

A Publication of the National Black Chaplains Association

The Capsule

MAY 2018 | Volume 1 Issue 3

Clinical Perspective

Join the NBCA

Tackling the Opioid Crisis

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From AME to UMC

From the Desk of the President

Our Annual Report

On behalf of the Leadership Team, I congratulate all of you who attended or supported the efforts and accomplishments of the 2018 Annual Session in San Diego, California. There were several culminating moments occurring throughout the conference that were particularly noteworthy, which included the following: the unprecedented number of participants, exhibitors and presenters (71); the Association conducted its first West Coast annual session; the level of active duty military presence; exhibitors present or those who forwarded literature for distribution; the special welcome and congratulatory letter by Governor Jerry Brown, which is posted on the website and the highest ranking civilian, Dr. Vito Imbasciani, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs of the State of California, who represented Governor Brown; the dissemination of our first Membership Directory (2018) published by Chaplain Tammie Elfadili, Special Project Officer. More than 12 substantive presentations were delivered with a plethora of relevant topics and insightful discussions. For a more comprehensive report, please reference the enumerated summary prepared by Chaplain Gwendolyn Lewis.



Chaplain Marvin L. Mills, Sr.
President, NBCA



28th Annual Conference National Black Chaplains Association



In addition to the significant accomplishments of the Conference, it is important to acknowledge the increase of memberships totaling 25 for 2017. On average, memberships have ranged between 3-4 members annually. This year alone, we have received six new members. On the fiscal side, we have received donations totaling more than \$47,000.00. In addition, the leadership team has introduced and installed a new paperless system to facilitate the collection of organizational funds. Last year, we created the first newsletter "*The Capsule*", under the abled leadership of Chaplain Alfray Thomas, Jr., Editor-in-Chief. To date, three outstanding issues have been published.

The increased presence of military chaplains, line officers and non – commissioned officers during the conference validated the Associations' commitment to building an endearing and enduring bridge between the Department of Defense and Veterans Affairs. A viable new initiative, The Navigators Program was set in motion, which is a tool to be used for coaching and mentoring individuals aspiring to become VA Chaplains.

A committee was formed to continue the research on opioids, suicidal and homicidal behaviors and the role of mental health chaplains. In a real sense there is an exciting movement underway, and I ask you to let it continue with you.

The success of the current administration is attributed to the guidance and orchestration of the Holy Spirit and the pioneering and dedicated leadership of past presidents and members.

Serving the Department of Veteran Affairs



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FROM MY HEART TO YOUR HEART

I too want to celebrate and say along with our President **“Congratulations to all”** who attended and supported the conference in San Diego, California. Our 28th Annual Conference was tremendous and well attended by the membership, panels, and guests. Well done! We accomplished much, embraced new members, got acquainted with former members, and were inspired by a powerful message on Friday night by our President entitled: “Healing the Prerequisite to Salvation” taken from **(2 Kings 5:1-27)**. Chaplain Mills sat the house on fire with a fiery message (*figuratively speaking*).

Let me also say a word about our President and his leadership along with the Executive Board. They were superb. Their leadership from planning, organization, and perseverance to our conclusion inspired us all. We have great things to look forward to in our excellent organization from both men and women.

Our organization has some outstanding writers and our newly established editorial staff. I want to commend them on such great articles that will encourage and teach us to be better individuals and Chaplains. Our editorial staff truly is a blessing in that they proof, edit, and produce such great work for this newsletter. Thank you!

As I stated in our earlier issue, if you swallow the pill, or **“The Capsule,”** you will be enriched by such great writers. Volume 1, Issue 3 will feature articles from the African American, the Multicultural, the Pluralistic, and the Clinical perspective. As VA Black Chaplains, we want to have diversity among us and address how we are connected universally (*ex. suffering, love and hope are universal*) regardless of race, cultural, ethnicity, or religious persuasion. Sit back, relax, and enjoy reading.



Chaplain Rev. Dr. Alfray
Thomas, Jr.
Editor-in-Chief

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SUMMARY OF THE VABC 2018 CONFERENCE IN MISSION BAY, CA

by Chief Chaplain Rev. Dr. Gwendolyn D. Lewis, Augusta, GA



A “magnificent legacy” is the best description for the 28th Annual Conference of the *Department of Veterans Affairs National Black Chaplains Association* held at the Hyatt Regency, Mission Bay, San Diego, California from April 14 -17, 2018. Black Chaplains travelled from near and far, across the spectrum of the United States to participate in this annual event lead by its President Chaplain Marvin Mills, Sr. who also serves as the Associate Director for Diversity Development at the National Chaplains Center in Hampton, Virginia.

The theme for this year’s conference was, *Battlefield Focus: Caring for Veterans, Their Families and Care Givers*. Chaplains came

ready to be equipped to do the work of ministry for our veterans, and their families. Shortly after arrival on the first day, the icebreaking began with a tour of the wonderful San Diego, California bay area including Coronado Island. The tour concluded with an opportunity to break bread, fellowship, and network at dinner. Thereafter, the planning committee and attendees reconvened for the conference registration, as fellowship ensued.

The President Chaplain Mills, accompanied by the Vice-President Chaplain Clifton Montgomery began the first day of training by calling the meeting to order. Thereafter, Dr. Robert Smith, Medical Director, VA San Diego Health Care System; Chaplain Larry Taylor, Chief, Chaplain Service, VA San Diego Healthcare System, and Chaplain Michael McCoy, Director, Chaplain Service, VA National Chaplain Center, welcomed the eager gatherers with greetings and introductions.

The first session commenced with a lively panel discussion, moderated by Chaplain Alfray Thomas, using the video documentary *Dead Wrong*, to catapult the discussion and trigger responses to the magnitude of suicides and opioid usage impacting our veterans and this nation. The panelist, Chaplain(s) G. Dianne Lewis, Fred Tittle, and Abdul-Rasheed Muhammad, addressed the Causal Relationship between opioids-homicide-suicide; involuntary treatment, and alternatives to opioids.



The morning continued with Chaplain Forest Kirk teachings on the spiritual aspects of addiction.

His synopsis of addiction is relative to the spiritual condition. He believes, “What makes addiction a spiritual problem is the fact that one must make a decision and have the integrity to stand by that decision.” In other words, addiction should not be categorized as a disease. It is a spiritual maladjustment of discontentment which began with Adam and Eve and continues to plague humankind. For help with addiction he advises, “seek help from God, Higher Power, and Faith.”

Dr. Alauna D. Curry, MD, Staff Psychiatrist, Michael E. Deakey, VA Medical Center, Houston, TX, and Assistant Professor, Baylor College of Medicine, Menninger Department of Psychiatrist and Behavioral Sciences, Houston, Texas shared valuable skills from her experiences and study, *Language of the Spirit*. She



emphasized that “*L.O.V.E.*” is required to address the challenges of mental illness, addiction and suicidal ideation. To “*L.O.V.E.*” means: to “*Listen without Judgment; Observe the emotions of the other; Validate the equal creator in both of you, and Express yourself skillfully.*”

Chaplain Jeff Lee, a retired Lieutenant, U.S. Navy (Seal) Veteran, and a Clinical Chaplain at VA San Diego Health Care System, shared thoughts from his PowerPoint presentation titled, *Moral Injury: A Chaplains Viewpoint*. He emphasized that Chaplains must take the lead in 21st century mental healthcare, and that the spiritual dimension relative to PTSD cannot be ignored, due to the fact that the Moral Injury event in one’s life affects the relationship with self, God, and others.

A wealth of social security information was presented by Yolanda York, Public Affairs Specialist, Social Security Administration, San Diego Office. She addressed concerns from the audience and gave several resources for assistance with social security questions. The day ended with a brief session titled, The Ultimate Networking Event. A new VANBCA initiative called, “the Navigators Program,” was introduced. In this program, potential Chaplains are empowered and mentored in the VA Chaplaincy employment process through a networking process with current VA Chaplain Service chiefs.

The conference continued on Friday morning with administrative announcements by the vice-president, followed with the “We Remember” Memorial Service. Chaplain Janis Grubbs and Chaplain Howard Jones offered a solemn salute to dearly departed fellow VA Chaplain(s) Richard Dubois Adams; Robert E. Burns; DeFarris Gooden, and Randall Carter Hutchinson. In addition, the Memorial Service program participants included: Chaplain(s) Rod Lindsay, Tiffany Hardy, Sherman Baker, and National Chaplain Center Director, Michael McCoy.

World-renowned author and teacher, Rev. Dr. Ken Blue blessed the conference with a powerful presentation entitled, *The Authority to Heal*.



His spirit-filled process of bringing about healing truly captivated the audience. He encouraged the listeners that healing is possible when you: “Listen empathetically; choose a prayer strategy; and heal by the laying on of hands.” A few notes underling the major points involved: “leaning in to take the person seriously; remembering that people respond to love; listening between the lines; help people without interfering with their freedom; address childhood issues; and pray in a way to express faith.”

The Association members met to receive committee reports. In summation, the organization is growing, it accounted for 25 new members in 2017, additional membership calculations are forthcoming. The President proudly boasted on the growth and aspirations of the organization.

The awards luncheon featured a guest speaker from the California Governor’s Office, Dr. Vito Imbasciani, MD, Secretary, California Department of Veterans Affairs of California (CALVET), the recipient of the Abraham Lincoln Pillar of Excellence Award for Best Practices to Veterans in California.



His new ventures are having a positive impact in veterans' lives. As the luncheon concluded, *The VANBCA Exceptional Service* award recipients, Chaplain Timothy Storms and Chaplain Hayden E. Goodwin were honored. Both are highly esteemed for their service and commitment.

The afternoon training session presenter Dawn Miller, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, VA San Diego Health Care System, shared a PowerPoint presentation on *Suicide Prevention*. Afterwards, an intriguing discussion concerning suicide prevention resilience training was facilitated by Chaplain(s) Pearlean Scott, and Dwight Webster.

NBCA Vice-President and Master of Ceremonies, Chaplain Clifton Montgomery set the tone for an evening of elegance and celebration at the 28th Annual State of the Association Banquet. A special moment of distinction and recognition was held for Director, National Chaplain Center, Michael McCoy, who was a recipient of the prestigious *Four Chaplains award*, at this year's 75th awards banquet held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in February. Chaplain McCoy received words of commendation from Chaplain Lucy Pierre, Chaplain Alvin Mills, Sr. Director of the Department of Pastoral Care Pilgrim Psychiatric Center, Long Island, New York, and the VANBCA President, Chaplain Marvin Mills, Sr..



