

A Publication of the National Black Chaplains Association

# The Capsule

MARCH 2019 | Volume 2 Issue 2

The Opioid Crisis:  
What Can Chaplains Do?

Taking A Stand  
While Kneeling

Join  
the NBCA

Here's How to Slay  
the Credit Dragon

The Story of the Brown Condor

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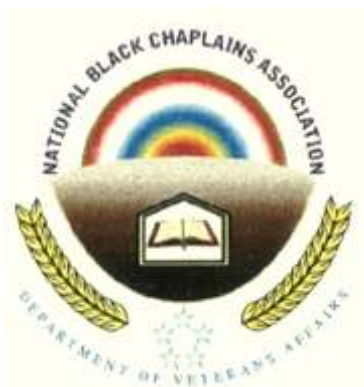
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**The Capsule** is a quarterly publication that was launched in December 2017 by the National Black Chaplains Association. This multicultural publication is centered around a mission to inform, inspire, educate and connect chaplains, families and communities of all

FAITHS and RACES through information, stories, food, and poetry. The Capsule is written primarily by Black Chaplains, but is also open to articles submitted by writers of others ethnic groups and other disciplines. In each issue we highlight articles with an African American, Multicultural, Pluralistic, Clinical, and Legislative Perspective – and so much more.

**The Capsule** represents a pill filled with excellent ideas that will strengthen us, various experiences that will help us cope with struggles we all face, views that may challenge us or our beliefs, and educational tools designed to enhance our ministries and our togetherness as a people. If you **swallow the pill** (that is, take in the information so that it can be beneficial to you just as food is beneficial to our bodies), it is our earnest prayer that it will inspire you to always be your best, do your best, and make a contribution to this and future generations that will be a blessing to people of all ethnicities, especially veterans and their families.

**The Capsule** is designed to help individuals cope with daily struggles, strengthen their faith, draw closer to God and be a blessing to others. We believe that by consuming the pill or taking in our content, individuals will find a renewed sense of hope through inspiration and information that positively impacts the world. We encourage your support through memberships, donations, subscriptions and advertisements at [alfray.thomas2@va.gov](mailto:alfray.thomas2@va.gov), [donations](#), and [membership](#).

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## From the Desk of the President

### A RESPONSE TO THE OPIOIDS/SUICIDE CRISIS

David Wallace, a writer for *The Arizona Republic* presented a dramatic call to action when he addressed the opioids crisis. His article, as provocative as it was, drew immediate attention when he wrote, “if a killer roaming America left 45,000 men, women and children dead each year, you can bet society would be demanding something be done to end the scourge.” Wallace continued by stating, “Well, such a killer exists. It’s called suicide.” What is of importance for us to understand is the argument of causality: Does opioids usage lead to suicidal behavior? There is widespread information that suggests such causality does exist.

The writer’s analogy was so compelling and riveting, it caused me to engage in serious thought about initiating some form of action to address the crisis, which has reached epidemic proportions. The nation was shocked to learn more than 20 Veterans were committing suicide daily. Again, communities became appalled when it was made known that more than 100 individuals were dying daily from opioids. Statistical data confirms the fact that drug addiction is getting worse and no solution is in sight. Recently, a panel convened by Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS) to discuss and



Chaplain Marvin L. Mills, Sr.  
President, NBCA

examine Department of Defense/Veterans Affairs Pain Management: Strategies and Collaboration in the midst of the National Epidemic of Opioid Overuse and Diversion which illustrates the gravity of the situation at hand within the military and civilian circles.

Both DOD and VA have been engaged in creating as well as implementing pain management strategies for almost 20 years. The panel provided an overview depicting the gradual evolution of pain management, along with specific treatments and educational offerings that have been shared across the spectrum from DOD to the VA health care systems. The presentations provided specific collaborations and outcomes that have been academically accepted as “best practices” and currently utilized in civilian medicine.



### What can we do as Chaplains?

Those of you who serve on interdisciplinary teams may suggest other viable modalities that have proven to be effective and not addictive. Acupuncture, for example, has been proven to be effective for thousands of years and remains worthy of consideration. Of course, where amputations are involved, opioids may remain necessary due to the intensity level of pain among amputees. Apart from what has been stated, Chaplains can lead educational focus groups; participate on the Suicide Prevention Team; and contact local, state and federal legislators to sponsor legislation supporting involuntary treatment programs for young people and adults who are suicidal and homicidal. For this reason, the Executive Board and I have commissioned two committees: *The Committee on Suicide Prevention* headed by Chaplain Tammy Elfadili; and *The Committee on Opioids* chaired by Chaplain Diane Lewis.

The intensity and unrelenting aspects of pain has become the main driving force behind opioid usage. The major benefit of opioids is the reduction of pain, but the overriding and unacceptable reality is the inherent harm it causes which may lead to addiction and possible death.

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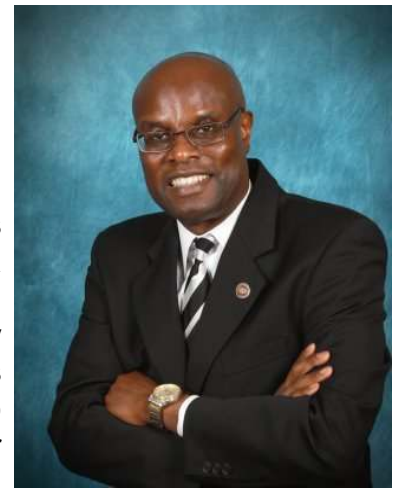
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## FROM MY HEART TO YOUR HEART

At the beginning of the year, we are all looking for a fresh start, new beginning and new opportunities. We anticipate that this year will be better than the last. It is my desire that this year would yield God's blessings, and the fulfillment of your dreams will be a reality. So far, we have made resolutions, celebrated Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.'s Birthday and Black History Month. What's next? We hope that The Capsule is included in your plans, and that you will continue to support the publication as we embark on our 2<sup>nd</sup> year together.

