of God, even Lutherans who think that the law must be preached like a hammer from outside of the situation until hammered people are in a state of submission before the sweet gospel can ever be mentioned. I've certainly spent enough time in the pastoral ministry picking up the pieces of shattered souls recovering from such terroristic preaching. But the prophetic interpretation of social catastrophe as a manifestation of the wrath of God is precisely not a supernatural hammer descending out of the clear blue sky like a lightning bolt from Zeus. Moreover, no one understands sinfulness or is concerned about divine wrath except those brought into the reconciliation of peace with God through the victory of the crucified and risen Christ, just as for these the favor of God becomes the sure foundation and not the uncertain goal of the new and Christian life. But the alternative to the terrorist preachers is not to jettison prophetic proclamation of the wrath of God or discerning theological understanding of the social injustice of this culture of greed and excarnation now being shaken to the foundations. But armed with this theological reflections, pastors will be in bold presence with the suffering as ministers of Christ and patient interpreters of the catastrophe.

All the same, I fear there is yet a deeper source among for our allergy to the eminently biblical and prophetic discernment of the wrath of God against social injustice than well-merited repugnance at terrorist preachers. This resistance arises from those who insist that the Bible be filtered by the philosophical tradition of the apathy of God. To the contrary, Lutherans, who remember their own theology, know that it is the philosophical tradition of the apathy of God that must be critiqued and reformed by biblical narrative which gives us the God of love whose love is against

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what is against love. That's what divine wrath is, not an offended, egotistical fit of divine hate as folks imagine both on the left and on the right, but creative love negating our lovelessness, indifference, even the apathy of which we make an idol in order to sanctify our own pious resignation and/or cynicism. Of course this event of God being against us should alarm! But it serves to drive us to messianic being — that is, if we have a Christ big enough (in the way of Isaiah 53) to conquer for us even the wrath of God — which is exactly what Paul's gospel teaches from its earliest iteration, as in 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10. The “dramatic coherence,” as the late Robert Jenson would have put it, of biblical narrative tells of how God in Christ surpasses the wrath of his love to triumph for the mercy of it for us and for all. And this ministry of the gospel boldly provides Jesus Christ and him crucified as the one true pastoral comfort and consolation to those who suffer bodily pain and spiritual disillusionment; it is the sure ground of hope because it knowingly meets people in the actual terror of isolation and abandonment under the tyrant powers of sin and death.

How little, I sometime fear, this gospel *drama* is proclaimed and enacted in pastoral ministry in its truth and purity! We get instead pious protestations of the hiddenness of God mysteriously distant from real life while we experience every day the powers of sin and death defeating us. We get vague and sentimental affirmations of a nice and loving divine parent disconnected from our on-the-earth reality where daily we meet the God of love who is against what is against love. Someday this pandemic will fade away. Maybe people will even return to church to hear a word from God about this catastrophe. But if they hear nothing that they cannot already tell themselves they will have no good reason ever to return. So, the time for proclamation is *now* in this present winter of doom.



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Auschwitz, Between Apocalyptic Theology and Humanist Philosophy, Luther for Evangelicals and a systematic theology, Beloved Community: Critical Dogmatics after Christendom. He is the coeditor with Derek Nelson of the three-volume Oxford Encyclopedia of Martin Luther. He is an ordained minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. With his daughter theologian, Sarah Hinlicky Wilson, he publishes a biweekly podcast, titled (tongue-in-cheek) Queen of the Sciences (see PaulHinlicky.com). With his wife, Ellen, and son, Will, he has a small farm in the mountains of Western Virginia where he raises grass fed beef, chickens and honeybees (see stgallfarm.com).

In Memoriam

Bruce Hartung

The following tribute to Peter Steinke first appeared in Concordia Journal, Summer 2020. It is reprinted here with their permission. Peter Steinke received the Christus in Mundo award during the Zion Conference in 2001. He died July 13, 2020.

THE REV. DR. PETER STEINKE, noted author, congregational systems thinker and teacher, Concordia Seminary alumnus and pastoral counseling colleague died on July 13, 2020. In 2009, Concordia Seminary in St Louis honored Dr. Steinke by presenting him with an honorary doctorate, Doctor of Letters, Honoris Causa. At a luncheon to celebrate the honorees of that year, I offered the following tribute:

It is true that Dr. Steinke is a 1964 graduate of this institution. We are honoring an alumnus. But Peter's contributions have extended far beyond the LCMS.