The first *State of the Association Address* of the Veteran Affairs National Black Chaplains Association (VANBCA) was given by none other than its current President, Chaplain Marvin Mills, Sr. The enthusiastic, humorous and gifted preacher delivered a powerful message entitled, *Healing the Prerequisite to Salvation*, his text was gleaned from II Kings 5:1. Chaplain Mills captivated the audience and left everyone eager for the future plans of the association. Afterwards, Chaplain McCoy presented the messenger with a plaque for his distinguished leadership, as he shared personal notations about the accomplishments of Chaplain Marvin Mills, Sr.

The conference convened with closing worship led by Chaplain(s) Jennifer Dukes, and Jarda Alexander. Then the preacher Chaplain Valerie Sanders left the attendees with a word of thought. *Legacy*, the title of her message, caused the congregants to think about the legacy we each leave

behind individually, and corporately. The leadership gave closing conference remarks, the attendees shared personal correspondence, and all departed feeling lifted and gifted to continue the work of ministry, thus to carry on the legacy of the VA National Black Chaplains Association.



For more pictures from the 2018 Convention, click on this link:

<https://vablackchaplains.org>



MEMORIAL DAY

by Chaplain Elder Sherri Headen, Indianapolis, IN

As I contemplate Memorial Day 2018 and reflect upon the Memorial Days in my not so distant past, a lump form in my throat and tears moisten my eyes as the melody of Taps resounds in my head. My recollection leads me to honour the lives and cherish the memories of our beloved fallen Veterans—those who served our country to ensure our freedoms, those who raised their right hands to solidify an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America. So, as a country, let us pause to remember how much we love and miss them for it is the death of our beloved ones that bonds us together as a nation.

You see the battlefield does not discriminate between nationalities, ethnic groups and cultures for the trauma of combat affects the American fabric across the board. Thus, we are drawn together by our common love, our common respect and our common grief. We are drawn by our need to reflect, our need to heal, and our need to cherish their beautiful memories. Memorial Day may be an occasion for sorrow, but it may also be an occasion of thanksgiving for God's gift of life and thankful they lived among us, like my father.

My father was a Veteran, a medic in the U.S. Army during the Korean War era. His enlistment in the Army was a strong determining factor regarding my decision to enlist. It encouraged me to do the same. My father served our country faithfully and afterward worked for and retired from Civil Service. He died in 2007 after a six-year journey with Alzheimer's Disease. As I often think about him, he seems so distant, so out of my grasp as I am unable to see his face, or touch and talk with him. But God's tender mercy reminds me, my father is never absent from me, for he dwells in my heart.



As I continue meditating on the beauty and solace of Memorial Day, I remember about 5 years ago visiting the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington D.C. at the time of the Changing of the Guard. Prior to the Changing of the Guard I read in the information brochure that "In 1921, an American soldier—his name "known but to God"—was buried on a Virginia hillside overlooking the Potomac River and the city of Washington, DC. The burial site of this unknown World War I soldier in Arlington National Cemetery symbolized dignity and reverence for America's veterans."

It was an emotional moving experience to watch an impeccably uniformed relief commander appear on the plaza and announce the Changing of the Guard. Soon thereafter the new sentinel left their Quarters and signaled the relief commander to start the ceremony. The relief commander walked out to the Tomb, saluted, faced the spectators and asked us to stand and stay silent during the ceremony. The relief commander and the relieving sentinel met the retiring sentinel at the center of the matted path in front of the Tomb. All three saluted

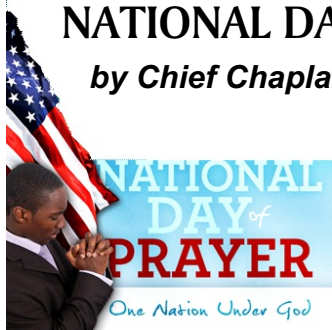
the Unknown Soldier who has been symbolically given the Medal of Honor. The ceremony proceeded with a series of other steps and concluded with a new soldier guarding the Tomb.

After watching the ceremony, I continued to think about the inscription on the Tomb, “known but to God”. Here lies a soldier that is unknown to us, but is known by God. Even though we are unable to identify this unknown hero, God knows all too well his identity and loves him beyond measure. His life, his joys, his challenges, his triumphs, his love, and his life experiences—God knows and has not forgotten the Unknown Soldiers or those who have died in service to this country.

Memorial Day reminds us of how our lives were touched by our fallen heroes. We embraced, we celebrated, we rejoiced, we wept, we argued, we played, we partied, we worshipped, and we lived and shared our love with them. Today, let our love empower the freedom to keep their memories alive in our hearts.

NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

by Chief Chaplain Rev. Dr. Gwendolyn D. Lewis, Augusta, GA



Dr. Ronnie Floyd, President of the National Day of Prayer, announced that the theme of the 2018 observance will be “Pray for America – Unity,” based upon Ephesians 4:3, which challenges believers to mobilize unified public prayer for America, “Making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Prayer is what is definitely needed in a time when the nation is so divided, broken, and seeking answers. One of the most powerful gifts given to humankind is the gift of prayer. The ability and opportunity to speak with and hear from God through prayer, and to connect with one another is not to be taken for granted. It is out of the biblical mandate to communicate with God through prayer which causes this day to take on a whole new meaning. Let us be reminded of scripture in II Chronicles 7:14, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”

While I totally agree with calling everyone to unity, I stop short of the fact that we are not to merely unify ourselves we must unify with God. Unity across racial, economic, religious, gender and nationalities is needed, but we cannot do it alone. *Prayer changes things, as God changes people.* To unify for the sake of prayer without the focus being about oneness with God is to miss the mark entirely. Not long ago, during the tragedy of 911, this nation for a moment seemed to be on the same path, which is love. Around every

corner you turned on, there was signage about Unity, Love and God. This nation must refocus on God, and prayer is the perfect vehicle to do so.

So, as we embrace the National Day of Prayer, let us touch and agree in oneness, so that the power of God will overshadow the biases, prejudice, discrimination, self-righteousness, and disparities in this nation, and across the world. Prayer is the key and faith unlocks the door. Our nation is in need of healing. Congress instituted The National Day of Prayer under the realization that if anyone can help us, it is God; and if thing can change us it is prayer. Now, let us pray.

The National Day of Prayer was created in 1952 by a joint resolution of Congress, and signed into law by President Harry S. Truman. In 1988, the law was unanimously amended by both the House and the Senate and signed into law by President Ronald Reagan on Thursday, May 5, 1988, designating the first Thursday of May

as a day of national prayer. Every president since 1952 has signed a National Day of Prayer proclamation.

www.NationalDayofPrayer.org

NATIONAL VIETNAM WAR VETERANS DAY

by Chaplain Fred Tittle, Palo Alto, CA

On March 29, 2012, by presidential proclamation, the Vietnam War Veterans Day was established, leading to the annual observance of events in 2014. The Vietnam War Veteran Recognition Act of 2017 further established the events as a national observance to recognize Vietnam War-era veterans for their service. Approximately 9 million U.S. military members served on active duty during the Vietnam War era-November 1, 1955-May 15, 1975. More than 58,000 were killed and more than 304,000 were wounded.

I served in Vietnam from 1970-1971, not as a Chaplain but as a Marine Infantryman with 2nd Bn 5th Marines. While the war in Vietnam was over years ago, there are health conditions related to Agent Orange that continue to claim the lives of many who served in Vietnam. The VA has recognized certain cancers and other health problems as presumptive diseases associated with exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides during military service. Veterans and their survivors may be eligible for benefits for these diseases: AL Amyloidosis, Chronic B-cell Leukemias, Chloracne, Diabetes Mellitus Type 2, Hodgkin's Disease, Ischemic Heart Disease, Multiple Myeloma, Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, Parkinson's Disease, Peripheral Neuropathy Early Onset, Porphyria Cutanea Tarda, Prostate Cancer, Respiratory Cancers and Soft Tissue Sarcomas... Another condition that is not listed as being presumptive that should not be dismissed is PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress), research has shown that PTSD has had a significant effect on the lives of veterans, as well as their families.



GOOD FRIDAY

by Chaplain Rev. Joe Stephens, Bay Pines, FL

Good Friday is the Friday preceding Easter Sunday during Holy Week as part of the Paschal Triduum and may coincide with the Jewish observance of Passover. It's a day on which Christians memorialize Jesus' crucifixion (Mark 15:42) and reflect on His passion and death for the salvation of the world.

As I reflect on Good Friday, "gratitude" comes to mind. When we fully comprehend what God did for us on Good Friday, we can embrace His love and accept that His grace is sufficient for us. Because of the finished work of Jesus Christ on Calvary's Cross we can have uncommon peace, joy, and wisdom. His angels have charge over us, and we are blessed coming in and blessed going out. He is our vindicator, and He will fight for us! Cohorts we are a blessed people and no weapon formed against us shall prosper as we serve Him all the days of our lives.



Additionally, I had the distinct honor and privilege to speak with a few colleagues and friends of different faith traditions to learn how they celebrate Good Friday. According to a chaplain from the Anglican faith tradition: Good Friday worship has been etched into Anglican worship from the very beginning of our history. The Veneration of the Cross, the Way of the Cross (Stations of the Cross), and the Three Hours' of Devotion (the Seven Last Words of Christ) are three Services that are celebrated in most congregations.

According to a chaplain from the Baptist faith tradition: a mini worship service is held for about an hour. The service opens with an invocation, then a responsive reading relating to Jesus upon the cross, a song of praise and worship, a prayer for the people of God and the reading of scripture (usually referencing the seven last sayings of Christ). It concludes with an invitation to join the church and finally, the benediction.

According to a chaplain from the Roman Catholic faith tradition: The Church looks upon the cross of Christ on Good Friday as the sign and symbol of Christ's salvific mission. Members gather in a prayerful mood to participate in the Stations of the Cross called the "Via Dolorosa or Via Crucis". After the Stations of the Cross, the members celebrate the Liturgy of the Word (reading about Christ's passion), the Veneration of the Cross (honoring the Cross of Christ), and the Service of Communion (reception of the Holy Communion). The Eucharist that is received on this day was consecrated on Holy Thursday hence there is no celebration of Mass on Good Friday.

According to a chaplain from the United Methodist tradition: "It is a day that proclaims God's purpose of loving and redeeming the world through the cross of Jesus Christ. A day focused on God drawing the world to Himself through Christ."

Chaplains, as we provide ministry to our nation's heroes and reflect on God's many blessings concerning Good Friday—what God did for us through His Son, reconciling us to Himself, I encourage us to be grateful, compassionate, patient, and forgiving towards others. For it is written, "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of humankind the things which God has prepared for those who love (1 Corinthians 2:9 NKJV).