Our writers and editorial staff have set new goals this year that will enrich and strengthen our global readership, and help us all focus on meeting the needs of our veterans. If you read and meditate on what you have read, each article will stimulate your intellect and cause you to grow emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. Furthermore, this issue will focus on articles such as: *Challenging and Rewarding Times for VA Chaplains*, *The Muslim Chaplain*, *Taking a Stand While Kneeling*, *2019 Pay Raise*, and *Making Credit your Friend, and Not your Enemy*. Our prayer is that these topics not only interest you but cause you to want to read the entire Capsule and share it with others.

***"People don't care how much we know, they want to know how much we care"***  
- Theodore Roosevelt



Chaplain Rev. Dr.  
Alfray Thomas, Jr.  
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# WILL THE 2019 PAY RAISE LEGISLATION PASSED IN THE HOUSE PASS IN THE SENATE?

*by Chaplain Rev. Dr. Gary Roundtree Sr.,  
Baltimore, MD*

Consistently over my years of federal service, I have noticed a high level of subjectivity involved with employee pay rates. This subjectivity has created a lot of anxiety for numerous federal employees trying to keep their salaries above annual inflation rates. Considering the current political climate, several questions have been posed by concerned active workers and retirees of the Federal Government such as "Will this congress insert a raise into the appropriations bill? Will it pass in the Senate? Will the President propose a pay freeze or pay raise? What distraction(s) could derail the entire process?"

On January 30, 2019, the House passed the Federal Civilian Workforce Pay Raise Fairness Act, H.R. 790, by a vote of 259-161 to grant federal civilian employees a 2.6 percent pay raise for 2019, effective with the date of passage. Introduced in the House by Congressman Gerry Connolly (D-VA), H.R. 790 is now awaiting Senate approval and then the president's



signature before it becomes law and is implemented. If passed and made law, certain civilian employees of the Federal Government to include the Excepted Service under which Chaplain Service falls will receive a 2.6% pay increase over the 2018 pay rate. This pay raise would be comparable to the 2.6% pay raise that was already granted to the military for 2019 and be a significant increase over the previously championed, bipartisan-supported 1.9 percent raise.

Although this bill has passed in the House, it remains unclear how it will fare in the Senate and with the President. Two distractions appear to challenge the

bill's approval which are the recent government shutdown and the President's recent state of emergency declaration allocating funds to build a wall for national security. Nonetheless, legislators seem empathically aware of the severe strain this recent government shutdown has caused many federal employees along with the effects of years of federal pay freezes and inadequate pay raises, making them champions of the H.R. 790 proposed pay raise. The hope and belief is that this pay increase is necessary to begin repairing damaged workforce morale and will be supported by the Senate.

What can we do as chaplains? Become advocates in your state. Write letters and call your state legislators as well as join and get involved in your local The National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE). Founded in 1921, NARFE protects the earned rights and benefits of America's active and retired federal workers. To learn more about NARFE, visit [www.narfe.org](http://www.narfe.org) and click advocacy link.



For more information about H.R. 790, visit <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/116/hr790>

## SLAY THE CREDIT DRAGON: GET PEACE OF MIND AND GREAT FICO SCORES

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

Make credit your friend, not your enemy. Far too long I have watched family, friends, and others run from the CREDIT dragon. The credit Dragon had me on the run for a long time, until I decided to face it and fight back. The battle was won with credit education, discipline, and commitment to a better way of life, and with much better interest rates!

Credit scores were created to analyze individual and company consumer behavior, that is, how individuals and companies are likely to pay their bills or whether they can handle increased lines of credit. This information is based on a predictive analytics model

designed by the Fair Isaac Co., which is now commonly referred to as FICO. Fico [credit] scores are calculated based on five main factors:

- ▶ Payment History (accounts for 35% of the total FICO Score)
- ▶ Debt/Amounts Owned (30%)
- ▶ Age of Credit History (15%)
- ▶ New Credit Lines/ Credit Inquiries (10%)
- ▶ Mix of Accounts (closed/open) and Types of Credit (loans, credit cards, etc. 10%)

These factors are weighted differently according to the credit score model used. For example, if you are seeking an auto loan, lenders of auto loans will use the FICO score model that focuses on your payment history and predict credit worthiness for an auto loan. This score might differ for a personal loan or mortgage loan.

So, let me encourage you to become a dragon slayer of your own credit dragon. Don't be haunted by a bad credit score, but rise up, find peace and assurance in knowing that God has given you authority over this problem in your life. Did you know that once a year you are entitled to a free credit report? Some states, such as Georgia, give you a bi-annual report.



You can access [www.AnnualCreditReport.com](http://www.AnnualCreditReport.com) to review, copy, and print your free credit report from all three national credit bureaus (TransUnion, Experian, and Equifax).

Here are some steps to help you acquire a 700 to 850 FICO score, the most favorable score in the eyes of most lenders:

- ▶ Get a copy of your credit report from all three credit bureaus. This is important as you will discover that the same information is not necessarily reported to each credit bureau.
- ▶ Review your credit report for accuracy. If you discover errors you will want to request a correction from the bureau on which the inaccurate record appears. Send proof of the discrepancy for the quickest and best results.
- ▶ Evaluate the credit report for negative items that greatly impact your score. Look for collection debt, charge offs, late/missed payments, credit cards using more than 30% of the balance, personal or government liens, any unpaid debt, overdue medical bills, and excessive credit inquiries have a negative impact on your credit.

