

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF ADVENTIST CHAPLAINCY MINISTRIES

THE

# ADVENTIST CHAPLAIN

ISSUE 3 2020





# DON'T SHIRK YOUR SELF-CARE PERSPECTIVE

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**P**astors and chaplains are leaders. We lead by taking care of the spiritual needs of our “parishioner.” These include patients, inmates, students, Sailors, Soldiers, Airmen/women, officers, and leaders/executives. Pastors and chaplains are “caregivers.”

If we fall apart, do not maintain a healthy frame of mind, or suffer from burnout, we can’t do our job. In other words, to take care of others, we need to take care of ourselves first. Pastors and chaplains are notorious for not taking care of themselves. Some erroneously believe it is a sign of weakness or lack of faith if they do so.

Jesus Himself knew that self-care is an issue of the most significant importance. That’s why He regularly took time out to take care of Himself. Often, His custom was to be alone first thing in the morning.

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where He prayed.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes He took a few of His disciples to show them how to take care of themselves. “After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone.<sup>2</sup>

Many times, after a busy and exhaustive event such as the feeding of the 5,000, Jesus took time to do self-care by sending the people and the disciples away so He could spend time to care of Himself.

“After He had dismissed them, He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray. Later that night, Jesus was there alone”<sup>3</sup>

Believe it or not, there are many dedicated followers of Jesus serving as pastors and chaplains who don’t

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take the Lord's example seriously. Some believe that self-care has no place in the life and work of a servant of God. Self-care, in their view, is "selfish." They have forgotten what Jesus said. "You shall love your neighbor *as yourself*."<sup>4</sup> If you don't love yourself, you have no way to give and take care of others.

Let's look at some practical strategies or activities, grouped under four major headings: the *spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical*.

**SPIRITUAL.** Prayer, Bible study, devotions, solitude, silence, and scriptural meditation belong to this category. The objective is to find a place apart from the daily grind where you can get in touch with God and discover who *you* are within the context of His love.

**MENTAL.** It is not only getting away alone. Mental self-care is essential. Things like thinking, reading, and discussing important issues with others support psychological *integrity* by maintaining completeness, wholeness, and unwavering commitment to personal values and principles.

**EMOTIONAL.** The idea is to stay in touch with how you're doing by *listening* to your feelings, *identifying* your emotions. Then you must conclude what they *mean* and what you should do about it.

**PHYSICAL.** This area is probably the area that comes most readily to mind when we think about self-care. It involves a healthy diet, regular exercise, adequate rest and sleep, and a conscious effort to reduce stress.<sup>5</sup>

Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries believes self-care is a vital part of healthy ministry. It is a requirement in

the Board Certification competencies by the Adventist Chaplaincy Institute (ACI) Board of Professional Chaplaincy Certification.

Chaplain candidates for Board Certification must meet with the committee that recommends the chaplain to the ACI Committee. The members review numerous competencies that the candidate must exhibit. A critical competency is to "Attend to one's physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being." The candidate must satisfactorily demonstrate understanding and implementation of their self-care.

In the United States, other professional organizations, including the Association of Professional Chaplains and College of Pastoral Supervision and Psychotherapy, have similar and reciprocal competencies for chaplains.

It is one thing to articulate how one will take care of oneself in professional chaplaincy, but another to practice self-care. Self-care is about health and wholeness, being well spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally—for renewal and personal and professional growth.

Chaplains and pastors need to follow Jesus' example and take time for self-renewal of the physical and spiritual energies to be successful. Today, add to your calendar a specific time to connect with God and allow Him to replenish your batteries to serve Him better.

<sup>1</sup> Mark 1:35

<sup>2</sup> Mark 9:2

<sup>3</sup> Matt 14: 22-23

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 22:39; Leviticus 19:18

<sup>5</sup><https://www.focusonthefamily.com/church/self-care-for-the-weary-pastor/>



# IT'S CRITICAL! PUT YOUR OXYGEN MASK ON FIRST

by Chaplain John R. Logan, Captain, CHC, U. S. Navy

Each time you travel on the airline of your choice, the flight attendants give the in-flight safety brief immediately before take-off. They point out the locations of the emergency exits. They demonstrate how to fasten your seat belts. They also show you how to inflate your life vests located under your seat. But one crucial part of the safety brief is unique. They mention, "In the event that the aircraft loses cabin pressure, the oxygen masks will automatically drop from the ceiling." The instructions are to "put on your

oxygen mask first, before attending to your child and assisting others.” They always tell you to do it first before helping others. But why?

A NASA researcher reported he “was able to see for himself how vital it is to actually follow that instruction. The experience of being in a depressurized airplane cabin was replicated for his benefit, triggering hypoxia-like symptoms that left him weak, disoriented, and unable to help save himself. Passengers have seconds to put on their oxygen masks before oxygen-saturation levels drop to a perilous point.”<sup>2</sup> “By helping others first, or ignoring the mask, a person will begin to lose his or her ability to recognize faces and shapes, and eventually pass out. Passengers are told over and over to take care of their own mask right away.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, take care of yourself first before you assist others.

A similar parallel to this scenario relates to our lives. Chaplains are clergy in a specialized profession. With such a demanding vocation, ministering to people in their most critical need is expected. Yet despite the counsel we give others about taking care of themselves, we too can neglect the importance of our very own self-care. Self-care is defined as “the practice of taking action to preserve or improve one’s health.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, “it is the mindful taking of time to pay attention to you, not

in a narcissistic way, but in a way that ensures that you are being cared for by you.”<sup>5</sup>

Some of us work long hours, sacrifice time with the family, neglect taking time off from work and vacation, doing all this at the expense of going about the Lord’s business. We are prompted to care for those entrusted to our spiritual and pastoral care while putting in the long hours and unending multitasking. Such workaholism and drive are not without its repercussions. If we are not mindful, lack of self-care can leave us overworked, burnt out, and useless. If you do not impart self-care as part of your routine maintenance, you run the risk of these three detrimental aspects to your life.

## 1. YOUR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH IS AT RISK.

Stress has been linked to some chronic illnesses and mental health disorders. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, chronic stress “over time, may contribute to serious health problems, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and other illnesses, including mental disorders such as depression or anxiety.”<sup>6</sup> Over time as the job stressors intensify, if we do not incorporate self-care into our schedules, we risk succumbing to burnout, therefore putting our body and mind at risk. Burnout is simply “a state of

If we are not mindful, lack of self-care can leave us overworked, burnt out, and useless.

emotional, mental, and often physical exhaustion brought on by prolonged or repeated stress.”<sup>7</sup> We also need to be cautious of being so fulfilled and gratified by what we do that we miss the warning signs of stress build-up on our bodies and minds.

