


THE YOKE

*The newsletter of the Chaplains and Pastoral Counselors Chapter
of the Ministers Council, ABCUSA*

December 2022

WHY THE YOKE, AND WHY NOW?

- *by Rick Barnes, C&PC Member-at-Large and chaplain at
Imperial Regional Detention Facility,  Calexico, CA.*

As we have restarted our newsletter, we have settled upon the name of our publication as “The Yoke.” Our chapter’s symbol features a stole and shepherd’s crook. While there are several theories of the stole’s origin, a common interpretation of its use is symbolic of the yoke. The yoke is the attachment joining two animals with a plow to till the soil. It is associated with hard work and burden. People in Jesus’ time would have known the purpose of the yoke well when Jesus spoke of it in Matthew 11:28 -30. They felt burdened by the Pharisees in their religious duties and the grinding nature of being poor in an occupied land.¹

As people, we experience burdens that weigh us down and make us struggle. The words of Jesus are an invitation of hope that we are not alone in our troubles; instead, Jesus is present and helping us with our burdens. As chaplains and pastoral counselors, we are agents of Christ’s good news in the midst of crisis and strife. Our ministry intends to help those who are struggling in a way that makes their burden a little easier to bear.

The Advent and Christmas season is one that often reflects wondrous expectation and joy. However, some have a tremendously difficult time. Be it from loss, loneliness, past history, or other factors, what is a happy time for many is a particularly difficult one for others. To that end, we offer reflections and experiences of this season that may encourage you in your journey or may be helpful as you seek to minister with those who are struggling during this time.

1. New Interpreter’s Bible Vol 8, Matthew and Mark, p. 275.

THAT’S NOT THE END OF THE STORY...

-by Sarah Fogg, President of the C&PC Chapter and



retired chaplain and spiritual care department head

I dug out a favorite daily advent reader this year, one an old friend from high school days had sent in 2002, the year both my parents died just five months apart. I re-read her letter tucked inside the front cover. She knew how hard the first Christmas can be after loved ones die and hoped that Christmas would still be a good one. Christmas is about family for almost everyone, religious or secular. And it can be overwhelmingly sad if we forget the meaning of Advent, or worse, don't know its meaning.

Handel knew. In fact, when his *Messiah* debuted in 1742, it was during Passion Week, just before Easter. His great work “tells the whole story of God’s Good News—Christ’s birth, death, and resurrection.”¹ Now, we sing it at Christmas time. But “Handel’s *Messiah* tells us that Christ’s birth is only the beginning. It’s not the baby Jesus but rather the crucified and risen Jesus who has the power to change our lives.”²

We’re hosting friends for Christmas dinner this year. We’ll be serving turkey and lamb. I’m planning to tell them very briefly, the whole story. Turkey symbolizes thanksgiving for the love of family and friends; lamb, the love of our Savior who came to us in a family, but died alone, despised and rejected. He did it to give us entry into his eternal family where the only tears will be those of eternal joy in his presence.

This year has been the hardest in my life. No family members died, but I have been lower in spirit than I ever imagined possible. I give thanks for my recent recovery, and I look forward to Friday evening, December 9th. Friends will join us at church for our first concert of the season. Sometimes the familiar words of the Christmas story don’t really reach my soul. But *Messiah*’s last chorus never fails. I’ll be on my feet, belting out the song with everyone else. My throat catches, I tear up, and I can’t sing it all the way through. No matter. Jesus reigns, my soul is alive. “King of kings, and Lord of lords, Hallelujah!”

1. Donna W. Payne and Fran Lenzo, *The Handel’s Messiah Family Advent Reader*, (Moody Press, Chicago, 1999), p. 11.
2. *Ibid.*, p.13.

WHEN THE HOLIDAYS HURT

Nathaniel Milton C&PC Member-at-Large and Pastoral Counselor



There are many holidays or special days such as Thanksgiving, birthdays, Valentine's Day, anniversaries, graduations, weddings, Hanukkah, and Christmas, to name a few. These can be difficult days for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one. For these people, the most difficult holidays of the year are often Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa. More than any others, these days mean *family togetherness* when the void formerly filled by a loved one is most acute.

