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Every year, conference brings renewal and fellowship

By David Lichter
Executive Director

As the 2017 National Conference, “Hearts on Fire: Our Own Emmaus Journey,” is now three weeks ended, we remain deeply grateful to the Conference Planning Task Force, chaired by Beth Lenegan and staffed by Jeanine Annunziato and Andris Kursietis, for their excellent preparation and implementation. Each year I marvel at the Spirit’s lead in identifying a theme, choosing speakers, selecting workshops, preparing liturgies, and creating a warm and welcoming environment that provides the context for personal, spiritual, and professional renewal. Each year is so unique, and participants of this year’s event commented often on the grace-filled ambience of the setting, the flute music filling the corridors, the call-to-quiet reflection invitation to everyone, and the gentle hospitality of the Santa Ana Pueblo, Tamaya people.

I am so aware of the unique, and expensive, opportunity that our national conference represents. This year brought 360 participants with another 60-plus joining via streaming. With NACC membership at 2,100, this means 20 percent of our membership was able to participate in the conference. Over the past ten years, 20-22 percent has been the average. For about 40 to 60 participants, it’s their first conference. Some return each year, while for many it’s an every-other-year, or every-three-year event. For so many who continue the healing ministry in the name of the Church, this inspiring NACC event remains a source of profound joy and renewal in their ecclesial mooring — since so many of our ministries are lived out in settings where we might be the only Catholic serving among a wonderful group of interfaith peers.

Every year I have the privilege to congratulate personally each newly certified member, along with Mary T. O’Neill, our Board Chair. Again, this year I could see in their eyes the fruition of the sacred sacrifices they made to become board certified, and I felt the deep passion in each of them. I witnessed again that “continuing the healing ministry in the name of the Church” was being lived out in their vocations. What a sacred moment and ministry this is!

I always pray that those who are blessed to participate be leaven for our membership and for their places of ministry, so that together, with one another, we can fulfill the mission of NACC as it: *advocates for the profession of spiritual care and educates, certifies, and supports chaplains, clinical pastoral educators, and all members who continue the healing ministry of Jesus in the name of the Church.*

NACC's road to Emmaus covers a lot of ground

By David Lewellen
***Vision* editor**

“Hearts on Fire: Our Own Emmaus Journey” officially began Friday, April 28, under cold, rainy skies in the desert north of Albuquerque, NM. Nevertheless, arriving chaplains got a good look at rolling desert scenery and mountains on the horizon at Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort and Spa.

The narrow, winding road to the hotel resembled the typical chaplain’s journey through life, said Fr. Richard Bartoszek, BCC, the liturgy chair of the conference task force, in the homily for the opening prayer service. Thinking back over the people who guided him on his path to chaplaincy, he said, “Every one of us here has those people in our lives and journeys who helped us see who we are.”

Looking at the altar cloth decorated with the names of hundreds of deceased NACC members, he said, “These people on here are part of our story and our journey. They make us realize how blessed we are by God. God sent us the very best.”

And as NACC members pay it forward, Bartoszek concluded, “You are sent to staff, boards, people at bedsides. You take away pain and let them know God loves them. And God sends you to be the best to them.”

Wind of the Spirit pushes retreat participants

By Davlyn Duesterhaus

The gusty 50 mph winds could have discouraged participants in the NACC Day of Reflection to even want to continue the day’s journey. But those who did go, and who even ventured onto the walking trails, felt the mighty wind of the Spirit moving, pushing, and even unbalancing them during the times of reflection.

The director of the Norbertine Spirituality Center, Meg Ashcroft, led us in the journey to reveal new depths of meaning in Luke 24:13-35, the scripture for the conference theme: “Hearts on Fire: Our Own Emmaus Journey.” With quotes, reflection questions, rituals, music, poetry, sharing times as well as silent periods, Meg gave each of us freedom to go inward, remain within, then to resurface hoping the Spirit burned anew within our hearts.

“Lightening the Load” (a poem by Fr. Francis Dorff, O.Praem.) encouraged us to “dump the thousand things we’ve brought along” to set the tone for the day. Following some silence, Meg read from Luke 24:13-21a. In a lectio divina way, some spoke of a word or phrase that stood out; mine was “while.” Quoting from Edith Stein, “walk with me along the next stretch of road before me,” Meg invited us to experience Jesus “drawing near” during the time for reflection. Personally, Jesus was near in a fellow retreatant as we walked together part of the time. In our conversing, the “while” of the unknown in my life became comfortable through the peace that Jesus was truly near.