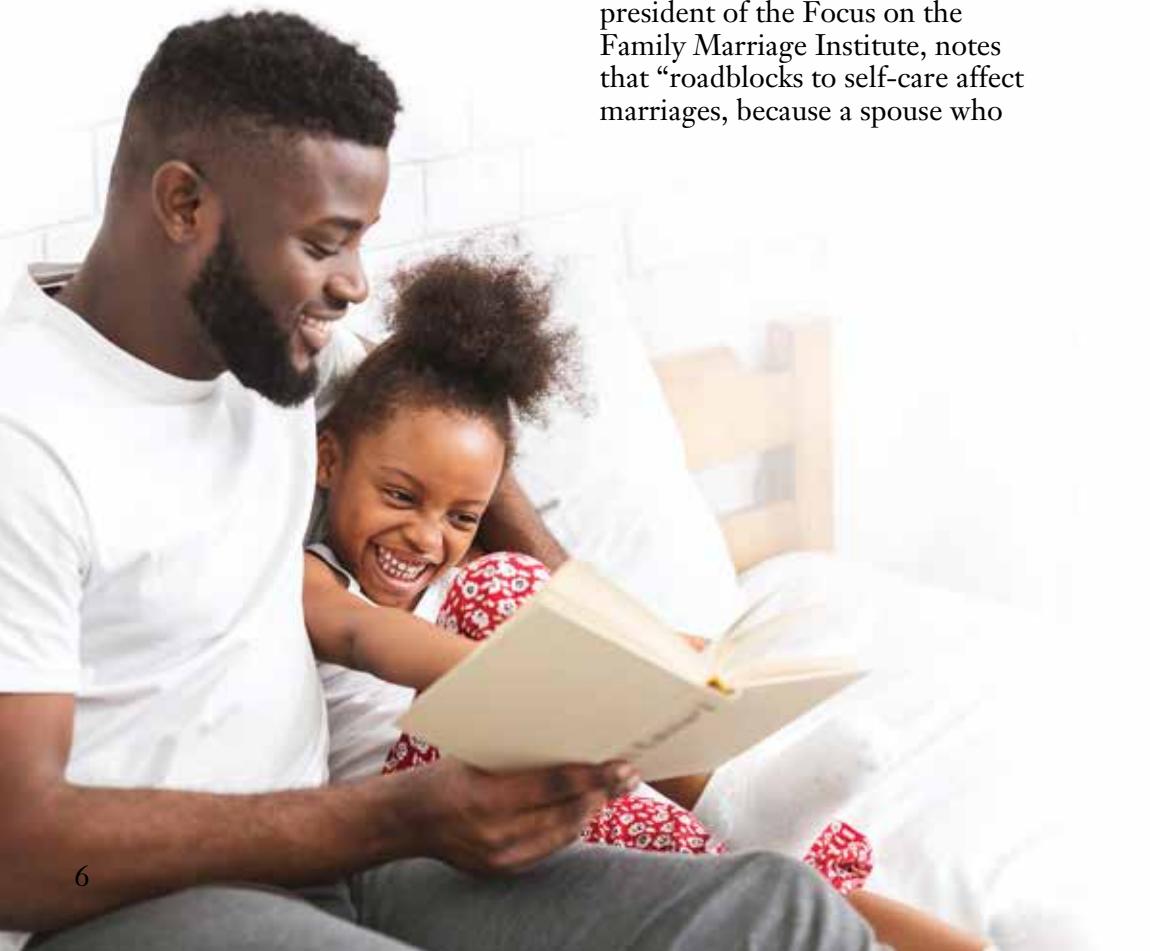
## **2. NOT TAKING TIME FOR SELF-CARE CAN NEGATIVELY IMPACT YOUR JOB AND DECISION MAKING.**

One contributing factor to poor job performance can be traced to a lack of self-care. In a pediatric surgical nursing journal, an article related to nurses’ self-care asked the question: what are the risks if they do not take time to care for themselves? The answers were “performance deficits; an increased risk of errors; a decline

in short-term memory; a reduced ability to learn; a negative impact on divergent thinking, innovation, and insight; an increased risk-taking behavior; and impaired mood and communication skills.”<sup>8</sup> These particular questions and answers can apply to just about anyone in most professions. But more so, this hits home to those who work in the clinical settings. The same can be said about the clergy and chaplains. Not taking time for self-care can jeopardize our careers and everything it took to get to us where we are.

## **3. LACK OF SELF-CARE CAN NEGATIVELY IMPACT YOUR FAMILY LIFE AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS.**

Licensed, professional counselor, Robert Paul, who is also the vice president of the Focus on the Family Marriage Institute, notes that “roadblocks to self-care affect marriages, because a spouse who



# If we are not careful, it is easy to be about our Father's businesses and be spiritually lost.

isn't cared for comes to the marriage depleted instead of ready to give. A marriage can thrive only when each spouse is seeking his or her own care.”<sup>9</sup> The same applies to those in courtships and long term commitments. To improve one's self-care, consider the following:

## A. MAKE THE MOST OF THE SABBATH AND TAKE VACATION LEAVE.

God gave us the Sabbath with a command to remember it. He specifically chose a day where one can rest and retreat from all the week's cares and concerns. He took a day off, which was meant to recharge and reconnect with Him. Sabbath observance has been linked to longevity and beneficial to both physical and mental health. Just as God took a day off from His work after creation, taking paid leave from work is essential to one's wellbeing.

How often have I heard of co-workers bragging about the amount of leave they have saved up. I had a co-worker who mentioned that he had not taken a vacation in five years. It is incredible how time flies, and milestones we've missed out on with family and our children. You do not get those precious moments back. Rarely on one's death bed would you hear someone say, “I wished I had spent more time at the office or work.”

## B. SPEND TIME IN DAILY DEVOTION AND PRAYER.

If we are not careful, it is easy to be about our Father's business and be spiritually lost. An article in *Ministry Magazine* noted that “pastors may struggle to make time for God. But a reality check will show that ministry gets hectic, and we may end up so busy doing God's work that we forget about the God for whom we work.”<sup>10</sup> The New Testament gives six different accounts where Jesus separated Himself from people to connect with our Heavenly Father. Mark 1:35 tells us that “Early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up and slipped out to a solitary place to pray.” Jesus made it a continual habit to seek solitude to commune with His Heavenly Father to prepare for the most significant undertaking in saving humanity. It was this type of spiritual discipline that gave Him victory over sin and temptation and also gave Him the endurance to bear God's ultimate will, to lay down His life as the sacrificial lamb for our salvation.

## C. TAKE TIME TO RECONNECT WITH OTHERS.

When was the last time you contacted a long-time friend or relative? It is easy to get so inundated with work that we forget to keep in touch with the people who saw us through our humble beginnings.

# Self-care is something that should routinely be part of our everyday living.

When I was a child, AT&T had a commercial jingle that said, “reach out, reach out and touch someone.” Do not underestimate the value of connecting with other people and your loved ones. However difficult and challenging you think your ministry is, some people want to see us succeed. Thanks to social media, you can just say hi without having the chore of having to write a letter and post it.

## 4. COMMIT TO A HEALTHY DIET AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.

As Seventh-day Adventists, our reputation precedes us with our 28 Fundamental Beliefs steeped in Christian doctrine and a health message with a lifestyle that is also in line with our beliefs. In the book



*Mind, Character and Personality, Volume One*, Ellen G. White, noted, “The health of the mind is to a large degree dependent upon the health of the body, and the health of the body is dependent upon the way in which the living machinery is treated. Eat only that food which will keep your stomach in the most healthy condition.”<sup>11</sup> Studies will show that many of the chronic diseases that are terminal could have been prevented had healthy eating habits been incorporated.

