

an essay:

A PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY & APPLYING IT AT THE BEDSIDE

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1. My understanding of human nature and how people grow, change and are healed

Fallen human nature is corrupted, having a natural tendency towards sin, and yet is not totally so.¹ All men have the potential to choose to do good over evil because he still retains certain Natural Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance.² This is so because man bears The Image of GOD³ and his purpose rests in GOD.⁴ His human nature is fulfilled only in “The Peace of GOD that surpasses all understanding...”⁵ in right relationship with The Lord and with others. Thus Saint Augustine says, O Lord, “...You have made us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in You!”⁶

Real positive growth comes when we find safe spaces to explore our life Story – our history, experiences and feelings – with empathetic confidants, moving us closer to being reborn in The Lord.⁷ This enables us to be in right relationship with GOD and others, fulfilling The Two Great Commandments, to love GOD fully and our neighbor as ourselves.⁸ Through Baptism, we are Born Again into in New Covenant with GOD because of His Love for us, no longer separated from Him because of our sin, becoming heirs to The Promise of Eternal Life.⁹ Thus the need to be part of The Living Body of CHRIST, The Faithful Church.¹⁰

Change for Good comes through our cooperation with Divine Grace, that “...free unmerited Love and favor of GOD” showered upon us, that favorable influence of The HOLY SPIRIT “in renewing the heart and restraining from sin.”¹¹ Only in GOD’s amazing Grace, poured out for us most fully at The Cross of JESUS CHRIST, can we change to a life filled with The Christian Virtues of Faith, Hope and Love.¹² And of these three, “the greatest of these is Love.”¹³

True healing comes in living daily in The Lord, our Eternal Good Shepherd.¹⁴ It comes in being saved by Grace through Faith, and not Good Works. It comes by embracing the responsibilities of a new life in Him in keeping The Law, living within our Faith Community, repenting when we sin and joyfully carrying out the Good Works that GOD calls us to.¹⁵ It comes in being able to lay our burdens down before The Lord, Who alone gives us lasting rest for our souls.¹⁶

¹ 1, CCC # 1264, p 353-354.

² 1, CCC # 1806-1809, p 496-497. Natural Virtues: Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, Temperance.

³ 2, NAB, GENESIS 1:26.

⁴ 3, WLC 1:1, “Man's Chief and highest end is to glorify GOD, and fully to enjoy Him forever.”

⁵ 2, NAB, PHILIPPIANS 4:7.

⁶ 1, CCC, # 30, p 18-19. Saint Augustine.

⁷ 2, NAB, JOHN 3:3.

⁸ 2, NAB, DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5 & LEVITICUS 19:18; MATTHEW 22:36-40.

⁹ 2, NAB, JOHN 3:16.

¹⁰ 2, NAB, EPHESIANS 5:22-32.

¹¹ 4, Webster’s 1828 Dictionary, “Grace,” noun, entries 2-3, p GRA – GRA.

¹² 1, CCC, # 1814,1817,1822, p 498-501. Theological Virtues: Faith, Hope, Love.

¹³ 2, NAB, ICORINTHIANS 13:13.

¹⁴ 2, NAB, PSALM 23:1-6.

¹⁵ 2, NAB, EPHESIANS 2:8-10.

¹⁶ 2, NAB, MATTHEW 11:28-30.

At the bedside:

How can I help you find the good and confront the evil?
How can I help you find your ultimate life purpose and place of peace?
How can I help you find the love of GOD, others and self?
How can I help you draw closer to GOD and to those you cherish?
Let me offer you a safe space in GOD's Name to tell your Story.
What is holy and sacramental to you, and how can I help you receive them?
What beautiful things of life for you and your loved ones need to be celebrated?
What forgiveness do you need to receive and give that I can help you find?
Can I accompany you as you search for The Holy, community, hope and meaning?

2. My personal theology of how GOD is present in the world today

GOD is already present in all of creation and not far off. He is present in His Word, testifying of His Love. GOD is present in His Providence, directing all things towards the good of people. He is Present in His Sacraments, through The Church, pouring out The Grace that each signifies. GOD is present in His Spirit, surrounding us, going before us and dwelling within us. He is present in all times and places, recording and punishing evil, witnessing and rewarding good.¹⁷ GOD is present when 2 or more gather in His Name. He is present when one person gives self to another for the love of GOD and neighbor. There is no time or place that GOD is not with us always.¹⁸

This means GOD is already on the scene when I arrive at the bedside as a Chaplain. His Presence does not depend upon my showing up. GOD is already working there in a multitude of ways. Knowing this relieves me of much of my worry of finding the exact right words and right actions in my pastoral care as a Chaplain. The Lord uses me for the time that I am there in His Name in mysterious ways that I only begin to understand – sacramentally as an instrument, channel and vessel of GOD's Grace. The most common things I do as a Chaplain - being with, listening to and praying for people – and all that I am and am not, are as much in GOD's hands as are the people He sends me to care for.