EASTER - THE MEANING OF WHAT EASTER MEANT TO ME THEN AND NOW

by Chaplain Rev. Latoya Smith, Leavenworth, KS

When I was a little girl, I could remember my mother and my aunt, who were regular church goers, say, "Alright ya'll it's time to go Easter shopping". I would always get so excited, because that meant to me, the beautiful colorful dresses, with the over kill of ruffles at the bottom of it. The ruffles were so big, to the point, I couldn't even see my pretty shiny black or white strapped shoes, or my white ruffled socks. Oh yeah, I can't forget the white gloves, one millions barrettes in my hair, and to top it off, the great big Easter basket, that was bigger than me. I can remember my mother buying us dye and dying what seemed like hundreds of eggs and then hiding them all over the place at church or at home, which we would spend so much time looking for them. They soon found out that eating too many boiled eggs wasn't a good idea, so they changed to the plastic eggs with candy inside. **That was Easter to me then.**

At church, I can recall all of the women wearing white, and the men wearing white or black suits depending on their position in the church. The preacher would wear his big shoulder padded, white beautiful robe. I remember walking in the doors and hearing, "aww... look at her, she look so cute with her pretty dress on". I was shy, but I loved the compliments. After the preaching, and please don't ask me what the preacher said, there would be an Easter play and then we would go Easter egg hunting. I never understood where the rabbit or eggs came into the picture, but it was fun. Even though I never understood the sermons, I never heard them mention anything about eggs or rabbits in the preaching. **That was Easter to me then.**



What is Easter to me NOW

Let me tell you what Easter means to me NOW..... (I might preach). Romans 5:6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

I believe Easter represents true freedom and true holiness (Eph. 4:24 KJV) for those who wholeheartedly believe in Jesus' death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and that He's coming back! *Hey glory....I just got happy.* When Jesus was resurrected from the dead, it was not just a symbol of deliverance from sin, but for those who truly believe, it is deliverance from the power of sin. It also is freedom from the penalty of sin, which is death (eternal damnation for the soul and the spirit) (Rom 6:23 KJV). If the Son (Jesus) therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed (St. John 8:36, KJV). His birth was the beginning of freedom from eternal damnation. Jesus 'life, even though he was not born in sin, represented how mankind should live before God (free from sin), though many think this is impossible. (For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him 2 Cor. 5:21). Jesus' death represents what man should do daily (1 Cor. 15:3); stay connected spiritually to a spiritual God (St. John 4:24 KJV). Jesus' birth, life, and death, which for mankind means you must be born again (St John 3:7), positions our life to be set apart from the world, dying daily to sin (1Cor. 15:31), and walking daily in newness of life (Romans 6:4 KJV). The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead or Easter Sunday, is the gift that God gave because He loves us, His creation. I live for God through Jesus Christ because Jesus is the atonement for my sins. His death means that He died to the very thing that was keeping me from God and eternal life.

Easter Sunday to me now, is no longer about the little girl in the pretty, colorful, extremely ruffled dress, but the woman of God who believes in the full gospel of Jesus Christ and the power of His resurrection and what it did for me when I believed on it by faith.

Easter Sunday is not the only day I focus on the resurrection of Jesus Christ because Jesus is never going to die for me again. I have to keep in memory that He died (once), He was buried, and that He was raised up from the grave, but also that He is coming back, and I must be ready for His return. I believe this daily.

I can't close with any other scriptures than these: 1 Corinthians 11:24-26

And when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, take eat: this is my body which is broken for YOU: do this in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He comes.



ARMED FORCES DAY

by Rev. Louis R. Tillman, IV, Chicago, IL

My body and my heart may grow weak, but God is the strength of my heart and all I need forever.
– Psalm 73:26

I grew up always hearing that we serve an “on time” God who never fails us. This season we are serving in both trying and exciting times. Times in which we feel as though our faith is being tested every moment of the day. Times in which we feel as though we aren’t sure about which direction God wants for us to move in. Times in which we are trying to both live and maintain. The prayer that we find ourselves uttering is “Lord, how do we best fit into your plan of action?”

We serve an “on time” God, one who is rich in both grace and mercy. These are times in which we have to learn how to be still and work on God’s time (*Kairos*) rather than our time (*Chronos*). Working on God’s time looks like moving faithfully in places that are unfamiliar and uncomfortable for us. It means the leaning of everything that we have onto God and not onto our own experiences, wisdom and understanding.

Those who have served in the armed forces have learned how to rely on God in their most challenging times. In this season, we are challenged to rely on God through our moments of chaos and our moments of celebration. For as the Psalmist David wrote, “*my body and heart may grow weak...*” God knows when we are weak and weary in mind, body and soul. And God also knows when our faith is being tested. But we serve a God that will transform our lamentations into liberation when we try to work in God’s plan of action for our daily lives.

We did not get to where we are alone, but by the grace and the mercy of the God that we serve. God gently reminds us that we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. These reminders are helpful, as we learn that we would not be where we are today unless someone paved the way for us. In this Armed Forces Day we celebrate those who have proudly served our country and protected God’s creation. Let us be reminded of both the times of struggle and success where God walked with us, allowing us to grow into the men and women we are today.

God is pleased with who you are and how you strive to build God’s kingdom. This Armed Forces Day is a time where both *Kairos* and *Chronos* have met, and we are reminded of where we have come from, as a powerful group of African Descent, and servants created by God. We are to live according to God’s plan of action by paying homage and respect from generation to generation. How will you spend this Armed Forces Day? How will you pave the way for the generations of veterans who will come after you? And how will you best fit into God’s plan of action? For God is the strength of our plan and all that we need forever.



MOTHER'S DAY (MY MOTHER)

by Chaplain Elder Gerald L. Miller, Prescott, AZ

These humans have trained many of great men. These people have labored and help raise the people on this planet, yes Mothers. The importance of mothers dates back to the dawn of creation. Every nation recognizes the significant role mothers play in the lives of children and adults. My mother played a major role in encouraging me to further my education. She would always us saying, "I want y 'all to get farther in your education than I did. She never wanted us to settle. I observed how they struggled to make ends meet having limited education and decided I wanted a better life. My mother's perseverance to endure hard times transferred onto me. It gave me the patience, while I was in undergraduate to endure living by limited means. I believe without a doubt that, I have honored my mother by finishing my degree. Then by going farther and getting my Masters of Divinity. Presently I know she would be proud to see me working for VA.

There have been many other women that have influenced my life. The church women in my community bought me clothes when mine were burnt up. The women in three surrounding churches came together and sacrificed their time and careers in order to buy me clothes for school. Jesus really showed up then. That altered my future, faith, and commitment to Jesus Christ.

The importance of women according to scripture is to not only procreate, but also train the child while the father is working. Always you found the father working and the mother enforcing his rules in the house. The apostle Paul told the early church admit these servants (in the Greek this means deaconess) to the administration of the church. Women have played a huge role in training in order for these young ones to be prepared. Mother's Day brings back remembrance of God's important role in he has for women.





MULTICULTURALISM

by Chaplain Rev. Dr. Priscilla Mondt, Ph.D., Fayetteville, AR

He asked me to sit so that he could talk in a whispered voice about his moral injury. He asked me repeatedly, “What did I do wrong?” A dying man, he wanted to unburden his soul. He felt so guilty for what he perceived was a moral violation. As a young man the Arkansas National Guard ordered him to Little Rock to keep black children out of a white school. A teenager given an order to hold children at gunpoint; it haunted him. When the President ordered protection of the children, the military did not switch units but ordered the same unit back to Little Rock to ensure the children were able to attend school. He was confused and shamed his entire life wondering whether God would forgive him for actions that he had no control over. His story is not included in the coverage of the infamous Brown versus the Board of Education.

Multiculturalism is a purposeful acceptance and integration of others. It is an active integration of all groups. It is looking out for one another, giving voice to the powerless and sharing privilege. It is accepting that there is another perspective even when we do not want to hear it; that others might suffer more than ourselves (Example: Native Americans were the last group to get the right to vote in 1924).

Dr. Derald Sue, the father of multiculturalism, gave two principles called *etic* and *emic*. Etic is culturally universal while emic is culturally specific. An etic value for Americans is freedom and the right to vote. Specific to chaplaincy culture is a value that all people are created and valued by God while an emic value is dependent upon the culture of our faith group. Multiculturalism celebrates the etic values (what we have in common) while actively seeking to understand the emic (unique perspectives). All counseling, to include pastoral, is multicultural.

In the counseling field, it is unethical to refer a client *solely because you do not understand their perspective*. Rather, the counselor must become educated on that person’s perspective whether ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, disability or other cultural issue. If a male counselor refers a woman Veteran simply because he does not understand women’s issues, he may be brought up on ethics charges and potentially lose his license. These ethics ensure learning from one another and force understanding of others.

Critical to understanding multiculturalism is what is called microaggressions. These are the everyday verbal, nonverbal and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons *based solely upon their marginalized group membership*. Microaggressions recognize both intentional and unintentional offenses; misunderstandings do happen.

Microinvalidation is a communication that excludes, negates or nullifies the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person belonging to a particular group. Examples include speaking of Veterans exclusively in the male gender or saying “Merry Christmas” to non-Christians or “Happy Holidays” to Jehovah Witness.

Microassault is an explicit derogation, either verbal or non-verbal. These may be name-calling, avoidant behavior and purposeful discriminatory actions. Examples are: referring to a Pentecostal as a “Holy Roller” (a name dubbed by the Ku Klux Klan before tarring and feathering) or Kike for a Jewish person. No matter how sensitive, educated or aware one is, mistakes and misunderstandings will happen. However, the goal is to consciously work on understanding another person’s journey.

PowerPoint available at: <https://vablackchaplains.org>

WOMEN’S HISTORY MONTH

“Sojourner Truth: Seeking Freedom and Justice”

by Chaplain Rev. Beth Putnam, St. Albans, NY

When I speak or write about Sojourner Truth, it’s always hard for me to figure out what to include, because she did so much. But since March is Women’s History Month, I’ll focus on the part of her story where she uttered a plea that all women and their rights be considered in the new Women’s Rights Movement. I will give a little background on her, so you will understand who made the speech known as “Ain’t I a Woman”.