As for physical activity, working out or the idea of going to the gym can seem like a chore, not to mention trying to fit it into the schedule due to the long hours and commutes. There is also the other aspect of a sustained chronic injury that makes it difficult as well. Try to find an activity that is fun and fulfilling, yet keeps the heart rate going. It can be your favorite sport, hobby, or walking. Brisk walking has been linked to many health benefits. After being sedentary for a while, it is best to break away from sitting down and walk around to get the circulation going.

Signing up for classes at the local gym can also boost your commitment level. However, with COVID-19, you can do various exercise programs and routines without ever going to the gym. To stay on task, get with a friend or find a workout buddy to commit to one or several activities several days per week, whether it’s walking, running, cycling, swimming, or playing your favorite sport. See which one of these activities fits your fancy and work it into your schedule. A couple years ago, I got into road cycling. It is low impact, and I can take in the scenery of where I am going. Also, I get the needed sunlight and fresh air.

Self-care is something that should routinely be part of our everyday living. The challenge, at times, can be consistency coupled with effective time management. There are many things that we hold sacred, and self-care should be one of them. If you think about it, we are replaceable and not indispensable in the workforce. So let us learn a valuable lesson from that pre-flight safety brief. Put your mask on first. Develop a solid self-care plan that is conducive to your schedule and lifestyle. We have only but one life to live until Jesus comes, so make it count. Let us work on taking better care of ourselves first, so we can, in turn, take care of others.

<sup>1</sup> Why you should put your oxygen mask on first before helping others: <https://www.traveller.com.au> (Accessed August 1, 2020)

<sup>2</sup> Erin Donelly, *Why You're Instructed to Put Oxygen Masks on Yourself First* [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-youre-instructed-to-p\\_b\\_11201778](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-youre-instructed-to-p_b_11201778) (Accessed August 1, 2020)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Selfcare: Oxford Dictionaries: [www.languagelife.oup.com](http://www.languagelife.oup.com) (Accessed August 5, 2020)

<sup>5</sup> Maria Barratta, Ph.D., LCSW, *Self-care 101: 10 Ways to Take Better Care of You*. Psychology Today, May 27, 2018. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/skinny-revisited/201805/self-care-101> (Accessed August 5, 2020)

<sup>6</sup> NIMH: *5 Things You Should Know About Stress*. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/index.shtml>

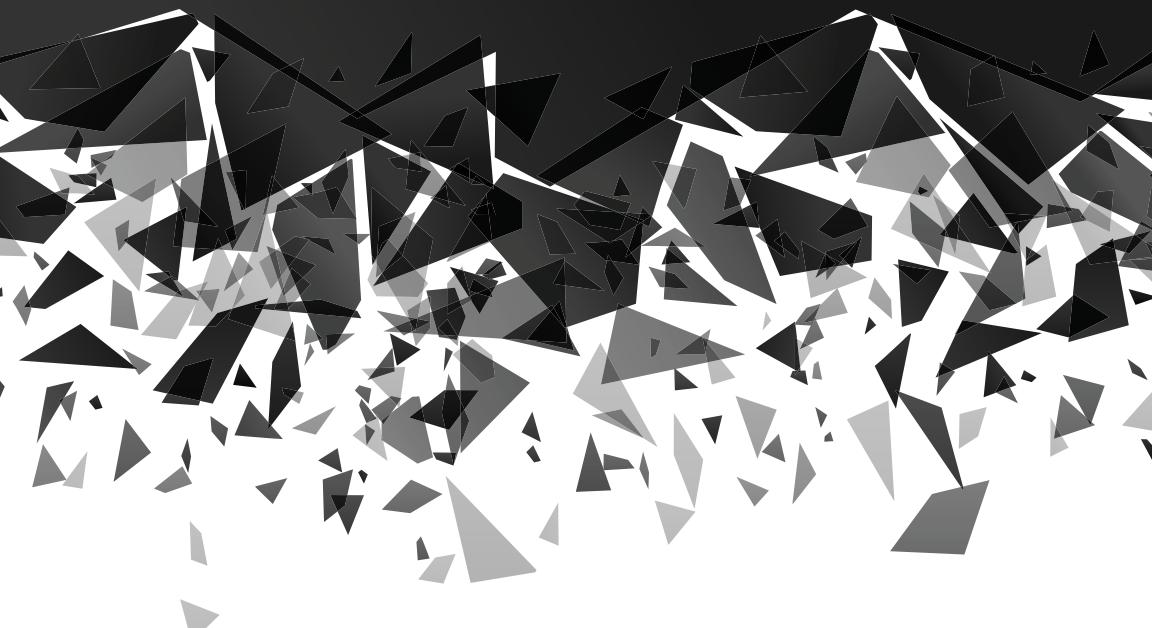
<sup>7</sup> Burnout: Workaholic, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/burnout>

<sup>8</sup> Barbara Bratton, MSN, PNP-BC, *Self-care for the Caregiver. What Are the Risks If We Don't Care for Ourselves?* Journal of Pediatric Surgical Nursing: 1/3 2018 - Volume 7 - Issue 1 - p 3

<sup>9</sup> Robert Paul, *How Self-Care Can Turn a Good Marriage Into a Great One*. March 24, 2018, <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/how-self-care-can-turn-a-good-marriage-to-a-great-one/> (Accessed August 5, 2020)

<sup>10</sup> Abraham Guerrero, MA, *Where Does the Time Go? Finding Time for God*. Ministry Magazine, August 2012, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2012/08/where-does-the-time-go-finding-time-for-god> (Accessed August 7, 2020)

<sup>11</sup> Ellen G. White, *Mind Character and Personality* Vol. 1 pg. 18 [https://egwwritings-a.akamaihd.net/pdf/en\\_2MCP.pdf](https://egwwritings-a.akamaihd.net/pdf/en_2MCP.pdf) (Accessed August 7, 2021)



# REBUILDING

## Shattered Lives

By **Chaplain Decikens Moyo**,

Zimbabwe East Union Conference with Deena Bartel-Wagner, Editor, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries

**R**egularly, a teenaged Decikens Moyo stood in the pulpit and preached. As others listened, they believed he had a gift and a calling. “My parents encouraged me to consider becoming a pastor,” says Decikens. “I resisted, but continued to agree to speaking appointments.”

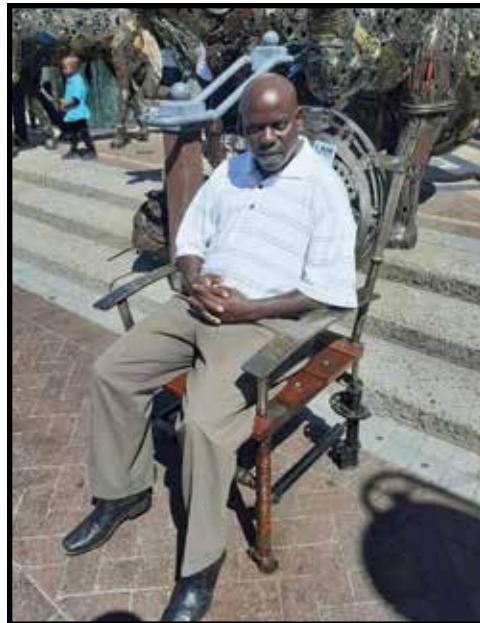
With each presentation, God worked on Decikens heart and life. Finally, he accepted that his calling was to become a pastor. This led Decikens into the literature ministry. “I spent time in communities sharing the gospel and healthy living as I sold books on these topics,” says Decikens.

