2019 National Conference

Partners in Pastoral Care: Continuing the Healing Ministry of Jesus in the Name of the Church

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Conference moves NACC toward collaboration goals

By David Lichter
Executive Director

As I sat on the steps leading down to the water at University of St. Mary of the Lake, a stillness pervaded the scene and my spirit. The early morning sunrise glistened off the calm waters, and I felt deeply grateful for this 2019 conference in Mundelein, IL, and for the many who contributed to it, from the many Raskob Foundation partners who helped plan and provided workshops, as well as our many members who offered workshops and volunteered time, and our generous, selfless, tireless staff.

In my introduction to conference registration brochure, I wrote, “Continuing the healing ministry in the name of the Church requires of us partnerships across a wide spectrum of care. ... We can’t serve alone; diverse partnerships are vital. Our 2019 NACC Conference will be a unique experience for our NACC members and the many providing pastoral care in the name of the Church ... This will not be our usual conference.”

The feedback received so far is that it was unique, from the USML setting to the plenaries and types of workshops offered. Most liked it very much. I hope most were refreshed and renewed. Let me highlight three things that were important to me and the future of NACC.

First of all, in the NACC 2018-2020 Strategic Plan, our second priority is that the NACC will lead in strengthening the pastoral care ministry of the Church. This conference provided a launching point for that leadership, as we shared the work to date of developing our documents and resources on pastoral care for dioceses (www.nacc.org/about-nacc/partners-in-pastoral-care). These were referred to in the pre-conference six-hour workshops on prison ministry, senior care, and diocesan pastoral care preparation programs. These will be further developed, and more examples of pastoral care training programs will be added to that site in 2019.

Secondly, our Strategic Plan mentions that you, our NACC members, will have more ways to “be in relationship with, a leader for, and professional/education resource within the local Catholic community and its bishop leaders.” It was wonderful to have several of our members lead workshops in which they described how they were already leaders and professional resources for pastoral care training in their dioceses. They gave excellent examples of ways we can all be more engaged in helping our dioceses prepare people for pastoral care service, whether in homes, senior living facilities, prisons or jails. This is such important work. We also believe, as our Strategic Plan states, that “Future board-certified chaplains will be reached mainly though the hundreds of Catholics who are being attracted to, already involved in, or affected by some form of pastoral care ministry in the Church.” Our visibility in helping those involved in volunteer pastoral care will make them more aware that chaplaincy can be a fulltime ministry. Your encouragement of them is vital for the future of our profession!
Thirdly, I was so grateful for the many Partners in Pastoral Care from our Raskob Foundation partners who were willing to participate or lead workshops. They included:

- Sr. M. Peter Lillian Di Maria, director, Avila Institute of Gerontology
- Denice Foose, BCC, Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston
- Deacon Edgardo Farías, director of detention ministry, Archdiocese of Miami
- Lisa Burkhart, associate professor, Marcella Niehoff School of Nursing, Loyola University Chicago
- Hyun Underwood, BCC, supervisor of permanent deacon formation, Diocese of Honolulu
- Sr. Dominga Zapata, S.H., Instituto de Liderazgo Pastoral, USML, Mundelein
- John H. Schultz, director of Catholic healthcare chaplaincy at ArchCare New York
- Glenda R. Spearman, BCC, senior staff chaplain, Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago
- Marc DelMonico, assistant director, USCCB Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service
- Harry J. Dudley, retired from the job that Marc Delmonico now holds
- Elisabeth Román, president, National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry
- Carol Walters, former president of National Association of Lay Ministry
- Jean Marie Weber, Association of Graduate Programs in Ministry and Cardinal Stritch University
- Fr. Andrew Sioleti, National Conference of Veterans Affairs Catholic Chaplains

(see https://www.nacc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Appendix-1-List-of-Partners-in-Pastoral-Planning.pdf)

It was so inspiring and assuring to have them participate and continue to partner in continuing the healing ministry in the name of the Church.