Sojourner Truth was born a slave in New York State, and all slaves in New York were freed in 1827. But Sojourner Truth did not trust her owners to abide by the coming abolition, and escaped the year before slavery was to end in New York. She lived for a year with a Quaker family, fearing that her owner would find a way to send her out of state before she could be freed. Turns out she was right not to trust her owners, when she escaped two of her children remained as slaves. When slavery ended in New York, she discovered her former owner had shipped her son to a Southern state to avoid freeing him. Here is where her striving for justice showed her great spirit. Rather than accept the loss of her son, Sojourner Truth sued her owner and won. Her son was returned to her, an unheard of triumph. Sojourner Truth went on to work as a housekeeper for two ministers, then she felt the need to follow her faith and begin to tell her truth. She became a public speaker about the importance of abolition, speaking against slavery as part of a group of abolitionists.

Her most famous speech was about her two great passions: abolition and women’s rights. This was at the beginning of the Women’s Rights Movement. Women could not own property, were subject fully to their husband or father, and were generally thought uneducable. Most of the speakers and leaders in the Women’s Rights Movement were Caucasian women, and their primary concerns were receiving education, owning property and obtaining the right to vote. There was tension between the Women’s Rights Movement and the Abolition Movement, as each thought their movement’s priority would be undermined by the other. Sojourner Truth stepped into the middle of this conflict. In May of 1851, Sojourner Truth spoke at the Ohio Women’s Rights Convention



in Akron, Ohio. It is reported, the leaders did not want her to speak. However, she insisted until they realized they could not prevent it.

Her speech, which became known as the “Ain’t I a Woman” speech, was a litany of her unique experiences, hardships and accomplishments due to her years as a slave. Her speech was first published in an abolitionist newspaper written by Marius Robinson. The most famous passage was quoted by him as: “I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that? I have heard much about the sexes being equal. I can carry as much as any man, and can eat as much too, if I can get it. I am as strong as any man that is now.” In a later account, the most famous, each section was punctuated by a statement “And Ain’t I a Woman?” Her plea, was that her strength, spirit and her experiences, was worthy of dignity, respect and basic human rights. She continued to champion for the abolition of slavery, for all freed slaves and all women to have rights, until her death in 1883.

PASSOVER DAY

by Chaplain Rabbi Deborah Schloss, Houston, TX

Passover is a week-long Jewish holiday that celebrates our ancestors’ freedom from 210 years of Egyptian slavery. The themes of liberation, boldness, hope, and renewal are prominent in the observance of Passover. Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin explains, “It is the retelling of how a rabble of slaves was infused with a sacred purpose and grew to enter into a covenant with G-d. It is the story that has taught the world that birth is not destiny, oppression is not defeat, “victim” is not an identity and partnership with G-d is open to us all.” During the time of our ancestors’ Egyptian slavery, they cried out to G-d and several remarkable women came to their rescue. Shifra and Puah were midwives who disobeyed Pharaoh’s order to kill all newborn Hebrew males. Yoheved and Miriam, Moses’ mother and sister, and Pharaoh’s daughter helped to save Moses’ life. These brave women kept alive our unquenchable quest for freedom.

It is no coincidence that during our Passover celebration this year, Jews around the world are also commemorating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. 50 years after his shocking assassination. In addition to King being a clergyperson, activist and a key leader of civil disobedience and non-violence during our country’s Civil Rights Movement in the 1960’s, he was also an outspoken advocate for the security of Israel and against anti-Semitism.

King, along with the above-mentioned women, each in their own way, took key steps to lead struggling and disheartened people to the Promised Land. During the time of our ancestors’ exodus from Egypt, the Promised Land was a physical place in our holy land of Israel. For Dr. King and others who led the 1960’s Civil Rights Movement and modern activists in the Black Lives Matter and Me-Too movements, the Promised Land is here in the United States, where the dream still exists that all can live in peace with ample opportunity, regardless of race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. And to this may we say, “Amen!”



PASTOR'S EXPERIENCE FROM THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH TO THE MULTICULTURAL SETTING OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

by Rev. Jeffery A. Stallworth, Jackson, MS

I have had the pleasure of serving in the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) church and the United Methodist (U.M.) church. My father, grandfathers, and uncles were ministers. In the black Methodist churches at that time, everything centered around male bishops. Some might have had theological degrees and others had merely entered college. The bishops were serious about their authority. This was true from the bishop to the presiding elders and their dogmatic, dominant, and demanding relationship of loyalty. This autocratic leadership style trickled down from the bishop to the presiding elders, the pastors, and even down to the laity of the church. The leadership of the black church was so demanding and debasing.



Whenever leadership showed up, it was understood that you would go into your pocket or into the church funds to show them your appreciation. The larger the church, the greater the payments. This was so much a part of the church and this style of payment was never questioned by the ministers or the laity. When I went to seminary and switched from Turner Seminary, which was the A.M.E. part of the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC), to Gammon, which was the U.M.C. seminary of ITC, I was unexperienced in understanding the business side and money. Money, ministry, and the flavor of Methodism were totally the opposite. The authority and loyalty that were evaluated by individual payments did not exist. Money-giving was streamlined with a greater accountability. It was unheard of to reach in your pocket or the church account to impress leadership. I learned that while half of Mississippi's budget alone was somewhere like \$12 million, the A.M.E. church's world budget—for all the world—or general budget was \$5 million. This disparity in money caused the churches to have a totally different outlook on its future and you could only wonder why the white churches brought in so much money. There was a night and day political, spiritual, and financial outlook between the U.M.C. and the A.M.E. churches.

The U.M. church guaranteed a minimum salary after finishing seminary. It covered housing, salary, furniture, retirement, and the list goes on. These accoutrements appeared to make some preachers indolent knowing that everything would somehow be covered. Black preachers seemed to become the welfare group in the U.M. church. On the other hand, there was tremendous strength in the A.M.E. church that produced ministers of mettle. It taught the ministers that if you don't work, you don't eat. As we can see, these differences have their strengths and their challenges in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the predominantly white United Methodist Church. Much like it is in professional sports, we may all be on the same team, but the way/rate that we are individually compensated can be drastically different. In whatever capacity that we're serving on God's team, we can trust that God will take care of us.





RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY – MY FAITH VERSES OTHERS

by Chaplain Ruben D. Williams, ACPE Certified Educator Student, Pittsburgh, PA

We live in a world where religious diversity is a part of our reality. The Pew Research Center found that 32% of the world identifies with the Christian religion followed by Muslims 23%, Hindus 15%, Buddhist 7%, Jewish 0.2 % and 6% practice various folk or traditional religions respectively. Although Christianity is statically the largest religious group in the world, there are other religious groups who significant impact many people. Our awareness and acceptance of diversity of religion are two important aspects of functioning in a pluralistic environment. One unique aspect of American culture is the freedom of religion. This freedom gives all religions the constitutional right to exist and practice religion in this country.

My Christian faith informs me God is a God of all people and in the image of God are all made. Understanding God as the creator of all people helps me to understand that God loves all people no matter their faith tradition and practice. God's love is the driving force in our reconciliation with each other and with God. My faith belief is in the Trinitarian model of Christianity, which is the belief in God in three persons and those three have harmony with one another and work together to bring about positive change in the world. The Church of Christ faith tradition informs my ministry in a pluralistic context. Two foundational principles transcend religion or creed, they are loving God and loving others as myself. Embracing these two principles is the ultimate expression of what it means to function as a minister in a pluralistic environment.

To engage others effectively in a pluralistic context starts with a solid understanding of pluralism. Pluralism is

more than diversity and tolerance, pluralism is when we actively seek to encounter those that are different, and we purposely endeavor to understand others through dialogue. As spiritual caregivers and colloques it is important for us not just to recognize our differences but also celebrate them, finding the good in religious practices and beliefs that are different from our own. One thing that I have found helpful my ministry is allowing others the space to be different. Being different is a part of who we are as human beings. We are all different, we all come from different places, and we all have different stories to tell about our lives. These differences are actually what makes us unique. Like snowflakes, all originate from the sky but "their different journeys to the ground will affect their shape and size, giving each snowflake its own unique identity. Although we are all different, the one thing that we have in common is our emotions. Emotions are the essence of our humanity that has no barrier. Our experiences of suffering, anger, sadness, fear, and joy are expressions designed to hold our religious and life experiences. Therefore, we are not so different at all, considering we all have emotions. It is my prayer that we can see past our differences and unite in our commonalties appreciating our diversity and using those differences to drive our curiosity to learn more about one another as we work in pluralistic environments.

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MY LIFE AS A CATHOLIC PRIEST

by Chief Chaplain Fr. Tony Mensah, Bronx, NY

As a boy, I remember being captivated by the Missionary Priest who left his country in Holland to serve the people of God in my home diocese of Kumasi, Ghana. Whenever he visited my village, my father's house became his make-shift rectory where I and other children would gather and watch his every move. I recall saying to myself, "I want to be like him." Those boyhood dreams of long ago inspired me to attend the minor seminary at age 15 and continue with major seminary to discern my priestly vocation. This discernment included a 2-year study of Philosophy and 4 years of Theology that led to my ordination at age 28 on July 10, 1983.



After ordination, I served for three years as an Associate Pastor of a typical Ghanaian rural parish that consisted of 42 remote villages. I was in every respect an itinerant priest. In 1986, the bishop sent me to London, England, to study secretarial administration. When I returned to Ghana, I became his private secretary for six years (1988-1994). Then it happened. It was finally my time to leave my country to serve the people of God elsewhere.

Between 1995-1997, I became the Missionary Priest to the Native Innu people of Labrador, Newfoundland. Unlike Ghana, winters in upper Canada were arctic and lengthy. Once I survived an unusual seven-month long winter! From Canada, I entered the United States to pursue

graduate studies in Pastoral Care and Counseling at Fordham University in the Bronx, New York, (1997-1999) and filled parish ministry placements in Queens and Long Island, New York.

After completing 4 units of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and Board Certification with the National Association of Catholic Chaplains in 2003, I switched from parish ministry to healthcare chaplaincy. I performed priestly duties as a Catholic chaplain in Bay State Medical Center in Springfield, MA, Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, and The Hospice of Dayton, OH. By now, I was also a US Citizen, creating my make-shift rectory in a land where Christianity is exposed to many different interpretations, where suspicions are common to the culture, and where its people are becoming increasingly alien to the faith. Nevertheless, the care of God's people has always been a charge to *the called* in every age since Christ's own service to His people. As it is written in Mark's Gospel, "I have not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45).

My service in the Veterans Health Administration began in 2010 as a Catholic Priest at the VA Central Iowa Healthcare System, Des Moines, Iowa. In 2013, I transferred to the Bronx VA, and in 2014, was selected to my current position as Supervisory Chaplain. My focus in pastoral care is on holistic healthcare. My goal is to help people find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation and when facing a fate that cannot be changed. My life as a Catholic priest is informed by the call to heal, to care and to love. My mission as a Board Certified Chaplain (BCC) with competency in Hospice and Palliative Care, a pastoral counselor, and credentialed Academic Associate in Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy is succinctly expressed in the words of Saint Teresa of Calcutta, "We are not called to succeed but to be faithful."



