

For the

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By the Rev. John A. Fale, Associate Executive Director of LCMS World Relief and Human Care, Saint Louis, Missouri

Nearly every day of the 14 years that I served as a chaplain and pastoral counselor I was energized by the fact that I would get to meet people who were looking for a word of comfort . . . a word of hope . . . something to hold on to . . . something to hold them . . . something . . . anything . . . as illness, disease, death, or broken marital and family relationships knocked the stuffing out of them. I was grateful that I had something to offer them.

7 You Care! You Understand!

By the Rev. Dr. Richard C. Eyer, Director Emeritus of Concordia Bioethics Institute at Concordia University—Wisconsin, Mequon, Wisconsin

When the sufferer experiences your willingness to enter into his suffering the response is usually something such as, “You care! You understand!” The pastor can then help the sufferer recognize his pastoral caring as God’s caring for the sufferer as simply as saying, “God cares for you.” Then conversation that follows can build upon the suffering of Christ on the cross as the evidence of God’s caring and desire to embrace the sufferer with forgiveness and hope.

10 The Cure of Souls: Good for What Ails You

By the Rev. Dr. Harold L. Senkbeil, Associate Professor of Pastoral Ministry and Missions at Concordia Theological Seminary

Mention “healing” and most people think of physicians, the medical arts, and pharmacology. Yet increasingly, medical personnel are broadening their horizons to think holistically about human health. They have come to see that the physical health of a human being is connected to mental and emotional health. Some health professionals have even begun to see that these two components of human well-being are incomplete without a third—spiritual health.

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What Is a



Chaplain?

● By the Rev. John A. Fale

I must admit that I was taken back a bit when I was asked to write an article for *For the Life of the World*, which is highlighting what a Lutheran chaplain brings to bear in the care of souls. I jumped at the opportunity to tell the story of those who serve as “domestic missionaries,” as chaplains (and others who serve in specialized pastoral ministry such as pastoral counselors) are apt to meet more non-Christians who welcome the spiritual care of a “religious type” than most any other church worker in The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS). Nearly every day of the 14 years that I served as a chaplain and pastoral counselor I was energized by the fact that I would get to meet people who were looking for a word of comfort . . . a word of hope . . . something to hold on to . . . something to hold them . . . something . . . anything . . . as illness, disease, death, or broken marital and family relationships knocked the stuffing out of them. I was grateful that I had something to offer them.

Upon further reflection, writing about what a Lutheran chaplain brings to bear in the care of souls is a daunting task to accomplish in 1200 words. A Lutheran chaplain possesses a veritable trove of treasures that have been given to us by God under the blessings of the First Article of the Creed, by Christ in His Word and Sacraments, and by Lutheran confessors of the faith. It is difficult to identify all that a Lutheran chaplain has to offer to the spiritually vulnerable and hurting souls one encounters each day. But I shall limit my discussion to the resources that I have found to be most helpful: the Scriptures, the *Book of Concord*, a hymnal, Dr. Walther’s *Law and Gospel*, and clinical pastoral education.

Lutheran chaplaincy is not outside of the church’s healing ministry of Christ; rather, Lutheran chaplaincy is an integral part of our tradition of providing specially trained ordained and commissioned ministers to carry out the ministry of the church in very challenging and demanding settings in life.* A Lutheran chaplain seeking ecclesiastical endorsement in the LCMS and certification through a professional pastoral care organization must have earned either a Master of Divinity degree, a Master of Arts in Theology with Deaconess Certification, or a Master’s degree in Theology and have completed 1600 hours of supervised Clinical Pastoral Education or its equivalent. Evangelical Lutheran theology is the foundation of a Lutheran chaplain’s pastoral or

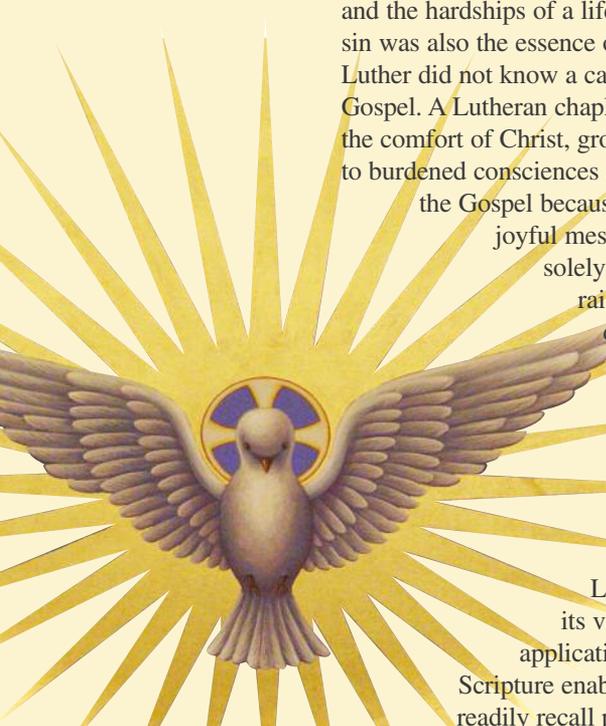
diakonical identity, providing the theological lens through which we see sin, suffering, and the work of God, and continuing to be the very spring from which a Lutheran chaplain continually draws. Clinical Pastoral Education teaches Lutheran chaplaincy students effective, interpersonal communication and relational skills, an awareness of themselves as instruments of bringing Christ’s compassion and healing gifts to those who suffer, and how to integrate and apply Lutheran theology to the care of souls.

