

THE YOKE

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

December 2023

IN THIS EDITION

EDITOR'S NOTE

YOU ARE LOVED,
SEEN, HEARD AND FELT

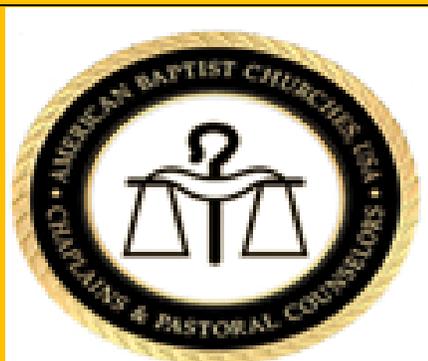
HOLIDAY GRIEF VIDEO

ANOTHER ASYLUM CASE

A WORD FROM THE
PRESIDENT

SPACE FOR GRACE

MILITARY CHAPLAINCY
AND THE MAUI WILDFIRES



Editor's Note

In this edition, we reflect on what it means to be a chaplain or pastoral counselor in the Christmas season, to look back at this year, and look forward to the new one.

“You are Loved, Seen, Heard and Felt”

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



As we enter this holiday season during these unprecedented times, I would like to say to you on behalf of the church community:

If you have lost a loved one or someone close to you, I listen to you.

If you are grieving any loss, I am with you.

If you are hurting or suffering in any way, I feel you.

If you are lonely or feeling invisible, I see you.

If you are experiencing any pain, emotionally, spiritually, or physically, I am praying for you in Jesus' name.

If you cannot see the light at the end of the tunnel, stretch out your hand, and Jesus will hold it.

Please hear and ponder this psalm of ascent:

*1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?*

*2 My help comes from the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.*

*5 The LORD watches over you—
the LORD is your shade at your right hand; (Psalm
121:1,2,5)*

Just know that whatever you feel or think of is understandable and okay. It is part of being human. It is okay to doubt. It is okay to be angry. It is okay to be quiet

or to scream. It is okay to cry and ask: “God, why?”. If you feel or see no hope now, that is okay, too. God the Father wants you to lay it all before Him, to ask Him, and cry out to Him. He already

knows your thoughts and your heart. God is with you. He says: "Do not panic. I'm with you. There is no need to fear for I'm your God. I'll give you strength. I'll help you. I'll hold you steady, keep a firm grip on you." (Isaiah 41:10)

In this season, I have experienced personal loss and hurt. I realized that when going through my journey of grief: Grief is an ordinary human response to an extraordinary traumatic event or loss. Grief is universal and personal. It can happen to everyone, and everyone does it in their unique way and pace. Grief does not know the time.

No one can take from you the loving memories, the reality of good things you shared with whomever or whatever we lost. You do not need to go through this alone. Your loss is yours. In that way, you are alone. Maybe some of you are or feel alone these holidays. Reach out to someone who went through a similar loss, your pastor, a neighbor, or a friend you trust.

God is there for you in your pain and grief. Look at Jesus' life and the suffering He went through. He understands us as no one else. Corry ten Boom says: "No pit is so deep that He is not deeper still; with Jesus, even in our darkest moments, the best remains, and the very best is yet to be." Whether you celebrate the holidays or not, in whatever way, that is all fine. It is up to you to choose, communicate and compromise.

God is faithful, and you are His beloved. He is here with you. When you are ready for it, His peace is there for you. "Because of God's tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace." (Luke 1:78, 79)

Contact someone immediately when your pain or grief is too much to bear by phone, chat, or by a knock on someone's door. Seek professional help if you need it. Please do not hesitate. It is okay.



[Holiday Grief Video](#)

Nat Milton, C&PC Member-at-Large and pastoral counselor at Peninsula Pastoral Counseling Center, Newport News, VA

Nat Milton sent along this video from David Kessler, known for his work at Grief.com about managing the holidays in the midst of grief. Through his poignant reflection, he shows that not only do we deal as professionals with people who are grieving, but we also have suffered our personal losses and grieve them too. This can make things more

[Click Here to Watch the Holiday Grief Video](#)

Another Asylum Case



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

About ten years later than I should, I have finally gone for board certification. I am awaiting my interview in February or March (prayers appreciated☺). Many of you know there is a lot of paperwork as we demonstrate competencies, etc.,etc. In demonstrating our competencies, we must adhere to HIPAA guidelines, either by calling the person “patient” or giving a pseudonym and stating that’s what we’re doing.

