# *Works of Hope*

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***Works of Hope***

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The Director's Column

## Cabrini Corner

At the end of 2024, Pope Francis proclaimed 2025 as a Jubilee Year of Hope, with the theme Pilgrims of Hope. I found this to be an extraordinary coincidence, as the NACC also celebrates its 60th anniversary in 2025. From its very beginning, the NACC has sought to bring the hope of Christ into people's lives, especially those who suffer from illness, loneliness, addiction, or despair.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Romans 15:13).

Our chaplains and pastoral ministers embody this Scripture every day. In moments of great difficulty, they inspire, accompany, and create sacred space for others. Life can often feel overwhelming, and I am sometimes asked: How do we provide care in situations that seem hopeless? Truthfully, I don't always know the answer. In my own life, when I face circumstances beyond my control, I look to my three children, all teenagers, who are filled with a natural sense of hope and possibility.

In his message for the Jubilee of Youth, Pope Leo reminded young people: "You will be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. You will be seeds of hope where you live, in your families, among your friends, at school, at work, and in sports. You will be seeds of hope with Christ, our hope."

The late musician Leonard Cohen once wrote: “There is a crack in everything; that’s how the light gets in.” Hope seeps through those cracks, but sometimes we need others to help us see the light breaking through. That is the sacred role of our chaplains and pastoral ministers: to listen, to accompany, to pray, to care, and to bring Christ’s mercy and hope into every situation, no matter a person’s background, politics, or beliefs.

Whether the cracks are the result of crumbling or expansion — life’s chaos and tragedy, or growth and joy — we are called to walk together on the journey. We notice the flecks of light shining in to bathe us in the gentle warmth of Christ’s love, compassion, and peace, and we point them out to our friends, family, and neighbors.

As we journey together through this Jubilee Year of Hope, may we notice the cracks in our own lives, and may we walk alongside others, helping them to see how Christ’s light shines through.

Erica Cohen Moore

Executive Director

Columna de la directora

## Rincón Cabrini

A finales de 2024, el papa Francisco proclamó el año 2025 como el Año Jubilar de la Esperanza, bajo el lema; Peregrinos de la esperanza. Me pareció una coincidencia extraordinaria que la NACC (Asociación Nacional de Capellanes Católicos, por sus siglas en inglés), también celebre su 60º aniversario el mismo año, puesto que, desde sus inicios, la NACC se ha dedicado a llevar la esperanza de Cristo a la vida de las personas, especialmente a quienes padecen enfermedad, soledad, adicción o desesperanza.

«Que el Dios de la esperanza los llene de alegría y de paz en la fe, para que la esperanza sobreabunde en ustedes por obra del Espíritu Santo» (Romanos 15:13).

Precisamente, nuestros capellanes y ministros pastorales encarnan a diario este pasaje de las Escrituras. En momentos de gran adversidad, ellos inspiran, acompañan y crean espacios sagrados para los demás. Sin embargo, a menudo, la vida parece abrumadora, y en ocasiones me preguntan: ¿cómo podemos brindar cuidado y esperanza en situaciones que parecen desesperanzadas o sin salida? Sinceramente, no siempre tengo una respuesta. Personalmente, cuando enfrento circunstancias que escapan a mi control, miro a mis tres hijos, todos adolescentes, rebosantes de esperanza y posibilidades, propias de la edad.

Cabe recordar que en su mensaje para el Jubileo de la Juventud, el papa León recordó a los jóvenes: «Ustedes serán la sal de la tierra y la luz del mundo. Ustedes serán semillas de esperanza donde vivís, en vuestras familias, entre vuestros amigos, en la escuela, en el trabajo y en los deportes. Ustedes serán semillas de esperanza con Cristo, nuestra esperanza».

En esta misma línea, el músico Leonard Cohen, ya fallecido, escribió una vez: «Hay una grieta en todo, y por ella es donde se filtra la luz». Efectivamente, la esperanza se filtra a través de esas grietas, aunque a veces necesitamos que otros nos ayuden a vislumbrar la luz que asoma. Este es el sagrado rol de nuestros capellanes y ministros pastorales: escuchar, acompañar, orar, cuidar y llevar la misericordia y la esperanza de Cristo a cada situación, sin importar los antecedentes, las opiniones políticas o las creencias de cada persona.

Así pues, ya sea que las grietas surjan del desmoronamiento o de la expansión — del caos y la tragedia de la vida, o del crecimiento y la alegría — somos llamados a recorrer el camino juntos. Somos quienes reconocen esos haces de luz que nos bañan en la suave calidez del amor, la compasión y la paz de Cristo, y los muestran a los demás; familia, amigos, vecinos; para contemplarlos.

Que, al peregrinar juntos en este Año Jubilar de la Esperanza, logremos reconocer las grietas en nuestras vidas y podamos acompañar a los demás, ayudándoles a ver cómo la luz de Cristo brilla a través de ellas.

Erica Cohen Moore

Directora Ejecutiva

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Faith in Action

## A Season of Hope

**Five ways to bring Advent into your ministry.**

By: Richard Hadley BCC

In the rhythm of the liturgical year, Advent stands as a sacred invitation to pause, reflect, and prepare. For healthcare chaplains, this season offers a profound opportunity to bring spiritual depth into the clinical setting — where waiting, longing, and hope are daily companions to patients, families, and staff alike.

A few years ago, an article featured a VA hospital that embraced Advent in a multidisciplinary way. The Spiritual Care Manager invited people to come share from their talents — on video — in 15-minute segments broadcast from the chapel, viewed across the hospital. Everything from original songs to poetry readings to ensemble singers emerged from all the hidden talent in their staff. So many came forward that they ran out of time slots for everyone! To begin thinking about how to incorporate Advent into your ministry, begin with inclusivity and a sense of discovery. What new ideas might you arrive at?

**Advent in a pastoral care context**

Advent, derived from the Latin *adventus* meaning "coming," is traditionally a time of anticipation for the birth of Christ. In the healthcare environment, this theme of waiting mirrors the emotional and spiritual posture of many individuals — waiting for test results, healing, reconciliation, or peace.

In a prison or seafaring environment, the theme of waiting can be much deeper than simply the end of an individual's sentence or return to port. Small goals and milestones are ever-present. Events like family contact, care package deliveries, or simply your next scheduled pastoral care visit can draw that deep sense of emotional anticipation and even spiritual preparation.

Advent is not merely a countdown to Christmas; it is a time of expectant waiting and spiritual readiness. Catholics are called to reflect on the mystery of the Incarnation — God becoming man — and to prepare their hearts for both the celebration of Jesus' birth and His eventual second coming. This dual focus makes Advent a season of both joy and solemnity.

Pastoral care ministers can draw on this parallel to offer spiritual care that acknowledges the sacredness of waiting. By framing Advent as a season of hopeful expectation, chaplains can help their care recipients and staff find meaning in their own journeys of uncertainty.

**Practices for integrating Advent into chaplaincy**

Here are several ways chaplains can incorporate Advent into their ministry. As always, please work with the site supervisor to ensure the activities and materials are cleared as approved for the venue.

**1. Advent reflections and devotionals**

Offer short daily or weekly reflections that connect Advent themes — hope, peace, joy, and love — within the realities of your ministry environment. These can be shared via email, posted in staff lounges and public spaces, or offered during brief huddles and prayer group sessions. Providing materials to be creative in making cards or other items that can be given to others for each theme can help to encourage cohesion and goodwill.

**2. Sacred spaces of waiting**

Create intentional, quiet spaces where individuals can sit, reflect, and pray. Decorate with simple symbols of Advent — LED candles, purple cloth, or Scripture verses — to invite contemplation. Provide a means to write a praise or a prayer. Create a QR code that leads to a simple online space, such as a survey where all responses are shown or a shared Google doc, where people can share inspirational thoughts or prayer requests.

**3. Lighting the Advent wreath**

Host a weekly lighting of the Advent wreath in a chapel or common area. Invite your pastoral care recipients to participate, offering prayers that speak to their spiritual journey and the light that Christ brings into darkness. The Advent wreath is one of the most recognizable symbols of the season. With its four candles — three purple and one pink — it marks each week of Advent.

The purple candles represent hope, peace and preparation, and love, while the pink candle, lit on the third Sunday (Gaudete Sunday), symbolizes joy. The gradual lighting of the candles reflects the growing light of Christ coming into the world. Some traditions also include a fifth white candle, symbolizing purity, that is lit on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

Other traditions include the Jesse Tree, which traces the lineage of Jesus through Scripture, and daily readings that guide the faithful through themes of hope, peace, joy, and love.

**4. Staff support and blessings**

Recognize the emotional toll of the season on the workers in your environment — healthcare, prison, hospice, maritime, and beyond. Offer blessings, handwritten notes, or small tokens that affirm their role as bearers of hope and healing. Blessing of the Hands is often used, but other rituals can be just as meaningful. Blessing the tools, workstations, or break areas also creates a sense of acknowledging what is sacred.

**5. Mission moments with Advent themes**

Use Advent as a framework for mission moments — brief spiritual reflections shared during meetings or shift changes. These can center on themes like “waiting with purpose” or “joy in the midst of sorrow.” It is often said, “Hope is not a strategy.” But this is a time to refamiliarize ourselves with a better understanding of hope. Many times, this word is used to describe a fanciful notion or wishful thinking. However, hope in its original sense was the anticipation of something certain that had not yet happened. Emphasizing the excitement of anticipation for something sure that isn’t quite here yet can be tied to many strategic goals and upcoming improvements.

**Advent as a ministry of presence**

Ultimately, Advent in chaplaincy and pastoral care is less about programming and more about presence. It’s about being with others in their waiting, listening deeply, and pointing

gently toward the hope that is coming. In the world and workplaces that often rush toward outcomes, Advent invites us to dwell in the sacred now.

Excerpt from the poem "Because We Hunkered Down"

By: Malcolm Guite, poet, priest, professor, and chaplain

Because through all of these we held together,

Because we shunned the impulse to let go,

Because we hunkered down through our dark weather,

And trusted to the soil beneath the snow,

Slowly, slowly, turning a cold key,

Spring will unlock our hearts and set us free.

Best Practices

## One Religion, Many Ways

**Caring for Hindu patients and families.**

By: Moira Bucciarelli BCC

Perhaps you have seen the checkbox that some social media sites use to describe a person's relationship status: "It's complicated."