Studying at Solusi University in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, meant Decikens followed in the footsteps of hundreds of other pioneers who trained to help those around them. Following graduation, Decikens soon found himself assigned to his first church district. “During the next five years, I pastored and learned what it meant to lead congregations in ministry,” says Decikens.

When a move to another district came, Decikens soon learned about additional ministry he would become involved in. “We had a church member who was serving a prison sentence in the local corrections facility,” says Decikens. “I requested permission from the prison to visit him.”

To receive visitation permission in Zimbabwe, an individual must complete an application and required identity documents to become an approved visitor. “I submitted the application and waited for my authorization,” says Decikens. “When the prison learned I was a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, they asked if I’d be interested in overseeing other Adventists interested in prison ministry.”

Decikens met with his local



Decikens Moyo

conference leadership for guidance and counsel. “The conference concurred with this ministry opportunity and seconded me to the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service,” says Decikens. “A prison system identification card was issued to me. A part of my job is to oversee the requests of all Adventists who seek to visitation permission.” Today, Decikens serves as the Director of Chaplains for the Zimbabwe East Union Conference and has access to the 46 prisons throughout Zimbabwe, and pastors eight Adventist church congregations.

#### OVERCOMING FEAR AND PREJUDICE

Because of limited resources, Decikens believed that joining the chaplain’s work with manpower from local churches would create a more significant impact in prison ministries. “At first, the idea moved slowly,” admits Decikens. “Many members were hesitant to visit

convicted felons in prison. Within our society, fear and prejudice of those convicted of crimes are prevalent.” The members needed to be educated about ministering to those in prison and among the least of these. The prison ministries program has grown, and one of the churches has 53 members involved in prison ministries.”

Each of the churches appoints a prison ministries director who heads the local outreach. Decikens meets with the local committees to guide them in their outreach and encourage them in their ministry.

### **CONVICTING THE CONVICTED**

The approach to minister to prisoners’ needs was a combined focus on spiritual elements and teaching practical leadership and daily living skills. “We held church services for the prisoners and supplemented these with Voice of Prophecy Bible studies, communion services, Daniel and Revelation seminars, and camp meetings,” says Decikens. “We’ve established congregations within prisons. Individuals who’ve been convicted by the laws of the land have found their hearts convicted as they met Jesus behind prison walls and requested baptism.”

The donation of televisions and DVD players by prison guards played another role in the inmates’ spiritual growth. “The televisions gave the prisoners access to Hope Channel, and the DVD players were used to



Restoring shattered lives is a vital part of the ministry that Decikens works towards in his chaplaincy ministry.

share various pre-recorded sermons,” says Decikens. “So many people were touched by the programming, and we could literally watch the changes take place in their lives.”

Preparing prisoners for release back into society is another facet of the ministry program. The focus is on developing leadership and practical skills that the individuals can take back into their community and use to better their lives.

“Our prisoners can learn leadership skills as they work in the various prison departments. These include the cafeteria and kitchen, the medical clinic, and even the chaplaincy department,” says Decikens. Providing them with leadership tools will help them once they are released back into their communities.

Many lessons and skills can also be learned from manual labor. Decikens has chosen to use gardening as a resource for training. Growing vegetables becomes more than harvesting produce to place on the table for a meal. The laborer develops the concept of taking responsibility as they water and weed the plants. They learn patience as the plants sprout, grow, and finally mature

into a harvest. When working with others, they learn teamwork and the importance of carrying their share of the workload. The gardening provides regular physical activity, which can be in short supply in prison. As crops and plants grow, so does self-confidence as prisoners see the results of their consistent, dedicated hard work.

### PREPARING FOR THE WELCOME HOME

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After serving a prison sentence, individuals can meet with resistance and prejudice when they attempt to re-enter society. As a part of his overall chaplaincy ministry, Decikens prepares those who will receive the convict back into their midst.

The family who is left behind following a judgment and conviction often suffers. Decikens supplies training to his church prison ministry teams to meet the needs of the family and work with them. In addition to visits, the team provides for spiritual needs, and in some cases, physical needs, too.

When a prisoner learns the release date, a series of events is triggered that Decikens oversees. "I believe it is important to prepare the local community and the family for this event," says Decikens. "I meet with the local pastor and give him information that he will have a new member added to his congregation. I also meet with the headman of the village to notify him that the person is returning home. For this visit, I'm often accompanied by a prison officer."

The next step is to meet with the individual or family who was victimized by the crime committed. "As I meet with them, we discuss how the criminal has changed, and now they are ready

to live a different life," says Decikens. "Then, we arrange a time after the release for everyone to meet in private to express regrets and forgiveness."

On the day the prisoner is set free, the local church provides clothes, food, and support during the transition back into the community. "We've discovered that the greater the support offered by the community and the local church, the more successful the individual can be as they resume their life," says Decikens.

### OUR COMMUNITY CHILD HAS COME HOME

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And how do those private meetings of regret and forgiveness play out? "As the victims meet with the prisoner, there are tears and words spoken," says Decikens. "The atmosphere is often one of 'our child has come back!' It becomes a celebration of healing."

One particular return didn't seem to go as planned. "A mentally ill individual was released back into his community," says Decikens. "We had taken all of the steps and prepared the village. On the day of the release, his mother cried and asked, 'You've only brought me a problem to take care of. Why have you done this to me?' She didn't want to accept her own son. That's when the village headman intervened. He said the village would help care for the son and make sure he took his medications. Today he's healthy and successfully living in the community."

As a teen, Decikens Moyo had no idea that God would use him to rebuild shattered lives. Today, his ministry brings hope and healing to families and communities.

# KNOW THE VOICE

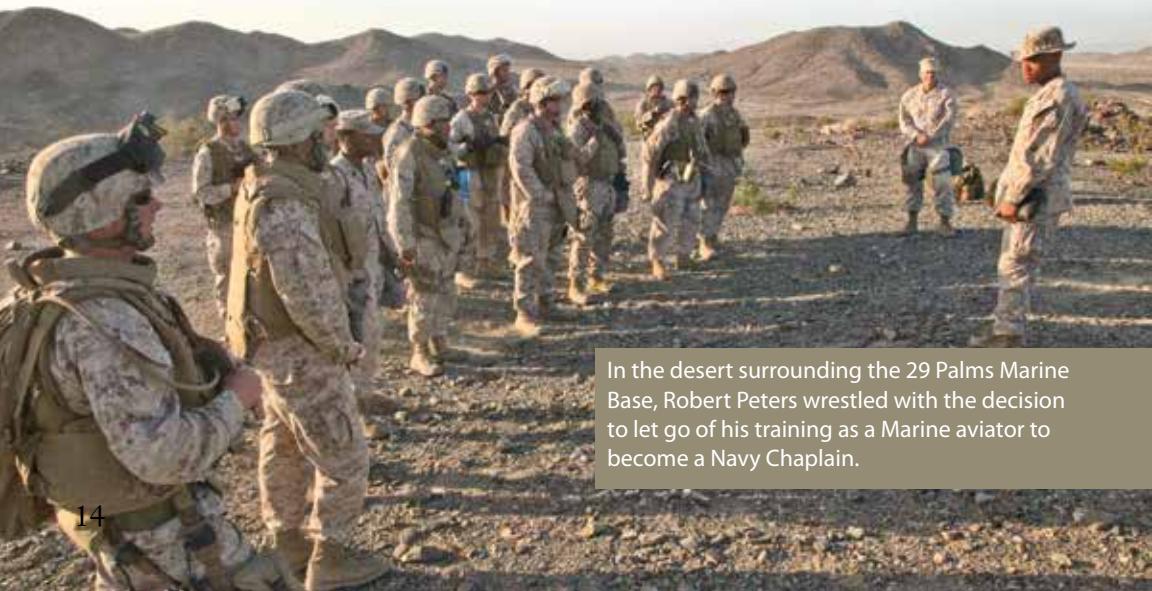
By Commander Robert W. Peters, III, CHC, U. S. Navy with Deena Bartel-Wagner, Editor

