

THE YOKE

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

August 2023

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Editor's Note

In this edition, we invited personal reflections. Some will be personal reflections of people, some of times past, some of recent happenings. You already know as chaplains and pastoral counselors that as much as your workplace demands consistent performance, we are not machines. This edition celebrates the personhood of who we are in different ways.

The Power of Family Connections,

By Nat Milton, C& PC Chapter Member -At- Large, retired Navy chaplain and pastoral counselor practicing in Virginia



My sister Jeanette transitioned to her eternal home in May. I had emotions that caused laughter and tears. I experienced laughter when I saw a video of her dancing following the remission from breast cancer. I smiled when I remembered her letting me use her car to get my driver's license. I smiled as I remembered the comfort I experienced

when I saw her when we passed each other in the hall during high school.



Not only did I experience laughter, I also experienced sadness when I thought about not being able to see her and spend time with her in person anymore on this earth.

Following the viewing, funeral and burial, I experienced deep connections with my family. I celebrated our wedding anniversary on June 1st and my birthday on June 4th. I went fishing with my only surviving brother. I went shopping with my oldest sister. I was elated to hold and spend time with my youngest sister's new grandson.

It was a joy to visit a nursing home with my high school classmate to pray, greet, sing, and give gifts to the residents. It was also life-giving to share a wonderful evening celebrating our 70th birthdays: singing, eating, reminiscing and enjoying each other's presence.

The Power of Family Connections continues to sustain and refresh my life, and I'm very grateful.

Be Watching for Nat Soon

As you may already know (or may not), our chapter has compiled an informational folder on the role of a pastoral counselor, and how they can be of support to the local church and to region staff. Nat will share about his ministry as a pastoral counselor in an upcoming webinar. We will send information with the confirmed date and time very soon.

One Summer Long Ago



by Sarah Fogg, President of the C&PC Chapter and retired chaplain and spiritual care department head

When asked to write a reflection on summer, I thought of one more than 70 years ago. At seven, I was allowed to spend a week by myself with my maternal grandparents in the neighboring state of Virginia. I was excited and proud to be "on my own." I knew my grandparents from many visits with my parents and two brothers, but being alone with them was special. They, of course, went out of their way to make my week a memorable one.

There were no big trips out of town to kid-special attractions, just a full week of intimate living. My grandfather owned a grocery store in his small, Virginia town, and I got to spend time there each day. He let me re-arrange his display cases and watch him as he helped customers find what they needed. Sometimes, one of his friends would drop by, and if there were no customers around, they would take chairs to the middle of the store for a leisurely chat. I remember my granddaddy putting me on his knee and asking me to "tell Mr. Cox a Bible story." My favorite was Gideon and all the steps he

went through testing God to make sure he understood what God wanted him to do. I loved all the details, and breathlessly went through each one with “and then...,” “and then...” Years later, in mid-life, I would follow Gideon’s example as I tested out whether God was really calling me to full-time ministry.

Back at the house, my grandmother made me an integral part of her day. I helped her feed the chickens in the large, fenced-in backyard, gather the eggs, prepare the food for dinner, and I walked with her to the small department store downtown her friend, Hattie Griffin, owned. It had a “beauty parlor.” I still remember the smell of permanents and the strange-looking contraptions she used for curling her customers’ hair.

Sunday morning, we went to church. I sat by my grandmother and sang with her the hymns she had sung and hummed all through the week. To this day, every time I sing, “What A Friend We Have in Jesus” and “Sweet Hour of Prayer,” I hear her voice. My grandfather, being an usher, would join us only after the morning offering was taken. I don’t remember what I was singing on Saturday night taking my bath, but I still remember looking back at the open door and seeing them both standing there, beaming. It’s a picture etched forever in my memory.

My grandfather died that Thanksgiving, instantly, of a heart attack. My grandmother joined him two years later. From them, I learned the difference between quantity and quality time. Gone when I was just seven and nine years old, they left me treasures that “neither moth nor rust consumes.”