"It's complicated" also describes any one person's relationship to the Divine. Assuming complexity helps chaplains as they greet, assess, and care for all the people they meet and serve.

While the patient's chart may list their religion as Muslim, Catholic, Christian, Jewish, or Other, a skilled chaplain knows it's more complex. What kind of Christian are they? Pentecostal and Holiness are very different than an Episcopalian or Presbyterian. If they are Jewish, are they secular/cultural or religious? And if the latter, conservative, reform, or ... ?

We can ask the same questions of Catholic patients, who are most familiar to us. A person might be lapsed (and possibly angry or hurt) or a practicing Catholic. Going deeper, we might find out they are drawn to Ignatian spirituality, or that they pray the rosary and have a Marian devotion. We work from broad categories down to the specifics of each person in their relationship to God, the sacred, and the practices that support their beliefs.

And so it is with the care of Hindu patients and their families, with some important distinctions. Hinduism creates space for a person to express their affinity for certain rituals, manifestations of the one God, or prayers. These affinities are influenced by family, class, culture, and region. For example, a Tamil-speaking South Indian Hindu may expect a different set of prayers at end of life than a North Indian Hindu. Nearly all Indians believe in God, with most saying they are absolutely certain in this belief. But the nature of the deities Indians believe in varies. One patient may feel comforted by an image of Ganesha in their room, while another may prefer one of Krishna.

"There is no universal Hinduism," explained Rajeev Persaud, a Hindu chaplain at Emory University. "Historically the term 'Hindu' was an externally imposed label." In fact, *Sindhus* was a word used to refer to all people who lived near the Indus River.

"The practices and people they tried to fit into this box are incredibly diverse," he continued. "For example, there is a long-standing atheistic tradition in Hinduism and a deeply devotional form of Hinduism.

"There are believers within Hinduism who are drawn to the rich and heady philosophical side of Hinduism, and who may read the *Bhagavad Gita*," Persaud further explained. "Others may be drawn to devotional practices and rituals or chanting, based on the *Gita* or the *Vedas*.

The care we provide as Catholic chaplains to Hindu patients and their families can begin with a warm introduction to build rapport and then staying with the broader layers of Hinduism, where there is more universality.

What follows are some "big picture" areas where Catholic chaplains may be of service to Hindu patients, families, or staff.

**Dietary practices**

Some Hindus are strict vegetarians, while others are vegetarian only on certain days of the week, and some eat meat as a part of their religious practice. Fasting may occur for certain holidays. Asking about this and if there is any need for assistance may be an appreciated courtesy.

**Universal holidays**

Diwali, which occurs over five days in the fall (October or November) is the Hindu New Year. Saying "Happy Diwali" or bringing an electric tealight are both appropriate ways to support a Hindu patient or staff person.

Holi, which occurs in February or March, is a joyful and colorful celebration of the arrival of spring, the triumph of good over evil. Traditional festival celebrations are marked by throwing colored powder and water. While this particular observance is unlikely to be

celebrated in the hospital for obvious reasons, you could bring other color media — paints, crayons, markers, etc. — to your visit during Holi.

**Meditation, reflection, and introspection**

Meditation is commonly practiced in Hinduism. It may be meaningful to ask if that is part of their spiritual practice and how it helps them, or if they need a sign on their room door for uninterrupted quiet time. Reflection and introspection are encouraged in Hinduism; it may be easy for Hindu patients to reflect on their values and wisdom.

**Pastoral care: What's that?**

Pastoral care in the hospital is generally not expected in Indian culture, and so the family and patient may be surprised or view your visit with some suspicion. Persaud advised that sometimes, just talking and having a secular conversation is what's appropriate and may lead to a deeper conversation.

**Beginning-of-life care**

In Hinduism, birth is sacred. People will likely have their own prayers they will say. Naming ceremonies are also common and will likely happen beyond the walls of the hospital.

**End-of-life care**

"And whoever, at the end of his life, quits his body remembering Me alone at once attains My nature. Of this there is no doubt." (*Gita* 8.5)

Chanting to remember God in one's final moments of life is considered an ideal to most Hindus. This can be supported (especially if the person is incapable of speech or chanting) by having a local volunteer or family member chant, or by playing chants recorded on YouTube. Some particularly helpful ones may be the Gayatri mantra, *Gita* 8.5 (on a loop), the Maha mantra, or Om Namah Shivaya.

It is thoughtful to have *Gangajal*, a bottle of holy water from the Ganges River, available. Some Hindus may want or expect a sip of this water at end of life, which can be administered by a Hindu priest or a family member.

If you serve in labor and delivery or pediatrics and a family has lost a child, that will certainly be a time to ask the family if they want a Hindu priest to be contacted.

**Afterlife**

The Hindu belief that the soul is indestructible and eternal can give comfort when it comes to death and dying. Of course, there are expected emotions of grief and loss. The core belief that the soul persists in another form can provide peace. Hindu families will generally believe that even though the soul has moved on, they can still feel a spiritual connection with their beloved.

**Bereavement**

For older generations, there is a liturgical and ideal way to remember the dead for 14 days in September, known as *Pitru Paksha*. Said Persaud, "There is a generational gap now, and younger people may not observe or even know about this tradition."

Giving to charity in honor of the deceased is another tradition and is known as *Dana*.

On a death anniversary, some Hindus may practice the ritual known as *Sraddha*. There, again, are varying levels of participation. It can be observed in a temple or at home. It does require a priest.

Culturally, Persaud noted, there can be a stoicism in grief. "You might hear: 'Krishna said not to grieve,' a reference to a chapter in the *Bhagavad Gita*. As a Hindu chaplain, he usually points out that the stoic nature only comes after a chapter where Prince Arjuna grieves for what he must do in battle. Grief comes first, "then," said Persaud, "we pick up the pieces, and God gives us strength to carry on."

**Prayer**

As Catholic chaplains, we are accustomed to praying with Christian patients or families. Hindus may see prayer more like Catholic rote prayers from memory and less like a spontaneous tailored prayer from the heart. Chaplain Persaud advised, as with all good spiritual assessment, to ascertain what is important to the patient or family member before beginning.

Chanting of a mantra, or *japa*, is common in all forms of Hinduism. It is the repetition of God's name, 108 times. God can have many names, so it depends on which one the patient or family likes to use (Rama, Krishna, Shiva, or Ganesha, for example). Again, underscoring that most forms of Hinduism view each of these as a manifestation of the one God. Spiritual care departments might consider having prayer beads, known as *japa mala*, available.

**Greetings**

While every region has its own forms of greeting, it's safe to stick with Mr./Mrs., and then first name. However, a professional may prefer the more formal Mr./Ms. and then last name. If you want to greet them with a *namaste* and hands clasped in front of your chest and a slight bow, that may be appreciated. If it is natural to you, some elders feel comforted by terms of endearment like "Auntie" or "Uncle."

There is so much more to say about a religion as rich, diverse, and ancient (4,000 years) as Hinduism. As with all patients, your care, respect, openness, curiosity, and compassion will help you connect with Hindu patients and their family. You will learn from them, as well!

Chaplain Profile

# Spirit Afloat

**Port ministry supports the world's seafarers on land, at sea, and in the office.**

By: Maryann P. Hobbie BCC

In our global economy, roughly 80 to 90 percent of the consumer goods we use every day has been transported by cargo ship somewhere in its journey from manufacturing to our homes.

Generally speaking, each of the 100,000 floating behemoths are operated by comparatively tiny crews of 20 people who are at sea for months at a time. Tallied up, that's a population of nearly 2 million seafaring souls working on ships, away from their loved ones, away from their faith communities, and away from society.

"I got the impression right away that homesickness is probably the toughest thing seafarers go through," said Bishop Frank Schuster, the Bishop Promoter for Stella Maris in the United States. "It is a huge sacrifice that they make. It's a huge cross they bear."

**International seafarers, international ministries**

There are two primary ministry organizations at work in the United States. Stella Maris, translated as Mary, Star of the Sea, is an international Catholic organization for port chaplains. Bishop Schuster was appointed to his position in May 2025. "My role is to be the bridge between the important work our chaplains are doing in ports all across the country, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)."

But the organization's US day-to-day operations are overseen by Sister Joanna Okereke HHJC, who has served as Stella Maris' National Director since 2015. "Our mission is to support our port chaplains," she explained. "They are the frontline ministry for our seafarers. Port chaplains are the smiling faces that seafarers can count on when they arrive in port. We provide spiritual support, of course. But we also support their basic needs, too, everything from facilitating communication with loved ones, to a ride to a store to buy fresh supplies, to advocating for safe work environments and fair contracts.

"Like other chaplain ministries, it can be tough," Sr. Joanna continued. "Stella Maris gives our member chaplains constant encouragement. Their walk is stressful, but through our love, our care for them, and our encouragement, our port chaplains continue to do the work."

The North American Maritime Ministry Association (NAMMA) is the big tent organization, bringing together the spectrum of Christian port chaplaincy associations. It hosts an annual conference and training event to ensure members, new or experienced, are up to date on

the mission and vision of the organization and safety and security practices, and to energize the entire team toward its common goal.

“Our goal is to ensure every Christian chaplain working in the maritime industry is equipped with the resources and training they need to live out their ministry,” explained NAMMA Executive Director Dr. Jason Zuidema.

“We are so propelled in the Western world to look at numbers, to look at bigness and greatness,” he commented. “This is not the vision of Scripture. As chaplains, seafarers are wonderful to work for because they’re also an unseen workforce. This is the space where chaplains operate, too. So port chaplains are the unseen among the unseen, the ones no one ever looks at, but who are the ones who bring light and hope and love to every vessel they board.”

**Ministry is onboard**

Port chaplaincy offers many looks. Some port chaplains enjoy going onboard to visit seafarers in their space. “I was blessed to celebrate the Holy Thursday Mass of the Last Supper on a vessel here in Seattle,” recalled Bishop Schuster. “It was my privilege to wash the Philippine crew’s feet as a part of the service. It is just one way for our church to show these men and women that we love them, we remember them, and we are here for them. It was the most blessed moment I have had as I entered my new role as seafarer promoter.”

**Ministry is on land**

Others find satisfaction in serving seafarers’ worldly needs. “I feel especially close to Christ when I’m simply driving visiting seafarers back and forth to Walmart,” explained Deacon Paul Rosenbaum, who has been serving at the Port of Charleston since 2004. “When I see them climbing the gangplank with their bags of snacks, shampoo, and other things, I know I’ve done something good. For us that may seem like a trivial thing, something mundane. But I think that’s exactly what Jesus wants us to be doing.”