Next year we will be with our other four Strategic Partners in Spiritual Care (ACPE, APC, CASC, and NAJC) in Cleveland for Vision 20/20: The Future of Spiritual Care to concentrate on our first 2018-2020 strategic priority: advancing the future of spiritual care. But we will continue to foster our Catholic ministry partnerships and provide resources for dioceses to strengthen their pastoral care ministries. We look forward to working with you to determine how we can best support these efforts in your respective dioceses. My 2019 World Day of the Sick letter to our bishops explained our efforts to provide resources for them (https://www.nacc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/WDS-2019-letter.final_.pdf).

As you return from the pastoral setting of our conference to the daily routine of your work, thank you again for all that you have done and continue to do for your patients in the name of Jesus and the Church.
Newly certified chaplain finds growing edge in beautiful setting

By Joan Sweeney

Last month, hundreds of chaplains and their guests gathered at the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, IL, for the annual conference of the NACC. This was my second conference and a very different setting from my first. We celebrated Mass in a beautiful chapel — not in a hotel ballroom. This conference was particularly special for me and for my fellow chaplains who were missioned as newly board-certified chaplains. For me it was a moving ceremony as we were officially recognized with the support and love of our fellow chaplains.

When I think of a chaplain, I think of a hospital, since I have only served in healthcare settings. But we were reminded that chaplains minister in prisons, parishes, the military, airports, seaports, etc. We were also reminded that patients are being moved from inpatient to outpatient settings. This benefits the healthcare system in terms of cost containment, but more importantly, it benefits the patients who receive medical care in familiar surroundings. Given this change, spiritual care must also be brought to the patients. This will challenge us to move out of our comfort zones of hospitals to change our delivery of spiritual care. We will be challenged “to extend with the compassion of Jesus” into communities.

Loneliness is a growing epidemic that worsens physical and mental health. As chaplains, we recognize the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit. We also know that bringing chaplaincy into new fields, especially in the rural areas, will help to address loneliness.

One of my growing edges as a chaplain is to know more about the diversity of people’s ethnicities and faith traditions. This was a major topic included in several workshops. I have realized that I need to understand the nuances of other faiths so that I can provide appropriate and sensitive spiritual care to all. This will challenge me to move out of my comfort zone into unfamiliar territory.

The university is situated on acres of natural beauty. As the name suggests, there is a lake on the property. I enjoyed several strolls along the lake and marveled at the beauty that surrounded me. It was conducive to prayer and contemplation. I became immersed in the presence of God and his creation.

Throughout the several days of the conference, I felt the spirit very much present and working with us and through us. We engaged in lively conversations in our workshops, sharing our experiences and developing new understanding. We gathered in fellowship in the Eucharist to nourish our souls and at meals to nourish our bodies and relationships. For me, one of the highlights of the conference was enjoying the company of other chaplains. Some of us may never see each other again, but for the time we were together, we cherished one another in the moment.

Joan Sweeney, BCC is chaplain for Northwell Health in Port Jefferson and Amityville, NY.
Business meeting: How to attract more and younger chaplains?

By David Lewellen
Vision editor

The NACC’s annual business meeting on Saturday showed a picture of an organization with more money, fewer members, and several strategies to attract the younger generation.

Executive Director David Lichter said that membership has declined from 2,900 when he joined the association in 2007 to 1,900 now. The largest category of membership is now laypeople, but their absolute numbers have not increased greatly, while the number of sisters has dropped dramatically. The association’s challenge is to “make sure more people know about chaplaincy,” he said. Last year 111 new members joined the association, about 60% of them lay, but “the numbers need to be much higher in our work and effort together.”

The NACC will continue to appeal to bishops and to members to find the next generation; one strategy has been to invite graduate theological schools to join the association, and a similar invitation may be extended to dioceses. Also, the ongoing Choose Chaplaincy marketing campaign is working to put online and printed material in front of students and young adults who might not know about the profession.

Treasurer Tim Serban said that the NACC’s total net assets have increased from $167,000 in 2008, during the worst of the financial crisis, to $1.45 million in 2019.

Board chair Jim Letourneau said that the NACC is working on partnerships in multiple directions, and “this conference is a birth of that strategy,” since it heavily involved other Catholic pastoral care organizations. The NACC has helped other associations set up competencies in fields such as criminal justice, diocesan ministry, and elder care, based on USCCB language for lay ecclesial ministry. This year, he said, the NACC will engage the USCCB “with our concern that Catholic pastoral care is in a crisis.”