REFLECTIONS: DINNER MEETING MC CHAPTER FOR CHAPLAINS AND PASTORAL COUNSELORS, BIENNIAL MISSION SUMMIT 2023 - PUERTO RICO



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

My very first in-person ABCUSA Biennial Mission Summit was in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico has stolen my heart with its people, places, passion, resilience, and heart for God and others. The Ministers' Council Chapter for Chaplains and Pastoral Counselors hosted a dinner on Thursday evening. About 50 people attended and were deeply moved by the stories and testimonies of a panel of Puerto Rican chaplains and pastors. I was so excited to finally greet and hug people I had worked with for multiple years and now finally met in person. Our chapter invited these panelists to get a flavor of ministry in Puerto Rico. *(Pictures of the dinner on the next page, article continues page 5)*

We gather together



Words of greetings



*Sarah Fogg, our chapter president
Patricia Murphy, Ecclesiastical Endorser, ABHMS
Matt Sturtevant, President of Ministers Council/ABCUSA
C.Jeff Woods, Office of General Secretary, ABCUSA*

Our panelists



Common themes in the panel's stories were the importance of self-care, following God's calling, and doing so grounded in God's love. During the Summit, ABC-USA presented a statement of re-affirming and empowering women in their vocation as ministers and clergy. We heard some powerful sermons from Puerto Rican female pastors and celebrated the election of Rev. Nikita G. McCallister as President of the American Baptist Churches USA. Read here the statement ABC-USA published on June 25. [American Baptist Churches USA Affirms and Celebrates Women in Ministry at 2023 Biennial in San Juan - ABCUSA \(ABC-usa.org\)](#)

Our panelist Chaplain Brenda Velez worked as a pastor for 24 years before becoming a school chaplain. She was a hospice and palliative care chaplain at the VA Caribbean for six years while co-pastoring in two churches. She appreciates the diversity in her work. Brenda shared how one of her patients was astonished to encounter a female chaplain because he had met only male chaplains. He said: "How can you be a chaplain?" She said, "What about it?" He said, "But you are a woman!" To which she responded, "Yes, nice to meet you." For Chaplain Brenda, opening doors to others matters because being a chaplain is not about gender but God. The apostle Paul reminds us that "*There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*" (Galatians 3:28)

Chaplain Brenda's experience and story resonate with the words of Rev. Nikita during the Summit: "I am standing here, draped in my American Baptist Women In Ministry stole because we have always been on the cutting edge. We have been ordaining women in ministry for a hundred and fifty years. We are a denomination that understands the Biblical basis for equal partnership in God's Kingdom. Because we understand that God poured out his spirit on all flesh – all flesh.... we are all made in God's image."

Panelist chaplain Anibal Cruz served for 21 years as a military chaplain, stationed in Panama and eight other countries. His sense of military duty is rooted in his faithful allegiance to God. He says, "I serve the Holy One in the lives of those serving with me." While serving on a tour far away, Chaplain Anibal led 13 worship services in one day, bringing God's loving presence to those far away from home, afraid of dying. In these moments, Anibal's military brothers and sisters could experience God's loving presence as described by the prophet Isaiah "*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*" (Isaiah 41:10)

Military Chaplain Felipe Candelaria has a sense of calling and duty like Chaplain Anibal. Chaplain Felipe shared his dream of wearing a military uniform years earlier, but not the one he wanted. In prayer, God said to him, go where I sent you, in the army. God has guided him every step of the way during his ministry in the army. Chaplain Felipe sees it as his calling to guide soldiers in spiritual fitness and be a light for others in crisis. His experience is that military people always seek out the chaplain during hardship and crisis. One of the other panelists recognized that a military chaplain is sometimes

considered an amulet. Everything is expected of the chaplain always to be there. People say, "When I see a chaplain, I want to talk." It is a blessing that a chaplain is significant in people's lives, but it also tells that a minister's self-care matters.

Pastor Efrain Torres addressed how self-care matters to all ministers. He has been a pastor for 30+ years. He studied clinical psychology and worked as a clinical social worker and a counselor in private practice. He supports people with sleep problems, marriage and life issues, burnout, loneliness, and a lack of motivation to pursue something in life. During his work, he has encountered the bias that pastors should not seek professional help for their mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Pastors, chaplains, and other ministers need to encourage each other in self-care when caring for others. Local congratulations could support their pastors in this as well.

Pastor Efrain referred to the story in 1 Kings 19, in which a messenger from God cares for Elijah and comes to provide Elijah's basic needs of comfort, safety, and security to help Elijah overcome exhaustion, distress, and fear. *"Then suddenly, a messenger tapped him and said, "Get up! Eat something!"* ⁶ *Elijah opened his eyes and saw flatbread baked on glowing coals and a jar of water right by his head. He ate and drank, and then went back to sleep."* (1 Kings 19:5, 6) When saying, *"It is more than enough, LORD!"* Elijah acknowledged his limits. (1 Kings 19:4) Doing so and receiving support for nourishment and rest serves as a reminder that pastors and chaplains are human, subject to emotional and physical challenges like anyone else. Embracing self-care practices, seeking support, and being attentive to one's well-being enables them to continue fulfilling their roles effectively and compassionately. In the story, God spoke to Elijah in a gentle whisper, guiding him in his journey. Pastors and chaplains should cultivate prayer and spiritual practices to listen to God's voice and find guidance and strength during challenging times. It allows pastors and chaplains to be God's loving voice and Jesus' hands and feet in the lives of the people they serve.