Clinical Perspective

IS THERE A PLACE FOR SPIRITUALITY IN MEDICAL ETHICS?

by Chaplain Rev. Dr. Kenneth Blank, ACPE Supervisor/Educator, Muskogee, OK

As chaplains, we are seen as bearers of historical virtues and values of the religious communities we serve. And in our hospital roles, we are often asked to provide ethical guidance in challenging times. As a result, Chaplains are often asked to serve on hospital Ethics Committees. It's a role we can fulfill as we make a significant contribution to the life of the medical facility.

But ethics has changed in the recent past, shifting from less of a religious endeavor to a more philosophical one. Today, most ethicists have Masters and Ph.D. degrees, not M.Div's. It appears that the Chaplain may be ill-equipped to serve on an ethics committee. And even if we do serve, is there a place for *spirituality* – our strength - in our understanding and care for those in ethical dilemmas? I think so! The following is based on an article by Ken and Sarah Vaux, titled: *Four Pathways to Medical Ethics*, found in *Second Opinion*, 1986.

The first pathway is (1) **Instinctual Ethics**. These values emerged from the heart of the community as they responded to illness, death and dying. These were pre-scientific times when instinct and intuition gave strength to the people. Their ethics were pragmatic, remembering what worked in the past. What relieved suffering? What method included family and community involvement in addressing the health challenges they faced? These approaches were often based on common sense and generally agreed upon by the populace. The Shamans, who demonstrated repeated benefits, were given the status of the community's healers.

As the community grew in numbers and the complexity of health challenges were noted, society realized they needed a "chosen cadre of healers" to meet the needs of the populace. Therefore, (2) **Professional Ethics** emerged. The Hippocratic School of medicine in the 4th century BC is an early – and perhaps the best example – of this new profession. New codes of conduct for the healer took root and the belief that the healer would "do no harm" when they arrived at the patient's door was established. The education for the new healers was also developed, very much like the guilds for bricklayers and carpenters. However, this profession was seen as a "sacred" blessing of the gods, giving it greater status in the community.

But professional ethics had its limitations. The dark side of medical monopolies, "kick backs" for referrals and great prosperity for physicians raised questions regarding the suitability of this ethic to underpin its role in society. Recently, the shortcomings of the professional ethics approach has contributed to at least 16 billion in fraudulent Medicare claims in 2016 alone, despite the codes of conduct "professionals" signed on to. But even with its problems, the virtues of a sacred Calling to medicine, the importance of integrity and the dedication to the community's wellbeing remain a benefit of professional ethics. But society saw the benefits unable to outweigh the problems.

The limitations of Professional Ethics led to what the Vaux's call (3) **Political Ethics**. Because of the specialized training and exclusive license of physicians, they have become the "sentinels" of society to forewarn

us about the dangers and risks to the health for the populace. For example, Medicine develops an annual flu vaccination which is a life saver for millions worldwide. The global response to the AIDS epidemic of the 1980's – with education, prevention and treatment - is a recent example to an “incurable” modern-day plague. The Center for Disease Control is another good example of this ethic working for our benefit.

It is apparent that the populace wants certain legal protections to support “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”, enacted through the political/legal process. However, the constant references (and demands) for one's rights and freedoms, ranging from the right to healthcare to the right to die, needed to be secured by some mechanism. We use the political process to ensure these rights and entitlements.

But do political ethics navigate well through the colliding claims on limited resources, lifestyle indulgence and patient/family demands for over treatment? Witness the huge increase in lawsuits to settle these claims. Or the infomercial on television notifying you that baby powder causes ovarian cancer and you better act quickly before time runs out to get your compensation. When physician assisted suicide was on the plate of the US Supreme Court in the late 90's, one justice asked this; “Why would you ever want 9 lawyers deciding about this issue!”

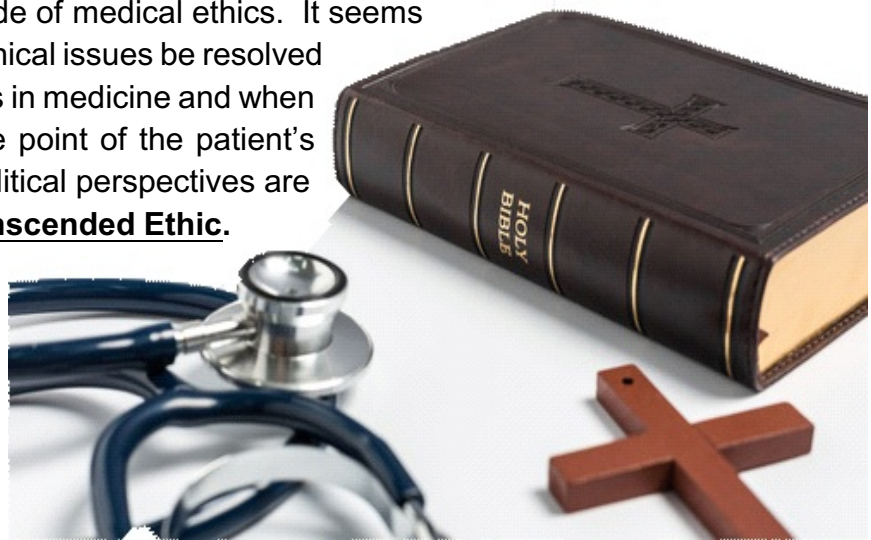
Today, political ethics is the dominate mode of medical ethics. It seems that only when the courts deny jurisdiction, can ethical issues be resolved elsewhere. One of the most value-laden moments in medicine and when the most difficult decisions are made, are at the point of the patient's death. While the instinctive, professional and political perspectives are all present, these times demand more, a (4) **Transcended Ethic.**

This ethic includes both private and communal experiences of the patient and family as well as of the physician.

More than ever in the past, the physician is present at the time of the patient's death. This was once the role of the pastor or rabbi. When faced with the crisis of death and the loss of human securities, life is cast upon mystery! Times of joy, hope, ecstasy, as well as grief, dread and despair are times of transcendent significance; when new feelings and thoughts come begging for answers.

These are experiences that are *ultimate* and therefore, theological. A spouse holding the hand of her husband of 62 years senses that nothing has prepared her for this moment. A father keeping vigil with his dying 37 year old son as cancer steals away his last breath. These are times of profound “letting go”, that instinct, profession and law cannot adequately comfort. *These are spiritual moments, when the need for a higher ethical code is necessary. And Chaplains are best situated to be part of those ethical moments.*

Chaplain Ken Blank, M.Div., Certified Chaplain and ACPE Supervisor/Educator, was Chair of the Ethics Committee, Eastern Oklahoma Veterans Affairs Medical Center, Muskogee, OK. Before that, he was Co-Chair of the Medical Ethics Committee, the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. And for 13 years, he also served on the institutional Review Board, Oklahoma Medical and Research Foundation, leaving as vice-chair.



THE BLACK MALE CHAPLAIN – WORKING WITH SOCIAL WORKERS

by Chaplain Roosevelt Hanna, Tampa, FL

As a chaplain, I routinely work with various disciplines within medicine including social work. Typically, I am the only male and Black person on these interdisciplinary teams giving voice to spiritual issues and patient advocacy. In my nine years serving as a chaplain, nearly 3 years with the VA and 6 years with a private hospital, I've always had to work with social workers to provide the best patient-centered care. Some chaplains seldom work with social workers for any reason. I've experienced both the joys and struggles of working with these dedicated professionals, and I can honestly say that I've had more successful collaboration with social workers within the VA who understand the chaplain's role than among non-VA social workers.

Chaplains and social workers are unique in that we both work to address the psycho-social needs of patients. We work independently and at times collaboratively to contribute to the holistic model of healthcare. Both professions require graduate-level education; however, chaplains address the spiritual needs of patients and their families. We are the subject matter experts when it comes to spiritual issues such as faith, sacred literature, and unique spiritual practices. Thus, the social workers and other interdisciplinary team members are quick to notify me when spiritual issues arise in their conversations with patients and/or family members. They are aware of the boundaries of this specialized care and will not hesitate to communicate with me.

Establishing a good working relationship and maintaining open lines of communication with social workers have been key for me to develop effective collaboration in patient care. While some of our interventions may overlap, my social workers know that I'm there to serve and can be trusted to address spiritual needs efficiently. The VA social workers with whom I work understand that chaplains are an integral part of the military and that many veterans continue to have high regard for chaplains in the VA. The great reputation of our current and former military chaplains

has helped to make my job easier. In fact, conflicts have been very rare, and I believe this has been due to mutual understanding of our roles and how chaplains and social workers complement each other.



I must say that I do believe that although chaplains and social workers share some similarities, they each should remain separate and distinct. I understand that throughout the VA, some chaplains are under social work or voluntary services. I know that this is a very sensitive issue, and hopefully it can be addressed in a future issue of the *Capsule*. I'm grateful that I'm at a VA where I can claim my pastoral authority and utilize the skills that God has given me without fear of crossing boundaries. I firmly believe that chaplains and social workers can coexist as long as we place the mission of caring for our Veterans in the forefront of what we do. We all know the "Golden Rule"- "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." As Black male chaplains, we ought to be among the first to model the behavior and extend the respect that we'd like to receive from social workers.

THE OPIOID CRISIS IN AMERICA

– A WAY OF DEALING WITH IT AS CHAPLAINS IN OUR VA

by Chaplain Rev. Barry Wheeler, Martinsburg, WV

We all have heard about the opioid crisis in America, and we as Chaplains wish to help all people who are in need in our facilities. The 2 groups of individuals affected by this crisis are the legitimate opioid users who have become accustomed to having their chronic pain treated by opioid medications; and the abusers who may have taken the medication legitimately in the past but are now abusing it. Both of these types of patients are impacted by the mandatory reduction in opioid prescribing, and hence, need care. What can we as Chaplains do to assist these patients?