During the question period, the issue of stagnant salaries and shrinking staff came up, and Serban said that a CHA subcommittee is working on benchmarks for staffing. Board member Bev Beltramo said that chaplaincy staffing is a “symptom of a greater struggle in healthcare more broadly. We’re not icing on the cake. We’re the eggs or the flour. It’s critical and it’s core to all we do. But you need the education and the research to be able to tell the story.”

Serban added that at the moment, even if chaplaincy jobs open, systems are having a hard time finding Catholic candidates to fill them. But board member Carolanne Hauck pointed out that on an individual level, everyone can do something -- she now has five people in the process of becoming chaplains whom she encouraged along the way.

An attendee who just finished his M.Div. and is starting a CPE residency asked about the expense of pursuing the profession, and board members agreed that it’s a problem. Hauck said she is “pained” by the low CPE stipend at her institution, and Beltramo pointed out that chaplains can find part-time work with less than four units of CPE. Letourneau said that the NACC already has invested in marketing and research, and it should investigate how else it can use its resources to remove barriers to the profession.

And Letourneau encouraged anyone else with questions or ideas to write to the board at conference@nacc.org.
Conference visitor finds new connections and calls to ministry

By Jean Marie Weber

Shortly after the NACC conference opened, Sister and I walked down to the pier overlooking St. Mary’s Lake. The weather was pristine, and the lake view was overwhelming as we witnessed a few fish jumping and a few fishing boats. Sister, a veteran chaplain, and I, an educator of lay ministers, had never met, but our meeting and conversation was a living out of the feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary which we had just celebrated at Mass on this 31st day of May.

Upon concluding our walk, Sister observed that it is these types of conversations that make the NACC conference special. This setting and the variety of meetings and conversations that took place on the beautiful grounds of the university were life-giving for many of the participants. Our visitation was symbolic among the many gathered!

The theme of the meeting, “Partners in Pastoral Care: Continuing the Healing Ministry of Jesus in the Name of the Church,” convened members of NACC, those representing diverse ministries, and in general, those who are working to address critical pastoral needs in a variety of settings. This conference responded to a new NACC initiative which began about two years ago through a gracious grant from the Raskob Foundation. Those gathered were challenged to examine the needs and types of pastoral care; the specific levels of competencies needed to meet those needs; the standards, training and formation required to obtain those competencies; the core elements for professional and volunteer pastoral care formation; and an organizational approach to provide the needed training.

At the opening Mass, Bishop Donald Hying, episcopal liaison for NACC, emphasized the importance of continuing the healing ministry of Jesus in the name of the Church and rejoiced with all of us as an impressive group of newly certified chaplains joined the ranks and were sent forth in this commissioning ceremony. On the feast of the Ascension, Cardinal Blase Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, presided at another Eucharistic liturgy in remembrance of deceased NACC members. Personally, I was very moved as I remembered a colleague, Tim Charek.

Ministry networking time provided more opportunity for these meetings and conversations. Many of us were delighted to engage in a workshop on “Healing, Health and Wholeness.” After traveling and gathering, this seemed to soothe and yet challenge all present to remember that self-care is essential. All present were sent off with a wellness checklist, reminding us that one cannot give what one does not have.

Two plenary sessions invited the entire gathering to consider the larger context of ministry in the Church and society. Dr. Zeni Fox invited all to ponder the nature of A Ministering Church by viewing the role of chaplain as part of the emerging models of lay ecclesial ministry. Her books, New Ecclesial Ministry: Lay Professionals Serving the Church and Lay Ecclesial Ministry: Pathways Toward the Future summarize this new reality. The second plenary session, by Robert...
Mundle, was a creative approach to learning to listen to others. Art, music, nature, drama, and other creative elements, virtual or real, can be amazing and remarkable venues for experiences of grace and healing. Both sessions were refreshing, bonding the group into the larger community of the Church in the United States.