Once you have identified negative factors impacting your score, plan to tackle these issues. For example, if your debt in collections is high, contact each creditor you owe (not the collection agency) to inquire about the debt. You can negotiate an arrangement to pay the full debt, settle for an agreed lower amount, or pay small installments until the debt is paid in full. Once you pay the debt, send a copy of the paid receipt to the collection agency. Afterwards, contact the credit bureau to report that the account is paid in full, and send (upload) a copy.

Credit debt is weighted so keep in mind how you manage your debt. Credit card usage (30%), payment history (30%), and derogatory marks (20%) these have the largest impact to your score. Credit age has medium impact to credit score, whereas, the total number of credit mixture, and credit inquiries have less of an impact, although they are all still significant to your overall FICO score.

**Best Practices:** Pay all debts on time, but never more than 21 Days after the due date. Pay credit cards down before the 21<sup>st</sup> of each month, which is when credit card debt is calculated into your FICO scores. Keep your credit card usage at 30 – 45%, never more. Be aware that your debt-to-income ratio is 35% or less. Check your scores weekly to see how you are progressing. Understand that FICO scores go up and down often, but you are in control of your score, not the credit bureaus. They report what you are doing to impact your credit.

Keeping an excellent credit history requires continual management. Utilize sites such as Credit Karma and Credit Sesame to track your FICO score, get notices when someone has accessed your credit file, and review your debit history for accuracy. Credit

Karma gathers your credit information from Equifax and TransUnion but not Experian. These sites require no financial obligation from the consumer, and you can cancel at any time. On these sites you can quickly dispute errors you recognize on your report.

Finally, I encourage you to embrace this biblical principle and these practices: First, lay aside the first tenth known as the *tithe* for God; second, pay yourself the second tenth; finally save a tenth for a rainy day. If you find these steps impossible to accomplish, pray to God for guidance on how to reduce your debt. Live within your means. It will make your life less stressful and more enjoyable.

To learn more about FICO and its history, visit [www.FICO.com](http://www.FICO.com)

Credit Karma analyzes your credit data and makes recommendations that can help save consumers money.

The service is paid by banks and lenders. For more information, visit [www.creditkarma.com](http://www.creditkarma.com)

## “LITTLE BY LITTLE”

### FINANCIAL PRINCIPAL #2 - INVEST

by Rev. Rhonda R. Neal, Danbury, CT

One of my favorite things to do is to trade stock options. A derivative of an underlying asset (stock), a stock option is a contract that gives people the right to buy or sell a stock on or before a specific date.

What fascinates me about this form of investment is that you can take a little money and make it grow. Proverbs 13:11 says, “Dishonest money dwindles away whoever gathers money little by little will make it grow”. Just the other day I cashed out of an option investment on a stock and made a whopping 791% return. A little more than 60 days ago, the stock was trading for about \$3 a share. Instead of buying the stock, I bought a \$5 “call” option for \$.80 premium with the intimation that the stock would rise from \$3 to \$5. Buying a “call” option is a bullish strategy that makes money when the market goes up and the stock price exceeds a target price; which for me was \$5. On September 24, the stock jumped from \$3 to \$12; a nice 400% stock return. My stock option value, however jumped from \$.80 to \$6.33 or 791% return. A small move in a stock is a demonstrative move in an option.

Why am I telling you all this? I am telling you because we serve a God of multiplication. Have you ever wondered how the two wise servants doubled their money in the Parable of the Talents? Mathew 25:16-

17 says that, “then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.” Boom! If God can take 2 fish, 5 loaves of bread and feed over 5000 people, what makes us think that He cannot bless us right where we are?

Instead of handing over our hard-earned money to people we do not know, we can learn to trade using videos. Investing is not just for the rich. Anybody can invest if they take the time to learn and practice. I took \$.80 and turned it into \$633 in 60 days, little by little. Who doesn't have \$.80? We can waste \$.80 at the blink of an eye. Start where you are with what you have and allow the wisdom of God to manifest. Amen!







## WHO PAVED THE WAY?

### THE STORY OF JOHN ROBINSON

by Chaplain Rev. Elizabeth “Beth” Putnam, New York Harbor, NY

Almost everyone has heard of the Tuskegee Airmen, the African-American pilots who flew in World War II. But most of us have not heard of John Robinson, without whom there may not have been an aviation school at Tuskegee. So, who was John Robinson?



John “The Brown Condor”  
Robinson 1903-1954

John Robinson was raised in Gulfport, MS, having been born in FL in 1903. He attended Gulfport High School for the Colored, a Black only school where students were only allowed to complete the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Eager for learning, John Robinson attended the Tuskegee Institute, where he completed a degree in automotive mechanics. He moved to Detroit when he could not get any work as a mechanic in Gulfport. He was able to get work as an auto mechanic in Detroit, but he really wanted to fly. He applied to the Curtis-Wright School of Aviation in Chicago, but was denied entry because he was Black. But he did not let that stop him, as he had not let anything else keep him from his dreams.

Since the aviation school would not let him enroll as a student, John Robinson moved to Chicago anyway and got a job at the school as a janitor working Saturday nights. He would sweep the floors, and listen in on the night classes. He then started a club for people interested in aeronautics, and the club built its own small plane. When the plane was successfully completed, the teacher whose classroom Robinson cleaned arranged for him to be accepted as a student. John Robinson became a licensed pilot, but he did not stop there.

Because of the many opportunities to study that had been denied him, John Robinson was committed to ensuring that other Black people could receive training as pilots. He and another pilot started their own flight school: The John Robinson School of Aviation. But he also went back to Tuskegee and convinced them to start their own aviation program. That aviation program trained the pilots who were later called the Tuskegee Airmen.