For our users, the first obvious intervention is prayer that the patient may be healed of the infirmity that is causing them pain. God is still in the healing business today! When the healing does not come immediately, we can recommend healing music (i.e. healing music search on YouTube), scripture reading as distraction therapy, and Yoga and Tai Chi. I believe we chaplains would be the ideal instructors for the Tai Chi so as to keep the spiritual element in line with patients' belief systems. The Christian Bible (Matthew 4:18) addresses the Holy Spirit (Pneuma) as the source of healing for the brokenhearted; deliverance of captives (to opioid addictions); recovering of (spiritual) sight for the blind; and liberty for the bruised (of body, soul, and spirit). Deep breathing exercises (focusing on our breathing and the Holy Spirit/Breath) bring calmness from anxiety, which may reduce the severity of pain. Meditation is another spiritual exercise with which we can assist. King David, who was no stranger to pain, meditated on God's Law day and night (Psalm 1:2). Isaac (Gen 24:63), Joshua (1:8), and Paul (1 Timothy 4:15) speak of meditation and recommend it as a normal spiritual discipline.

For our abusers, we can provide prayer for deliverance from this disease. We offer empathic listening as they share the traumatic experiences of their past that may have contributed to them abusing substances to escape their emotional pain. We can provide spiritual counseling from their faith tradition, and assist them in dealing with their moral injuries. We can assist them in giving and receiving forgiveness for God, for others, and for themselves; as well as dealing with any grief and loss that they may be experiencing. We can offer Celebrate Recovery Groups or assist local churches with providing them.



In our weekly Grief and Loss class here at the Martinsburg VAMC we discuss grieving the death of the parts of ourselves that we lost in combat/MST. For instance, just before Desert Storm, I helped my brother-in-law move a wall inside his house. We ran into several set-backs as we worked, and he commented that it seemed I never got upset about

anything. After combat, it seemed that everything was able to set me off. That patient part of myself was another victim of the war, and I miss it. I had to grieve that loss within myself, as well as the loss of my innocence, and belief that I was invincible. I then had to learn how to be patient when it no longer came naturally. God uses our own struggles and victories to form and inform us so we may assist others in struggles and temptations.

DO YOU WANT TO GET WELL?

by Chaplain Rev. Gretchen Hulse, Pittsburgh, PA

What does it mean to be well? What types of things make you feel well? How do you pursue wellness in your life? Most people might describe wellness as including three main components: growth, balance and absence of illness. Wellness is a holistic approach to the integration of mind, body and spirit (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000).

According to current wellness theories, six dimensions comprise our overall wellness: social, emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual and occupational.

SOCIAL includes interpersonal relationships and engaging in one's community. » How we relate to others» Who we surround ourselves with.

SPIRITUAL includes our values, morals, spiritual beliefs and practices. » Establishing peace» Discovering meaning and purpose in life» Living concurrently with our values.

EMOTIONAL includes our feelings and reactions and how we process those feelings.» Handling our emotions (sorrow, fear, anger, joy, etc.) » Coping with emotional challenges.

OCCUPATIONAL is about finding our niche when matching skills and fulfillment with our contributions. » Financial planning, goal setting and financial well-being» Balancing work and leisure.

INTELLECTUAL includes critical thinking, lifelong learning and openness to new ideas that promote growth.

PHYSICAL includes nutrition, physical fitness, stress reduction, mind-body wellness, medicine and healthy living. » Maintaining a healthy quality of life.

Ideally, we would give each dimension optimum attention to achieve a completely balanced life and overall stellar wellness. In reality, we all struggle with various dimensions of our lives at different times. Sometimes, we are really good about eating well and exercising regularly. Other times, we are really focused on connecting well with others. Rarely do we maximize our potential in all dimensions so that none lack attention. Please contact me if you would like to try an awareness exercise to help you identify whether or not you live a balanced life and areas that may require growth and attention. The awareness exercise can help you visualize aspects of your life that might benefit from added direct attention and growth. You can use the information to decide how much energy you want to devote to improving your wellness and to identify steps you will take to reach that goal. Don't delay—seek wellness today!



PROTESTANT REFLECTION ON HOLY SATURDAY

Redemption and Hope for PTSD, Moral Injury, Grief and Loss, and all who Suffer

by Chaplain Rev. Dr. Richard D. Ross, Redlands, CA

Read: Ephesians 4:8-9; 1 Peter 3:18-4:2

Holy Saturday, the day between *Good Friday* and *Easter Sunday* or *Resurrection Day* (or Sunday), commemorates the day that – after His death on the cross – that Jesus lay in His tomb. One might say that in His death Jesus appeared to be observing the Passover Sabbath. However, we might also remember that it was Jesus Himself who said, ***The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.*** (Mark 2:27-28, NIV).



Holy Saturday is observed by the Roman Catholic church, the Eastern Orthodox church, as well as many mainline Protestant churches. Additionally, as part of Catechism, The Roman Catholic Church teaches it's that Jesus' work on Holy Saturday was the final missionary purpose in fulfilling His messianic role or mission.

In Ephesians 4:8-9 we hear about Jesus' descent to *the lower earthy regions* – i.e. the grave or Hades – which many believe is the resting place of souls between death and resurrection (a sort of limbo if you will) – a place between life and death. A place of great suffering – a place where one might, as Jesus stated, feel *forsaken* by God. Maybe there are some of you reading this today who feel far away from God, maybe even feeling that God doesn't care about you or isn't concerned about your illness, infirmity, or whatever it is that you are going through – and may also in some way feel *forsaken* by God. During these times one might ask questions like: *Where is God in my suffering? Is God present in that suffering? And, Has God abandoned me in my suffering?*

As we pause to reflect on *Holy Saturday*, we are reminded that the power of the Holy Spirit cannot be extinguished by the grave, nor by descending to hades or hell. What does this mean for us: We might conclude, that Jesus – was *Forsaken for our sake* – so that we, who feel forsaken and unworthy may understand that this is actually not true at all, but is only what the evil one or father of lies wants us to believe about ourselves – and finally (after what may feel like a lifetime of suffering) accept God's forgiveness through Jesus. ***For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost.*** (NIV). The Bible also says it another way in this well-known verse, ***Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you*** (Hebrews 13:5; Joshua 1:5) neither in life or death – or during those times when we may feel that our life is a living hell or that we are living (or maybe just simply existing) in a place between life and death.

PRAYER: The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. AMEN.

PAD AND DIABETES

by Dr. Sonny Tucker, Jr., MD, Contract Vascular Surgeon, Dallas, TX

(Proceeding article contains graphic medical photos)

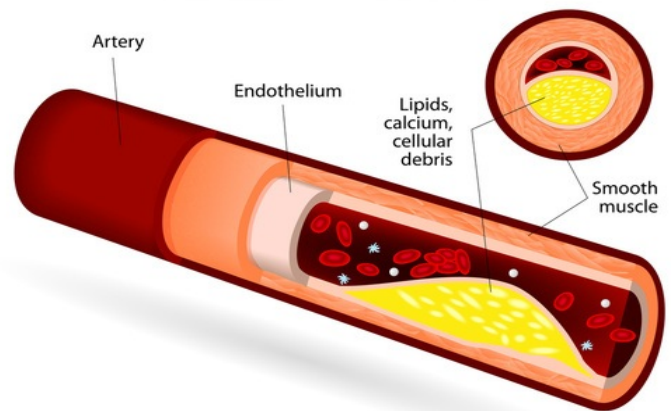
What is PAD?

PAD stands for Peripheral Arterial Disease, which is primarily atherosclerosis of the arteries in the arms and legs. This is also known as hardening of the arteries and involves the buildup of plaque within the inner wall of arteries. Plaque is a complex material that includes calcium, cholesterol and blood clots. As the atherosclerosis progresses, the plaque gets thicker and the artery gets tighter, resulting in decreased blood flow or complete blockage. Pieces of hard plaque can sometimes also break off and travel in the bloodstream causing a blockage in a different location.

PAD is a complex process that leads to decreased blood flow to the arms and legs. PAD results from involvement and interaction of multiple factors that include diabetes, genetics, elevated cholesterol/lipids and smoking. This is the same process that affects the arteries in the heart and can lead to heart attacks and also similar to the process in the carotid arteries that can lead to strokes.

PAD can affect the arms but more commonly affects the legs. Early on, it leads to pain most commonly in the calves after walking past certain distances. This pain can also occur in the buttocks and thighs. A short period of rest is needed for the pain to resolve. In the later stages, PAD and the decreased or absent arterial blood flow can be so severe that it leads to constant pain, wounds that do NOT heal, dead muscle or life threatening infection/gangrene. If the blood flow is not improved, an amputation may be necessary. Sometimes, it is not possible to improve the blood flow.

ATHEROSCLEROSIS



What is diabetes?

Diabetes exists when blood sugar (glucose) is abnormally broken down in the body. This results in a constantly high level of glucose in the bloodstream. People with diabetes have a high risk of developing PAD and eventually needing an amputation than people without diabetes. Diabetes contributes to and speeds up the process of atherosclerosis in many different arteries in the body, particularly in the legs and the heart.

Diabetics have several other associated chronic medical conditions. Diabetic neuropathy is a condition that causes abnormally functioning nerves. The nerves become directly damaged by the chronically high circulating glucose. Diabetic neuropathy can manifest as loss of feeling in the feet and legs, chronic sensation of burning, pain, constant tingling or a combination of all of these.

Risk factors for developing diabetes include, obesity, family history of diabetes, women who had diabetes during pregnancy and inactivity. Persons who have a family history of diabetes, have a history of gestational diabetes or polycystic ovarian syndrome, or are members of certain racial/ethnic groups (that is, African Americans, American Indians or Alaskan Natives, Asian Americans, Hispanics or Latinos, or Native Hawaiians or Pacific Islanders) may be at increased risk for diabetes at a younger age or at a lower body weight.