Two representatives from the USCCB shared “Resourcing Best Practices in Pastoral Care: Overviews and Conversations for Formation Leaders.” The emphasis highlighted the Partners in Pastoral Care project and templates for formation that were developed with the help of this office. For example, the six-hour session on jail and prison ministry referenced the outreach of those serving in prisons and the need to continue services to the incarcerated, as the formational structures that formerly supported these ministries are collapsing.

The NACC business meeting included awards, recognitions, updates, member engagements and looking ahead to the 2020 conference in Cleveland. Although familiar with NACC through my work at the USCCB Commission on Certification and Accreditation, as a guest presenter at this conference, I was impressed again with the responsibilities of the organization, the history and vast chaplaincy experience represented in this group. It was an honor to have my own Cardinal Stritch University listed as an education institution member. A surprising reality was the decline in religious sisters serving as chaplains. The needs in pastoral care ministry are many and increasing as healthcare delivery systems continue to shift and change. We are called to respond!

It was my privilege to present “A Parish Perspective: Laity at Work in Pastoral Care,” which explored the call to recruit and form diverse groups to minister. It focused on a 2017 research study I conducted which revealed that many lay ministers in Catholic parishes take responsibility for the pastoral care of the sick and dying and the hosting of funerals — but they are functioning with little or no formation. Who and where they are and what they are about is often taken for granted.

The need to work with these lay ministers became a new reality and a shared resolution for those in attendance. These parish lay ministers share the ministry with chaplains, but need formation, mentoring and support. This outreach effort provides new challenges for all of us. James 5:14 calls for a response: “Is any among you sick?” And in the words of Jesus, “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5). Let us all join hands and be partners in pastoral care, continuing the healing ministry of Jesus in for the name of the Church. Sister and I discussed this down by St. Mary’s Lake!

Jean Marie Weber, PhD, is director of educational programs and liaison to the Catholic community at Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, WI.
Zeni Fox: Taking the very long view of lay leadership

By David Lewellen
Vision editor

The shift toward lay leadership in the Catholic Church is just the latest in two millennia of changes, Zeni Fox believes — which is not to say that it’s easy.

Fox, the author of *New Ecclesial Ministry: Lay Professionals Serving the Church*, has made a career of studying lay leadership, and she thanked the NACC conference audience for providing her the chance to learn more about chaplaincy as a field of ministry.

Chaplains see spiritual care as a professional ministry, but Fox took a step back to the question of what “professional” means. Years ago, she served in the relatively new role of parish director of religious education, and worked with a group of peers that included three with master’s degrees and one without a bachelor’s degree who did her job very well. Confronted with that fact, Fox concluded at the time that “a professional is one who is acknowledged as a professional by other professionals.”

The line drew a laugh, but she pointed out that United States bishops wrestled with that question during the long process of producing the 2005 document “Coworkers in the Vineyard of the Lord.” Fox, who consulted with the bishops on that landmark publication, said that there was doubt up until the night before whether it would be accepted, and that the bishops chose not to include the term “professional” because it has no basis in Scripture or Church teaching, and because they didn’t want to create an elite within the church.

What is the underlying relationship between people in ministry? Today, she said, in the Catholic Church and American society, it is primarily hierarchical. But the early church emphasized multiple ministries and communal lifestyle.

Over the course of church history, Fox said, “Certain modes arrive, flourish and then diminish,” citing the ruined monasteries that dot Europe. From the more recent past, the world of being known by name in church is gone, whether the backdrop was a rural village or an urban ethnic neighborhood. But even so, the need for personal interaction is “greater than it ever was.”

Therefore, she asked, “What does this call you to? The extension of care that will be needed.” Pastoral care as the gift of presence, she said, is “more valuable than any of the words you may say.” The word “pastor” derives from the Latin for “shepherd,” and early depictions of Jesus in art, she said, were exclusively as the good shepherd.

“Yours is ministry greatly needed in our day,” Fox said. “The Spirit of God is doing something beautiful and new,” even if “new charisms are not fully understood or recognized.” But the charm of chaplaincy in particular, she said, is something to celebrate. The Catholic Church has not developed a tradition of celebrating lay calls, and she said that Friday’s certification Mass “moved me, that there was that affirmation of the connection to the church.” She concluded, “Think only a little bit about the present crisis. Think much more about what’s happening and rejoice.”
Robert Mundle: The power of genuine listening

By David Lewellen
Vision editor

Genuine listening, even for a professional, can be a strikingly deep experience.