Dn. Rosenbaum said he also enjoys meeting and talking to individuals from all faiths. “I encountered an Indian seafarer with a rosary in his hand. I asked if he was Catholic, and he replied that he was not. He was Hindu. ‘I love the Catholic church,’ he told me. ‘Wherever we go in the world, you take care of us.’

“And that’s what we are all about in our ministry. Another time, a Hindu vessel officer asked why I do this. I told him I do it for two reasons. First, we depend on the men and women onboard for nearly everything we have, and this is my way of thanking them. Secondly, if I’m going to dress like this, in my clericals, I have to live out my Christian beliefs. God gave us two great commandments: love God and love your neighbor.”

**Ministry is in the office**

Port ministry is certainly focused on spiritual care for each seafarer. Prayers, blessings, Eucharist services, and Masses are all elements of the job. But there is also advocacy work to be done. “We step in with major humanitarian violations,” said Michele Barutha, an accomplished commercial vessel officer and member who also sits on the board of the Seattle Seafarers Center. “Unfortunately, it’s not uncommon for some seafarers to not receive the wages they were promised, or to have their medical needs go unaddressed while at sea or even be at sea on an unsafe vessel. We stand with and for those people who need an advocate to help them claim what is rightfully theirs, from payment to safety.

“Seafarer abandonment is at an all-time high,” she continued. “Some companies sail under the flag of countries who don’t adhere to international law. As a result, when they determine the cost of maintenance, the cost of fuel, or the cost of taking care of the crew is more than they want to pay, they just abandon it all, leaving the seafarers to fend for themselves in a foreign port. Our ministry helps those people to not lose hope and to know they are not alone here.”

**Follow the star of the sea**

Dn. Rosenbaum noted that every port ministry group can offer volunteer opportunities for any interest. “Certainly, there is a need for trained and formed pastoral care ministers and chaplains to tend seafarers’ spiritual needs. But people can also assist in making ditty bags of toiletries, make food packs, or even be a driver on a shopping run.”

“Today’s need in port ministry can be simply summarized by the word accompaniment,” said Bishop Schuster. “Our seafarers need that human connection most of all. It is something we can all provide. When you think of the star out on an ocean, it provides direction, gives you navigation, it shows you where you are. It’s a point of stability over an ocean that’s often tumultuous. And life can be that way — whether you’re a seafarer or not. And so, we can allow our Blessed Mother to embrace us as that star of the sea, on that ocean of life that we travel through together.”

Chaplain Profile

## A Stranger in a Strange Land

**Sister Rita Anaka’s chaplaincy journey from Nigeria to America.**

By: Erin Tribble MA, BCC

When Sr. Rita O. Anaka DDL, BCC, arrived at O’Hare International Airport in Chicago in March 2004, what surprised her most was how the airport staff addressed her. “Rita,” she recalled. “They called me Rita, not Sr. Rita. And they said it so musically. I liked that.” A Daughter of Divine Love originally from Nigeria, Sr. Rita had come to the United States to begin training and working as a hospital chaplain.

Several months prior, the bishop of the Brownville, Texas, diocese had contacted the community's Mother General to ask whether there were any sisters who would be suitable to the role. "Because our name is Divine Love," she explained, "he wanted someone who could transmit that love to the patients and also learn a bit of Spanish."

The Mother General called Sr. Rita, who was on sabbatical in Italy, and told her that several sisters in the community had mentioned her name. "They said I can do it, I can show that love, and so I said, 'Yes, Mother, I will do it.'" Sr. Rita arrived in Harlingen, Texas, a few months after landing in Chicago.

Today, Sr. Rita works full time as a staff chaplain at Johns Hopkins Sibley Memorial Hospital in Washington, DC, where she feels she is living out her true calling. "I continue to accept who I am and to be with people as they are, in a vulnerable state," she said.

This deep acceptance of self and others is at the heart of Sr. Rita's understanding of chaplaincy and of her vocation as a religious sister. "I find that when we become sick, we are more open to the Lord and can meet ourselves and God in a simpler, more direct way.

"The vulnerability that illness brings often presents people with an opportunity to let go of the masks they wear to be acceptable in some way," Sr. Rita reflected. "It is better to become who we are than to try to become someone else."

Becoming comfortable with who she truly is has been a process for Sr. Rita. On the one hand, she has known from a very young age that she had a religious vocation and would be a nun. "My parents recognized and supported that I was called to be a religious," she recalled. "They always whispered in my ear, 'You will be a nun.'" Forty-one years after making her first profession, Sr. Rita remains convinced that religious life is the right life for her.

**Challenges of identity**

Despite this strong sense of vocation, however, Sr. Rita encountered challenges about her identity as an African and a religious when she began looking for chaplaincy positions in the United States. "On the application forms, I was surprised to see questions about whether I'm black or brown, and I thought, 'What is this?'" She had never experienced this issue in Nigeria and wondered whether identifying her race would affect her ability to get a job.

Another surprise was feedback she received after a few unsuccessful interviews. "Wearing my religious habit was not going well for me," she said. She had been interviewing for various positions and was not hearing back from anyone. "I finally asked for some feedback and one person told me, 'We would have loved if you had dressed down.' They said the habit can be intimidating, that it can make people feel judged, and it makes me come across as being better than others."

Not surprisingly, while this perspective was prevalent in secular institutions, she enjoyed a warmer reception in the faith-based ones she eventually joined. The leadership team at her

first job in the US, Valley Baptist Medical Center in Harlingen, Texas, supported her wearing her habit, she noted, as does her current employer. “At Johns Hopkins Sibley Memorial, they welcome everything I am,” she said, “my color, my habit, my accent — everything.”

**Continuous academic learning**

Sr. Rita already had two master's degrees, one in theological ethics and one in education. “I’m close to completing my third master’s degree in marriage and family therapy,” she said. “I love academics and studying, and I’m so happy I have accomplished so much over the years.”

In addition to these academic achievements, Sr. Rita has made great strides in her chaplaincy career. She became an NACC Board Certified Chaplain in 2016 and was soon invited to serve as a panel interviewer. “That same year of my certification, I helped the NACC, and I’ve helped them as an interviewer ever since,” she added.

**Continuous personal learning**

In addition to her academic growth, Sr. Rita’s chaplaincy journey has helped develop her personal practice and outlook. “I have learned that not everybody will love me, even in my religious community, so I have learned to create some boundaries.

“I’ve imposed myself on others, thinking they need help, but what religious life and chaplaincy have taught me is to let people invite me into their life before I go in.” She explained that some of this tendency to impose help is cultural. “In Africa, we are very family-oriented, so sometimes we jump in where we’re not supposed to. Often, the best course of action in a difficult situation is to take care of ourselves, and the rest will fall into place.”

Setting boundaries is a skill that Sr. Rita continues to work on personally, professionally, and in her training as a prospective marriage and family therapist. “I am a person who goes a lot with my heart’s emotions,” she said. “At times, I’ve felt emotionally sick after visiting certain patients; it was difficult not to carry their pain.”

But both chaplaincy and therapy training have been teaching her to cultivate healthy detachment. “Now I listen with both my heart and my head, and this helps me keep my emotional reactions from taking over.”

**Understanding cultural differences**

Other lessons Sr. Rita has learned, especially as an international chaplain, include awareness of cultural differences related to eye contact and tone of voice. In Nigeria, she noted, people make direct eye contact, which might be uncomfortable in other contexts. “We also tend to raise our voices when we want people to hear us, but it’s not like that in America. So, I’ve learned to speak in a lower voice and to slow my speech when trying to help someone hear or understand what I’m saying.”

While being aware of and adapting to cultural and other differences are certainly key skills for chaplains, Sr. Rita always comes back to the most essential competency: Be who you are. “We all want to be accepted, so we wear masks so that people will accept us,” she said. Masks have their place, depending on the role we’re in at a particular time and place, but they are temporary. “You don’t wear a mask forever, and they should never completely hide who you are; that doesn’t work. Healing comes when we are transparent and genuine — with ourselves, with each other, and with God.”

Best Practices

## Guide for Getting Together

**Following a few essential guidelines can yield a great connection.**

By: Wade West

With the National Association of Catholic Chaplains’ announcement that the next national conference will be in 2028, members have voiced a renewed interest in organizing state or regional retreats and gatherings to maintain their personal connection to friends and colleagues. There have been a handful of regional events popping up over the past few years, but one group has been consistently gathering for fellowship, professional development, and recharging their pastoral care batteries since 2001.

With over a quarter-century under their collective belts, the North Central Prairie Chaplains (NCPC) are the longest-running regional conference series in the NACC community. “Bob Barnes was really the founder of the group,” explained Nicole Reuter BCC-PCHAC, one of the group’s current committee members. “Back then, Bob and his colleagues wanted an easier way for the chaplains, mostly in rural parts of Minnesota and the Dakotas, to just kind of connect and have an opportunity to do some education that’s a little bit closer to home.”

### Find a reasonable central location

Over the years, the NCPC conference has had many different homes. “We met for quite a few years at a hotel right off the interstate in Alexandria, Minnesota,” recalled Brent Derowitsch BCC, who is also on the planning committee. While the venue was nicely situated in a convenient place for the wide-ranging group, eventually the participants started wanting a more pastoral setting, with green space and a quiet, reflective environment.

“We’ve always really tried to keep the price down,” he continued. “That was part of why it was hard to find venues at first. Plus, you have to consider other issues specific to your population. For instance, most of our participants are older or coming from very rural environments, so we don’t want to put them into an urban environment where traffic or

getting around is out of their comfort zone. For us, we have tried to be in a smaller town or at least on the outskirts of the Twin Cities, so it's easy."

For the past four years the NCPC has been at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, with stops at other college campuses before that. The duo noted that academic venues offer many advantages, including reasonable fees, available food services, good meeting facilities, a beautiful campus, and the academic community.

**Get a good presenter**

Derowitsch and Reuter suggested a great way to find speakers is to reach out to local college professors or practitioners who are used to breaking down a single topic into a series of sessions.

"It's such a joy to be able to access local talent," said Derowitsch, "like the professors of St. Thomas and St. John's. It's just been a kind of joy to tap into that local wisdom."