But John Robinson’s contribution to the role for Blacks in aviation, and in the military, did not stop there. John Robinson had formed an all-Black aviation unit for the Air National Guard in Illinois, setting the path for Black pilots. But he did not stop there.

Ethiopia was one of the few independent countries in Africa, but it was under attack from Italy as part of Mussolini’s expansion. When John Robinson heard about the struggle in Ethiopia, he volunteered to lead the Ethiopian Air Force. John Robinson met with Haile Selassie’s cousin in America, and was subsequently appointed to establish an Air Force, train the pilots and lead the air defense of Ethiopia. In the end, the defense failed, as John Robinson had 19 airplanes and 50 pilots for the whole Air Force against the Italian Air Force, which had 100’s of airplanes. But John Robinson’s defense of Ethiopia was big news back in America, as he was a black man leading the defense of a black nation. He inspired a generation of aviators to join the Air National Guard, to train as aviators, and eventually become part of the American Air Force.

Synopsis [John Robinson \(aviator\)](#) largely based on the biographies of John Robinson written by Phillip Thomas Tucker and Thomas E. Simmons.)



## TAKING A STAND WHILE KNEELING

*by Chaplain Rev. Mel Brinkley, Tucson, AZ*

I will never forget the day a fellow tenth grader, a black student, invited me to look at a book with him in homeroom. Every page of that book had a picture of a black man that had been lynched by a mob of white men. Some pictures even showed white boys basking in the glow of their evil mentors' approval. Instead of listening and empathizing with my fellow student who desperately wanted to have a serious conversation with me, I acted defensively. I said in a tense voice, "I did not do that. That wasn't me." Now, looking back through almost fifty years of hindsight, I wish I had said something like, "I know this has happened and still happens. Something needs to change. What can you and I do together to make that change?" That would have been, hopefully, an invitation to find common ground between two teenagers trying to understand their world.

Regrets do not correct the past but sometimes, if our conscience is truly our guide, I believe they can morph into courage. Recently, I attempted to make amends for my lack of maturity on that fateful day in tenth grade. During a dinner conversation, a friend of mine discussed her disapproval of the conduct of some NFL players. She objected to athletes

kneeling instead of standing during the National Anthem. She said she doesn't like it when people use their public platform as a means of protest, just because they are celebrities. She believes it is an insult to our flag, our nation, and our military. I sat quietly, trying to unravel my own tortured knot of emotions and memories. In the middle of my soul searching my wife interrupted our friend with a sharp challenge, "Would you like to hear from someone who served our country in the war zones of Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan?"

Our friend ignored my wife's challenge and glibly moved on to telling us what her father, a World War II veteran, would have said about these professional athletes, if he was still alive. Finally, something stirred in me and I interrupted her: "I think all Americans have a right to make a peaceful protest. In the military, I put my life on the line so that people I don't know, some of them I might genuinely dislike, can express what they believe freely and without fear of persecution. These NFL players are kneeling. That, in my estimation, is a peaceful and respectful protest."

After that night, I made a pledge to not sit quietly when I hear someone disrespecting the rights and freedoms of my fellow Americans. I care deeply about my country's future. I care deeply about every American citizen having the same freedoms that I do. I put my life on the line for those freedoms and I would gladly do it again, for all Americans.



**Chaplain Reverend  
Mel Brinkley**







## ISLAM PERSPECTIVE

by Chaplain Mohammed Mokarram Hossain, Washington, DC

The concept of coexisting in its most basic form is simple and appealing. Islam promotes to strive to see the good in others and come together to be unified regardless of differences of one another. However, different ideologies separate us every day, whether they be moral, political, or religious. Whether we let these differences cause a division between us is what defines a large part of our character.

As a Muslim chaplain, I am frequently asked questions regarding the rules of my faith, and whether they are too strict or “different” to adhere to. Many times, the follow up question is often regarding whether Islam and pluralism can even be mentioned in the same conversation. Islam wholeheartedly endorses pluralism as long as it does not force Muslims to compromise their own faith. Sadly, due to the portrayal of Islam in the public media, or even Islamic scholars short sightedness, it is very common for individuals to be misinformed regarding what Islamic views are regarding other faiths and beliefs which fall outside of it.

To create social disorder through harm and misjudgments or any other “wrongful” acts in Islam’s eyes should be stopped. It is more appropriate to join hands with others under the banner of a peaceful pluralistic society. On the other hand, people who eat pork, consume alcohol, gambling, or commit polytheism are entitled to their own religious beliefs and are included in a pluralistic view of society.

The holy Qur’an (2:256), it says “There is no compulsion in the religion.” There are of course, pillars of Islam which should be followed to become a devout Muslim, and not doing so warrants sin, but there is no compulsion for any individual to be forced to do any action under the banner of Islam. Only Allah (God) knows of one’s heart and status!

Islam has another layer of pluralism which may come as a surprise to many people to include within the believers of Islam. The Holy Qur’an states that all righteous monotheists are deserving of salvation. In the Qur’an (2:62), it states “Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians, whoever believes in Allah (the only Creator) and the Final Day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve.”

To understand the cited excerpts from the Quran, it is important to remember that Islam and the other two Abrahamic faiths are intertwined in their history. In fact, Quran reaffirms that the original Bible and Torah were both books revealed by Allah. This is also due to the fact that all three religions share one God (In Arabic, God is translated to Allah). The only difference is the manner in which we pray to this God. As time progressed, subtle differences eventually set the three religions apart. The above verse explicitly says that monotheistic individuals who do good deeds and are righteous shall enter paradise eventually, regardless of their religion.