In his preface to the Large Catechism, Luther emphasized the importance of learning and memorizing the Catechism and Scripture, because the Word is the very power of God that gives “immeasurable comfort.”¹ Comforting afflicted souls was the ministry of Christ as He drew people to Himself as the incarnation of God’s promises in Scripture.² His Word was God’s Word, the very Word that offered and gave life and salvation as He fulfilled the promises of God



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* The words “chaplain” and especially “chaplaincy” have been defined in a variety of ways in the Lutheran tradition. Currently they can refer narrowly and exclusively to a man in the office of the public ministry or more broadly to a man or woman in an institutional chaplaincy setting. This article is using them in the broader sense.



through His perfect life, bloody death as the sacrifice for all sin, and His resurrection that took the sting out of sin, which is death. Comforting souls that suffered under the heavy burden of the Law, sin, and the hardships of a life infected by the results of sin was also the essence of Luther's care of souls. Luther did not know a care of souls apart from the Gospel. A Lutheran chaplain seeks always to bring the comfort of Christ, grounded in our justification, to burdened consciences and weary souls through the Gospel because it is a "comforting and joyful message," as it "directs them solely to the merit of Christ and raises them up again by the delightful proclamation of God's grace and favor acquired through the merits of Christ."³

Because the *Book of Concord* is a true exposition of Scripture and a correct exhibition of Lutheran doctrine it is, by its very nature, pastoral in its application; just as memorizing Scripture enables a Lutheran chaplain to readily recall particular verses or stories that speak to a specific need. Memorizing and being familiar with the theology and doctrine of our beautiful confession of the faith equips the Lutheran chaplain to apply the very theology of Scripture to the reality of suffering and subsequent explorations for sources of comfort and relief. Luther and the other authors of the *Book of Concord* understood that pure theology cannot and should not exist solely as a set of theological precepts to be learned. The *Book of Concord* is replete with examples of applying the comfort of theology to the reality of suffering. Speaking to the use of the sacraments, Melancthon wrote, "Here we are talking about personal faith, which

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accepts the promise as a present reality and believes that the forgiveness of sins is actually being offered, not about a faith which believes in a general way that God exists.

"Such use of the sacraments comforts devout and troubled minds."⁴ Regarding Baptism Luther stated, "It is so full of comfort and grace that heaven and earth cannot comprehend it."⁵ One of the roles I served as a chaplain was to teach or instruct those who did not know the blessings God gives through the Gospel and to remind Christians of these precious gifts, while at the same time teaching them how to comfort

themselves through these gifts of Christ's mercy.

Lutheran worship, hymnody, and occasional rites and services were also helpful resources to me as a chaplain. After ten years I still remember Marjorie, a hospice patient who was dying of cancer. I was called by Marjorie's family because she wanted to receive Holy Communion with her family as it was clear that death was imminent. When I arrived, Marjorie's family told me that she was incoherent, "speaking gibberish." As I eased up to Marjorie's bedside and listened to her, I recognized the words she was speaking. "Your Mom is not speaking gibberish," I told her family. "Marjorie is reciting the *Te Deum*." During other pastoral visits, as some patients shared their concerns with me, I often remarked that the cry of their heart sounded like the words of a hymn or psalm; then I shared the words of the hymn or psalm. It brought relief and comfort to them to know that theirs was an experience shared by people of faith before them.

For baptisms and occasional services, I gave copies of the Order of Service to family members gathered around. After the service some families remarked that being able to participate or follow the service was very comforting; they felt a part of the prayers lifted up.

Just as Luther considered himself to be a lifelong student of the Catechism and correctly applying God's Word in Law and Gospel, a Lutheran chaplain is well-served by reviewing Walther's *Law and Gospel*. One of the most difficult tasks in caring for souls is correctly applying Law and Gospel. Indeed, it is spiritually dangerous to speak words of Law when a heart is already terrified and burdened, and Gospel to a heart that is quite secure in itself and feels no need for the mercy of God. Through attentive, careful listening, seeking clarification and understanding, a Lutheran chaplain invites conversations about one's life, thereby gaining understanding of the soul's needs.

What does a Lutheran chaplain bring to bear in the care of souls? We bring Christ, who forgives, heals, and makes all things new.

The Rev. John A. Fale is the Associate Executive Director of LCMS World Relief and Human Care. He is a board certified Chaplain in the Association of Professional Chaplains and a certified Fellow in the American Association of Pastoral Counselors.

1 Large Catechism, Preface, 11.

2 Luke 4.

3 FC, Epitome, V:7.

4 Apology, XIII, 21-22.

5 LC, Fourth Part: Baptism 39.