In his book *Disciples Indeed*, Oswald Chambers wrote, “Our Lord’s conception of discipleship is not that we work for God, but that God works through us.” As Christians, we accept that we want God to work through us. Putting it into practice can test our faith when we don’t clearly see our life’s direction.

“My family—both paternal and maternal grandparents, my mother and father, and aunts and uncles—impacted me to become the person I am today,” says Robert Peters. “Through their

instruction, their lives, and their words, I learned what it means to sacrifice, forgive, and what it means to allow God’s work in my life.”

During his college years, Peters earned an undergraduate degree in Commercial Art Illustration from Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama, and a degree in Communication Graphics from the University of Alabama–Huntsville. “I wanted to serve my country and began to ask God for direction on how I could best do this,” says Peters. “He led me to



In the desert surrounding the 29 Palms Marine Base, Robert Peters wrestled with the decision to let go of his training as a Marine aviator to become a Navy Chaplain.

the United States Marine Corps. There were many disciplines I needed to learn, and training as a naval aviator proved to be a good match for me.”

Peters spent eight years with the Marines and served with the Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 162 (HMM-162). He deployed with HMM-162 as the Air Combat Element for the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit, Special Operations Capable, on the Mediterranean Sea. During his deployment, Peters participated in Operations Autumn Shelter, Balkan Calm, Silver Night, and Operation Deliberate Forge.

“During those years with the Marines, although the training was intense, my relationship with God grew stronger,” says Peters. “In the military, you can tell what branch someone belongs to by the way they talk, their walk, their appearance, and even their personality.”

With this realization, a conviction grew in Peters’ heart. “Christians should be identifiable in the same manner,” says Peters. “When I realized this, I began to put it into practice. My presence began to impact others.”

As Peters immersed himself in Bible study and seeking how to best live as a Christian, he noticed something troubling. “I began to see incongruencies in the behaviour of some of the chaplains,” says Peters. “These behaviours ranged from excessive inebriation to inappropriate language, to participation in viewing inappropriate photos and movies with the Marines who I worked with daily.”

When lay leaders began to mention that they were leading out in Bible studies and the chaplains never attended, Peters grew increasingly concerned. “I sought out one of the junior Chaplains and began to ask



Commander Robert W. Peters, III

questions,” says Peters.

Peters wasn’t prepared for the response the chaplain gave. “He told me, ‘It sounds like you are thinking about becoming a chaplain,’” says Peters. “As we continued the discussion, the chaplain repeated his statement about me becoming a chaplain two more times. The third time he stood and said it forcefully. Becoming defensive, I angrily jumped up to utter a refusal, but no words would come out of my mouth even though my mouth was moving! I’d never had this happen before.”

In his mind, Peters began asking, *“What is going on, God? You don’t want me to be a chaplain. You brought me to the Marine Corps to be a naval aviator.”*

Finally, Peters could utter the words, “This conversation is over,” and left. As he walked away, he wondered about what had just happened. The unsettling event wouldn’t leave him.

Sleep wouldn’t come that night.

“I was training at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, California. The surrounding area is desert-like, and



Chaplain Peters ministered to Marines during their deployment in Afghanistan.



Chaplain Peters takes the oath of office during his promotion ceremony.



Ministry to young recruits is energizing and provides opportunities to help direct their lives.

God said, ‘Get up and let’s talk,’ says Peters. ‘I spent the entire night in an argument with God about what had happened. At sun-up, I went home, took a shower, and reported for that day’s duty. My schedule included flying that day.’

Peters continued to struggle with the thoughts he’d had and stopped by the base chapel to pray. ‘While I was sitting there, a young Marine came in and needed to talk. There were no chaplains available,’ says Peters. ‘I listened to him and gave some advice.’

Again, at the end of the second day, sleep would not come, and Peters again returned to walk the desert thinking, praying, and questioning. The sun rose again, and he reported to work for the third day without sleep, but not feeling tired. ‘While I was in the dining hall that day, the young Marine who spoke with me in the chapel approached me,’ says Peters. ‘He said, ‘Thank you, sir. It’s all working out. Just like you said it would.’

After talking with the young man, Peters didn’t even try to go to sleep. He walked straight out into the desert and began thinking about the past three days and nights. ‘I didn’t need a whale belly experience to know God wanted my attention,’ says Peters. ‘I felt God say, ‘I want you to be a chaplain, and I want you to tell your CO tomorrow.’’

Peters was stunned. How could he deliver this message to his commanding officer? The Navy had invested millions of dollars in his aviation training. Hadn’t he prayed before becoming a Marine and believed that God wanted him in the Marines? ‘Throughout my time with the Marines, I had a burning desire to know why God led me to join them,’ says Peters. ‘The rest of the night,

I talked with God about my past. As the hours passed, I realized that God was telling me that this was the reason He'd brought me to the Marines."

The next day Peters met with the Executive Officer. The first words he spoke were, "I don't know how to tell you this... With those words, doors opened in unexpected ways for Peters to become a chaplain. Within months, following an inter-service transfer, Peters was enrolled at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University.

Since those three days and nights in the desert, Peters says it's phenomenal how God has led. "In this world, we are involved in warfare. We have an enemy and must be prepared," says Peters. "Our responsibilities are to teach, preach, heal, and cast out demons. Teaching people just how real and simple things are in the Bible. God has given us so much power, and He wants us to use that power in the warfare on this earth."

Peters and his wife, Dollis, minister together to those around them.

"Dollis is a God-fearing woman, and we work hand-in-hand in ministry. Her giftedness in hospitality and caring for people is a blessing as we disciple young parents and families," says Peters.

Today, Peters continues to serve his Marines. Currently, he's stationed in Okinawa, Japan as the Deputy Force Chaplain of the III Marine Expeditionary Force, the Brigade Chaplain of 3D Marine Expeditionary Brigade, and the Group Chaplain of III Marine Expeditionary Force Information Group.

"During their basic training, Marines, Sailors, and Soldiers learn to recognize their drill instructor's voice," says Peters. "As Christians, we must know God's voice in our lives."

When Peters heard God's voice in his life, he responded. His discipleship continues to be honed as he allows God to work through him.



The Robert Peters family—l. to right Robert, Dollis, Robert IV, and Kara.



Peters knew God had led him to the Marines. He believed his job was to be a helicopter pilot. Then he learned God had other plans.



Even chaplains have the opportunity to fly in U. S. Navy fighter jets.