But the group isn't limited to local speakers. Lately they have widened their search to the national level, including Dr. Barbara Reid and this year's presenter, Dr. Zachary Moon from Chicago.

The NCPC model brings in one presenter for the entire weekend's sessions. "We prefer having one speaker," Derowitsch explained. "It's the preference that we take a deep dive with one topic and one speaker. For example, this year's topic is on moral injury. Our speaker will break out his topic into five different learning objectives and host a 90-minute session on each one, including time for conversation and time for reflection."

**The elephant in the room**

"Cost is always a big concern," said Reuter. "But we are self-sustaining with our group. Participants each pay their own room and meal costs, which we have been able to keep reasonable. And then we pay our presenters $400 per session, so it's a $2,000 stipend and then expenses.

"This year the registration for the full event, plus private room, was only $175," she continued. "Plus, we do have different pricing for local college students who want to learn more about chaplaincy, and a lower rate for people joining us virtually for the sessions, who obviously aren't staying on-site or eating meals."

If there is anything left over after the expenses are all paid out, "we donate that back to the NACC," Derowitsch added.

**Engage your participants in planning**

"Step one is to definitely find your people," said Reuter. "And especially find people you like to spend time with. You can't do it alone. If you're going to be an instigator to get a regional event off the ground, you absolutely need good collaborators. We definitely lean on each

other. We are built as a committee, so we have a chair, and a lot of the work falls on the chair to keep it going, but it is very much a group effort, especially for the brainstorming."

"One of the nice things about organizing a state or regional event is that you can look and see what we need as a community," Derowitsch said. "It's kind of interesting because you're basically doing your own needs assessment. Is there a particular thing going on in our area that we want to focus on?"

Planning the next conference isn't just a committee project. Each of the NCPC's events includes a designated session before lunch on the second day to check in with participants and ask how it is going for them. "At each of our events, we meet with the participants and get their feedback about the current event, and how it's going," explained Derowitsch. "Then we ask for ideas for future topics or presenters. Sometimes participants suggest topics related to our competencies or people who have expertise in an area of our work, such as authors, educators, or other chaplains."

**Technology is your friend**

"I think these days it's really essential to have a hybrid format," said Derowitsch. "The NACC national conference has offered that for a number of years now, at least for the plenary sessions."

He added that the smaller regional conference format events rely on interactivity more than a national conference speaker. "I would say that the organizers, the committee members, and the presenters all need to be really intentional about welcoming the virtual participants and making space for them to be interactive — not just spectators."

The North Central Prairie Chaplains group is continuously working to improve their technology game. "In fact, we have someone at the conference who is actively watching the screen," noted Reuter, "keeping an eye on the chat channel, bringing those participants' questions to the conversation. We also encourage people joining from off-site to use the hand raise function to make sure they're included."

Of course, not every event planning committee has a member with a passion for technology. But putting forth the effort to give on-site and off-site participants equal footing and voice in discussions and activities can make the difference in participant satisfaction.

**Lean on the NACC for help**

Even though the North Central Prairie Chaplains handle most of the organization and planning on their own, they still need a hand with technical aspects and data tracking for participants.

"We couldn't do this without NACC support," said Reuter. "They help with registration and promotion for the event on the website and with emails. They also help us with some of

the technology to make sure our off-site participants are able to get in, and they also record the sessions."

"The NACC awards Continuing Education Hours for the chaplains who attend the conference," she added. "We work with Jeanine Annunziato directly to ensure everyone gets the credits in the correct competencies for their recertifications. She is so supportive and easy to work with. Definitely reach out to the main office staff as a part of your planning process."

NCPC uses a consistent schedule so everyone knows what to expect. They meet on the third Thursday of September each year.

Thursday

1:00 – Registration Opens

2:00 – Welcome Prayer & Introduction

2:30 to 4:00 – Session 1

4:15 to 6:00 – Session 2

6:00 – Dinner

7:00 to 8:30 – Session 3

Friday

9:15 – Breakfast

9:30 to 11:00 – Session 4

11:15 to Noon – Education and Feedback Session

Noon – Lunch

1:00 to 2:30 – Session 5

2:45 – Closing Prayer

Collaborator Profile

## Disaster Ministry

**The American Red Cross Disaster Spiritual Care team makes a difference.**

By: Maryann P. Hobbie BCC

When disaster strikes in the United States and abroad, the news coverage will nearly always include a familiar flash of white and red at the scene. The American Red Cross (ARC) has become ubiquitous to disaster support and recovery operations.

By the Red Cross' own estimation, the organization's volunteers respond to a disaster, such as a family home fire, flood, wildfire, hurricanes, and more, every eight seconds. The flagship disaster services fall under seven categories: overnight stays, meals and snacks, distribution of emergency supplies, physical health services, mental health services, workers, and emergency response vehicles. Those are the opportunities the general public sees.

But there is an additional team of Red Cross volunteers whose boots hit the ground just as quickly, providing crucial support and service to both disaster survivors and responders. That team is the American Red Cross Disaster Spiritual Care team, led by NACC chaplain and former Board member, Tim Serban BCC.

**Legislative origin**

Like most pastoral care programs, the ARC's Disaster Spiritual Care program arose from tragedy. "In 1996 TWA Flight 800 crashed, killing all on board," recounted Serban. "Their families went to Congress and asked for three things: mental health support, childcare, and spiritual care." The resulting legislation, the Aviation Disaster Assistance Act, required the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) to provide those things anytime there is a disaster.

"The NTSB tapped the American Red Cross to fulfill its obligations under the new legislation," said Serban. "And the Red Cross in turn approached the chaplain community to provide the spiritual care component.

"The participating organizations," he continued, "NACC, the Association of Professional Chaplains (APC), Neshama: Association of Jewish Chaplains (NAJC), the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE), and the International Association of Police Chaplains (ICPC) each provided one point of contact to activate volunteer chaplains as they were needed." Serban was named the liaison for NACC.

**Serving at historic tragedies**

Serban completed his Red Cross Disaster Spiritual Care course in 1999. Just two years later, he led the Disaster Spiritual Care team following the 9/11 World Trade Center attack in New York City.

"We supported the Family Assistance Center in Manhattan, the workers on the ground, and the victims' families," he said. "We accompanied the family members to the site.

"Early on, we made an intentional linguistic shift to describe what we were doing. Instead of bringing people to see where their loved ones died, we helped them honor the place where

their loved ones last lived. It was a small change in wording, but it made a real difference for those individuals.

“Family members were given a yellow hard hat when they came to the site,” continued Serban. “As spiritual care teams accompanied families into Ground Zero, workers would see those special hats and stop what they were doing to honor the visit. The entire site would go silent and still as we all accompanied the grieving families in that terrible moment.”

Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005, killing 1,300 people. “The Red Cross deployed us to support the hurricane recovery work and to support the mortuary,” Serban recalled. “We were asked to be the sentinels, if you will. To hold the flame and honor the deceased.”

His experience in New York quickly came into play in New Orleans. “We had created a universal prayer during our work at Ground Zero,” he said. “It was simple and nondenominational: ‘We honor this person’s life. We honor the persons who found them. We ask that they know peace in God’s arms and that they be reunited with their family again.’ We said that as each hurricane victim was recovered.”

**Navigating religious diversity**

The recovery effort quickly found itself in the middle of a major spiritual challenge. “Both Muslim and Jewish traditions require the burial for a washed and blessed body to take place within 24 hours,” Serban said. “Since the victims’ bodies were not identified when they were recovered, and autopsies were ongoing, local spiritual leaders were, understandably, distressed.

“We facilitated a discussion between the local religious leaders and the disaster officials about how we could honor the variety of spiritual practices and beliefs, given the very challenging situation.

“We agreed that since no faith tradition would be offended by a cleansing of the deceased body, we would add a final station to the autopsy process to wash the body after it was touched. Even though it wasn’t a perfect alignment to the community’s different religious practices, we all agreed that it was as close as we could get, given the circumstances. And that’s the kind of community-wide work we do to alleviate spiritual suffering as much as we can.”

**Always space for spiritual care providers**

“In the last three years we have shifted from a seasonal response model to continual readiness,” said Serban. “We no longer have one fire season, one hurricane season, or one tornado season. The need never stops.”

To meet the growing need, the American Red Cross Disaster Spiritual Care team is always welcoming certified chaplains and other faith leaders into the fold.

“Red Cross does not create chaplains,” Serban said. “Certification has to come from an outside organization. But you don’t necessarily have to be a Board Certified Chaplain to be on the team. The Red Cross has three different options for eligibility. First, you could be a Board Certified Chaplain. Second, you could be an experienced volunteer or paid chaplain in a position like hospice. Or third, you could be a leader of a faith community with evidence of your journey and training.”

**Just like your day job, but with chaos and unpredictability**

Serban advised that working chaplains are especially suited to disaster spiritual care work. And he would know. He has been in the healthcare spiritual care space for over 30 years, starting as a bedside chaplain and rising to vice president of mission and spiritual care, and system executive director. Serban also sat on the NACC Board for six years.

“Many chaplains already know how to debrief,” he said. “Many are familiar with critical incident stress management and can support caregivers. It’s a natural role for chaplains to ask, ‘What did you see, what did you feel, how are you coping, and how are you holding it together?’ Chaplains are trusted as a safe place to communicate and tell their story.”

But disaster spiritual care is a different experience altogether, he added. “Order and predictability are somewhat standard in healthcare settings. Disasters are chaotic, and you have to be flexible with uncertainty.”

If that speaks to you, Serban advised that individuals can connect with the American Red Cross Disaster Spiritual Care team. Visit RedCross.org to find your local contact and begin your journey into disaster ministry.

Liturgy Formation

## Small Spaces, Sacred Spaces

**Creating moments outside the chapel.**

By: Maryann P. Hobbie BCC

If you asked your average person to name a sacred space, chances are good they’ll tell you about their church, a famous shrine, or maybe even a cemetery where their loved ones lie in rest.

But if you happened to ask the same of a chaplain or pastoral care worker, you probably heard a different, very personal, and intimate answer. Why? Because as the frontline workers in what Pope Francis called the spiritual field hospital, these individuals are masters of improvisation.

Imagine for a moment encountering a grief-stricken wife in the elevator bank. You had seen her an hour ago when you were in her husband's room, distributing Communion. She was holding it together in front of her teenage sons and husband with his spinal cord injury and terminal brain cancer.