Our Minister's Council chapter for Chaplains and Pastoral Counselors has heard this self-care need of Puerto Rican chaplains and pastors and wants to be in ongoing dialogue through conversations, webinars, and mentoring opportunities. In future newsletters, we will share more about different initiatives.

FROM THE SACRED SPACE MEETING ON AUGUST 24

[Chaplaincy & Specialized Ministries Request Form \(smartsheet.com\)](#) is the way to request any forms, changes, or when you would like to talk to the ecclesiastical endorser, Dr. Pat Murphy.

At the start of Spiritual Care Week, Saturday, October 21, 10 a.m.-1 p.m. EST, there will be a conference and training on this year's theme of Spiritual Care Week (October 22-28, 2023/ www.spiritualcareweek.org)

Theme: Chaplaincy and Mental Health: It is Healthy to Get Help More info to follow.

Save the date: Spiritual Caregivers' Conference, April 9-11, 2024, at Space for Grace, King of Prussia, Pennsylvania. Registration opens around the second half of September—more information to follow.

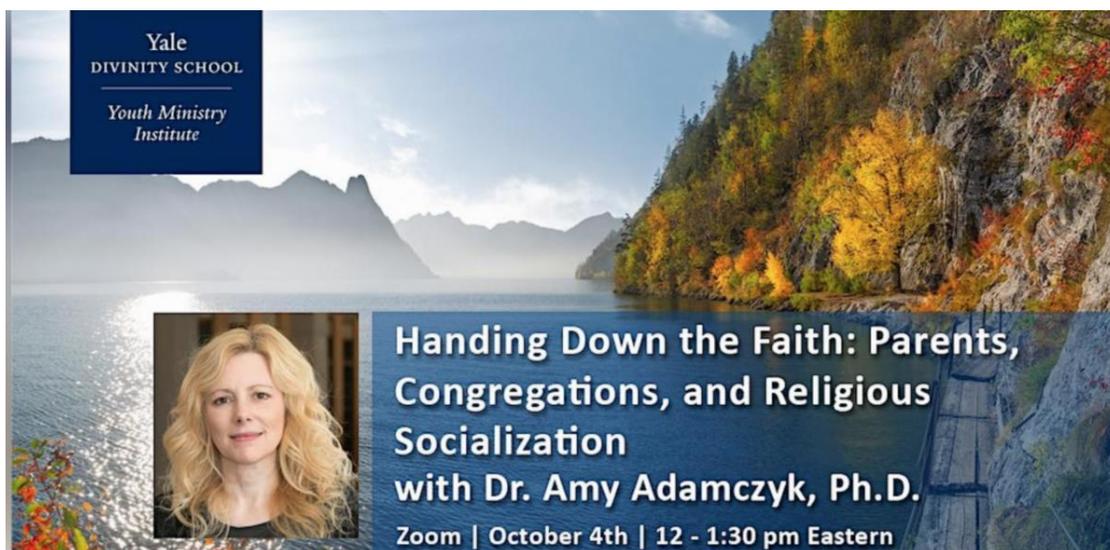
Annual Report: Deadline for Military, VA and Federal Correction Facilities chaplains -November 1, 2023. The start to turn it in is October 15, 2023.

For all other chaplains, the deadline is January 8, 2024. Once you have turned in your annual Report, you will get a certificate of endorsement – January 8-December 31, 2024.

For supporting victims on Maui, Hawaii: [ABHMS mobilizes in response to devastating wildfires ravaging Maui — American Baptist Home Mission Societies](#) .

The next Sacred Space is December 7, 7 p.m. EST.

YOU MAY LIKE ...



This online event features Dr. Amy Adamczyk, Ph.D. the coauthor of *Handing Down the Faith: How Parents Pass Their Religion on to the Next Generation* (Oxford, 2021). Drawing on key findings from the book, she will discuss how parents view the role of congregations and how they feel that their own experiences growing up shaped their perspectives on childrearing and religious socialization.

[More information](#)

We pray blessings of peace and strength for you!

Your Executive Committee,

President: Rev. Dr. Sarah L. Fogg sarahfogg4@gmail.com

Secretary/Treasurer: Rev. Lee Axtell lee.axtell@gmail.com

Member-at-Large, Rev. Richard Barnes chaplainrickbarnes@gmail.com

Member-at-Large, Rev. Nathaniel Milton nmilton@peninsulapastoral.org

Member-at-Large, Rev. Petra van de Water petravandewater@gmail.com