In that spirit, let me tell you about people I will call for this assignment “Joseph,” “Mary,” and “Jesus. “ Where I work, Joseph be spelled Josef, Yusuf, or Jose, and the other names with similar treatment. Joseph was a small businessman in his country of origin when, through no fault of his own, he became perceived by his government as a political threat. He had just gotten married to his beloved a few months back, and those with nine fingers can realize another complication in their life, as Mary had just given birth to an adorable baby boy, Jesus. Even though the couple had a bewildering start, Joseph was committed to Mary, and Mary to Joseph, and both to their baby.

The family had just settled down for the night when Joseph got wind of some government agents looking for him. The one who told him said he had to go and now. So, they packed up and headed to a strange land, hoping they would receive more mercy than their own country had shown. They were able to eke out a living, with Joseph using some of the skills he had developed over the years. Mary did what she could to manage the house and to care for Jesus. They loved each other very much and counted blessings even in the difficulties.

Eventually, there became a regime change back home. While the usual temptation is to stay, they headed home, and established themselves there.

Of course, you probably realize I have violated HIPAA and have told the basics of the Christmas story, not nearly as eloquently as Matthew or Luke, but the basics. And this story is one I hear variations of on a daily basis in the immigration detention setting.

My point, at least in this telling, is my understanding of the Matthew 25 passage tells me that when I do things unto the “least of these,” I’m doing them as unto Jesus. It’s easy to lose that perspective in a setting where the turnover rate is at least 800 percent a year. It is also easy to do alongside a hospital bed with yet another patient, or another service member who has gotten themselves into trouble, or another client pouring their heart out.

As we’re looking at the year ahead, I realize focus and self-care continue to be areas of importance so I may see with fresh eyes, not just another person; rather an opportunity to

minister even unto my Lord. This is my invitation to our community as well. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

A Word from the President



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

Looking back on the chapter's activities this year, I am pleased that we offered you, our treasured members, four CPC webinars and two additional webinars through the Ministers Council Third Thursdays program. I hope you were able to join us for them and that you found them helpful to your ministry.

Looking forward to the New Year, 2024, we have more webinars coming your way. One will highlight the particular blessings and challenges of pediatric chaplaincy; the other will enlighten us on the recent ACPE changes for pastoral counselors that incorporate spiritually integrated psychotherapy. I hope you will want to join us for both webinars. We'll get as many as we can recorded and posted on the Ministers Council website so you can see them later if you miss them. Please shoot us an email to let us know other webinar topics you'd like to see.

In late spring, our chapter will hold elections for new officers. Please be thinking if you might want to serve other chaplains and pastoral counselors in this way or know of others whom you want to nominate.

Advent and Christmas remain the busiest time of the year in ministry. Please know that we are thinking of you and praying for new, invigorating, and perhaps, surprising ways God will use your talents in this glorious season of hope, good will, and peace.



<https://abhms.org/space-for-grace-spiritual-caregivers-conference-2024/>

Military Chaplaincy and Maui Wildfires



Lee Axtell

Secretary/Treasurer

Navy Chaplain serving the Marine Corps, Honolulu, HI

There was a lot of preparation for a “call up” to go to the island of Maui for most military chaplains stationed on the island of Oahu. However, to my knowledge, no military chaplains were called up or requested. As written in news articles and public affairs announcements the military had a lot of capabilities such as portable shower facilities, laundry facility and mortuary affairs equipment on standby. The military did provide helicopter air lift support from the island of Oahu to the island of Maui. My understanding is The Federal Emergency Management Affairs (FEMA) provided many of these humanitarian assistance resources to the people of Maui, sourcing them from local businesses, which in turn, begins the process of supporting the local community.

Military chaplains served in the form of providing pastoral care to all the staff members who were in the planning processes of support in bridging the distance between the mainland and the Hawaiian Islands. These staff members worked around the clock planning, and they were the ones who might have first heard about the number of deceased, the tragedies of fires still burning and coordinating lifesaving efforts with civilian agencies who were engaged at that time on Maui. For chaplains, the uncertainty of “am I going or am I not going” takes an emotional toll even before we are given the verbal go ahead – or in our case, we did not go. Always being prepared and then not being called upon can be draining. Military chaplains live in the world of transition and uncertainty of “when” the next deployment or Task Force assignment may come. My opinion on how we live out a ministry profession like this is the certainty of our Divine calling and Scriptural Confidence that God is good and in control.