You can see now that her composure is going to crack at any moment. Gently, with a swift prayer in your heart, you step toward her, ask her if she wants to talk. Her sorrow and struggle of the last few months' journey quietly pours out. The Spirit's presence is strong, meeting her vulnerability, her fears.

Finally quieted, you pray aloud with her. She takes a deep breath, ready to go to the parking lot and the safe space of her car, where, she says, she cries every day on her way home.

That small corner of the elevator bank had become a sacred space.

**A different kind of elevator speech**

Almost every spiritual care provider has their own small-space elevator stories. "I've said hello to more than one fellow passenger," recalled Deb Galvez BCC. "When they see my chaplain badge, they just begin sharing the story of their family members in the hospital, and by the time they've reached their targeted floor, their whole story pours out."

In the spirit of hospitality, Galvez walks them to their destination. "You're hearing the stories of their lives," she continued. "You're hearing their sorrow; you're hearing that they've been estranged from their families. But mostly you're listening."

**Intentional small-space services**

Everyone can likely recall a treasured small-space sacred moment. Many of life's most meaningful spiritual experiences don't fit the normally scheduled prayer service in a chapel model but rather come about organically as the Spirit directs.

Deacon John Archer, a maritime chaplain to seafarers, once held a service in, literally, a closet. "Most of the 20 crew members from India were Hindus," he explained. "The handful of Catholics among them had preferred to be ministered to without causing discomfort with their crew mates." Hence, a closet served for the Communion service for the six grateful men. Christ's presence was honored.

Another maritime chaplain, Deacon Paul Rosenblum, noted that the nontraditional spaces he had to work with felt odd at first. He recalled finding himself in the mess hall, cleaning ashtrays, unplugging the karaoke machine, all in preparation for a Communion service that he wasn't confident could be liturgically correct, given the environment. He worried about what people might think.

"Prayer in small spaces is always interesting," he reflected. "Sometimes, it will be in a hallway or at the top of a gangway where a seafarer stops and asks for a prayer or to receive Communion. Sometimes we'll be praying in a van, taking visiting seafarers to

Walmart to pick up snacks and toiletries." He had to ask himself what's more important: to be a liturgically typical space, or allowing these men and women to receive the Lord? He had to stop worrying about what people thought. "Any place becomes a sacred place if you're doing ministry with people."

**Small spaces in the Big House**

After 18 years as the Director of the Office of Pastoral Outreach for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, Deacon Robert Vigil still feels the twinge whenever he enters a new prison facility. "The fear never goes away," he said. "It's a fear of the unknown. You have to trust in God and pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you. Every story is different; every facility is different. Ministering in prisons forces you to think out of the box."

His favorite story about praying in small spaces is his very first visit to a prison. "As the heavy metal door clanged shut behind me, I felt the fear roiling in my gut," he recalled. "I invited some guys to come join me for a Bible study."

His physical discomfort intensified when he looked up at a giant of a man who seemed to be over 6 feet tall, 350 pounds, and was covered with tattoos from head to foot. "He didn't just stare at me," said Dn. Vigil, "he stared through me." In spite of the menacing figure, Dn. Vigil went into a small side room to sit with a few inmates and began the Bible study.

The giant didn't stop staring at him from the back of the room. Feeling uncomfortable, Dn. Vigil excused himself to use the bathroom. When he came back, he invited the man again to join the Bible study, but he just persisted in his stare.

Dn. Vigil sat himself back down to resume. "Shortly after I started the study group conversation, the guy with the tattoos extended his long arm and beckoned me with his finger," he recalled. "The other inmates were visibly uncomfortable, not knowing what was going to happen next."

Instead of ignoring the imposing man's gesture, Dn. Vigil got up and walked over to the man, who simply said,  I want to join your study."

"I told him that I had already invited him, and he didn't respond," he said. "His response broke all the stereotypes in one sentence. He said, 'When you came back from your break, you really looked at me, you looked past all this,' gesturing to his height and tattoos, 'and you saw my heart.'

"That's when the fear left me, and my ministry took off," Dn. Vigil reflected. "The man not only joined the group but became a big help and was always the first to greet me whenever I visited the facility."

**Small spaces in homes**

Not all the small, sacred moments occur in a healthcare workspace, ship, or prison. Sometimes the Spirit brings us into people's homes.

Michele Rosha BCC, a retired NACC chaplain, recalled ministering to a sick gentleman who, afraid of dying alone, had returned to his ex-wife's home. "He had taken to his bed, was not speaking or praying," she explained. "The family, worried about him, called me to come over. They asked if I could try to get him to talk, so I went with their two adult sons up to the small bedroom.

"They asked Dad again if he wanted to see a priest," she continued. "No response. They left the room, and I just sat by his bedside. I let the Holy Spirit give me the words. 'I just wanted you to know that God is loving and compassionate,' I told him. Into the sacred silence the man said, 'Thank you.'

"I asked again, for the family's benefit, if he wanted to see a priest. No response. So I quietly left the room."

Later that day, Michele received a phone call. Alone, the man had walked down the stairs and joined his family in the living room. After that, he rose to walk back to his bedroom. Weak, the family assisted him climbing up the stairs, but then, with his ex-wife and sons holding him, he died in their arms. He had not, as he had feared, died alone.

**In the bubble**

Miracles happen in small spaces: miracles of connection, miracles of finding peace through prayer, miracles of navigating life's storms.

Galvez likes to think of prayer in small spaces as bubbles. "You can be working with a patient in a big room, crowded by anxious family members and determined medical staff. But in that moment, it's just you and the patient," she mused. "It's as if there's a small bubble around you, creating a small and sacred space where you're just connected."

And those bubbles aren't just for professional use. Galvez said she will often create her own small prayer space when she gets home in a season of grief. "I'll shut the curtains and make the space for God to minister to me. God brings me faith, and hope, and trust — all those things that are so hard for us sometimes as humans."

Pastoral care workers aren't typically blessed with a nicely appointed chapel to do their ministry. Most days are filled with meeting individuals where they are: hospital rooms, prison side rooms, family homes, and even a container ship closet. Understanding the profound gift you bring to the people you encounter will empower you to turn any place into a sacred space, no matter the size.

Formación litúrgica

## Pequeños Espacios, Espacios Sagrados

**Creando momentos fuera de la capilla.**

Por Maryann P. Hobbie BCC

Traducido por Make Gallitelli

Si le pidieras a una persona promedio que mencionara el nombre de un espacio sagrado, probablemente te hablaría de su iglesia, de un santuario famoso o incluso de un cementerio donde descansan sus seres queridos.

Sin embargo, si hicieras la misma pregunta a un capellán o a un trabajador de cuidado pastoral, seguramente escucharías una respuesta diferente, muy personal e íntima. ¿Por qué? Porque, como trabajadores de primera línea en lo que el Papa Francisco llamó el hospital de campo espiritual, estos individuos son verdaderos maestros de la improvisación.

Imagina por un momento encontrarte con una esposa afligida en la zona de ascensores. La habías visto hace apenas una hora, cuando estabas en la habitación de su esposo, distribuyendo la Comunión. En ese momento, ella se mantenía firme frente a sus hijos adolescentes y frente a su esposo, quien tenía una lesión de la médula espinal y cáncer cerebral terminal.

Ahora puedes ver que su compostura está a punto de quebrarse. Gentilmente, y con una breve oración en tu corazón, te acercas a ella y le preguntas si quiere hablar. Su dolor y la lucha de los últimos meses comienzan a salir en silencio. La presencia del Espíritu es fuerte, encontrándose con su vulnerabilidad y sus miedos.

Finalmente, ella está tranquila, y oras en voz alta con ella. Ella respira profundo, lista para dirigirse al estacionamiento y retirarse a la seguridad de su auto, donde, dice, llora todos los días camino a casa.

Así, ese pequeño rincón de la zona de ascensores se habría convertido en un espacio sagrado.

**Un tipo diferente de conversación de ascensor**

Casi todos los proveedores de cuidado espiritual tienen sus propias historias de pequeños espacios en los ascensores. «He saludado a más de un compañero de viaje», recordó Deb Galvez BCC. «Cuando ven mi placa de capellán, simplemente comienzan a compartir la historia de sus familiares hospitalizados, y para cuando han llegado al piso al que se dirigen, me han contado toda su historia».

En el espíritu de la hospitalidad, Galvez los acompaña hasta su destino. «Estás escuchando las historias de sus vidas», continuó. «Estás escuchando su dolor; estás escuchando que han estado distanciados de sus familias. Pero, sobre todo, tú estás escuchando».

**Servicios intencionales en espacios pequeños**

Todos probablemente pueden recordar un momento de espacio pequeño que atesoran, y en muchos casos, las experiencias espirituales más significativas de la vida no encajan en el modelo de servicio de oración programado en una capilla; más bien, surgen de manera orgánica, según la dirección del Espíritu.

Por ejemplo, el diácono John Archer, capellán marítimo para marineros, una vez celebró un servicio, literalmente, en un armario. «La mayoría de los 20 miembros de la tripulación de la India eran hindúes», explicó. «El puñado de católicos entre ellos prefirió ser atendido sin incomodar a sus compañeros de tripulación.» Así, un armario sirvió como lugar para el servicio de Comunión de los seis hombres agradecidos, y de esta manera se honró la presencia de Cristo.

De manera similar, otro capellán marítimo, el diácono Paul Rosenblum, señaló que los espacios no tradicionales con los que debía trabajar le resultaban extraños al principio. Recordó encontrarse en el comedor, limpiando ceniceros y desenchufando el karaoke, todo en preparación para un servicio de Comunión que no estaba seguro de que fuera litúrgicamente correcto, dado el entorno. En ese momento, se preocupaba por lo que pudieran pensar los demás.

No obstante, reflexionó: «La oración en espacios pequeños siempre resulta interesante. A veces será en un pasillo o en la parte superior de una pasarela, donde un marinero se detiene y pide una oración o recibir la Comunión. Otras veces estaremos rezando en una camioneta, mientras trasladamos a marineros a conocer Walmart para comprar bocadillos y artículos de aseo personal.»

Finalmente, tuvo que preguntarse qué era más importante: ¿tener un espacio litúrgicamente típico o permitir que estos hombres y mujeres recibieran al Señor? Con ello, comprendió que debía dejar de preocuparse por lo que pensara la gente. «Cualquier lugar se convierte en un espacio sagrado si estás ejerciendo el ministerio con las personas.»