As a chaplain in a Veterans Affairs Medical Center, I have to provide services from a pluralistic view to a pluralistic environment. Accommodating patients, their families and VA employees of all religions is of paramount importance. A core tenant of religion is the fact that we spread peace and tolerance. Pluralism allows for us to put aside differences and work together to facilitate a better future filled with understanding.



## CHALLENGING AND REWARDING TIMES FOR VA CHAPLAINS

by *Chief Chaplain Rodney A. Lindsay, Dublin Georgia*

In an article, “America’s Changing Religious landscape” Pew Research Center reports that the number of religiously unaffiliated adults has increased by roughly 19 million since 2007. There are now approximately 56 million religiously unaffiliated adults in the U.S., and according to the new survey, this group sometimes called religious “nones” is more numerous than either Catholic or mainline Protestant. The unaffiliated (or nones) are now second in size to evangelical Protestant among major religious groups in the U.S.

While serving in the US military for many years, I was exposed to a very diverse religious landscape. Having travelled around the world to numerous countries on multiple humanitarian and combat deployments, I learned many lessons on the do’s and taboos of religious customs and cultures. As VA Chaplains, we are regularly exposed and introduced to Veterans from distinct faith group backgrounds. One key priority that remains the same in both the military and VA hospital is the mandate to protect the Veteran’s right to free exercise of religion. Veterans who are Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and other faith groups are a part of a growing religious landscape in our VA medical Centers and we have a golden opportunity to accommodate their religious needs as we do for those veterans who embrace Christianity or those who are religiously unaffiliated.

There is an overarching principle that keeps me focused and grounded as I make a concerted effort to maintain my own integrity of faith and belief while also accommodating the faith and belief systems of others. This principle is framed in a short phrase I learned in military service, “cooperation without compromise”. This principle has simply revolutionized my thinking because it allows me to be able to be true to my own belief systems and while simultaneously respecting the belief of others who may be radically different from my own. The more I maintain an open mind and receptive point of view, the more I shift in my thinking from toleration to celebration of our religious, philosophical, and ethical commonalities. Some of the commonalities that are embraced by both interfaith and ecumenical communities are: following the Golden Rule, seeking peace during war, and striving for solidarity in the pursuit of justice for the oppressed and downtrodden. We all embrace love, truth, and justice.

Our ever-expanding religious landscape in the VA medical centers certainly affords us the opportunity to listen and speak on behalf of those who are in spiritual crisis or experiencing spiritual injury no matter their political persuasion, philosophical underpinnings or cultural and religious background. Our pastoral care and spiritual support are both challenging and rewarding as we strive and succeed to accommodate our veteran’s holistic needs.

When life and death realities knock on the door, ones’ faith or a lack thereof may cause one to ponder the somber words of Martin Niemöller, a prominent Lutheran Pastor and outspoken public foe of Adolf Hitler. Niemöller, expressed these simple, but profound words, “First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionist, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak for me.”

“We, as VA Chaplains, have the privilege and responsibility to advocate for those receiving spiritual care from us. We are to give a voice to theirs needs regardless of their religious or spiritual affiliation. By addressing the needs of our veterans, especially those who have differing religious beliefs than what we hold, we are truly providing quality spiritual care. Yes, these times are challenging, but they are also rewarding.”







## Clinical Perspective

### WHOLE HEALTH: SPIRITUAL WELL BEING

by Chaplain Elder Sherri Headen, Indianapolis, IN

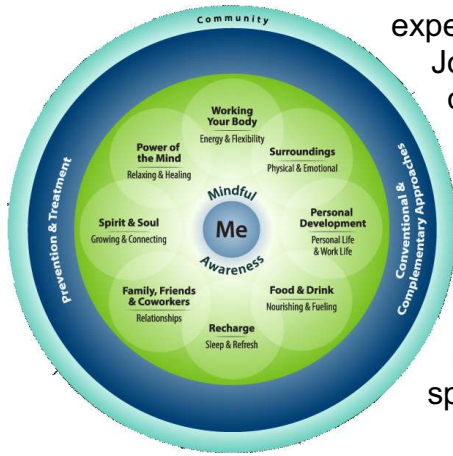
While sitting at John's (alias name) bedside, he explained why he feared dying. John is a 70-year-old U.S. Army Veteran, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, who served in combat during the Vietnam War. He told me, "We had to beat that bush" while out on patrols. He was an infantry soldier who spent many months engaging in guerrilla warfare in the jungles and rice fields of Vietnam. While sitting at his bedside, I listened with patient anticipation to hear his narrative reflection, as he recounted some of his combat as well as R&R (rest and recuperation) experiences. John seemed eager to share his story in a safe, judgment-free space. When he shared how he and his comrades banded together and some of their zany R&R adventures, he lit up with enthusiastic joy! However, when he began to recall some of the things he witnessed and had to do while serving in two combat tours, it was like the proverbial dark cloud overshadowed his countenance. John became tearful and at times, sobbing, as he struggled to give voice to these experiences. My heart ached for him and I could only imagine the emotional and spiritual weight of guilt, grief, and fear he was experiencing.

As a veteran, even though I have not experienced combat, I understand the reality of following orders, being in a foreign, unfamiliar place, and the necessity of trusting my comrades to have my back and their same trust in me. I found myself fighting back tears as I held his hand and listened. As John continued, he discussed the poor prognosis his physicians gave for his life expectancy. He became frustrated as he discussed his palliative care team's suggestion that he consider supportive care via a hospice agency. John did not want to hear anything about hospice! He viewed it as the Grim Reaper's plan of care! John lived alone and his closest family member lived 45 minutes away and their relationship was estranged. He has been a loner for many years, due to suffering with PTSD, addictions, and poor anger management. He did not have adequate social or familial support to assist in caring for his needs and he was no longer physically able to adequately care for himself. At one point in the conversation, John recognized his limitations, however, in almost the same breath, he was adamant regarding his ability to care for himself.