As the military chaplains trained in preparation to go to Maui, we reviewed our counseling basics for just a time as this:

Regarding counseling, a few things to remember:

- a. Listen much, speak little.
- b. Grief often brings out sadness masked as anger.
- c. As God’s representative, you may be the outlet, don’t take it personally.
- d. If asked “Why would God let this happen?” please don’t feel compelled to provide an answer or “defend” God. Perhaps respond with, “These types of tragedies often challenge our faith. How are you doing in all of this?”

God bless, Chaplain Lee Axtell



January 2024

Greetings in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ!

We cordially invite you to join the Chaplains and Pastoral Counselors Chapter of the ABCUSA Ministers Council for the year 2024. Our ongoing purpose is to “build up the Church of Jesus Christ by sustaining and improving the professional church leadership of the American Baptist Churches USA in general, and chaplains and pastoral counselors in particular.” We focus primarily on member support and raising our profile within the wider denomination.

Since our formation in 1991 at the ABC Biennial in Charleston, West Virginia, all endorsed American Baptist chaplains and pastoral counselors have been invited to join our chapter of the ABC Ministers Council. This larger, national body gives us many opportunities to connect with and find support from fellow ABC clergy, something many of us, working in non-congregational settings, often find difficult to do. We also recognize that our training, plus our experiences in varied secular environments, gifts us with much to offer back to our denomination and colleagues.

2023 was a banner year for our chapter. We were able to bring you four webinars plus two others through our parent group, the Ministers Council. And, of course, there was the ABC Biennial in San Juan, Puerto Rico. It was wonderful seeing, meeting, and getting to know some of you for the first time at our Thursday evening dinner meeting. Thank you so much for taking the time to be with us in San Juan and when you joined us throughout the year on webinars. This year, it is our plan to put more of our webinar recordings on the Ministers Council website. Look for ones you wanted to attend but had to miss. You will find them on the website soon.

You may pay your dues in either of two ways 1) to us, by completing the attached application form and enclosing a check for both the National Ministers Council and our chapter of the Ministers Council, or 2) through the National Ministers Council website, which allows you to pay them and us. Either way, please fill out and return the attached membership application, including your areas of expertise, so that we may know you better and be more aware of the depth of talent and gifts otherwise hidden in our chapter membership. Don't forget to note the sliding scale for national membership dues. We would like to have all our members paid up and onboard no later than June 30, and much earlier, if possible.

Our chapter officers continue to represent you in various ways throughout American Baptist circles—at the Professional Ministries Team meetings in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, at the Chapter Representatives meetings of the Ministers Council and at other venues where ABC clergy gather and fellowship. Thank you for your confidence in us to tell your story. Do let us know when you celebrate milestones or minister in some new way. We want to share these blessings with your colleagues.

May God continue to bless you in your ministries.

Your Executive Committee

President: Rev. Dr. Sarah L. Fogg

Secretary/Treasurer: Rev. Lee Axtell

Member-at-Large, Chaplain: Rev. Richard Barnes

Member-At-Large, Pastoral Counselor: Rev. Nathaniel Milton

Member-At-Large, Chaplain: Rev. Petra van de Water



Name: _____ Title: _____

Date: _____ ABHMS Endorsement Year: _____

Submitted my 2024 or plan to submit) my annual report to our Ecclesiastical Endorser. Date: _____

Preferred Mailing Address: _____

Preferred Email Address: _____

Phone Number: Home: _____ Cell: _____

Place of Ministry: _____

Job Title: _____

Areas of Expertise: (lecture, workshop, etc.) _____

1) Ministers Council Dues (choose one from below)

Annual Income of:		\$ _____ .00
\$60,000 or more:	\$100.00	
\$25,000-59,999:	50.00	
\$10,000-24,999:	25.00	
Under \$10,000:	10.00	

2) C & PC chapter Dues \$ 25.00

3) Total Dues Submitted: \$ _____ .00

Mail your check and this completed form to:

(Check payable to **Ministers Council**)

Rev. Lee Axtell, Secretary/Treasurer
C & PC Ministers Council
1248 Onioni Street
Kailua, Hawaii 96734

Once your check is processed, you will receive a membership card and/or this year's sticker for your permanent membership card from the national office.