Diabetes and PAD

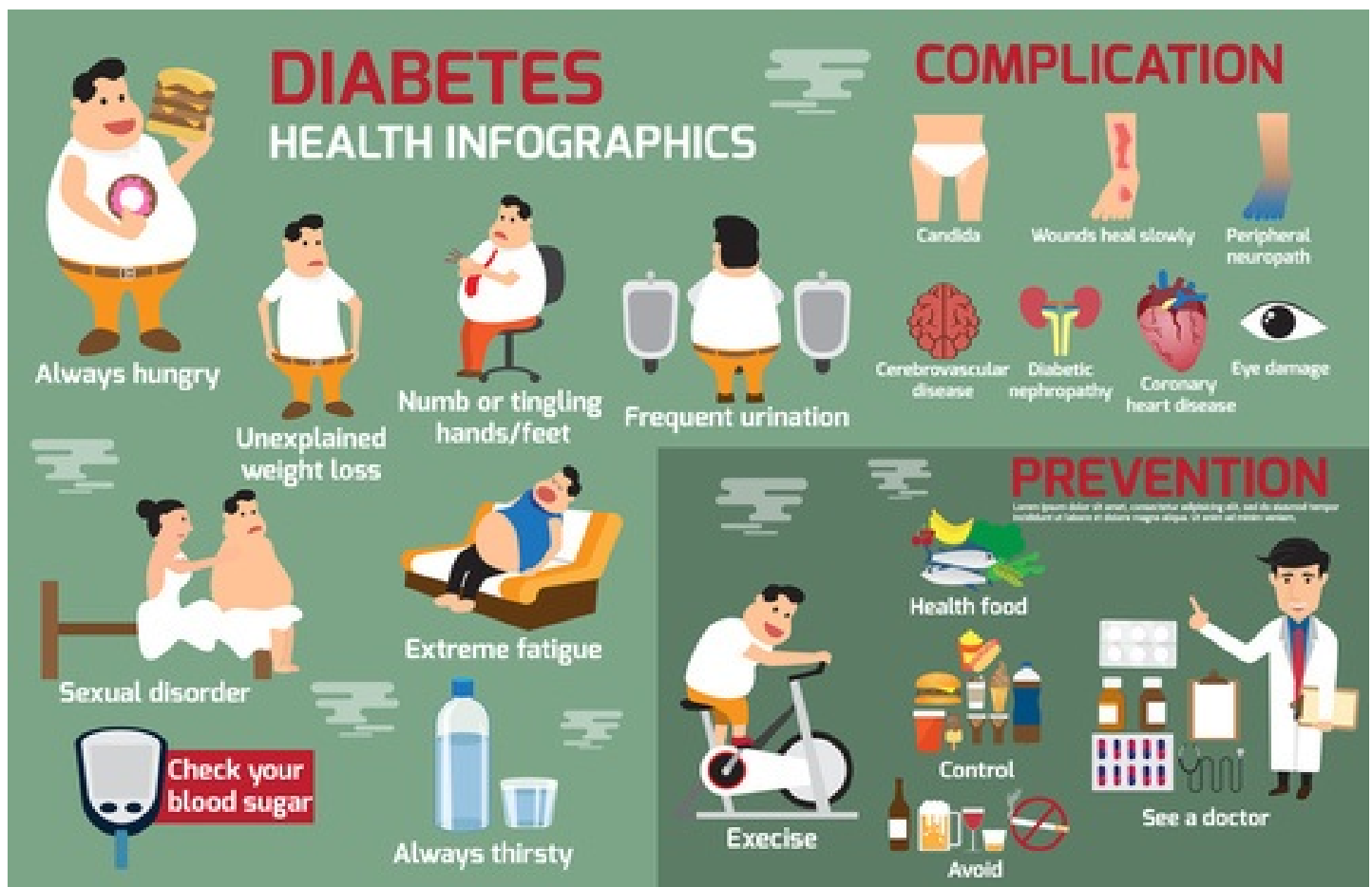
Diabetes is one of several conditions that can lead to the development of PAD. Both diabetes and PAD can occur separately. But if they occur together, the risk of amputation increases dramatically. Diabetics with PAD have specific issues such as being more prone to foot infections and wounds that can be a challenge to treat and heal. The goals of treatment in diabetics with PAD, is to avoid amputation and when amputation is necessary, to minimize the extent of amputation while simultaneously maximizing the healing and functionality of the remaining limb.

It is important to get tested for diabetes, which is done by several different blood tests. If a person smokes cigarettes and has diabetes, it is also important to get tested for PAD. Testing for PAD starts with checking for the presence and quality of pulses at the ankle. If the pulses are abnormal, further more complicated testing may be required.

It is important to effectively treat other related issues such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Also, maintaining a healthy diet and weight and regular exercise is very helpful. Finally, stopping smoking is one of the absolute best things a person can do to help slow down PAD.



PowerPoint available at: <https://vablackchaplains.org>





Book Review

CONTENTMENT: A JOURNEY OF HEALING

by Chaplain Rev. Dr. Larry Black (Published author), Bay Pines, FL

"For as he thinks in his heart, so is he." Proverbs 23:7

Contentment: A Journey of Healing is a book of change based on Christian principles and leading-edge research in cognitive neuroscience that has been tested and proven by the world's leading theologians, psychologists, and medical doctors. Through the clinically tested method of *trace*, *erase*, and *replace*, I define and explain the power of the human mind. Once you understand the way you think and act, and you follow the prescribed steps, you will ascend from dissatisfaction to contentment. Dissatisfaction and discontentment rest on two harmful mechanisms: 1) the false belief that external conditions can control your feelings and 2) the practice of negative self-talk

Tracing

Human learning is a process of conditioning. Once a certain event has occurred, mental impressions develop that favor its recurrence under similar circumstances. This mindless repetition continues until you become aware of and change your past conditioning. Tracing is where you trace back through your mind to when you first began to feel discontented and identify the issue, then confront, understand, and, ultimately, find relief from it.

Erasing

This is the process of challenging your thoughts, and reappraising them. When you discover that your beliefs and understandings might be false, you erase your incorrect thinking and its influence by changing the meaning you assigned to the wounding incident you experienced. You rethink the event as positive rather than negative.

Replacing

This is when you substitute new, positive, powerful thoughts for old, negative ones. One resource for such positive thoughts is religious literature. The moment you identify a negative thought coming into your consciousness, turn to these inspirational words and ideas, and repeat them until your most recent negativism becomes obsolete. Perseverance in this practice changes the nature of your thoughts from discontentment into contentment.

To attain true contentment all three parts—mind, body, and soul—must be included in the healing process. All three components must work together harmoniously. To move beyond the unfulfilled stage of your life, you need to view yourself holistically. The most effective approach is to make changes to your mind; the effects of these adjustments will cascade into your physical and spiritual life.

Changing your Thinking

By changing your thinking, you change your beliefs, when you change your beliefs, you change your expectations, when you change your expectations, you change your attitude, when you change your attitude, you change your behavior, when you change your behavior, you change your results, when you change your results, you change your life! Change your thinking.

-Author Unknown

Prose and Poetry

POETICALLY INCLINED

by Chaplain Rev. Jennifer, Dukes, Tuskegee, AL

There is something mystical about words. Words have rhythm, one syllable two syllables, and or even more - polysyllabic. Words give voice to feelings, desires, experiences, dreams, sensations... Words are a gift from the universe. Words create. Words destroy. Words empower. Words narrate.

Some have been kissed by the angels and have mastery of words, the word-o-logists. The poetically inclined like Maya Angelou – who unapologetically spoke her truth about her determination to overcome the social ills of sexism, racism, classism, in *Still I Rise*; “You may write me down in history, with your bitter, twisted lies, you may trod me in the very dirt. But still, like dust, I'll rise.” She wrote and spoke what many women then and still now claim as one of their mantras when faced with adversity.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46446/still-i-rise>

Before there was Jill Scott, who was an English major, and an English teacher, is Sonia Sanchez. A small woman in stature, often associated with the Black Arts Movement, for intentionally misspelling words, giving them rhythm and cadence and breath – the way some people speak. She has weaved melodies around her words. Diana Ross co- wrote a song with her entitled *Hope is an Open Window*. A song that speaks to... and undergirds the meaning of love. “We might be strangers, we can be friends. You and I we both need to let somebody in. Hope is an open window, love an open door. To reach out for each other, is what we came here for.”

<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/dianaross/hopeisanopenwindow.html>

And what about The Floacist, Natalie Stewart, who charges words to bend, bow, sway, and swing to the mood of her spirit, whether it is con moto, grave, allargando, allegro, her words, flow across her tongue and through her lips. Inspiring a mood of desire to become closer in *Let Me...* “Looks like faith means to


lead us into nowhere, touching every layer of matter from beginning to latter, It's the laws of attractions that's in action here...We were all born supernatural, And right now I just wanna get closer to you.”

<https://genius.com/Floacist-let-me-lyrics>



So, what about the poet, who uses the words she writes for mere reflection of the soul, the Jennifer Dukes' of the world. Who have been urged to publish, but still hold their work close, for only a few friends who understand... She wrote a poem entitled *N d Garden*, at the National Black Chaplains Conference in San Diego, CA, March 16, 2018, at the table, “n d garden I find peace, a billowy softness of comfort encapsulated n warmth, shrouded in strength cradled by the pure essence of life”

In summation, the words of the poetically inclined inspire, urge, set the mood, and tone for, and even speak volumes to the places that many have found themselves to be, but just didn't have the words to give voice to their souls. The poetically inclined, the word - o- logists of the soul. A gift.

*Prose and Poetry***WHY I STOPPED***by Chaplain Rev. Dr. Robert Thomas, Mather, CA*

I stopped because my apparel prompted you to share,
I paused because my bowtie created a desire in me to care;
To listen to an important family narrative,
To hear your soul speak became my imperative;

To see you take the time to find that priceless photo,
Helped me take a breath before dealing with a visit-Solo;
To hear your excitement and to see your eyes shine,
Encouraged me as I prepared to listen and realign;

And later in the day whether you believe it or not,
The earlier pause helped us reconnect, as you faced an emotional knot;
Your spirit knew you could share with me this dilemma,
Your heart knew you could risk resolving this grief trauma;

I don't know if you ever made that vital call,
But the courage to even ask me was a heal all;
You let me know, what I am can be so valuable,
You created a strong staff bond of what is achievable;

Thank you for your willingness and openness to share,
This moment is a beacon of what's possible when we truly care.
Always stay in the moment, and take courage to trust your heart,
Quality veteran patient-centric care is more than a science,
It's an art.



Inspiration for the Soul

SERMONETTE – HOW TO LIVE A SUCCESSFUL CHRISTIAN LIFE

by Rev. Anna J. Thomas, Bridgeport, WV (Wife of Dr. Alfray Thomas, Jr.)

Many of us have heard the phrase “The Secret of Success”. What is success and how do we achieve it? The world’s view of success is based on social status, fame, and material wealth. If that is the case, only a small percentage of us would meet the criteria. God’s view of success is obedience to His Word, love for Him and His people, and stewardship over His resources. Everyone can meet the criteria. It is a choice.

In **Matthew 6:19-33**, we find some clear guidelines on how to live a successful Christian life. In verses 19 and 20, we are instructed to lay up treasures in heaven. That is, do not focus on earthly things with no eternal value. We must not love the world or the things in the world (see **1 John 2:15, 16**). The things in the world are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. We must realize that the flesh cannot be satisfied; therefore, it must be controlled. We must realize that the eyes don’t need to see everything. Our eyes take mental pictures that can create unholy desires. Pride keeps us from appreciating the accomplishments and contributions of others because we are too focused on ourselves.