Meg proclaimed the second selection (Luke 24:21b-27) and discussed how chaplains — and those in ministry — give and give and give but fail to be generous to themselves. Leading the group into the next reflection, she prepared a quote from John Churchman: “Companioning one through the mystery of suffering begins with a simple yes. ... simple yes when called upon ... end(s) up being graced in my helping of others.” That line, and the questions given, helped us ponder experiences from personal or other persons’ suffering, pains, and dying to self.

The final section (Luke 24:28-35) was read, followed by singing, “Stay with me, remain with me, watch and pray, watch and pray.” Meg directed us to reflect on the question, “What do you most want to ‘go and tell’ the people who are in your life?” The sharing could take any form — story, song, insight, affirmation, image, dream, poem — and she asked us to return with a stone or pebble for the closing ritual.

With permission from another retreatant, I wrote a summary of her story about being in a desert of life, and that in this desert of New Mexico, a companion was praying with her for physical healing. Her chaplains’ department had been downsized, leaving only and her companion as full-timers. The news upset her emotionally and physically, and she became very ill. As the two were conversing and praying, she heard a voice ask, “What do you want?” It was as if Jesus drew near and heard all she was going through. His presence overwhelmed her, bringing relief and tears of comfort. The voice was “Jesus” in another chaplain, who seemed to feel the angst, and spoke to her from behind. And Jesus drew near. ...

For the closing ritual, each person placed his or her stone, creating a cairn, as seen in the picture taken by another participant. God invites you to participate, also.

In reading this glimpse of the NACC Day of Reflection, may you experience your own Emmaus journey anew. May your heart be on fire as Jesus draws near.

Davlyn Duesterhau is a chaplain at BSA Hospice in Amarillo, TX.

Business meeting: Past successes, future opportunities

By Karen Pugliese

Quietly waiting for the NACC business meeting to begin, I found myself visualizing and cataloging all the similar meetings I've attended over the past 34 years. As I reflected on this meeting, located on Native American tribal grounds, the image of "Vision Quest" surfaced as an evocative symbol of our prophetic call as chaplains, and our ministry as a professional association.

Board Chair Mary T. O'Neill welcomed participants and new board members Beverly Beltramo and Carolanne Hauck. Jim Letourneau, chair elect, led the gathering prayer.

Describing this year's pre-conference board meeting as "full, creative, energizing, and substantial," Executive Director David Lichter set the tone for the business meeting agenda. His report, "Snapshots from 2016," was characterized by the word "collaboration," and structured in the form of three significant signposts: looking back at accomplishments; present day membership issues and survey responses; and looking forward to strategic priorities.

Looking Back. David expressed deep appreciation for a highly successful year. As I listened to his coverage of the financials and the increase in gifts, sponsorships, and partnerships, I was aware that many of our hearts were burning with gratitude for David's 10 years of stewardship, this year resulting in an amazing \$193,441 surplus. Tremendous support for visioning the future of chaplaincy, and in particular, the pastoral ministry of the Church, came from a grant of \$30,000 from the Raskob Foundation — a Catholic organization funding our planning process. The Goal IV Team is developing future scenarios for NACC, identifying settings for pastoral care, and grappling with several questions: What levels of competence and training are needed? What kind of programming would be necessary, and what would the outcome look like in terms of recognition or credentialing? The team will apply for a Phase II Grant for a feasibility study of expanding our focus to additional ministries within the church. David and NACC state representatives have engaged bishops in dialogue focused both on promoting chaplaincy and on how NACC can assist dioceses in ministry formation.

Collaboration continues with our cognate partners in professional chaplaincy. NACC partnered with ACPE, APC, CASC, and NAJC in creating common certification competencies, narratives, questions, and intended outcomes. Planning is in process for a joint APC-NACC conference in Anaheim, CA, in July 2018. Just a few days before our conference, plans were confirmed for a joint ACPE, APC, CASC, and NAJC conference in 2020.

Present Day. Together with our strategic partners NACC is looking at developing associate levels and expanding certification. On the closing day of the conference, the conversation was scheduled to continue with the CHA Advisory Council as well.

Beverly Beltramo presented preliminary results of the Membership Survey, especially related to sustainability given concerns about aging membership and fewer new members. Five hundred and forty respondents identified five critical areas: professional advocacy; new ministry settings and new ways to minister; financial stability and job security; advocacy with bishops and the Church; and continuing to be the presence of Christ in an increasingly bottom-line-driven industry. Asked if NACC should seek to strengthen relationships with cognate chaplaincy groups, with other ministry groups within the Church, or both, more than 300 responded “both.”

Looking Forward. Jim Letourneau outlined a three-pronged approach to our strategic priorities this year. First, promotion of professional chaplaincy, including advocacy, marketing and recruitment efforts; professional development (research, advanced certification and clinical outcomes); and cultivation of strategic partnerships.