**Pequeños espacios en la Gran Casa**

Después de dieciocho años como Director de la Oficina de Alcance Pastoral de la Arquidiócesis de Santa Fe, el diácono Robert Vigil todavía siente un escalofrío cada vez que entra a una nueva prisión. «El miedo nunca desaparece», dijo. «Es un miedo a lo desconocido. Tienes que confiar en Dios y rezar para que el Espíritu Santo te guíe. Cada historia es diferente; cada instalación es diferente. Ministrar en prisiones te obliga a pensar de manera creativa.»

Por ejemplo, su historia favorita sobre orar en espacios pequeños se remonta a su primera visita a una prisión. «Cuando la pesada puerta de metal se cerró tras de mí, sentí el miedo agitarse en mi estómago», recordó. «Invité a algunos hombres a unirse a mí estudio bíblico.»

Sin embargo, su incomodidad física se intensificó cuando levantó la mirada y vio a un gigante que parecía medir más de 1,80 metros, pesar 160 kilos y estar cubierto de tatuajes

de pies a cabeza. «Él no solo me miró», dijo el diácono Vigil, «El vio *a través* de mí.» A pesar de la presencia amenazante, el diacono Vigil, ingresó a una pequeña sala lateral para sentarse con algunos internos y comenzó el estudio bíblico.

El gigante no dejaba de observarlo desde el fondo de la sala. Sintiendo incomodidad, el diácono Vigil se excusó para ir al baño. Al regresar, volvió a invitar al hombre a unirse al estudio, pero él persistió únicamente con su intensa mirada.

Entonces, el diácono Vigil se sentó de nuevo para continuar. «Poco después de iniciar la conversación del grupo de estudio, el hombre con los tatuajes extendió su largo brazo y me hizo señas con el dedo,» recordó. «Los otros internos estaban visiblemente incómodos, sin saber qué iba a suceder.»

En lugar de ignorar el gesto del hombre, el diácono Vigil se levantó y caminó hacia él, quien simplemente dijo: “Quiero unirme a tu estudio.”

«Le dije que ya lo había invitado, y él no respondió,» continuó. «Su respuesta rompió todos los estereotipos en una sola frase. El dijo: “Cuando regresaste de tu descanso, realmente me miraste, miraste más allá de todo esto” — señalando hacia su altura y tatuajes — “y viste mi corazón”.

«Fue en ese momento cuando el miedo me abandonó y el ministerio despegó», reflexionó el diacono Vigil. «El hombre no solo se unió al grupo, sino que se convirtió en una gran ayuda y siempre era el primero en saludarme cada vez que visitaba la instalación».

**Pequeños espacios en los hogares**

No todos los pequeños momentos sagrados ocurren en un entorno laboral de un centro de salud, un barco o una prisión. A veces, el Espíritu nos conduce al interior de los hogares de las personas.

Por ejemplo, Michele Rosha BCC, capellana jubilada de la NACC, recordó ministrar a un hombre enfermo que, temiendo morir solo, había regresado a la casa de su exesposa. «Se había acostado en su cama, no hablaba ni rezaba», explicó. «La familia, preocupada por él, me llamó para que fuera a verlo. Me pidieron que intentara hacerlo hablar, así que subí con sus dos hijos adultos al pequeño dormitorio.

«Ellos preguntaron de nuevo al padre si quería ver a un sacerdote», ella continuó. «No respondió. Salieron de la habitación y yo me senté junto a su cama. Dejé que el Espíritu Santo me diera las palabras. “Solo quería que supieras que Dios es amoroso y compasivo”, le dije. En medio del silencio sagrado, el hombre respondió: “Gracias”.

«Volví a preguntar, por el bien de la familia, si quería ver a un sacerdote. No hubo respuesta, así que me retiré de la habitación en silencio».

Más tarde, ese mismo día, Michele recibió una llamada telefónica. Solo, el hombre había bajado las escaleras y se había unido a su familia en la sala de estar. Luego, se levantó para

regresar a su dormitorio. Débil, la familia lo ayudó a subir las escaleras, pero luego, con su exesposa y sus hijos sosteniéndolo, murió en sus brazos. Así, no había muerto solo, como tanto había temido.

**En la burbuja**

Los milagros ocurren en espacios pequeños: milagros de conexión, milagros de encontrar paz a través de la oración, milagros de navegar las tormentas de la vida.

A Galvez gusta pensar en la oración como espacios pequeños, como burbujas. «Puedes estar trabajando con un paciente en una habitación grande, rodeada de familiares ansiosos y personal médico determinado. Pero en ese momento, se trata de solamente tú y el paciente», reflexionó. «Es como si hubiera una pequeña burbuja a tu alrededor, creando un espacio pequeño y sagrado donde simplemente estás conectado».

Y esas burbujas no son solo para el uso profesional. Galvez dijo que a menudo crea su propio pequeño espacio de oración cuando llega a casa durante una temporada de duelo. «Cierro las cortinas y hago espacio para que Dios ministre en mí. Dios me da fe, esperanza y confianza — todas esas cosas que a veces nos resultan tan difíciles como humanos».

Los trabajadores de cuidado pastoral no suelen contar con una capilla bien equipada para realizar su ministerio. La mayor parte del tiempo están llenos de encuentros con personas que se cruzan en sus caminos: habitaciones de hospital, pasillos de prisiones, hogares familiares e incluso un armario en un barco contenedor. Comprender el profundo regalo que brindas a quienes encuentras te empoderará para convertir cualquier lugar en un espacio sagrado, sin importar su tamaño.

Pastoral Ministry

## Time to Celebrate

**Pastoral Care Week lifts up pastoral care ministers.**

By: Moira Bucciarelli BCC

Like the Church's liturgical times of year, hospital systems have their own ways of marking time by recognizing the many staff that keep a hospital system running. Most chaplains know about National Nurses' Week (May 6-12), which began as Nurses' Day in the 1970s.

**The origins**

What chaplains and other pastoral care workers may not know is that their own Pastoral Care Week, October 19-25, was initiated by Sr. Patricia Doerr OP of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains (NACC) in the early 1980s. She worked in conjunction with others at

the Council on Ministry in Specialized Settings (COMISS) and at the Association of Professional Chaplains (APC) to launch Pastoral Care Week.

From the first resolution on Pastoral Care Week issued by the NACC in 1983, to the present, Pastoral Care Week has gained a strong foothold in organizations' annual calendars to become a source of recognition, education, and encouragement for chaplains nationally and internationally.

**A time for connection**

As the Manager of Spiritual Care for the 350-bed Providence Little Company of Mary hospital in Torrance, California, Aviva Levin procured funding from a foundation to host a daylong regional retreat for 50 staff chaplains in the Providence system for Pastoral Care Week in 2024.

"We never hang up our phones and detach from the job," Levin said. "To be with people who speak our language and really know what it feels like to be overwhelmed by the four deaths you had yesterday, it was so meaningful."

The retreat provided an opportunity for the system's chaplains, who usually work solo, to get to know each other and share ideas. Levin witnessed follow-up connections that led to chaplains adapting new programs into their context. "As chaplains, we are all over, and we don't have a team with us, like nurses do. Bouncing ideas off a peer is a treat." She hopes to do a retreat for chaplains in the region every other year.

**Pastoral Care Week 2025**

This year, Levin and her team will emphasize educating hospital staff about what chaplains do and the value they bring to the hospital community. "The Providence Promise to patients and families is: 'Know me, care for me, ease my way,'" she explained. "Everything our chaplains do supports fulfilling that promise."

Levin's plan is to hold five days of interactive and game-based tabling near the hospital cafeteria entrance. "We'll have a different topic each day," she said. Her topics include "Do you know what it takes to be a chaplain?" and "Chaplains by the numbers," about the hours chaplains give attending deaths, providing staff support, responding to codes, doing patient and family care, etc. Another day will focus on chaplain chart note terms and tools of the trade like presence and active listening. "We want to let our coworkers know the richness and capacity of our team; we are more than people who pray. We want to expand the understanding of what a chaplain is and how we can ease your day."

In addition to Levin's tabling plan for the Little Company of Mary location, Providence will hold its fifth annual Spiritual Care Week webinar. The brainchild of Sherri Brewer, Senior Manager of Executive Operations for Providence and her team, the webinar offers the system's chaplains a session to explore a relevant topic, taught by a chaplain or spiritual health leader. In 2025, the session will look at "Chaplaincy at the Crossroads of AI and

Human Dignity." Previous years' topics have included chaplaincy and climate change, workplace violence, research, and systemic injustice.

**NACC's continued support**

Since the first resolution posted in 1983, the NACC has supported and promoted the annual week of recognition and awareness with a variety of material, events, and outreach. This year's Pastoral Care Week programming from NACC will include a special webinar for members, a prayer service, a career fair for students, and more!

"Pastoral Care Week has always been an important event for the NACC," said the association's Executive Director, Erica Cohen Moore. "It's vital that we set aside time to recognize and celebrate the work of our chaplains and pastoral care ministers. It's a time to share our story and affirm the work of so many who bring Christ into some of the most difficult places and situations in our society."

Pastoral Ministry

## Companions at the Threshold

**Doulas bring a special kind of care at the end of a lifetime.**

By: Richard Hadley BCC

Anyone who has been pregnancy-adjacent in the past 25 years has likely pondered, discussed, heard about, and possibly hired a doula to accompany the expecting mom-to-be through the pregnancy and into the initial stages of parenthood. If your ministry practice is in the birth and maternity space, you have probably had a chance to work with a doula.

But most people are not aware that there are emerging doula practice fields at the other end of life's journey. In a culture that often avoids conversations about death, a quiet revolution is taking place — led by compassionate individuals who accompany a person or their family at the end of life.

These nonmedical professionals offer holistic support to those facing terminal diagnoses and their families, guiding them through one of life's most profound transitions with empathy, presence, and care.

**End-of-life doulas**

End-of-life doulas (EOLDs) provide emotional, spiritual, and practical support to an individual during the final stages of their life. Unlike medical professionals, EOLDs focus on the human experience of dying. Their work is rooted in compassion and nonjudgmental care, often filling gaps left by traditional healthcare systems. Whether sitting at the bedside

during active dying or helping families prepare in advance, doulas bring a sense of calm and clarity to a time often marked by confusion and grief.