Building on the groundbreaking work in Family Systems of the former Georgetown University professor Murray Bowen, being under the tutelage of Edwin Friedman, whose work extended Bowen's work into congregational life, and being of an essential entrepreneurial spirit, Peter has brought systems thinking into the warp and woof of congregational life. The fundamental idea of human interconnectivity, and that this interconnectivity must be part of our understanding of people and of organizations, is crucial to Steinke's work. In individualistically-oriented America, attention to the interplay of individuals and how they function as groups of people, attention to the process of that function and not just to the content and words of the interaction, and self-care for the leaders of organizations so that they are less anxious than the organizations they serve — these are all central hallmarks of Steinke's work.

You, Peter, have taken these contributions far beyond the LCMS, and, indeed, have served the church catholic. Those of us who have grown by reading you, like myself, but even more so those in the church catholic who have grown by direct contact with you in supervision, workshops, training events and consultation, have reason to rejoice with us in this the granting of to you of a Doctor of Letters, Honoris Causa.

Peter, you have traveled far and wide. Welcome home to your alma mater, Concordia Seminary.

Now, over ten years later and in reflection upon Peter's death, much of what was spoken about him in 2009 can be underlined and even magnified.

Peter's legacy is a rich one. Healthy Congregations, an organization founded by him, continues to contribute to the life and vitality of our congregations. Accessible at www.healthycongregations.com, it offers thoughtful work and consultation concerning congregational dynamics. Peter published two additional books, A

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Door Set Open: Grounding Change in Mission and Hope (2010) and *Uproar: Calm Leadership in Anxious Times* (2019) since the time he was honored at Concordia Seminary. These books expanded and deepened the insights of some of his previous works, such as *How Your Church Family Works* (1993), *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (1996) and *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (2006). The new books showed his remarkable competence and keen interests kept active as he aged.

Attention to the emotional processes of congregations and those processes in individuals led Peter to observe keenly how people and institutions behave. This then led him to attend to the personhood of the leaders of congregations. Hear him as he wrote in 2006:

People vary considerably in how they address emotionally challenging events. On the lower (immature) side, people are *reactive*. They blame more often; they criticize harshly; they take offense easily; they focus on others; they want instant solutions; they cannot see the part they play in problems. On the higher (mature) side, people are more thoughtful and reflective; they act on principle, not instinct; they can stand back and observe. They are *responsive*. Intent and choice characterize their behavior. The leader's capacity to be in conscious control over (to respond to) automatic functioning (reaction) affects the well-being of the whole community. The leader's 'presence' can have a calming influence on reactive behavior. Rather than reacting to the reactivity of others, leaders with self-composure and self-awareness both exhibit and elicit a more thoughtful response.¹

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We still need to hear Peter and we can in his newest book, *Uproar*, where he takes on larger societal questions. Does this sound familiar?

Under the siege of *Uproar*, our thinking capacities decline. We even use our reason to justify the irrational. Our trusty inventory of opinions is imperiled. Truth is put on a seesaw; suspicion is overseeded. Polarized, groups find it difficult to converse without wielding emotional hatchets. Explosive tantrums throw respect to the wind. Ethics are stored in the attic — “out of sight, out of mind.” God is reduced to a candy machine, easily nickled-and-dimed. Buffeted by lies, stable folks lose confidence. Normal has become a backseat driver.²

When I began to offer “Congregational Dynamics and Behaviors” as an elective at Concordia Seminary, I called Peter and asked if I could use one of his training tapes to help our students understand the basics of his understanding of family

1 Steinke, Peter, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, (Herndon, VA, The Alban Institute), 2006, p. 1.

2 Steinke, Peter, *Uproar: Calm Leadership in Anxious Times*, (Lanham, MD, Rowman and Littlefield), 2019, pp. 2–3.

systems theory as it applies to congregations. He graciously offered the training tape for my use in the class, a tape funded by Lutheran Brotherhood (now Thrivent). His permission to use his training tape was so characteristic of Peter: he was hopefully committed to the healthy life of congregations and was willing to share himself and what he taught in a very gracious and open way.

I believe that this openness was made possible through God's work in and influence on Peter. And, he wrote as a word of encouragement to leaders:

Your ministry of leadership is grounded in the freeing gift of God's grace. In Christ, you are no longer a slave in bondage to fear. Knowing yourself to be accepted as a child of God, you are free to serve in love.... You can be faithful to your task because you believe God is faithful to you. Anxious times test your wisdom, your patience, and your hope. But you draw courage, knowing, "those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." Isaiah 40:31

Like many others, I have been deeply influenced by and greatly thankful for Dr. Peter Steinke, his being, his work and his contributions to the healthy life of congregations and the church catholic. We all owe him much and we still need and have his voice.



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