Jim characterized the current approach to Catholic spiritual/pastoral care ministry as “electric.” This encompasses competency development; services; and educational resources and partnerships within ministry groups. Upcoming meetings with bishops will clarify what we can offer them and their dioceses, and what types of memberships, formation and cultivation might be provided. The third focus will be to clarify relationships and expectations for a Phase 2 Raskob Foundation grant.

Tim Serban led a listening session, inviting participants to reflect on what questions might be surfacing and what further information we need. Comments from table discussions were recorded and collected. Feedback will be summarized and shared with the board and members in the coming weeks.

The meeting concluded as it began — with gratitude and recognition, and with the blessing of 25-year anniversaries, NACC staff, and volunteers.

As it was for the disciples on the road to Emmaus, there was more to talk about than time for conversation. We were encouraged to look to NACC Now and *Vision*, as well as local gatherings and networking calls, for updates as we continue the quest for a meaningful and sustainable future for NACC.

Karen Pugliese, BCC, is an advanced practice chaplain at Central DuPage Hospital in Winfield, IL.

Megan McKenna: Walking the road, telling the story

By David Lewellen

***Vision* editor**

For the second time in two days, the NACC conference heard the story of the road to Emmaus. But as well as offering a theological message, Dr. Megan McKenna used the account as a lesson in the power of story.

“All stories are true, and some actually happened,” said McKenna, speaking in front of the altar and podium. “They’re about creating community and conversation. They’re the glue that holds community together.”

For chaplains, and indeed for anyone, “You approach everyone in ministry with your story,” said McKenna, an author, theologian, storyteller, and lecturer. “There is only one story. How do you tell it? We believe life is stronger than death, forgiveness is stronger than violence. We forget that sometimes, so we talk about it as healing and meaning.”

But, she added, “Healing and curing are two totally different things.” Most people want to be cured, to have the problem removed, but healing offers spiritual peace. “We’re all going to die. We can’t get cured from that reality,” she said. “But healing is always there.”

The Emmaus story, she said, is a “Luke sandwich,” and considering only the famous middle part is like “trying to eat peanut butter and jelly without bread.” She told the story in three parts, using liturgical language to introduce each, and she urged her hearers to try to listen with fresh ears: “These stories are hard because you think you’ve heard them.”

McKenna sought feedback and reactions from the audience, and offered further commentary of her own. She did not condemn the male disciples for disbelieving the women’s account: resurrection is both scary and implausible, so “how long would it take you to believe that someone who is dead and buried is now alive?”

To explain the disciples’ lack of recognition, she said, “You work with people every day whose eyes are restrained from seeing Jesus. Grief fear, anger, suffering, betrayal — everything blinds us. Then the recognition of who Jesus is lasts that long (finger snap) and then he disappears. Then we go back and face all the realities we’ve been running away from.”

McKenna also shared a painting and poem that imagines a servant girl recognizing Jesus before the disciples did. “If we believe the risen Lord is here, we’re the servants,” she said. “But be aware that you’ve seen him before and you’ve heard his voice. You’re very good at listening.”

She continued, “The story begins when the teller stops talking. What do you do next? If you want him to stay, get together. You tell the story with others, you summon the presence of the risen Lord

that stays and stays. There's more power in this room than anything you're doing separately. Look around. What does it look like? This is as good as it's going to get."

McKenna concluded with a story of a girl lost in the woods for weeks who eventually found a boy who had been lost for months. "What if we are all lost and meant to find each other?" she asked. "This what you do in your ministry. You were meant to find each other, and in finding each other, find God. May you go with God and ever know where you are."

On the road to interpretation

By David Lewellen

Vision editor

The disciples who failed to recognize Jesus on the road to Emmaus were victims of their own expectations, Dr. Diane Bergant told the NACC conference.

In a fast-moving, well-received theology lesson, Dr. Bergant, CSA, pointed out that ancient Israel had different meanings for “messiah” or “anointed one,” and that most of Jesus’ followers expected a political leader and had their hopes dashed. “Jesus was a disappointment,” she said, deadpan. “But don’t we always hope that the next governor, president, superior, boss, will be better than the one we have?”

Bergant, an emerita professor of Old Testament studies at Concordia Theological Union in Chicago, IL, pointed out that “resurrection story” is misnomer, since the four Gospels describe only Jesus’ reappearances and finding an empty tomb, adding that an “empty tomb proves nothing. The body could have been stolen.” The Emmaus story in Luke suggests that the testimony of the women who found the tomb was discounted because they were women — “but that’s another workshop,” Bergant said, to rueful laughter.