“A doula provides their patient with the support and latitude needed to face their end-of-life challenges with dignity and grace,” explained Jeannine Millner, a certified doula. “We listen with acuity and are emotionally present for the patient and their loved ones. We serve as a nonmedical member of the healthcare team and can help decode ‘med-speak.’”

**Bereavement doulas**

Another practice growing in the United States is bereavement doulas. “A bereavement doula is a very specific practice,” explained Abby Jorgensen PhD, founder of Haven Bereavement Doulas and author of the book, *A Catholic Guide to Miscarriage, Stillbirth, and Infant Loss*. “Where a death doula, if you will, is primarily focused on the person who is dying, a bereavement doula is someone who accompanies the family of a little one who has died anywhere from conception through the first year. In medical speak, that’s termed perinatal loss.”

**Personal callings**

For Delaney Rhea, the journey began with a deeply personal experience. “When my grandfather and father-in-law died within two hours of each other, I was overwhelmed — not just with grief, but with the chaos of not knowing how to handle death,” she shared. That moment sparked a journey of bereavement and discovery, leading to the fulfilling work of companioning with others as a “death doula.”

Training as a Stephen Minister brought forward her skills in compassion and brought out an unconditional positive regard about becoming an end-of-life doula. Rhea was also inspired by her paternal grandmother. “I would say that she was serving as a death doula to her community in the 1900s, way before that term was first used. She spent time with those at the end of life with such a calming love. She embodied being a caregiver when there was no longer an option of curing.”

Millner’s path was similar. “Following the unexpected death of my first husband, I felt a strong calling to help the bereaved. I couldn’t find the support I needed, nor the guidance for my children. That led me to Annie’s Hope and eventually to a master of science in thanatology.”

“My mom had a thing when I was growing up, that we just don't let people grieve alone,” recalled Jorgensen. “I think actually that God really repurposed some hard experiences for good, which I'm grateful for. There were about five perinatal losses in one summer in my really close circle of influence. And I kept thinking, what am I doing? How can I fix this? How can I solve this? What do I say that's the right thing that's going to take away their pain?

“I'm also a professor of sociology at St. Louis University. And so, being the good little budding academic, I went and looked up, ‘How do you fix this problem? How do you take

away people's pain?' And of course, realized very quickly you don't get to; you just get to make sure that they don't have to go through it alone."

**Better call a doula**

The best time to engage an EOLD is early — ideally as soon as a terminal diagnosis is made, explained Rhea. "Much like hospice, the longer a person and their family have access to support, the better they can manage the hardships of end-of-life. Doulas can assist with planning, organizing affairs, and creating meaningful legacy projects while the individual is still active and communicative."

"Because the goal of a doula is to create a good death, we can begin working with a patient any time they deem appropriate," Millner says. "Unlike hospice, doulas don't require a six-month prognosis. We can help with planning, paperwork, and conversations about what a 'good death' looks like."

The timing for a bereavement doula is a little different, due to the nature of the situation. "One thing that's really common for me is that I'm working with families who the medical system has sent home," explained Jorgensen.

"A lot of times when families experience a loss, especially if it's an earlier loss, like before 20 weeks' gestation, which is the marker between a miscarriage and a stillbirth in the US, they will seek medical care.

"Then that medical care provider will say, 'Go home and expect cramping to start within a couple hours and call me if you get a fever or you bleed through more than one pad in an hour.' And that's it. Those families are sent home, but they're mourning the loss of their little one. And the family doesn't get access to the emotional and spiritual resources that chaplains provide through hospital settings."

**Where doulas and chaplains dovetail**

Collaboration with chaplains can deliver excellent care for patients. "Often chaplains have to visit many patients in a hospital or hospice setting, so they only have so much time with each person," Rhea said. "Because we are hired by the family or individual, doulas can fill in gaps of care, offering much more bedside companionship and death-specific support, and that really complements a chaplain's care."

"I think pastoral care and doula care can definitely be parallel, which is really nice," said Jorgensen. "In my bereavement doula role, I might work with a family early on, if they know there's a high chance of loss or they know the loss will occur, but we're not sure when. I might be working with them in birth planning.

"A birth is still a birth, no matter the outcome, whether the little one is alive or dead when they're born. So, I might be helping them with the birth plan or I might be working with the parents about how to talk with older kids — siblings of the little one. Chaplains may be involved during that pre-birth time, not it's not the norm.

“When we get to the birth, the chaplains are often really involved,” she continued. “That's where I have the most connection with chaplains, and one of us being in the room doesn't mean the other one shouldn't be in the room.

“And so that can be very helpful in terms of filling out the support team, making sure that every need is addressed. I’m the one saying, ‘Here's what the doctor's talking about when they say this is what's happening with your cervix.’ The chaplains typically don’t have a lot of OB training to cover that part of a birthing mother’s needs.

“But then if somebody wants to have a particular blessing or prayer said over them, they’re going to receive that much differently from a chaplain than they’d receive that from me. So, filling out the support team during the birth is really beautiful and really important.”

**Training and challenges**

The path to becoming a doula is varied. Training programs range from brief online courses to months-long, in-person instruction. This lack of uniformity means those who reach out for an EOLD’s services should investigate the doula’s background and experience before they hire her or him.

“I received my training from Lifespan Doulas in Ann Arbor, Michigan,” Delaney explained. “And I just completed my master of science in thanatology, which deepened my understanding of death education and its impact on communities.”

Millner earned her certificates from the University of Vermont’s Robert Larner, M.D. College of Medicine and holds credentials in both adult and pediatric practice. Others train through organizations like the International End-of-Life Doula Association (INELDA) or the National End-of-Life Doula Alliance (NEDA).

Jorgensen has leveraged her academic experience to create training and education resources through her organization, Haven Bereavement Doulas. “The Haven team is about helping people who are interested in becoming a doula get more grief-informed, helping them get more ready to support families.”

In addition to education, Haven is an emerging professional association. “We have our Haven Certified Bereavement Doula (HCBD) credential program, our code of ethics, our scope of practice, even efforts to change legislation,” Jorgensen said. “But we’re still really young compared to other organizations, and it will take some time to establish our members’ reputations for quality care. The National Association of Catholic Chaplains has done that in an incredible way with chaplains, and we've seen it pay off. So, if bereavement doulas can follow that model, we will be in a great space.”

**A culture ready for change**

As our society begins to confront its fear and denial of death, the role of end-of-life and bereavement doulas becomes increasingly vital. They are not healers in the traditional

sense, but companions — guiding individuals and families through the sacred threshold of life's end with grace, dignity, and love.

Their work reminds us that death is not just a medical event, but a deeply human experience. And in that space, doulas offer something truly transformative: presence. "End-of-life doulas are inherently compassionate servants," added Millner. "They have answered a call to do some of the hardest work known to humanity — accompanying the dying on their journey from this earth to the unknown that lies ahead."

**Resources**

Learn more about doulas with these resources:

INELDA

NEDA

Midwest End-of-Life Doula Collective

Haven Bereavement Doulas

*A Catholic Guide to Miscarriage, Stillbirth, and Infant Loss* by Abigail Jorgensen

## NACC News

**Introducing the Go Forth Campaign — Celebrating 60 Years of NACC**

As part of our 60th anniversary, the NACC is launching the Go Forth Campaign, an opportunity for our chaplains and members to share the good news of the NACC, chaplaincy, and pastoral ministry within their communities.

Go Forth comes from the Church's sending, *Ite, missa est* — "You are sent" — and from Christ's great commission:

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Through this campaign, we invite NACC chaplains to embody the Church's mission of accompaniment, walking with those who suffer, offering compassionate pastoral and spiritual care, and being a beacon of hope in a hurting world.

The Go Forth Campaign also asks each of us to pause and reflect, asking how might we share the story of chaplaincy and pastoral ministry with those who have yet to encounter it?

The call of this campaign is to introduce parish communities, dioceses, universities, and beyond to the good and faithful work of NACC.

**Coming in 2026: The NACC Ministry Institute**

In the first quarter of 2026, the NACC will launch the Ministry Institute, a new initiative designed to support the ongoing education and formation of our members and chaplains, as well as provide an entry point for those seeking basic training in pastoral care.

As part of this effort, we are developing two cornerstone offerings: the Pastoral Care Foundations Course and a course on Ethical and Religious Directives for those serving in healthcare settings. These resources will be delivered through a new Learning Management System, which will allow us to expand and enhance our educational opportunities in the years ahead.

We are excited to share this new resource with you in the coming year. Stay tuned for more details in the months ahead!

**NACC Expands CPE Opportunities — CPEI and CPSP**

The NACC is pleased to announce a new partnership with Clinical Pastoral Education International (CPEI) and the College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy (CPSP), recognizing their Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) units toward certification, thereby expanding CPE opportunities for NACC's members and individuals discerning chaplaincy, regardless of geography.

**About CPEI**

Clinical Pastoral Education International (CPEI) is accredited by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC), recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). CPEI offers high-quality CPE, providing innovative training, credentialing, and professional development for spiritual care professionals nationwide. To learn more, visit cpei.edu.

**About CPSP**

The College of Pastoral Supervision & Psychotherapy (CPSP) is a covenantal community committed to the clinical, spiritual, and professional formation of chaplains, psychotherapists, and diplomate supervisors. Through chapter-based peer support, rigorous training, and ethical accountability, CPSP fosters excellence in pastoral care across diverse clinical settings. To learn more, visit cpsp.org.

**Welcoming New Director of Development: Julie McCaw**

The NACC community is delighted to welcome Julie McCaw as our new Director of Development. Julie comes to us from Kansas City, Missouri, where she lives with her husband, Dave. Together, they have five adult children. She enjoys traveling, playing golf,

and spending time with her family, especially with her two beloved Doodles, who bring joy and energy to daily life.

Professionally, Julie brings a wealth of experience and a heart of service. She previously served as the executive director of a nonprofit dedicated to accompanying individuals living on the streets, addressing food insecurity, and supporting many who live on the margins of society. Her leadership and compassion reflect a deep commitment to the mission of caring for those most in need.

A lifelong Catholic, Julie is excited to bring her passion for service and her development expertise to the NACC. We look forward to the many ways Julie will strengthen and grow our community. Please join us in welcoming Julie to the NACC!

**The North Central Prairie Chaplain Conference**

The annual North Central Prairie Chaplain Conference took place September 25-26 on the beautiful campus of St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota. Chaplains and members joined both in person and virtually for this meaningful gathering.