Attached are a hand-out, a video link, and additional references you may find helpful this season as you minister to those you serve.

TOTAL FITNESS

*by Lee Axtell, C&PC Chapter Secretary-Treasurer
and Navy Chaplain serving U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Pacific*



Spiritual fitness is not new in the military but it continually gets defined and redefined. As a military chaplain, I am always looking for ways to connect our service members with God, hope and courage to stay in the fight. The "fight" isn't necessarily war; it can be one's marriage, single life, work relationships, etc... Here is one way that Campus Crusade for Christ describes Military Total Fitness as a resource for personal improvement:

Physical Fitness (Body): Reflects a service member's ability to physically perform the tasks assigned individually and as a unit.

Social Fitness (Relationships): Demonstrated by a service member's ability to successfully interact with peers, families, and their communities.

Mental Fitness (Mind): Incorporates a service member's self-confidence, strong coping and decision-making skills.

Spiritual Fitness (Spirit): The foundation upon which meaning and purpose of life are built. Spiritually fit service members and their families are equipped to meet the unique challenges of military life.

These four areas form an interconnected and indivisible unit - the service member! This Christmas season, as I walk through the passageways (Navy talk for hallways) and office spaces, I will be checking in on my flock to see in which area they may want to improve themselves in 2023.

CHRISTMAS SEASON IN THE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

*by Petra Van de Water, C&PC Member-at-Large
and chaplain at Stanford Children's
Hospital.*



The Christmas trees throughout the hospital are decorated. Softly colored lights add to the friendly atmosphere amidst the buzzing busyness of staff and loved ones making their way. When I attune to the sounds, I hear the piano's seasonal songs.

The busyness in the hallways is different from last year when there were tighter visitor restrictions due to the pandemic. Grandparents and relatives can now visit in pairs, bringing love and support where needed. The hospital is filled with very young lives. Young ones, sweet cherubs, are being born and bringing joy into the lives of their loved ones, gathering around their cribs.

Sadly, there is a surge of little ones suffering from RSV (respiratory syncytial virus). Parents of these toddlers are worried and confused about what's happening and exhausted from long hours in the Emergency Room. The medical teams are on alert and in ongoing communication with parents. I see multiple clinicians in PPE around a crib, tenderly and patiently caring for a little one with difficulty breathing. Tubes and equipment are wrapped tight to its tiny body.

I put my arm around a tearful mom and lead her to a quiet place in the unit. She has no words and lets her tears flow. I embrace her and pray. During the prayer, we experience the presence and love of Jesus in that quiet place. Jesus is everywhere and also there with the mom and her little one. Jesus Christ came into this world fully human and fully divine as a tiny baby, born in modest and marginalized circumstances. *"So, the Word became human] and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness."* (John 1;14a)

This Advent and Christmas season reminds me of the unique gift of drawing parents and little ones closer to Jesus when they need him the most. When I serve by faith, Jesus's unbounded love works in, through, and beyond me in every encounter with young patients and parents. My role as a chaplain is to extend Jesus' invitation of God's grace through presence and prayer. Please pray with me this beautiful Celtic prayer of remembrance, joy, and gratitude for Jesus' presence and love.

The joy of discovery, that moment
when hope and expectation were gloriously
met by the illumination of one bright star.

We cannot imagine
what words were spoken by visitors
or if first impressions
left them somewhat confused.

Messiah and Savior, a king born
in the barest of palaces.
Yet they saw and fell down
on their knees in adoration.
Lord, they saw you and knew
whom they had met.

As we meet around a crib, candle, or advent wreath,
draw us into that stable in our imagination.
the quiet moments of prayer
this Christmas - that brief oasis from
the bustle of the world –
bring alive to us the smell of the hay,
the sound of the animals,
the cry of a baby.

Draw us close to Savior, Messiah, and King,
as we bring not gold, myrrh, or frankincense,
but the gift of our lives
–the only offering we can bring.

Celtic Prayer, ed. Becca Anderson, New Beginning