“We know an awful lot of theology, but we don’t understand resurrection. It’s not resuscitation,” she continued. “It’s the essence of our faith. Jesus was a good theologian and a good teacher. He re-interpreted the Mosaic tradition.”

A patient in a modern hospital bed who asks, “What have I done to deserve this?” may require a new interpretation of tradition, Bergant said. Some people who can’t or won’t do that work give up on the Church, finding that change is coming too fast or not fast enough. But, she said, “Anyone involved in ministry is a practical theologian, interpreting the tradition for people’s lives.

“To those to whom we minister, we are the church,” Bergant said. “I am a weak, flawed human being, but look what God has done in me and through me. ... (Patients) are not asking for medical answers. It’s not about a cure. All you can give is healing, so they can face the future.”

When we need advice, Bergant said, we seek it from those with wisdom, not just knowledge. “Wisdom is what you learn from life,” she said, and it often comes the hard way. “We all work with human beings. They can be very disappointing,” she said with a twinkle in her eye.

Religious highs, such as the ones the disciples experienced, feel good and serve a purpose. “But how long does a religious high last?” Bergant asked. “Don’t expect it to last long, because you’ll be out of commission if it does.”

What comes next? “Welcome to the real world. Welcome to death,” she said. “Jesus was a failure in this world” in the eyes of his followers, redeeming his reputation only by rising from the dead. Everyone seeks success — but that, and failure, are also subject to re-interpretation.

Many paths, one truth; many faiths, one God

By David Lewellen

Vision editor

As well as many languages and cultures, God has also ordained many religions, Emmanuel Lartey told the NACC conference.

“God wishes there to be many different religious traditions and for people to belong to many religious journeys,” said Lartey, a professor of pastoral theology at Emory University in Atlanta. It is a conviction born of his own experience as a native of Ghana, a member of a pluralistic culture that was open to many influences.

Christianity and other Western influences, of course, came to most of Africa under the banner of colonialism. But post-colonial African Christianity continues to re-evaluate colonial attitudes.

As an example, Lartey cited the Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11. The migratory people who settled and began to build upward were, he said, interfering with the divine diversity of creation. But in the hegemonic, name-seeking desire to dominate, the “variety intended to be characteristic of humanity was at risk. . . . This is the very essence of colonization. The language, custom, way of life of one people imposed upon all. God the creator of all diversity cannot abide such hegemonic control.” Far from being a punishment, in God’s creation of multiple languages, “Now each must have their own voice, each must speak for themselves. God pluralizes their culture and their way of life.”

Language is important to diversity, but so is religion, and Lartey cited examples from the New Testament, in Jesus’ encounters with the Roman centurion and the Canaanite woman. Both were of different faiths from Jesus, but Jesus praised both for the strength of their faith. In the latter story in particular, in response to the woman’s challenge, “Jesus has to reappraise his focus and recognize there are others outside his own ethnic/religious tradition who are also children of God,” Lartey said. “She challenges the master’s own ministry and life purpose. Even by his own stance he had to act differently.” But commentators hardly ever point out those differences of religion.

In religious dialogue, “doctrine is the least useful starting point,” Lartey said. Only after empathic interpersonal interaction will people be willing to hear others fully. “But this is what you all do, isn’t it?” he asked his audience. “As chaplains in different settings, you treat each other with respect and work with other people.”

For instance, when Lartey led a small church in Accra, Ghana, a member’s daughter was diagnosed with leukemia. As well as prayer and support from the church, the man also sought help from a traditional healer. Lartey joked that he was surprised to learn about it, but added, “Who was I to condemn him? Who was I to say, ‘Don’t do that?’ ”

In the Jains of India, Lartey found flexibility, tolerance, pluralism, as well as some useful metaphors about truth. It can be seen as the summit of a mountain, with many paths up, but failure likely if it is pursued as a conquest. The pursuit of truth is also like a cut diamond with many facets, but “whatever angle the stone is held up to the light, the light itself remains constant.”

Several audience members questioned how the pluralistic view reconciles with John 14:6, “None shall come to the Father except through me.” “How about if I understood that to be a Christological function statement?” Lartey answered. “It is Christ’s work to bring people to God. How he chooses to do it is not up to me. He may do it outside my particular congregation. ...

“Religious plurality is divine,” Lartey said, and interreligious spiritual care can be one means to normalize it. But he asked his audience to cultivate respect and “acknowledge you do not know it all. ... Shake off the shackles that have subjugated and kept people from expressing what they have experienced of God in their lives.

“God often reveals Godself through encounters with strangers, people of different cultures, languages, religious traditions. People we despise or ridicule,” he concluded. “May we use our traditions as steppingstone points of contact to reach out to God beyond us all.”