As the conversation continued, I asked John if he identified with a faith tradition or to describe his spirituality. John became tearful again and wept as he reflected on growing up attending a Christian church with his grandmother. John described going to Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, church camp, and getting "saved" at age 15. He said, "Well, that was then. God don't want to have nothing to do with me now... I've done too many bad things." John reminded me of the things he did while serving in combat and since. "When I die, God's gonna close the gate on me," John said as he continued to weep.

Time and time again, while serving as a VA Chaplain, I have encountered this level of spiritual distress in veterans. This is a level of moral injury, that my godfather, Thomas Harris, a Vietnam veteran and prior Vet Center Team leader for many years, describes as "spiritual disconnection." The Spirit and Soul emphasis in the Whole Health approach is of paramount importance. Neither medical, psychological nor social interventions can provide the complete support and healing needed in this and other spiritual distress issues.

While these other disciplines are important, the Spirit and Soul emphasis when caring for the whole person cannot be neglected if optimal health is going to occur. What are some of the ways humanity achieves spiritual connection? Connection to a higher power, connection to humankind, connection to nature, connection to life



experience, connection to the cosmos and connection to mystery (having faith). As John and I continued to engage, as the chaplain, I provided spiritual guidance and counseling regarding the nature and presence of God's love in connection to the reality John faced while serving in Vietnam and his life afterwards.

After a couple of hour long sessions with John, he experienced emotional release, reconnection with God, embraced his faith, and no longer feared being rejected by God as he faced the end of life. John's fear from his spiritual distress caused heightened anxiety, anger, grief and rejection of sound medical advice. However, when the Spirit and Soul portion of his Whole Health was addressed, it had a profound positive effect on his physical, mental, emotional as well as spiritual health.

[www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/Veteran-Handouts/Introduction\\_to\\_SpiritAndSoul](http://www.va.gov/PATIENTCENTEREDCARE/Veteran-Handouts/Introduction_to_SpiritAndSoul)

## OPIOID OVERDOSE: KNOW THE SIGNS OF AN OPIOID OVERDOSE

by Chief Chaplain Dr. Gwendolyn Lewis, Augusta, GA

Opioid overdoses reach epidemic proportions! Many states are overwhelmed by this national health crisis. Last month it was reported that an individual is more likely to die of an opioid overdose than by vehicle accident. This data is alarming, overwhelming and unbelievable. Opioid addiction has no face and all nationalities, genders and classes are affected. Families are being devastated.

The opioid epidemic which began in the late 80s now is a national emergency as opioid overdose and death rates constantly increase. In the late '90s pharmaceutical companies assured the FDA and American citizens that people would not become addicted to these drugs, yet in 2016 approximately several years later more than 64,000 opioid overdose deaths were reported. Statistics for 2017 note 72,000 opioid overdose deaths.

Listed among the Opioids are hydrocodone, Oxycodone, Codeine, Morphine, Hydromorphone, and Fentanyl. Typically these drugs are used to treat pain. However, prolonged use builds a tolerance against the drug, thus requiring increased usage which often leads to addiction. A high dose of these opiates can result in overdose, even cause death. A new variation of Fentanyl named Carfentanil is said to be 100 times more potent, is now making its way into the drug trade.

The problem of opioid addiction is far from over. Last week the FDA seized 254 pounds of fentanyl, the largest opioid bust in US history as it was prepared to cross the border in Arizona. President Donald Trump has declared opioid addiction a public health emergency. What can we do to help? Know the signs of an opioid overdose. In an article submitted by Harm Reduction: Responding to Opioid Overdose they suggest that everyone be familiar with these signs.

### The following are signs of an overdose:

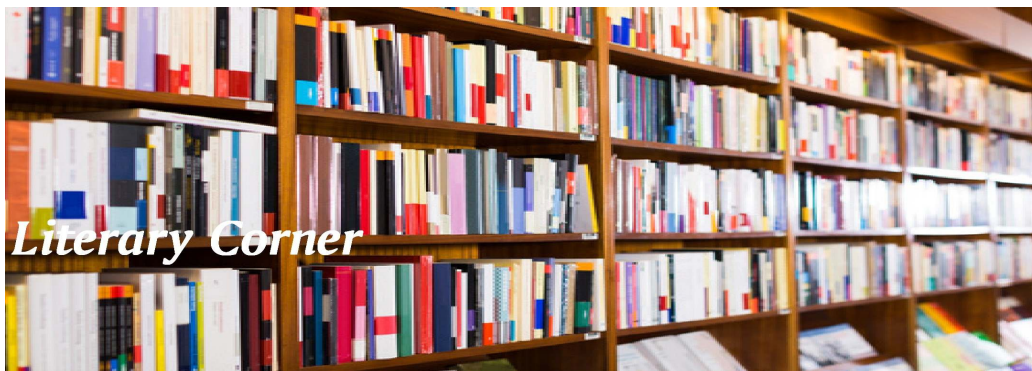
Loss of consciousness, Unresponsive to outside stimulus, Awake, but unable to talk, Breathing is very slow and shallow, erratic, or has stopped, For lighter skinned people, the skin tone turns bluish purple, for darker skinned people, it turns grayish or ashen. Choking sounds, or a snore-like gurgling noise (sometimes called the "death rattle") Vomiting, Body is very limp; Face is very pale or clammy, Fingernails and lips turn blue or purplish black, Pulse (heartbeat) is slow, erratic, or not there at all.