Robert Mundle, the Saturday afternoon plenary speaker at the NACC conference, told his audience of skilled listeners that they could help teach others to listen. There are 500,000 hospice volunteers in the United States, who want or need to develop their skills, and “who better than us to provide this kind of training?”

Mundle, the author of “How to Be an Even Better Listener: A Practical Guide for Hospice and Palliative Care Volunteers,” told the story of a care conference for a 93-year-old woman that the patient attended. Every specialist around the table gave input into how she should be treated, then the leader turned to her and asked what she thought, and she answered “You’re all too young.”

“And she was right,” Mundle concluded. “How could we know what like be 93? Or to be her at 93?” The conference should have let her speak first, and then proceeded with the responses from different disciplines.

Aside from basic skills such as being at eye level and not interrupting, Mundle talked about listening as a spiritual practice that can transform lives and relationships. “What does it feel like to listen to another person?” he asked. “And what does it feel like when someone really listens to you?” He did a research study of hospice volunteers, asking them to tell about a time in life when they were really listened to, and he found that it’s rare and powerful; some volunteers got emotional just remembering it. Another question was about times they needed a listener and didn’t get it, and the pain lasted for a long time.

In very difficult situations such as impending death, he said, “If you can’t think of anything to say, just say, ‘I can’t think of anything to say.’” The really important thing is just to be with the other person.

Mundle gave a series of examples from various fields such as jazz, portrait photography, being in nature, and storytelling, to show how genuine connection can be shaped in various situations. Sometimes in that situation, he said, people will say, “I don’t know why I’m telling you this, I’ve never told anyone before” — and there were nods from the audience.
Sacred space enhances sacrament of anointing

By Carolanne Hauck

What a beautiful way to end a meaningful and busy Saturday, by participating in what presider Fr. Rich Bauer called the Catholic Church’s best kept secret: the sacrament of anointing. Different for us this year from years past was the sacred space in which the service was held: a small chapel on the second floor of the retreat center. Simple, small and sacred. One would have guessed hundreds were singing as the choir of chaplains, many of whom only met the day before, used their voices (and instruments) to call upon our healer, Jesus.

Father Bauer reminded us of a physician who used the metaphor of a burning building to describe what we as chaplains do. Instead of running from the fire, we run to it — and eventually we get burned. Then we ourselves are the ones who need healing and anointing. He invited us to acknowledge the emotional and sometimes physical pain of caring for others and to accept and receive this rich gift from the Church for our own healing.

Chaplain Mary Tracy shared a beautiful reflection, tying the meaning of Paul’s reminder that we are one body with John’s words describing the women at the foot of the cross. She invited us to join Mary and bring to the dying Christ our sense of powerlessness and our own suffering. With our eyes closed, she led us to the face of Jesus, where we were encouraged to look directly into his eyes, notice his love for us, and feel the healing power that comes from his own vulnerability, his own humanity. Mary offered the idea of holding this visual mantra of Christ looking into our eyes as a way to continue to bring healing to ourselves, our community, and our world.

As the priests went before each person, anointing and praying for Christ’s healing, others also used their hands and touch to pray for one another’s healing. These moments called to mind the heart of chaplaincy and the mission of NACC: to bring the healing ministry of Jesus in the name of the Church to those in our care. On this night, chaplains received the healing ministry of Jesus through the Church.

Carolanne Hauck, BCC, is director of chaplaincy care and education at Lancaster General Health in Lancaster, PA.
Cardinal Cupich leads Sunday Mass

By David Lewellen
Vision editor

The NACC’s annual Mass to remember the members who have died within the past year was also memorable for its setting and its guest celebrant.

In the soaring space of the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception, Cardinal Blase Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, led the NACC in worship, delivering a well-received homily and a few jokes. It was the first time in memory that a cardinal has addressed the NACC.