Reyes offers catalytic conversions with conversing narratives

By Julianne Dickelman

Dr. Raymond Reyes, inciting us to sing the world into being, woke us up and gathered us together on the final morning of our conference, rousing us with song, story, chanting, and much laughter. One needed to simply consent to be immersed in his rhythmic, passionate bursts of energetic language and being. Dr. Reyes' message was *felt* as much as heard.

The poet's role, he reminded us, is to confront complex issues of the time, to create great dialogue, and to celebrate both. Dr. Reyes challenged us, in his alliterative alchemy of multiple images and provocative metaphor, to be transformed — and to be agents of transformation.

Weaving personal stories rooted in his Mexican and American Indian heritage, theology, and Jesuit principles imbued in his almost 30 years as professor and administrator at Gonzaga University, Reyes inspired us into that dialogue between our particular narratives and our complex cultural and societal issues.

Those issues of our time are many, illustrated by Reyes' remark, "When the winds of change blow, some people build walls, some people build windows." Walls are barriers against diversity. But diversity, Reyes posits, is God's way of being in our world. Diversity is a living curriculum toward love and service. So, he reminds us, we are called to window-building — windows that open to promote consciousness, windows through which the winds of justice ("what love looks like in public spaces") might blow. And, his imagery continues, like salmon swimming upstream, we struggle against the current, but we are compelled to continue this journey, speaking truth to power, knowing that "courageous conversation creates caring community."

If the source of all conflict, perhaps the bricks that build these walls, are the three R's — race, religion and resources — then the three R's essential to open windows must be relationship, relevance and respect: to know the power of ourselves and the other in relationship; to know what we care about and make it relevant without sacrificing what we believe; and to act on what we care about out of respect, or, quoting Martin Luther King Jr., "to act in the spirit of sacred hospitality."

Dr. Reyes continued to stir our imaginations by referencing celestial navigation, the ancient science of position-fixing that enables a navigator to transition through a space using three navigation points. But rather than the stars a mariner might employ, Reyes offers us Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection as our reference points, as we traverse the often-painful and humbling journey on our Emmaus roads, trying to relocate ourselves, awakened and in service. He illustrated these reference points with stories from his own journey out of anger toward love, toward seeing people as "mysteries and not problems," by hearing through "love that listens."

He offered many thought-provoking images and language potions — catalyzing our conference conversations and kindling alchemical fires within — so that we might return to our daily work knowing who we are, what we value, as well as our purpose and destiny. Dr. Reyes concluded by inviting us to be hollow bones through which God breathes the melodic, and to have strong backbones to have the courage to hold others accountable. And to keeping singing and dancing — and laughing — because humor is "rain for parched imaginations."

Julianne Dickelman, BCC, is a chaplain educator at Providence Healthcare in Spokane, WA.

A diverse set of workshops

NACC members spent the morning learning about topics as diverse as storytelling, ministry to the "nones," and diversity itself. In "Diversity, Social Justice, and Pastoral Competence," Thomas Chirido, BCC, an ACPE supervisor, said, "We are not just individuals interacting. There are multiple group identities, each with a particular history that bears on our relationships."

Race and gender are obvious categories, but Chirido asked participants to recognize Jesus himself as a person in the margins, outside the power structure of the Roman Empire. "How is power used?" he asked. "As a supervisor, I know a lot of information about my students that they don't know about me. That's a power difference."

In "Spiritual but Not Religious: A Path for Connection and Comfort," Kristie Zahn told participants to consider, "Where can I build bridges?" Members at this conference come from a very particular faith tradition, and the trend especially among younger people is for a more individual, amorphous experience of "the big questions."

“Is research part of our Emmaus journey?”

Allison Delaney opened her workshop with that provocative question, and answered, “I think so.” Delaney is currently pursuing a master’s of public health degree under the auspices of the Transforming Chaplaincy program, and although she said candidly that the work has been harder than she expected, “it’s a waste unless I can help you.”

Her first research project has been asking chaplains what questions they want research to solve for them. The top response has been outcomes, whether issues such as certification or number of patient visits make a difference in the outcome of treatment. Another response was how to avoid burnout. But, she cautioned, “Just like praying is different from talking about prayer, talking about research is different from doing research.

Other workshops covered topics as diverse as storytelling, ministry to the “nones,” and diversity itself. In “Diversity, Social Justice, and Pastoral Competence,” Thomas Chirido, BCC, an ACPE supervisor, said, “We are not just individuals interacting. There are multiple group identities, each with a particular history that bears on our relationships.”