At the bedside:

Does my presence with you bring a sacramental Presence of GOD into your sight?
Does my presence with you remind you of The Presence of GOD in your life?
Do you need me to help you reconnect with The Sacraments of your Faith Tradition?
How can I help you find GOD's Presence where you are now?

¹⁷ 2, NAB, I TIMOTHY 1:17.

¹⁸ 2, NAB, MATTHEW 28:20.

3. My understanding of Ministry and myself as a Minister

I believe that I am a faithful and zealous lay Catholic. I have a high sense of being part of The Body of CHRIST,¹⁹ the part I presently occupy being a lay Chaplain in a secular hospital within an interfaith Ministry.²⁰ I am happily bound by sacred duty to not knowingly do or say things in my office as lay Chaplain that is contrary to The Catholic Church, the hospital I serve, the Chaplain Department in which GOD has presently placed me, nor the profession of Chaplaincy. Most of the time I think I keep these trusts well. Sometimes I fail. My growing edge here is to explore how these trusts can more flexibly inform one another in my current office as lay Chaplain.

Not everyone needs Religious care from me as a Chaplain. But I can offer Spiritual care to virtually everyone I am called to care for. This seems to be made more possible in me by the curious blessing of not carrying the dual mantles of the office of Chaplain and the office of ordained Minister. This opens a wide field of opportunity for me to minister to people of all Faiths and of no Faiths, based first on common humanity. While people generally see the Chaplain as coming in The Name of The LORD, hearing their Spiritual needs is at times all that people need from me. If people also want Religious care from me, I can then offer this with deeper sensitivity and connectedness.

Being open in this way allows me to do a spiritual assessment informally as I find out who people are through their Story. From my own experience, I know that when we feel we are appreciated and our story respected, then our sense of The Holy, our support systems, what we hope for and in and how we find meaning flow as part of sharing ourselves.²¹ This is one of the fruits of the remarkable and joyful shift I see in my pastoral care from “therapeutic listener” and fixer of life problems to “healing listener” and companion of people on their life journeys.²²

At the bedside:

Tell me who you are in your life Story – your history, experiences and feelings.
I am curious if and how you feel a sense that GOD is somehow with you now.
I am wondering what kind of support you have - Family, Faith Community, friends?
What are you hoping for now? Where do you put your hope in?
What kind of meaning or purpose do you see in all of this?
How do you need me to be with you now? In the spiritual? In the religious? In both?
I will be an empathetic companion to you, so that you may know you are not alone.
I will be a healing listener to you, so that you know that you are heard by man and GOD.

¹⁹ 2, NAB, EPHESIANS 5:22-33.

²⁰ 2, NAB, I CORINTHIANS 12:27-31.

²¹ 5, Mount Carmel Medical Center, Pastoral Care Department, “Spiritual Assessment Instrument.” 1989. 1.) “The Holy” – Religion, Spirituality; 2.) “Community” – Family, Friends, Faith community; 3.) “Hope” – hope for; hope in; 4.) “Meaning” – making sense of situation.

²² 6, Miller, “The Art of Listening in a Healing Way,” p 13, paragraphs 2-3.

4. Images that inform my practice of Ministry

The Good Samaritan bound up his neighbor's wounds with his own hands and cared for him out of his own resources. This, even though to him, the one in distress was a total stranger, and possibly even of a different Faith, race, culture and community. I offer to bind up the wounds and care for my neighbors as a hospital Chaplain because I love GOD and because my heart feels for the affliction of others, even the stranger. Especially the stranger. As a hospital Chaplain, I am a "Good Samaritan."²³

Henry Nouwen talks of The Wounded Healer. It is exactly because I have suffered wounds in my life, and because GOD has healed my wounds – some partially and some completely – that I am able to feel for and be open to caring for my neighbor. "For a deep understanding of his own pain makes it possible for... [the Minister] to convert his weakness into strength and to offer his own experience as a source of healing to those who are often lost in the darkness of their own misunderstood sufferings."²⁴ My wounds – and their healing - help me to feel and show understanding for others in their woundedness as a Christian, a pastoral caregiver and as a human being. As a hospital Chaplain, I am a "Wounded Healer."²⁵

Saint Francis of Assisi directed his monks, in their care of others, to "preach The Gospel at all times. And when necessary, use words."²⁶ My hope is to be an instrument and vessel of GOD's Peace for others as good people throughout my life have been and are to me. So I pray, "Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, Faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. And where there is sadness, joy...!" Within GOD's Peace, I am a breaker of people's loneliness and aloneness. As a hospital Chaplain, I am a "Saint Francis of Assisi."²⁷

King David, the one time shepherd, writes of The LORD as The Eternal Good Shepherd in PSALM 23. GOD feeds, waters, restores, guides, protects, encourages, anoints, blesses, delivers and loves us as we turn to Him.²⁸ GOD's Mercy and faithfulness endure forever.²⁹ JESUS CHRIST is The Good Shepherd Incarnate, Who lays down His life for the sheep, giving life.³⁰ It is not my place as a hospital Chaplain to be the Minister who guides people on a particular Faith journey.