Preaching on the text of Jesus’ departure from the disciples, Cupich said that their being left behind in Jerusalem is “a metaphor for all the things in life that seem disastrous or catastrophic, that we think we need to flee and go to another place.”

He told of eliciting the painful story of a woman from Eastern Europe, speaking for the first time about why she emigrated to America — because her father told her, “You’re no good to me.”

“That woman was my grandmother,” he said, to murmurs of surprise. She built a good life for herself in America, “and she could see that those words were not the total of her life, even though they came from her father, because she had a loving Father.”

Everyone, he said, has “Jerusalem moments” in their life, but they must be endured, because with the promise of Pentecost, “the story isn’t over yet. Give courage to the people in your ministry not to flee Jerusalem, but to wait for our own Father to keep his promise.”
Panel discussion: Where does pastoral care go from here?

By Daniel Waters

Our final gathering before the closing celebration of the Eucharist was the pastoral care panel discussion with David Lichter, executive director of NACC; board members Beth Lenegan and Carolanne Hauck; and Harry Dudley, the conference’s Outstanding Colleague Award recipient.

The point of this time together was to take an overall view of the conference and reflect on its theme, Partners in Pastoral Care. David shared two stories; the first was of his encounter in a Catholic hospital with a CPE resident. David asked the resident if he was a “Catholic chaplain” and the resident responded that he was a chaplain who happened to be Catholic. His point was that this is a great answer that speaks to the profession of chaplaincy.

David’s next story involved Bishop Dale Melczek, the NACC’s former episcopal liaison, and the controversy in the early 2000s around the terms “chaplain” and “lay ecclesial minister of healthcare.” Catholicism is our motivation, just as this conference has been our motivation, David said, and we are richer because of it. We bring it to other settings, and the conference is an important part of that.

Carolanne Hauck shared a story of her role with an interdisciplinary team as a chaplain in a NICU. Others on the team, including a physician, were initially dismissive of her role, but when Carolanne related the details of the board certification process and her continuing education requirements, she reframed her role completely for them. The physician began checking with Carolanne to see if he was appropriate in his professional relationship with patients. Carolanne became an important resource for that interdisciplinary team.

Harry Dudley, who was outside NACC but partnered with it in his long-time role with the USCCB, shared experiences of his work in lay ecclesial ministry. He praised the NACC’s development of competencies and certification, naming them “the gold standard.” But he challenged our organization to look at new pathways with these competencies, drawing the contrast of an “all or nothing” model versus embracing other pathways that consider candidates’ widely varied circumstances. Harry challenged the group to develop language around varying levels of competency, allowing someone to enter at one level to discern a call to chaplaincy and potentially grow to other levels. He sees great potential in NACC’s role to partner with other lay ministries within the church to help develop competencies and certifications in areas like prison ministry. Others looking from the outside wonder how to get into chaplaincy, he said. How can we make it work?

Beth Lenegan shared her story of being the first director of religious education in her parish, where she had a wealth of experiences with the bereaved, sick and dying. She initially explored CPE to grow her skills as a DRE — with no intention of becoming a chaplain. But she emphasized that people just like those at the panel discussion were the ones who mentored her into a change that she never anticipated. She invited and challenged those gathered to be inspiring mentors today, to share our knowledge and to inspire hope.

The participants discussed creative ways to make training for chaplaincy affordable. There was gratitude for the stories the panel shared and a suggestion for a Vision issue devoted completely to chaplains sharing their stories of discernment to this profession.

Daniel Waters, BCC, is manager of mission and spiritual care at Mercy Health St. Charles Hospital in Oregon, OH.
Pre-conference retreat: Time to breathe, to rest, to remember

By Kimberly Borin

As soon as you walked into the retreat space you could feel the energy, joy, and heartfelt care of our retreat leader, Beverly Ann Stewart. She led a day-long retreat titled “Leaning on the Everlasting Love of God, Pastoral Care and the Co-Accompaniment.” Stewart, the spiritual formation director of the Archdiocese of Chicago’s pastoral ministry program at Catholic Theological Union, has the gift of storytelling and bringing to life the stories of others.