Race and gender are obvious categories, but Chirido asked participants to recognize Jesus himself as a person in the margins, outside the power structure of the Roman Empire. “How is power used?” he asked. “As a supervisor, I know a lot of information about my students that they don’t know about me. That’s a power difference.”

Another session dealt with alcoholism and other addictions as spiritual problems. J. Randle Adair, an Albuquerque internist, said that families that include an addict “don’t talk, don’t trust, and don’t feel.” And treating those spiritual problems is much more difficult — and requires more focused and sustained intervention — than would be required for an emotionally healthy family.

Newly certified chaplains get warm welcome

By David Lewellen

Vision editor

Twenty-four recently certified chaplains celebrated the latest step of their journeys as they received their certificates in a missioning Mass.

Whatever a patient's religion, "you let them know 'I'm here for you, I want to hear who you are, I want to hear who God is to you,'" Fr. Jack Crabb, S.J., said in his homily. He charged the newly certified to practice good self-care, "but I'm not going to ask for a show of hands on how many do it." He praised the new generation of chaplains for taking up the mission. The cohort received enthusiastic cheers from their more experienced colleagues and received their certificates from Executive Director David Lichter, Board Chair Mary T. O'Neill, and Mary Davis, co-chair of the Certification Commission.

Following the Mass, the newly certified went outside for a chilly but beautiful group photo against the backdrop of the Sandia Mountains.

Through the ceremony, "I felt I belonged to the NACC," said Fr. Akajiaku Eluca of Patchogue, NY. "I got to meet my (professional) family." Deacon Michael Bolesta of Addison, TX, said, "They could have just mailed it, but coming here made it special — and to receive it in the context of Mass."

"It's huge. I have no words," said Kristie Zahn of Racine, WI. "It's very humbling and very rewarding."

Eugenia Lai of Sugarland, TX, brought her husband and daughters to see the ceremony. The family made a point of coming in person, she said, because "It means a lot to be commissioned by the whole congregation to serve."

Love is contagious: The anointing ceremony

By Amy Mickolite

All of the conference activities brought spiritual gifts, but it was the liturgical events that bonded the group as a community in Christ. The service of healing was one of the most profound religious encounters I have experienced.

The ceremony began with illumination. Volunteers thoughtfully placed candles on each of the main tables; additionally, they placed a single candle in front of photos of deceased NACC members. Fr. Richard Bauer, presider, welcomed all to “be present in the moment but mindful that tomorrow we go back to our own Jerusalem, and may we do so with our *Hearts on Fire*.”

Fr. Bauer invited us to join him as he blessed the holy water. Barbara Burkhardt’s reading from James 5 reminds us: “the Lord’s coming is near. Be patient in the face of suffering.” Mark 5:21-34 was the Gospel reading recounting several miraculous healings by Jesus, particularly the woman who had so much faith that “if I just touch his clothes I will be healed.” Sr. Rosemary Abramovich, OP, offered an insightful homily based on the scripture.

James tells us that in time of sickness the “elders of the church will pray over those in need and anoint them in the name of the Lord.” During the liturgy of the anointing, we were once again welcomed to raise hands and bless the oil. This invitation from our presider was a powerful gesture of spiritual hospitality celebrating the communal Kingdom of Christ.

Along with Fr. Bauer, four other priests assisted in the sacramental blessing. Those desiring anointing, the vast majority present, remained seated, and others stood with those individuals as the sacrament was offered. The act of witnessing and laying hands on those receiving sacramental anointing was truly grace-filled. It was humbling to bear witness to the far-reaching impact of suffering. I believe we also experienced healing.

The power of the sacramental act, of singing, and of offering spiritual love to one another spilled into our reciting of the Lord’s Prayer and our offering of peace to one another. Fr. Bauer suggested that each of us recite the prayer in our language of origin. Many voices in unison but vastly different tones and words created a feeling that our faith was strong enough to conquer any ills. Our heartfelt exchanges of peace mirrored our spiritual fervor. Simply shaking hands would not have sufficed.

At the close of the service most lingered for a time, wanting to remain in this beautiful, sacred space. “It was a meaningful liturgy with such appropriate music,” said Alycia Gorman, my tablemate. Fr. Fidelis Umukoro, seated next to me, added, “It was a spirit-filled and holy celebration.”

Our music ministers were a consistent presence throughout the conference. These volunteer musicians, who serve regularly at various churches in the local diocese, formed a new cohesive professional group. NACC staff, leadership, and members offer sincere gratitude for the commitment and stellar efforts of main vocalist Barbara Guenther, fellow singers Angelica Facio and Vernon Reza, flutist Carol Feeney, guitarist and vocalist Steve Herrera, and Kevin Newman on piano and voice accompaniment.