It is rare for someone to die immediately from an overdose. When people survive, it's because someone was there to respond. The most important thing is to act right! Knowing the signs, plus immediate action can save a life because Opioid overdose does not produce immediate death, those minutes between overdose and death are critical.

Also, become knowledgeable about the CPR and the use of rescue drugs, to help save lives. "Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) is an [emergency procedure](#) that combines chest compressions often with [artificial ventilation](#) to manually preserve intact brain function until further measures are taken to restore spontaneous blood circulation and to breathe in a person who is in [cardiac arrest](#). Highly [recommended](#) in those who are unresponsive with no breathing or abnormal breathing, for example, [agonal respirations](#)." (Mayo Clinic)

Naloxone is a rescue drug for opioid overdose, and when available, make it the first choice. Naloxone is considered an opioid antagonist; it reverses the high in the thus reversing the side effects of opioids. Those affected and impacted by this major health epidemic need your help and your prayers.



*Prose***THE SELF KNOWS**

*by Chaplain Rev. Kathy D. Thomas, Doctoral Candidate, Tulsa, OK*

How much of yourself can you lose  
and still be yourself?  
How do your strengths weaken you?  
How do your weaknesses define you?  
Can you still be you if you pretend  
that you're someone else?

Self can be trusted to  
lose what is not good,  
and reinforce the necessity.  
Self knows best.

Self is both strong and weak.  
And that is okay.  
Self sometimes pretends in order  
to lift up another soul.  
And that is okay.

Knowing  
Self as it is,  
And welcoming the  
Self that IS  
is the key to contentment.

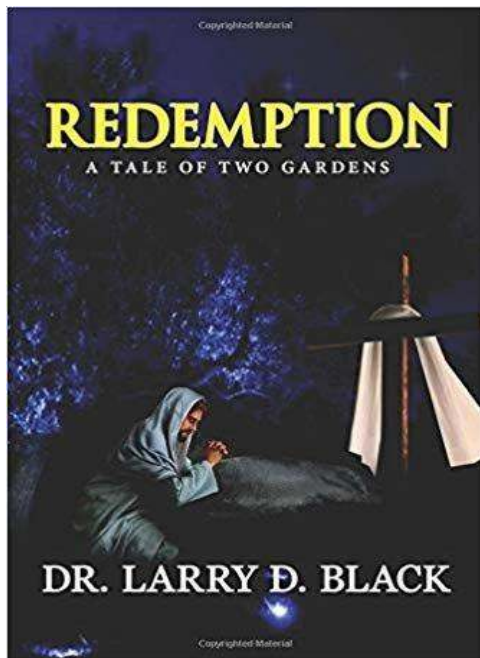
Trust Self because  
Self connects with Spirit.  
And Spirit knows what is best.



## Book Reviews

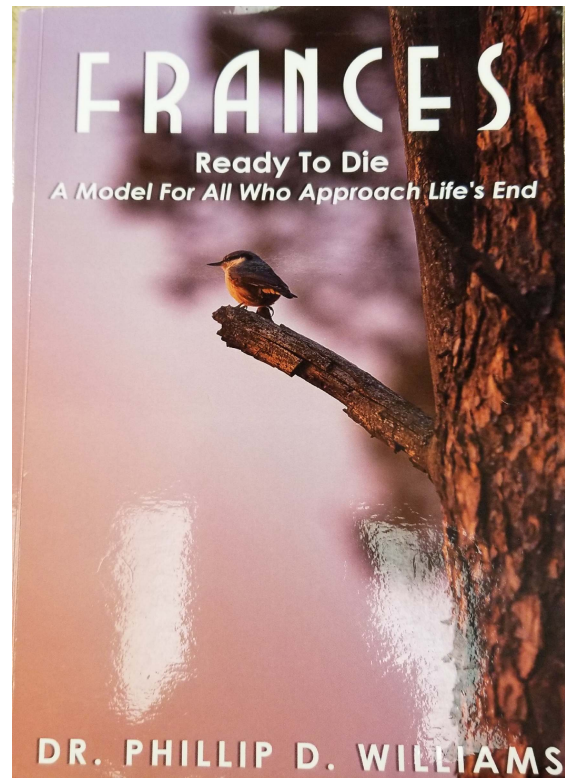
### REDEMPTION: A Tale of Two Gardens

Redemption takes you on a behind-the-scene eye-witness account of the greatest story ever told: of sin's proliferation in a perfect garden and Christ's dramatic rescue to save humanity from its results. Beginning in Eden, you hear the dialog between Satan and Eve concerning some fruit. You see her eat and give some to her husband Adam. You hear God punish, then promise, then put them out from Eden. As you read, you're carried down through the centuries of time to another garden: Gethsemane. Where you witness the decree of Christ, the deceptive kiss of Judas, and the defiance of Peter. Along the way you discover the hidden harmony and amazing analogies. You see with crystal clearness the contrasts and similarities. You learn firsthand the symbolism too obvious to overlook; the message too clear to pass over; the conclusion too plain to miss. In Eden, Adam took the fruit from Eve's hand; in Gethsemane, Christ received the cup from His Father's hand. In Eden, Adam sinned; in Gethsemane, Christ suffered. In Eden, the first Adam fell; in Gethsemane, the second Adam conquered. In Eden paradise was lost, but in Gethsemane paradise was regained. It is indeed, the Tale of Two Gardens.



*Dr. Black is a Clinical Staff Chaplain  
at the VAMC in Bay Pines, FL.*

*For further information or obtaining a copy of his book,  
please call 727-398-6661 Ext. 14267*



### FRANCES: Ready To Die: A Model For All Who Approach Life's End

How do you approach the death of a loved one when it's a family member? How do you help a loved one transition to the final chapter of the journey? Phillip Williams is faced with that challenge when his sister is told she has days to live. A seasoned hospice chaplain, the authority faces the challenge of being a brother and being her minister. In this warm and inspiring book, Williams chronicles the last days of his sister Frances' sacred journey. The book is filled with divine wisdom on how to live without excuses and finish the journey with dignity and grace. This tender account of how Frances lived her faith is an inspiration to all.