# When Life Isn't Fair

**B**ringing hope amid dark times is a role chaplains often must fill. Dr. Mansfield Edwards served in that role following the shooting down of a plane carrying 176 persons from Iran to Ukraine. The news of January 8, 2020, horrified the world and shook the York Region

community. Thirty-three-year old Bahareh Karami, one of their own, was among the victims. Bahareh worked as an environmental sciences technologist at the Regional Municipality of York and was based at the Administrative Centre in Newmarket.

“The 400+ attendees at the memorial service were a multifaith group,” says Edwards. “My message needed to be relatable and uplifting to them as they grieved the loss of their co-worker and friend.” Edwards also spoke to Bahareh’s family as the service was streamed live to their home in Iran.

Two weeks before her death, Bahareh had become a Canadian citizen. Following her first trip home to Iran since immigrating to Canada, she was returning to her job when she boarded the fateful flight. Her family and friends remembered Bahareh for her love for her family, dedication, and

Chaplain Mansfield Edwards spoke words of hope at the memorial service for Bahareh Karami.



*“My message needed to be relatable and uplifting to them as they grieved the loss of their co-worker and friend.”*

strong work ethic, and enthusiasm to volunteer in her community.

The memorial message, “When Life Isn’t Fair,” focused on the “dark days” each person faces when “days of despair and discouragement come and when there are more questions than answers.” Edwards compared this to the “dark days in our country.”

He told his listeners, “Human beings—intelligently designed—are wired to respond negatively ... to death.” As a way of coping with the grief they were feeling, Edwards offered four ways to deal with grief.

1. Affirm the new reality by beginning your healing.
2. Pursue your nagging need for answers, with God, with others, and with government leaders.
3. Cherish and reinvest in the people who have been placed in your life. Value and take care of each other.
4. Trust God, even when you don’t understand the happenings around you.

Following the service, Bahareh’s family thanked Chaplain Edwards and said that his message brought them comfort and hope. Others attending the service told him they wished they

More than 400 people attended the memorial service, which was also livestreamed to Bahareh’s family in Iran.

could have one more conversation with Bahareh. “I suggested that they write a note or a letter to Bahareh and slip it under her office door,” says Edwards. “Many notes were found in her office following the service.”

Edwards has served as a volunteer chaplain with the York Regional Police since 2004. He also serves as the president of the Ontario Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Oshawa, Ontario, Canada. “In December 2018, I was tasked with handling all religious aspects for a swearing-in ceremony for the York Region mayors and regional councillors,” says Edwards. “When the memorial ceremony organizers were making plans for Bahareh’s memorial, they requested that I speak.”

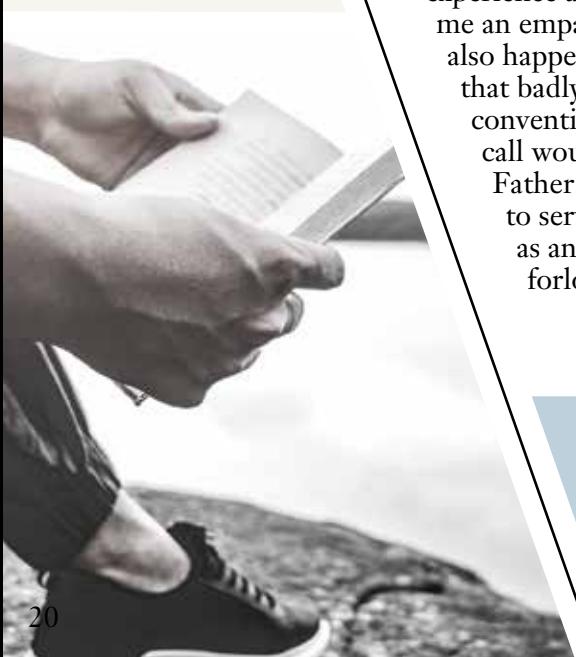


# WE SHOULD BE CALLED....

**G**rowing up as a pastor's kid, my first experience of call was an extension of my father's call to ministry. The responsibilities and weight of pastoral ministry do not belong to the pastor alone. They are, for good and ill, passed down to the subsequent generation.

We moved a lot. We experienced a large amount of disruption and uncertainty. I played piano from age five, and was already a regular part of music ministry by age eight. I was baptized at 13. I felt inspired by an apocalyptic message evangelistic series.

My sense of a call came later, and much differently. It happened that the breadth of experience a disrupted childhood afforded made me an empathetic listener and a good friend. It also happened that I grew up in a generation that badly needed both. I did not feel a conventional call to pastoral ministry. My call would be more in keeping with that of Father Mulcahy or Friar Tuck. I felt called to serve, time and again, alongside friends, as an agent of hope and comfort in often forlorn circumstance.



“Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us that we should be called the sons and daughters of God.”

Following a relief trip after Hurricane Katrina and teaching ESL in Russia, my time at Union College cemented my desire to become a chaplain. I very much appreciated the opportunity to begin in chaplaincy from the very start. After six years of experience, I have narrowed down on my passion. We are in institutional autumn. Not only in the church or health care, but everywhere. We have democratized authority in an age of more information and less empathy. Against all of this, I have identified my personal gospel. “Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us that we should be called the sons and daughters of God.”

A servant leader in such a time as this should be articulate and fluent in conveying the love of God. In bringing to the mind of those placed

in their sacred charge that they are part of the family of a God who has not abandoned them to the caprices of an apathetic universe. This should be done with listening, first, with empathy and curiosity, and above all, with respect for the work that God has already begun in the lives of others of which we cannot know.

Having worked in an environment of crisis, I have come to count on this axiom. Prior pastoral relationship is spiritual preventative care. In the ICU, CF/Geriatric Outpatient, and Emergency Department, having a proactive stance, participating in the rounding and rituals, getting to know the patients and their family before crisis hit meant that I knew stories, hardships, relatives, and the movement of God during



If we are to communicate the love of God to my generation, it will help immensely if we are aware of what God is already doing to be found at the end of these searches.

critical moments and changes. Similarly, developing relationships with staff and becoming their pastor and mentor meant that when they suggested I see a patient, they were prescribing a treatment they understood.

I have come to value chaplaincy ministry so much because I see it within the Bible. For every burning bush and still small voice, God sends a Nathan or Paul or Philip twice. God sends people to communicate with people. He demonstrates His love for us by participating in our lives and relationships. This is especially important to remain mindful of, given the rapid ascendency of quantification over quality. Of automation over empathy. In a time marked by 'disruption' and 'agile', timelessness and transcendence are increasingly unique qualities which are powerful

when they're communicated effectively. After much listening, I feel that I can safely say that I grew up in a generation largely defined by a search for four things. Novelty, meaning, security, and identity.

If we are to communicate the love of God to my generation, it will help immensely if we are aware of what God is already doing to be found at the end of these searches. We should not be intimidated by change, but rather understand that the one who says "Behold, I shall do a new thing" every instant in the life of this universe has led His children to traverse the impossible and impossible so often that at this point, it's routine behavior for Him. In summation, I feel a call to ministry, and a curiosity as to what God will do next, both in my life, and the life of any community He should call me to serve.