Amy Mickolite is a palliative care chaplain at Wellspan Health York Hospital in York, PA.

Recognition for Nancy Cook, George Fitchett, Cecille Asekoff

The NACC honored one longtime member and two longtime friends for their contributions to the association and to chaplaincy as a whole.

Nancy Cook, regional director of spiritual care at Christus Southeast Texas Health System, received the Distinguished Service Award for her work on the NACC's Standards Commission, Finance Committee, and as a state liaison and interview team educator.

"Her positive energy and charisma have spread across the entire Christus system," said Fr. Emmanuel Chikezie in his introduction. "Nancy is a very humble individual. She doesn't want accolades. But Nancy, I'm giving you that today."

Cook thanked her team at Christus and "a lot of other people who work just as hard and just as long." Chaplaincy as a profession has "made great strides, and there are also great strides ahead of us," she said. "But we will get to where we need to be."

George Fitchett, Ph.D., an APC chaplain and one of the leading researchers of spiritual care, received the Outstanding Colleague Award. Decades ago, "he wasn't welcomed with open arms by chaplains or by doctors, but he persevered," said Caterina Mako in her introduction. "He's available to anyone who comes to him with a thoughtful question or a challenge."

Fitchett thanked the NACC for years of support and friendship, in particular its support of the Templeton Foundation grant that funded the Transforming Chaplaincy program. "That work will come back to you" in its future benefits, he said.

The association's other Outstanding Colleague, Cecille Asekoff, helped found Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains in 1989 and has been a long-standing advocate for professional chaplaincy. David Lichter told the audience that Asekoff recognized that collaboration is "only possible if you are deeply rooted in your own tradition. ... She insists on mutual, respectful collaboration."

"Every faith group has its own uniqueness which must be preserved," Asekoff said in her acceptance, and that was one reason she felt a kinship with the NACC: "We did not want to get swallowed up in the melting pot of bigness." Instead, she used the metaphor of the tossed salad, where "a tomato stays a tomato, a cucumber stays a cucumber, as part of one delicious whole."

Restored and renewed – and certified

By Mary Columbo Reichert

I always approach the conference as a combination spiritual adventure and professional training time, and I always hope to leave restored in spirit and renewed in calling. Particularly since I was receiving my certification this year, I approached it the same way, and I was *not* disappointed.

I shared a shuttle from the airport with other attendees, and we laughed and joked and became friends along the way. As we entered the winding road that led to the resort, we moved from fun-loving to reverential. The mountains seemed to demand respect, and we obliged. I was struck by a sense of sacredness in the Pueblo that invited me to enter a place of openness and peace that I often lose in the day-to-day.

My journey continued on the day of reflection as Meg Aschcroft helped us get “In Step with the Grace of the Moment” through readings, reflection, and sharing. The conference opening ceremony and prayer service continued the momentum, and we all swayed, danced, and clapped as we sang our proclamations that “we are marching, singing, dancing, praying in the light of God.”

The next day, we celebrated the Eucharist together, and my years of work toward board certification were acknowledged. We 24 who were present had congratulated each other during our rehearsal the day before, and now we took our places for formal recognition and missioning. As we stood at the front of the room, members of the group raised their hands and offered a blessing on us and our work. The energy was palpable, and I realized that there was synergy here. We were being sent to our work, and we were also witnessing to the others the importance of this call. This was a dual blessing.

Workshops covered many topics. The ones I attended reviewed the components of a good story and clear communication; how family dynamics affect spiritual care; and the chaplain’s role in bioethics conversations. I was grateful to explore the skills I use in my work.

The plenary sessions provided insights I could apply to both my work and personal life. Some of the lessons were: Unmet expectations lead to disillusionment, but open-mindedness allows for a reinterpretation that offers healing; awareness of what resonates or disturbs me may help me identify growing edges; and I can honor the uniqueness in others and still be faithful to my core being.

Beyond the learning was a powerful sense of camaraderie and strength. Whether sharing in worship, meals, or casual conversation, we listened, supported, comforted, and encouraged one another in ways that honored the Sacred in our midst. As I left the Pueblo after the conference, I realized I had been restored and renewed, and I said a silent thanks for this time and this place and these people.

Mary Columbo Reichert, BCC, is the weekend house chaplain at Orlando Regional Medical Center in Orlando, FL.

‘Art of Dying’ translates imperfectly to secular age

Carlo Leget, *Art of Living, Art of Dying. Spiritual Care for a Good Death*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017. 216 pages, \$24.95

By John Gillman

In recent years, practitioners in palliative care and hospice have shown renewed interest in the *ars moriendi* (art of dying). Dutch author Carlo Leget has added his voice to that endeavor. Raised a Roman Catholic and watching patients, family members and staff in long-term care settings in Holland, Leget endeavors to revitalize and transform the traditional *ars moriendi* into contemporary language.