In **Matthew 6:24**, we are instructed not to serve two masters. We must serve God only. How do we serve God? We serve God by serving His people. Serving requires humility. Jesus washed the feet of the disciples as an example of service and humility (see **John 13:3-5**). Service requires sacrifice. We must get personally involved in the lives of others. When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of his eulogy, he said that he did not want people to mention his Nobel Prize, awards or where he went to school. He said, “I’d like somebody to mention that Martin Luther King, Jr. tried to give his life serving other.”

In **Matthew 6:33**, we are instructed to seek the kingdom of God first. We must seek the kingdom of God first spiritually. We do that by establishing a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Then we must represent Christ through our witness. I often ask the question: “If someone accused you of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to prove it?” Our life should be evidence that God is real. Our life should be evidence that Jesus is Lord. Our life should be evidence that the Holy Spirit is our guide. We must seek the kingdom of God first naturally. In other words, we trust Him and acknowledge Him in all our ways (**Prov. 3:5, 6**). We must stop doing things our way and do them His way. We must seek Him when making decisions because He is already in our future. We must stop being anxious and give God a chance to speak to our heart. We must seek the kingdom of God first financially. We do that by acknowledging that everything belongs to Him and we have been given stewardship over His resources. We don’t need the latest and the greatest or the new and improved. The next best thing is just the world’s way of taking God’s resources out of the kingdom.

President Barak Obama used “Yes We Can” as his 2008 campaign slogan. In **Philippians 4:13**, the Apostle Paul wrote, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” I conclude with a question: “Can we live a successful Christian life?” The answer is yes, we can. Let the church say, AMEN!

[Dr. King's Funeral Service - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQbLW9mDdb)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQbLW9mDdb>

PRAISE AND WORSHIP SONG – WORSHIPPING TO PSALM 121 “HELP”

by Chaplain Rev. Janice Green, Columbia, MO

As chaplains, we are always providing, ministering, pouring out, and being available to those in need. But where does the Chaplain's help come from? Sometimes we are the last ones that seek help when our well is dry. We need to remember where to go in order to get refueled, and replenished. We are a vessel of God and a servant to others.

The song, **My Help**, is written by Jackie Gouche Farris. This song is special to her because it was revealed to her one early morning and she was able to write this in ten minutes. This is also her favorite song because it is almost word for word scriptural. Jackie Gouche Farris brought Psalm 121 to life and I encourage you listen and allow the words from this song speak to the empty places and be refreshed, renewed, and revived by The Brooklyn Tabernacle choir.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k47xB8eoT5g>

[Verse]

I will lift up mine eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help.
My help cometh from the Lord.
The Lord which made heaven and earth.
He said, He will not suffer thy foot; thy foot to be moved.
The Lord which keepeth thee.
He will not slumber nor sleep.

[Bridge]

For the Lord is thy keeper.
The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. Upon thy right hand.
Nor the sun shall not smite thee by day nor the moon by night.
He shall preserve thy soul.
Even forevermore.

[Chorus]

My help, my help, my help.
All of my help cometh from the Lord.





MEAN VEGETARIAN COLLARD GREENS

WITH COCONUT BLACK BEANS AND RICE (FAST FOOD)

by Rev. Rhonda R. Neal, Manager of Guidepost Outreach Services, Danbury, CT

Mean Vegetarian Greens (4 servings)

Three bundles of collard greens
 Three pieces of garlic sliced
 Two shallots
 Two teaspoons of hot pepper flakes
 Three plum tomatoes
 One tablespoon of olive oil
 One can of vegetable broth
 One pinch of salt and pepper to taste



Wash greens thoroughly. Tear out the middle long stem and stack 15 leaves on top of one another. Roll the short end of the stack of greens into a log. With a sharp knife, slice the log into ½ inch strips and put the cut greens aside. Cut tomatoes into small blocks and put aside.

In a medium pan, sauté shallots and garlic until opaque. Add the vegetable broth and then the greens. Let greens cook on medium temperature with the lid on for about 30 minutes and then add pepper flakes, salt, and pepper. Cook for about another 10-15 minutes and then add tomatoes for color. Enjoy!

***Note;** post a fast, you can add two tablespoons of butter and substitute vegetable broth for chicken broth enhancing flavor.

Coconut Black Beans and Rice (4 servings)

One can of Goya black beans
 One cup of brown rice
 One can of Goya Coconut milk
 Fresh thyme or 2 teaspoons of power thyme
 Fresh sage or 2 teaspoons of powder sage
 One small onion
 One celery stalk
 1/4 cup of red peppers
 One cap full of Extra Virgin Olive Oil
 One pinch of salt and pepper to taste

Empty a can of beans and coconut milk into a medium, non-stick, saucepan until it boils. Lower heat and add rice, thyme, sage, extra virgin oil, salt, and pepper. Stir occasionally. Cut into small pieces, onion, celery and red peppers and add to rice and beans. Cook rice and beans with the pan covered for about 45 minutes. Add a little water if the rice is still hard.

SHRIMP AND CHEDDAR GRITS

WITH COLLARD GREENS AND TOMATOES

by Chaplain Jarda Alexander, San Diego, CA



Last year, I was introduced to Hello Fresh, a food delivery company which ships fresh proportioned ingredients to my doorstep along with step-by-step meal instructions. I found after a long day or week, knowing what I was going to cook and having the ingredients on hand both saved me time and made healthy cooking relaxing and fun rather than laborious. In this issue, I will share one of my favorite healthy meals I make when I'm missing home.

TIME:

Prep Time: 10 minutes

Total Cooking Time: 30 minutes

Calories: 510

INGREDIENTS NEEDED for 2-person/4-person meal:

1 ½ cup/ 3 cups of Water	10 oz/ 20 oz Shrimp
1/2 cup/ 1 cup of Milk	1 tsp/ 1 tsp Chili Flakes (optional)
1/2 cup/ 1 cup Grits	2 tbsp Olive Oil
4 oz/ 8 oz Collard Greens	1 tsp of salt (optional)/ Mrs. Dash Original
4 oz/ 8 oz Grape Tomatoes	1 tbsp Butter (unsalted)
2 cloves/ 4 cloves Garlic	1/2 cup/ 1 cup Cheddar Cheese

INSTRUCTIONS:

STEP 1: In a medium pot, bring 1 1/2 cups of water, 1/2 cup Milk and a pinch of salt to a gentle boil, cover and lower heat. Stir until grits are creamy and tender (10 minutes). If grits become stiff, add a splash of water.

STEP 2: Wash and dry all produce. Remove and discard stems from collards and roughly chop the leaves. Mince or grate the garlic cloves. Halve the tomatoes lengthwise.

STEP 3: Heat a drizzle of olive oil in a large pan over high heat. Add cut collard greens and cook until slightly softened (4-5 minutes). Stir in fresh minced/ grated garlic and cook until fragrant (30 seconds). Season with a dash of salt and pepper (or Mrs. Dash) to taste. Remove from the pan and set aside.

STEP 4: In the same pan, cook the tomato halves on lower heat to medium-high in a drizzle of olive oil. Cook until tomatoes are starting to blister (3-4 minutes), tossing frequently. Set aside with collard greens.

STEP 5: Heat another drizzle of olive oil in the same pan over medium-high heat. Season shrimp with salt, pepper, and a pinch of chili flakes (all optional) to taste. You can substitute salt and chili flakes with preferred seasonings (e.g., Mrs. Dash Original). Add shrimp to pan and cook until opaque (4-5 minutes), tossing occasionally. Optional: You may return collards and tomatoes to pan with shrimp and toss ingredients until thoroughly warmed.

STEP 6: Add 1/2 tbsp butter and cheddar to simmering grits that you've been stirring occasionally throughout and stir until melted. Optional: Add a dash of salt and pepper to taste, although not necessary. The cheddar is salty enough. Divide the grits between plates and top with shrimp, collards, and tomatoes. ENJOY!

WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN THE NBCA

by Chaplain Resident Lester G. Bandy, Montgomery, AL

I marvel when I think about how an amazing God has granted me this opportunity to serve those who once fought for the freedom that I am experiencing today. In reality, my matriculation through the Montgomery Veteran Administration Center, an Outpatient Clinic and the CLC, is an opportune time for me to give back to the men and women who have sacrificed much for our country. Indeed, it is also an opportunity to be all that I can be. The opportunities to learn more and be more equipped for service seem endless as I matriculate through the CPE Residency Program here in Tuskegee, AL. which also the place where I learned about the VA National Black Chaplains Association.

As I thought about why I joined the National Black Chaplains Association, the words solidarity and mentor (mentorship) came to mind. It affords me the possibility of being positively influenced by the guidance and direction available from chaplains who have a wealth of experience that I can draw from. I see this association as a great forum for learning and professional growth. A priceless opportunity to learn new things and be even more effectively equipped for service. I consider it a privilege to attend the most recent meeting of this association in San Diego, to meet the President and to rub shoulders with fellow chaplains from all over the Country. These are some of the benefits of becoming a member of NBCA.



I feel proud to be a VA Chaplain and it reminds me of when I was a member of another association called BSAS, Black Students Association of the Seminary. It was the experience of solidarity, a common passion and purpose among black professionals serving collectively a student body and community with a unified purpose that made me a proud member of BSAS. A similar but greater excitement and elation is experienced in my residency which started on October 02, 2017 at Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System in Tuskegee, AL. The 28th Annual National Black Chaplains Association where I met likeminded professionals, reminded me of this solidarity of passion and purpose in serving our veterans.

The opportunity to meet chief of staff and the president gave me additional inspiration and hope of fulfilling the call of becoming a VA chaplain, which I consider a great calling. My eldest brother, who died one year before my birth, lost his life in 1959 while serving in the Army. I personally feel called to serve as a VA chaplain as a means to support and honor the men and women in uniform. While at the National Black Chaplain Association, I learned new things about cutting edge ministries to positively impact our veterans. As a member of NBCA, I feel part of a team who care about supporting the next generation of African American VA Chaplains.

NBCA Mission

The mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs National Black Chaplains Association is to promote the highest level of pastoral care for patients and members of their family and community; to strengthen the effectiveness of African American chaplains; to assist in the recruitment and retention of African-American chaplains, and to foster the education, growth and development of all federally employed chaplains and professional allies.

NBCA provides a nationally recognized clinical certification for qualified members. In 1993 the association entered into a certification validation agreement with the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) of Atlanta Georgia, and in 2000 entered into the reciprocity arrangement with the National Association of VA Chaplains (NAVAC), recognizing valid clinical certifications by VA cognate groups.

Join us today! Membership forms available at

<https://vablackchaplains.org/join/>