*Editor's Note: This issue of *The Adventist Chaplain* launches a new column—*In Our Hearts | On Our Sleeves*. Chaplains may contribute their thoughts anonymously for publication. For more details on submission, contact the Editor.*

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## NAD Director's Thoughts



# I NEEDED A JUMP-START

He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40: 29 – 31 NKJV

Recently, I had a moment that every driver dreads. I went into the garage to start Debra's car, and nothing happened. Usually, I turn the key to the right, all the way, then release it. Immediately, the car would crank, then purr. Not today. I tried it again. I pressed the horn, and nothing happened. We had driven the car the day before, and there was no hint of trouble. I was perplexed, but I knew what to do.

For such a time as this, I had bought a policy with the American Automobile Association (AAA) that would allow me to call for assistance if ever I had a problem with our cars. When I called the Customer Care

Line, the phone was answered quickly. The attendant asked my name. When I responded, he called me by my name and asked me if I was safe. I replied, yes. He then asked, "How may I help you today?"

When I explained the problem, he said that he understood and would dispatch a service truck to help me. He asked me to wait patiently and gave me an approximate time when my help would arrive. I waited and tinkered on some other tasks while waiting. Before too long, the AAA truck was at the house. Frank, the mechanic, was polite and accommodating. When he asked me to turn the key, nothing happened. He knew just what to do.

Frank had a portable device that he called a Hot Shot. He thought that it would give me enough power to jump-start the car. It did not. We laughed while musing about the good old days when you could jump-start a car by putting the transmission in neutral and pushing the car until it was going fast enough to “pop the clutch.” Not this car!

He had another option. He connected a long set of cables to the battery in my car. Then he plugged the cables into a contraption on the bumper of his truck. He said, “Turn the key.” I did, and the car started, without hesitation. I remarked that I wished there was something like that to get me going when I feel tired and depleted.

His eyes lit up, and Frank smiled as he said, “There is something you can use.” I asked, “Really?” Frank replied, “Yes, the Bible says in Isaiah 40:29–31 He gives power to the weak, And to *those who have* no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew *their* strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

I joined him as he was quoting the verse. His eyes and smile brightened further. He said with enthusiasm, “You are a believer?” I responded affirmatively, and we ceremoniously bumped elbows. I told Frank that that verse was one of my favorite verses of scripture.

Frank told me that when he was younger and a Track athlete, that verse was in his mind as he would sprint the last quarter of his races. He said that

he rarely lost a race when he focused on that text as he ran.

We reminisced about times when we felt depleted, emotionally, spiritually, or physically and intoned that verse. Invariably, we found renewal. Before he left, Frank paused and said something profound to me. What did you do while you waited for me to arrive? My response was, “I worked on some other projects.” He said, “That is what you should do when you are waiting on the Lord to renew you. Work on some other of His projects. Waiting on the Lord is not idleness. It is service!

“You knew I was coming, so you did not just sit and pout or sulk. You did something productive while you waited. Likewise, you know God is going to show up, at the right time, with just what you need to jump-start you. Just keep doing well, and your help will always show up. You might have to wait a while, but your renewal is assured”.

I said, “Frank, you have made my day. Not just because you jump-started my car, but because you have given my faith a jolt too. Thank you.”

Strangely, but thankfully, since then, Debra’s car has started every time that we have needed it.

If you, dear reader, are feeling depleted, burned out, run-down, or dispirited, turn your mind to the Word of God. If you don’t have a favorite verse that restores your soul, may I commend you to the verse that Frank and I claim? Isaiah 40:29 – 31! Wait on the Lord, and He will jump-start your heart, your vision, your enthusiasm,

*continued on page 30*

## Chaplaincy:

## RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

And other sheep I have,  
which are not of this fold.  
Them also I must bring, and  
they shall hear My voice;  
and there shall be one fold  
and one Shepherd.

John 10:16

Developing an appreciation and respect for religious pluralism is a crucial element of success in chaplaincy ministry. Religious pluralism is not the burial of your tenets of faith, but rather an ability to minister to the needs of others without apprehension. As a new chaplain in the United States Navy Chaplain Corps, and with only a few years of pastoral ministry under my belt, I was responsible for conducting worship services on Sunday mornings to a congregation that consisted of various Protestant faiths. Fortunately, my grounding and firm conviction as a Seventh-day Adventist allowed me to minister effectively in a pluralistic environment. This opportunity also resulted in many cherished friendships and developed ministry skills that

**By Washington Johnson II,**

Assistant Director, Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists; Staff Chaplain, North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) Peterson AFB, Colorado

helped prepare me for greater chaplaincy responsibilities.

#### WHAT IS RELIGIOUS PLURALISM?

Pluralism is an attitude or policy regarding the diversity of religious belief systems peacefully co-existing in society or the workplace. Religious pluralism has a long history and development that reaches from antiquity to contemporary trends in post-modernity. The Seventh-day Adventist Church strongly believes in religious freedom for all people. A person's conscience, not the government, should dictate his or her choice to worship—or not.

One of the earliest documented examples of religious pluralism is found in the "Cyrus Cylinder." This

The Seventh-day Adventist Church strongly believes in religious freedom for all people. A person's conscience, not the government, should dictate his or her choice to worship—or not.

artifact describes how Cyrus, a Persian king, promised freedom of religion and worship for the diverse religious groups of people living in the empire. Cyrus was an outstanding advocate of religious pluralism and is referred to as "God's anointed."<sup>1</sup>

The founding fathers of America believed in religious pluralism. Many migrated to her shores in search of religious tolerance. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution protects religious pluralism. It states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." Religious liberty, as it is defined, guarantees that multiple religions can worship peaceably.

## PROSELYTISM

Proselytism is the attempt of any religion or religious individuals to convert people to their beliefs. As chaplains, it is essential to remember not to cross this line in pastoral care in a diverse religious setting. Proselytism is not a positive code of conduct for chaplains and can lead to termination. That is why it is critical that persons with an interest in chaplaincy as a career know the difference between

evangelism and proselytizing.

During deployment, a service member noticed that my diet did not include pork and certain kinds of seafoods. After a few weeks, the service member inquired about my diet. At the member's request, I shared my reason for my dietary practice from Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. He thanked me for the information, and only the Lord knows the outcome of our conversation. As chaplains, "We are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people."<sup>2</sup>

But it doesn't mean that we have to wear our beliefs on our sleeves or evangelize everyone with whom we come in contact.

## MINISTRY OF PRESENCE

The ministry of presence is also an element of pluralism that can transcend faith groups to meet respective needs. As a chaplain serving on a public campus ministering to students with varied religious backgrounds, I learned that one of the most potent ministry influences is the "ministry of presence." It is a term used in chaplaincy to describe how chaplains minister – without words to facilitate spiritual and moral

# NAD UPDATES

Taking Christ's message of love and hope to those who are spiritually lost and who would not usually attend a traditional church requires a 24/7 ministry to people, not only of diverse faith groups but those with no faith beliefs.

support when entering the room of a dying patient, the cell of a prisoner, a grieving parent, a student with test anxiety, or a service member experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or moral injury. These are the words others have used to describe the ministry of presence.

*"When pain is the deepest, words are the fewest."* – Ann Voskamp

*"We do not have to be brilliant, articulate, biblical scholars; it is true that the greatest ability as a friend is availability. Just show up—and you exercise the ministry of presence."*

– Stephen Davey

*"Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words."*

– Francis of Assisi

As long as people are hurting and searching for more than this life has to offer, there will be a need for qualified chaplains willing and able to minister in diverse religious settings. Taking Christ's message of love and hope to those who are spiritually lost and who would not usually attend a traditional church requires a 24/7 ministry to people, not only of diverse faith groups but those with no faith beliefs.