In our time together, the 50 attendees told a “Believe it or Not” fact about themselves. Participants shared beautiful moments of how they arrived to be a chaplain, and how their journey had unfolded in often very unlikely ways. As each story was told, gifts emerged that offered hope, laughter, “aha” moments, and reminders that we are held in grace and accompanied by God and the Holy Spirit at all times. The words offered by the attendees offered their own nourishment and affirmation, and they were held in the hearts and hands of all who heard them.

Afterward, participants were led in a contemplative meditation and visualization, allowing us to imagine abiding in God's love. The time for breath, surrender, quiet, and encouragement offered another opportunity to trust in the unfolding of our lives, and to know that we are not only guided but deeply loved along the way. This reminder of leaning on the everlasting love of God allows us to remember that we are divine vessels and we can allow the love of God to move through us, granting us permission to trust and perhaps to not have to work so hard.

Beverly Ann Stewart allowed us to enter with joy and to share our sacred journey stories. She gave us time to breathe, to rest and to remember that we partner with God and one another in our ministries to offer hope and tender care to all those we serve. We were reminded that in our work we also stand in the midst of mystery in situations that are sometimes heavy with the paradox of grace and suffering on many levels. We were reminded to lean into God and with each other as we do this sacred work. We were also reminded to do the important work of self-care in whatever way fills our spirit, so that we can be grounded, centered, and ready for the work we are called to do. She reminded us of spiritual writer Hong Curley’s words of wisdom: “a true healer is the one who heals himself first so others can benefit from his own healing.”

To cement the grounding and nourishment, participants created painted rocks to express healing through the use of art. These reminded us to continue to be open to the spirit, sing out our story, trust in the journey, and lean into the partnering and abiding love of God. It was a nourishing day of stories and hope to sustain us for the journey ahead.
Newly certified chaplains celebrate in a spiritual setting

By David Lewellen
Vision editor

The NACC’s 2019 conference officially opened with a Mass to recognize the association’s newly certified chaplains. That event happens every year, but this year’s ceremony, in the ornate Chapel of the Immaculate Conception at the University of St. Mary of the Lake, was a different-looking affair from the usual hotel ballroom.

“You could feel the love in the room,” newly certified Tim Lankford said afterward. “Being in a church, there’s a sense of holiness. You couldn’t ask for a better setting.”

“This event always brings me annual joy,” said Bishop Donald Hying, the NACC’s episcopal liaison. “This is a moment to ponder the wonder of your existence. None of us willed ourselves to be. We just found ourselves in this skin, and sometimes we wonder why we are here. Let’s think about the people along the way who formed us, fed us, nurtured us, accepted us.”

Bishop Hying talked about moments of transcendence, whether through nature, art, prayer, or simple conversation, in which each person feels recognized as someone loved by God. Whether a hospital, prison, nursing home, family, or church, “every place where people hang out should be a place of transcendence and acceptance.”

Many of the newly certified chaplains might have felt similar emotions as they walked past the altar to receive their certificates and be congratulated by Bishop Hying, NACC Executive Director David Lichter, and Board Chair Jim Letourneau. The full congregation greeted them with long applause and arms extended in blessing.

“It’s a blessing to celebrate with the community,” said newly certified Fr. Ikechi Korie, OP. “A Mass is a thanksgiving, and I say thank you to God for making it possible.”
Workshops fill the spaces in between convening

By David Lewellen
Vision editor

When chaplains at the NACC conference are not gathered en masse in the chapel or auditorium, they are keeping their brains busy with workshops and interest group gatherings.

On Friday afternoon, about 20 people sat in knots to talk about geriatric ministry. Jennifer Paquette told several interested listeners about the resident-centered model that she saw in action at Providence Mount St. Vincent in Seattle, where residents can choose what to do and when.

Across the hall, 25 chaplains sitting in rows participated in one freewheeling conversation about ministry in the emergency department and intensive care. Talk moved over death cafes, bereavement trains, chaplains’ responsibilities for releasing dead bodies (and for keeping the body out of the morgue until family arrives), and gently isolating hysterical relatives in the emergency department so that their grief does not raise the emotional temperature of other patients’ families.