This year's theme focused on moral injury and the role and responsibility of chaplains in accompanying those who carry it. The two days were filled with prayer, insightful presentations, rich fellowship, and the peace found in the serene surroundings of St. John's.

This annual conference continues to be a cherished opportunity for learning, connection, and spiritual growth, an event that nurtures chaplains in their vital ministry and strengthens the bonds of community year after year.

**First Responder Chaplains Gather in Seattle**

On August 13, Joe Cotton, Executive Director for the Office of the Vicar General for the Archdiocese of Seattle, brought together first responder chaplains and ministers for a day of connection and conversation. The group explored how to support one another, provide peer support, consider certification pathways, and strengthen ties with the NACC.

NACC chaplain Phil Reeves MTS, BCC, attended with his service dog, Darcy, offering an introduction to the work of Guide Dogs of America.

The conversation sparked new initiatives right away. Participants committed to monthly virtual peer support sessions and began planning a First Responder Mass at the local cathedral for National First Responders Day on October 28.

NACC was honored to take part in this first step and looks forward to expanding support for chaplains and members serving in first responder and law enforcement ministries.

## Calendar of Events

### Month of November

| | |
|---|---|
| | Black Catholic History Month |
| November 1 | All Saints' Day |
| November 2 | All Souls' Day |
| November 6 | FREE NACC Webinar - First Responder Chaplaincy: What it is and Why it's Important (Chaplain Joe Cotton MA and Chaplain Phil Reeves MTS BCC) |
| November 11 | Baltimore Gathering - Accompanying the Bereaved on their Road to Emmaus |
| November 20 | NACC Webinar – Spirituality, Religion, and Mental Health |
| November 27 | Thanksgiving |
| November 30 | First Sunday of Advent |

### Month of December

| | |
|---|---|
| December 8 | Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary |
| December 12 | Our Lady of Guadalupe |
| December 14 | Jubilee of Prisoners |
| December 16–24 | Simbang Gabi |
| December 18 | NACC Webinar - Practice of Rest as Worship to Your Community |
| December 25 | Christmas, The Nativity of the Lord |

### Month of January

| | |
|---|---|
| January 1 | The Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God |
| January 5 | The Epiphany of the Lord |
| January 18–25 | Week of Prayer for Christian Unity |

### Month of February

| | |
|---|---|
| February 7 | World Day of the Sick Gathering & Mass with Archbishop Garcia-Siller in San Antonio, TX. Co-sponsored with Catholic Health Association of the United States. |
| February 8 | International Day of Prayer & Awareness Against Human Trafficking |
| February 11 | World Day of the Sick |
| February 17 | Lunar New Year |

The Bishop's Column

## Go Forth

Expectation. Stillness. Waiting. Advent's spiritual elements are also three gifts of chaplaincy.

As we enter the depths of autumn, we can glimpse in the distance the growing closeness of the Advent season. Much of our contemporary culture tends to consider Advent a mere prelude to the celebration of Christmas. However, I firmly believe Advent is a unique liturgical event that has its own integrity, meaning, and spirit ,and Catholic chaplains are specially formed and blessed to help people discover and experience the precious grace of awaiting the coming of our Lord.

One of the key spiritual elements of Advent is a sense of expectation. It is a special time of longing. After all, we recall the yearning of our ancestors in the Jewish faith for the fulfillment of the promise of salvation and their longing for liberation from the oppression of sin and injustice. With them, we listen to the words of the great prophets who speak of the time when the bright hope of the Lord will dispel the darkness of despair. An opportune way to mark the Advent season and to capture this sense of expectation is to devote time to identifying a personal longing within our own heart. Because of their special charisms of pastoral care and accompaniment, I suggest that Catholic chaplains are prime candidates to assist people in a journey to name a particular area of one's life that yearns for the grace of the Lord. This yearning might be a desire for the reconciliation of a relationship, the healing of a broken place in oneself, or the desire for a fresh outlook on the future. I encourage our chaplains to generously invest their time in helping people identify this deep longing and to guide them in articulating an expression of this to the Lord in prayer. I can envision how this journey will be a source of expectation and the place where one longs for the presence of Christ to be born anew.

A second key spiritual element of the Advent season is a sense of stillness. In contrast to the bombast and merrymaking of the Christmas season, Advent is a quiet time. This stillness is related to the quietude of the Chosen People straining in the silence to hear the Word of God announcing a coming Day of Salvation. Moreover, it reflects the serenity of the young Virgin Mary as she intently listens for the heartbeat of eternal life become flesh

in her womb. Advent is a time for us to seek such quiet in our lives. Because Catholic chaplains are masters of the ministry of peaceful presence and skilled in the arts of listening and discernment, I call upon them to encourage people to learn the wisdom of entering into and befriending the silence. As the author of Psalm 46 promises, it is within this very stillness that we will come to know God.

Lastly, a third key spiritual element of the Advent season is a sense of waiting. While a famous holiday tune opines that "we need a little Christmas," the fact of the matter is that Christmas comes to us in its own time. No amount of compulsion can hurry the arrival of the Lord's presence or quicken its pace. In Advent we unite with our Jewish brothers and sisters of ancient days who waited generation after generation for the Promised One. Because Catholic chaplains are well aware that patience is a virtue and not a spiritual gift one simply inherits, the gentleness and kindly accommodation that is a hallmark of their pastoral visits identifies them as mentors of the lessons of a patient approach in the unfolding of life. May they school others in the practice of slowing down one's life and letting life come to us. In a world addicted to instant gratification and on-demand acquisition, it is good for us to wait and to learn anew who is truly in control of our life and our destiny.

And, so, by all means, let us stir up the Christmas spirit and look with eagerness and enthusiasm toward the 25th of December. Yet, let us not rush this journey too speedily. Let's linger for a while in Advent and savor its special sense of expectation, stillness, and waiting. With the help of our Catholic chaplains, I promise you that the effort you invest in honoring the season of Advent could well result in one of the finest Christmas gifts you will ever receive!

Most Reverend Jeffrey R. Haines

Auxiliary Bishop, Archdiocese of Milwaukee

Episcopal Liaison of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Columna del obispo

## Avanza

Expectativa. Quietud. Espera. Los elementos espirituales del Adviento son también tres dones de la capellanía.

A medida que nos adentramos en el otoño, podemos vislumbrar en la distancia la creciente cercanía de la temporada de Adviento. Gran parte de nuestra cultura contemporánea tiende a considerar el Adviento como un mero preludio de la celebración de la Navidad. Sin embargo, estoy convencido que el Adviento es un acontecimiento litúrgico único que posee su propia integridad, significado y espíritu, y que los capellanes

católicos están especialmente formados y bendecidos para ayudar a las personas a descubrir y experimentar la preciosa gracia de esperar la venida de nuestro Señor.

Uno de los elementos espirituales clave del Adviento es la sensación de expectación. Es un tiempo especial de anhelo. Después de todo, recordamos el anhelo de nuestros antepasados en la fe judía por ver cumplida la promesa de salvación y por alcanzar la liberación de la opresión del pecado y la injusticia. Al igual que ellos, escuchamos las palabras de los grandes profetas que anuncian el tiempo en que la brillante esperanza del Señor disipará la oscuridad de la desesperanza. Una forma oportuna de marcar la temporada de Adviento y captar este espíritu de expectativa es dedicar tiempo a identificar un anhelo personal en lo profundo de nuestro corazón. Gracias a su carisma especiales de cuidado pastoral y acompañamiento, considero que los capellanes católicos son los más indicados para ayudar a las personas en el camino de reconocer en su vida un área particular que anhela la gracia del Señor. Este anhelo puede ser el deseo de reconciliar una relación, sanar una herida interior o abrirse a una nueva mirada hacia el futuro. Animo a nuestros capellanes a invertir generosamente su tiempo en ayudar a las personas a identificar este profundo anhelo y a guiarlas para que lo expresen al Señor en oración. Puedo vislumbrar cómo este proceso se convertirá en fuente de expectativa y en el lugar donde uno anhela que la presencia de Cristo renazca.

Un segundo elemento espiritual clave del tiempo de Adviento es la sensación de quietud. En contraste con la pompa y la alegría de la temporada navideña, el Adviento es un tiempo de quietud. Esta quietud evoca la del Pueblo Elegido, que se esfuerza en el silencio por escuchar la Palabra de Dios anunciando la llegada del Día de la Salvación. Además, refleja la serenidad de la joven Virgen María, que escucha atentamente los latidos del corazón de la vida eterna encarnando en su vientre. El Adviento es un tiempo para que busquemos esa quietud en nuestras vidas. Dado que los capellanes católicos son maestros en el ministerio de la presencia pacífica y expertos en el arte de escuchar y discernir, los invito, como capellanes, a animar a las personas a aprender la sabiduría de entrar en el silencio y amigarse con él. Como bien promete el autor del Salmo 46, es dentro de esta misma quietud que llegaremos a conocer a Dios.

Por último, un tercer elemento espiritual clave del Adviento es la sensación de espera. Si bien una famosa canción navideña afirma que «necesitamos un poco de Navidad», lo cierto es que la Navidad llega a su debido tiempo. Ninguna urgencia humana puede acelerar la venida de la presencia del Señor ni acelerar su ritmo. En el Adviento nos unimos a nuestros hermanos y hermanas judíos de la antigüedad, que esperaron generación tras generación a El Prometido. Como los capellanes católicos saben muy bien que la paciencia es una virtud y no un don espiritual que simplemente se hereda, la amabilidad y la gentileza que caracterizan sus visitas pastorales los identifican como verdaderos mentores para enseñar el valor de un enfoque paciente en el desarrollo de la vida. Que puedan enseñar a otros la práctica de ralentizar la vida y dejar que esta llegue en su momento hasta nosotros. En un mundo adicto a la gratificación inmediata y a la adquisición bajo demanda, nos beneficiaría

esperar y aprender de nuevo quién tiene realmente el control de nuestra vida y nuestro destino.

Por lo tanto, animémonos con el espíritu navideño y aguardemos con ansias y entusiasmo el 25 de diciembre. Pero no nos apresuremos demasiado en este camino. Mas bien, detengámonos un momento en el Adviento y saboreemos su especial sensación de expectación, quietud y espera. Con la ayuda de nuestros capellanes católicos, yo les prometo que el esfuerzo que inviertan en honrar la temporada de Adviento bien podría convertirse en uno de los mejores regalos de Navidad que jamás hayan recibido.

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