²³ 2, NAB, LUKE 10:30-37.

²⁴ 7, Dykstra, "Images of Pastoral Care," Henry Nouwen, "The Wounded Healer," p 79, paragraph 6 – p 80.

²⁵ 7, Ibid., p 77-84.

²⁶ 8, Kiefer, "Francis of Assisi, Friar," p 1, paragraph 5.

²⁷ 9, Attributed to Saint Francis, "Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi."

²⁸ 2, NAB, PSALM 23:1-6.

²⁹ 2, NAB, PSALM 100:5.

³⁰ 2, NAB, JOHN 10:10-11.

But it is my place in my present office to accompany, witness and encourage people in their own Faith journeys, if that is where they wish to go. In many ways, I am called to shepherd people, especially through the initial shock of emergent situations. I guide, advocate for, protect, enable and travel with those I care for. Every time I report for duty, in a deep way often beyond human words, I lay down my life for others. As a hospital Chaplain, I am a “Good Shepherd.”

Robert Dykstra talks of the hospital Chaplain as “The Intimate Stranger.” As one who comes to minister to the suffering, but who is not ordained, I am relieved of having to be a defender of The Faith, a dispenser of Sacraments, a Teacher of The Scriptures, an Evangelist, a Preacher or Prophet. I come in GOD’s Name and, if that will not suffice, in a common humanity. I come as a one-time companion and confessor – to whom giving account as a religious figure will not likely be met again. I can thus hear and accompany people in parts of their feelings and questions that they would likely never share with their Pastor, Rabbi or Priest. As a lay hospital Chaplain, I am “The Intimate Stranger.”³¹

At the bedside:

I will be a Good Samaritan to you by binding up your wounds.

I will be a Wounded Healer to you by feeling your pain.

I will be a Saint Francis of Assisi to you by being an instrument of GOD’s Peace to you.

I will be a Good Shepherd to you by laying down a part of my life for you.

I will be an Intimate Stranger to you by hearing your confessions that none else can bear.

5. Barriers that inhibit the work of GOD in the world and how they are overcome

The lack of respect of men for our fellow man is in direct proportion to our loss of respect for GOD and His Laws. Thus a loss of respect for human dignity. If we do not respect The One Who creates us in His Own Image, is it surprising that we lose respect for our neighbor and ourselves? The correction is in The Two Great Commandments, to love GOD fully and to love others as much as self.³² From this flows The Golden Rule, to do to others as we would have others do to us.³³ As a hospital Chaplain, I am called to set an example of respect for our fellow man.

The lack of connectedness of men to our fellow man occurs when we lose sight of GOD as our Father in Heaven and thus our common humanity. We then seem to feel free to appropriate permission to use and abuse others for the sake of ourselves. The correction is, even if we can not see The Image of GOD in others,³⁴ to at least see our own need for Spiritual Well-Being in our neighbor - that common search for meaning, purpose and connectedness with others, self, creativity and a higher power.³⁵ If we can not have Charity for one another for CHRIST’s Sake, we can at least have empathy for

³¹ 7, Dykstra, “Images of Pastoral Care.” Robert Dykstra, Chapter 11, “The Intimate Stranger,” p 131, “Theme # 4, The Importance of Leaving in Crisis Work,” paragraph 2-4.

³² 2, NAB, MATTHEW 22:36-40.

³³ 2, NAB, MATTHEW 7:12.

³⁴ 2, NAB, GENESIS 1:27.

³⁵ 10, Nursing Diagnosis Handbook, “Spiritual well-being,” Definition, p 1153.

one another for humanity's sake. As a hospital Chaplain, I am called to remind others of our common spiritual connectedness.

There is the lack of mercy of men for our fellow man which flows from a materialistic worldview divorced from the spiritual. This can only lead people to consuming one another for the sake of self. The correction is embodied in such Faith Traditions as The Catholic Teaching on "Works of Mercy," both spiritual and physical, testifying to Divine Presence and Love working in the midst of human cruelty and want. The Spiritual: to admonish sinners; to instruct the uninformed; to counsel the doubtful; to comfort the sorrowful; to be patient with those in error; to foster forgiveness as The Lord forgives us; to pray for the living and the dead. The Physical: to give drink to the thirsty; to clothe the naked; to shelter the homeless; to visit the imprisoned; to visit the sick; to bury the dead. As a hospital Chaplain, I am called to care for others in Works of Mercy, testifying to The Presence and Love of GOD in our midst. ³⁶

At the bedside:

I will treat you with respect, and others will see, and do the same.

I will connect with you in our common humanity, and others will see, and do the same.

I will care for you in Works of Mercy, testifying to GOD's Love and Mercy.

Others will see, and do the same!

³⁶ 11, Kosicki "I Demand Deeds of Mercy," p 13, "Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy"

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