After-dinner workshops covered topics ranging from cultural clues to pastoral field education. At a roundtable for directors of spiritual care, common themes emerged — advocating for more staff, checking the consistency of chaplains’ skills, managing volunteers, cultural and language proficiency. Not every problem got solved, but directors were relieved to learn that others shared their struggles.

At a well-attended workshop on the justice system, Fr. Dustin Seddon and Fr. George Williams said that at the moment, there is no infrastructure in place for Catholic prison ministry -- unlike well-funded, well-networked evangelicals who are doing good work. The two priests have started the Catholic Prison Ministries Coalition as a loosely organized information clearinghouse, with no current ambitions to incorporate or raise funds of their own.

The prison system, Fr. Williams said, “warps the reality that we are social beings.” Chaplains can offer prisoners human relationship, but need to be very aware of their own motivations in doing the work. “My biggest headache is volunteers, not prisoners,” he said. It is true that prisoners can be manipulative, but “when you take people’s choices away, the only way to get anything is by manipulating,” and chaplains, whether professional or volunteer “have to learn to say no lovingly.”

An unfortunate reality that most healthcare chaplains have not thought of is that a prison chaplain cannot be seen ministering to both prisoners and staff — the two groups are too opposed to each other. Eating lunch with the staff is a possibility, or doing marriages or baptisms off-site, but Fr. Williams said that if prisoners see him being friendly with the guards, he’ll be viewed as “a cop with a collar on.”
Catholics can usefully advocate for reform at the local and national level, he said, and it is one of the rare issues that finds support on both sides of the political spectrum. But he believes that a century from now, people may view the current prison system the way we now view slavery. “This system cannot be made nice.”

A Sunday workshop on online CPE* began with the stipulation by presenter Jerry Kaelin that “3D is better than 2D.” But for aspiring chaplains in remote areas or on odd schedules, the flat video screen can be surprisingly effective. When a program like Zoom offers a close-up of every participant, “it’s harder to fall asleep in group,” he noted, to laughter.

Kaelin, a CPE supervisor at Loyola University Medical Center, said that all online CPE must be synchronous, or happening at the same time. Asynchronous material, such as reading an article, does not count. And remote video conferencing is more effective on a big screen, such as a desktop computer, than on a phone, he said. Loyola requires that CPE students taking a unit remotely have an onsite preceptor, to make sure they are doing the coursework and handling their pastoral care work satisfactorily – but there are no firm rules about the qualifications for a preceptor.

* https://www.nacc.org/conference/workshop-materials-handouts/su2-4/
NACC honors three outstanding contributors

Three people with very different backgrounds were honored with the NACC’s annual awards at the conference at the University of St. Mary of the Lake.

Harry Dudley received the Outstanding Colleague Award for his years of collaboration with the NACC as the USCCB’s assistant director of the Subcommittee on Certification for Ecclesial Ministry and Service. He has been heavily involved with NACC’s Raskob Foundation grant that has become Partners in Pastoral Care. Mary T. O’Neill praised “his consistent call for competency, education and oversight of the ministry, by both volunteers and paid staff.”

“You were bridge builders in a culture more comfortable with building walls,” Dudley said in his speech of thanks. “You are my heroes. You are the ones who run into the fire when others are running away. You are blessed. You all do this in the name of the Lord and the name of this Church. So bless you all and thank you for allowing me to walk with you.”

Sr. Emily DeMuth, CSC, received the association’s Distinguished Service Award. In her 70 years as a sister and 40 years as a certified chaplain, “she’s got that thing that we all want,” said Bridget Deegan-Krause. “She has brought us blessings of delight and joy.”

“I’m happy every day that I get up, and I say, ‘Dear Lord, thank you for this day,’” Sr. DeMuth said in her acceptance. “Looking at one and looking at another, everyone could receive this award. So I will receive it in your name. … I will continue to try to minister as long as the good Lord allows me to.”

Sean K. Doll O’Mahoney was honored with the Emergent Leader Award, for his service as a certification interviewer and a member and now co-chair of the Certification Commission. “I’m honored to receive this and richly blessed by this body of people,” he said. “I look forward to continuing to learn with you, and hopefully I’ll bring some bread or pizza to the work session this summer.”