As a chaplain, I am often reminded of the words of John the Revelator. "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands."<sup>3</sup> In Heaven, we will worship one God, we will be one family, but we will come from various religious faiths. Yet, we will all worship together and accept each other without apprehension. What a joyous day that will be!

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 45:1, KJV

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 2:9, KJV

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 7:9, KJV

# MINISTRY of PRESENCE

By Makeba Garrison, M.Div. M.ED West Cancer Center & Research Institute

Relationships are of primary importance in life, and value increases as one ages. I meet many elderly people who are the only survivors of their family, which means they crave interaction. Some are experiencing depression. When these individuals meet me as the chaplain, they are relieved that they have an opportunity to talk and be heard in the clinical setting. One such patient, we will call her Mary, was a widow. She had two adult sons who lived near her but had “their own lives.” When I first met her, she shared that she had support but no friends. I asked her to elaborate. She confided that her sons take her to doctors’ appointments; and make sure that she has food but rarely just come by and sit to talk. She missed the companionship of those she worked with for many years.

Over time I grew to understand Mary’s needs were like so many other seniors. She was grieving the loss of many family members and friends. Her days consisted of scanning the obituary to see if she recognized anyone. Besides being lonely, she expressed a desire to review her life. The review of life is an important, meaningful opportunity to forgive self and others, and gives one an opportunity to see if their life was purposeful and meaningful.

Many seniors feel isolated, lonely, and without purpose. As the chaplain, I listen to them, allow them space to review life and offer any spiritual practice which brings meaning

to their lives (i.e., communion, scripture reading, prayers, etc.). Research summarized in Mayo Clinic Proceedings indicated nearly 350 studies of physical health and a full 850 studies of mental health show better health outcomes for the aged when religion and/or spirituality are at the core of their value systems. As we care for our elderly, let us remember that their spiritual well-being is important and lends to healing. The ministry of presence is being available to hear their stories.

Spirituality means not just one compartment of life, but the deepest dimension of all life. The spiritual is the ultimate ground of all our questions, hopes, fears, and loves. It includes our efforts to deal creatively with retirement and find a purpose for our lives after our family has been raised. It concerns our struggles with the loss of a spouse or a move from a home of many years, questions of self-worth, and fear of reaching out to make new deeper, peace, wider friendships, the discovery of new talents, wider boundaries of love.

All of these are spiritual concerns.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Fisher, K., *Winter Grace: Spirituality and Aging*. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1998, p. 13.

*Editor’s note: This article originally appeared in the West Cancer Center & Research Institute Geriatric News, Volume 1, Issue 3 May 2020*

*continued from page 25*

your potential, and your reality. Do something positive for someone else while you wait. Waiting on the Lord is not idleness. It is service.

Since January, many of you have heavily invested yourselves in support of the patients, first responders, care providers, and systems who have been most affected by the COVID 19 pandemic. Thank you for your faithful service to God by serving His people.

Doubtless, many of you are tired, drained, and impacted by the stress of an invisible marauder causing mayhem, myriads of death, isolation, a paradigm shift in worship methodology, economic instability, and despair among many in our

society. The social unrest and the political climate may also have taken a toll on you. Be of good cheer. A jump start is available.

Building upon this idea, Chaplains Ivan Omaña and Gilda Roddy, ACM Assistant Directors, are collaborating on a project that they will unveil in a few weeks. Look for some new, inspirational content titled Jump Start. I am excited about their innovative initiative. How blessed I am to be supported by younger, enthusiastic, and capable disrupters. Ivan and Gilda, *Carpe diem!*



Come to me, all of you who are struggling and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28, CJB

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THE ADVENTIST CHAPLAIN is a quarterly publication of Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries (ACM), the ecclesiastical endorsing agency of the Seventh-day Adventist® Church.

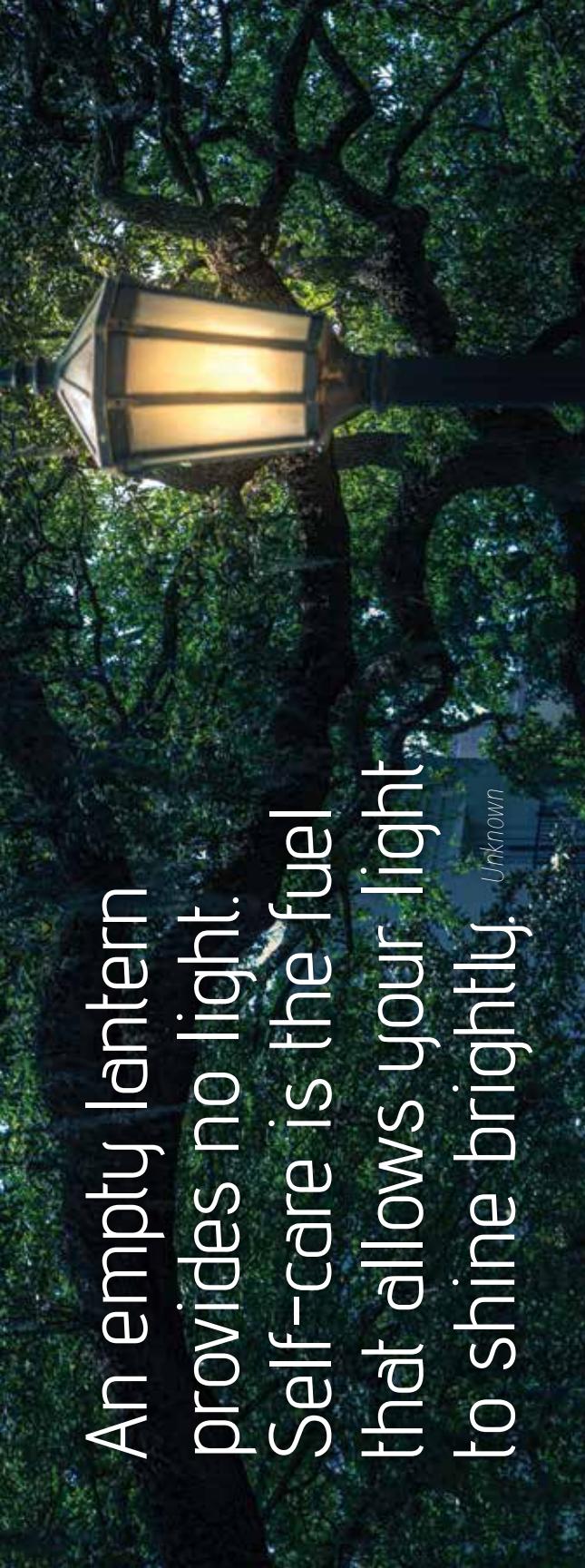
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A photograph of a glowing street lamp in a dark, wooded area. The lamp is illuminated, casting a warm glow on the surrounding trees and foliage. The scene is dimly lit, with the lamp being the primary light source.

An empty lantern  
provides no light.  
Self-care is the fuel  
that allows your light  
to shine brightly.

*Unknown*



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