The *ars moriendi* originated at the height of the Black Death in Europe (1346-’53) when up to 60 percent of the population was wiped out. In his book, Leget sketches the five contrasting themes of the traditional *ars moriendi*. These appear as polarities between faith and loss of faith; hope and despair; charity and avarice; patience and impatience; and humility and complacency. Since the majority of the population in the Middle Ages was illiterate, the five temptations and the contrasting virtues were represented at that time by 10 images carved on blocks of wood. The temptation scenes include devils surrounding the dying person in bed, and the virtues are portrayed by accompanying angels, God, Jesus, and the saints in a contrasting scene.

Leget translates these traditional, religiously embedded portrayals into a new model of non-moral perspectives that speak to the modern world. Thus he reframes the polarities into a contrast between knowing and believing; remembering and forgetting; holding on and letting go; doing and undergoing; and oneself and the other. Successive chapters at the heart of the book address each of these in turn, though in inverse order: Who am I and what do I really want? How do I deal with suffering? How do I say goodbye? How do I look back on my life? What can I hope for?

To engage patients with these questions, the chaplain must first create inner space, namely the ability to look at the whole person and to hear the multiplicity of voices and stories shared. Two concluding chapters apply the new model in a Roman Catholic perspective and a nonreligious perspective.

This book would be enhanced by including copies of prints from the wood blocks and by inviting an artist to create images for the new model Leget proposes. A fundamental question I have is to what extent can the traditional *ars moriendi*, a term that implies and is thoroughly embedded in a religious context, actually be translated into a secular, more humanistic context. To me, the connections between the two model are sometimes more tenuous than apparent. Furthermore, I would suggest that Leget’s new model, which is applied primarily to the art of dying in the book, be given more attention regarding its implications for the art of living.

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Literary dialogue partner invites reframing of story

Kathleen Dowling Singh, *The Grace in Living: Recognize It, Trust It, Abide in It*. [Wisdom Publications](http://www.wisdompublications.com), Somerville, MA, 2016, 216 pages, \$17.95.

By Julianne Dickelman

We spend so much of our lives trying to figure “it” out. We seek the right teachers, the right books, the right spiritual path, the right ministry. We seek peace, enlightenment, oneness with the Divine. What is the source of this yearning? Called by many names, this author refers to that longing in our hearts as grace.

Kathleen Dowling Singh is a bestselling author, Dharma practitioner, and teacher who invites us to engage in *spiritual biography*, “... a bench to sit and rest in the midst of our journey and take stock of what life has been about.” This is a different exercise than spiritual *auto*-biography, which she distinguishes as more self (ego)-oriented. A spiritual biography notices “growing illumination” where one is “tracing the awakening of your own essential nature as it comes to know itself as grace.”

Depending on where we are in life, many of us have bumped into that doing, achieving, seeking exhaustion. Singh’s invitation may be attractive: to sit still and remember, to recollect (*re*-collect) the “transformative shifts” in our lives, to allow a gentle movement from “surviving” toward “surrendering into the stillness of being.”

This book offers itself as a dialogue partner, perhaps a literary version of a chaplain, who sits with you in holy curiosity, asking good questions, inviting you to listen to your story with new ears. Singh uses depth language rooted in her Buddhist practice and draws from the wisdom and mystical traditions of other paths.

She offers us a pattern of “four quarters” as movements of the journey, and reflections from six other spiritual journeyers whose stories, I found, triggered my own recollection of forgotten or discarded memories.

The four quarters include:

- (1) Moving from tasting to hunger. *What were the moments that led you to search for greater being, for spirit? What were the moments that called you back to limitation, to survival mode?*
- (2) Seeking to end seeking, from seeking to seeing. *What inner obstructions did you bring to the journey and what has been the changing nature of your relationship with them?*
- (3) Healing into maturity — a deep preference for letting go of what no longer serves us. *What practices and experiences have brought you more deeply into your heart?*
- (4) Ripening. Trust permeates us when we stop believing frightening illusions of separation. *What are you grateful for? What do you offer the world?*

Why this book for those of us in spiritual care ministries? Perhaps you have already walked a road in northern Spain or entered into St. Teresa’s “interior Castle” and are looking for another provocative, poetic entry point that will allow you to rest in grace. Additionally, you may find the stories, reflections and questions inspiring in your attentive ministry to others’ yearning.

You can listen to an interview with the author on *The Wisdom Podcast* (February 10, 2017).

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