*Dr. Williams is a Clinical Staff Pastoral Chaplain at the VAMC in Palo Alto, CA. He has authored 13 books and has served in ministry for 30+ years.*

*In addition, he is a drug and alcohol rehabilitation counselor and regularly speaks on death and dying. Please visit Dr. Williams website at [www.pdwbooks.com](http://www.pdwbooks.com)*





## *Inspiration for the Soul*

### *Sermonette -*

## **IT DEPENDS ON WHOSE HANDS IT'S IN**

*by Minister Howard Brooks, Fairmont, WV*

### **Scripture Reference: Isaiah 42:5-6**

As I was looking over the Isaiah passage, two words came to my mind immediately: *master* and *hand*. The word “master” means one who is highly skilled, a teacher, to overcome, to be victorious or superior. I do know of a Master who is a teacher for in Matthews 5:1-12 we would find Jesus going up to the mountain side to sit down with the disciples who came to join him. Jesus began to teach them the Beatitudes and told them to rejoice and be glad because great is their reward in heaven.

This master is highly skilled, and we know that from Matthew 14: 17-19 when He fed the multitude of five thousand people with two fish and five loaves of bread. Also in Matthew 14:25-27 Jesus walked out on the water and the disciples saw Him and He told them to be courageous. “It is I and don’t be afraid.” In Mark 1: 29-34 He healed the mother of Simon’s wife and many others of various diseases and ailments.

Also, in Mark 4:39 He told the winds and the waves to behave by saying three words: “Peace Be Still”. Lastly, in John 11:38-44, He raised Lazarus from the dead by speaking, “Lazarus, come forth” three times. (Once for the Father, once for the Son and once for the Holy Spirit). I also know of a Master who reigns victorious and superior over death. I am going to call Him JESUS! There is something about that name JESUS! It is the sweetest name that I know. There is power in the name JESUS!

Now let’s take a look at the word “hand” and in the topic today: “It depends on whose hands it’s in.” I want us to take a good look at some of the characteristics that each of us can see looking at your own hands. The first characteristic I want you to take a look at is how big or small is your hand? The next characteristic is whether your hand is rough or smooth? The third characteristic is whether your hands are soft or hardened? The fourth characteristic is whether your hand is warm or cold? Lastly, is your hand strong or weak?

You see, saints, God’s hands look like the color of brass and are powerful for in Habakkuk 3:4 it says God’s splendor was like the sunrise and rays flashed from God’s hands where God’s power was hidden. Psalm 63:8 reminds us that God’s hands hold us. So, it is important to know that the right things are going into God’s hands and that by doing so:

*All of your pain and sorrows will be gone!*

*All your sickness will be gone!*

*All your misery and strife will be gone!*

*All your doubts and fears will be gone!*

*All your hardships will be gone!*

You will then become totally renewed in the right spirit. God always outstretches God’s hands to each of us and it is up to us to reach out to grab a hold to God’s unchanging hands.





## FAITHFUL GREEN SMOOTHIE

*by Chaplain Resident Rev. Louis Tillman, Hampton, VA*

### Ingredients

1 cup ice cubes

½ cup water

½ cup almond milk

(You can make your own almond milk by blending a handful of raw almonds, soaked;  
1 teaspoon of vanilla; a pinch of salt and 4 cups of water. Strain if you wish.)

2 large kale leaves

1 large banana (the riper, the better)

1 tablespoon flax meal

1 teaspoon vanilla

¼ teaspoon turmeric

1 tablespoon cocoa

1 tablespoon carob

1 cup of crushed pineapples to sweeten the taste (optional)

Directions: Blend all the ingredients together until thick and smooth and enjoy the healthy goodness!





## WHY JOIN THE VA NATIONAL BLACK CHAPLAINS ASSOCIATION?

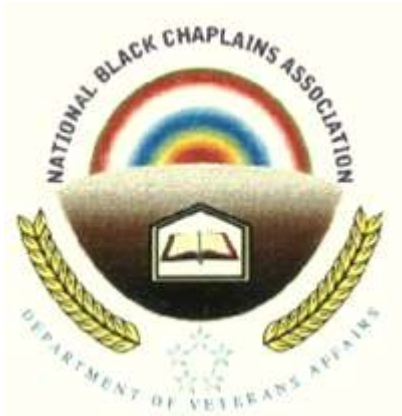
by Chaplain Jeffery A. Stallworth, Jackson, MS

To become a chaplain is a great honor. In order to move through the dynamics that are relevant, such as understanding old and new language, would not be possible were it not for a black chaplaincy group. There would be less matriculation and there would be less understanding of placement. There would be no one to complain or explain where black chaplains are missing the target of success. For example, post-traumatic stress disorder could possibly be wider if the chaplain knows how to address it properly, and then more people would be covered in areas of disabilities. There are administrative areas that might be overlooked, such as how important it is to update position descriptions (PD). You can have a chaplain in Mississippi who is working way beyond the job description or a chaplain in New York who is working below the description and not realize that other groups are updating and meeting necessary continuous education. How to reach various grades as chaplains come in is so important because if PDs are being examined and black chaplains are not addressing the updates, a grade 12 can easily and quickly become an 11. It is necessary to know that the classifications and descriptions of the jobs are changing every year, but if it is not in the description of a job requirement or explained at some point in the system, new chaplains will be downgraded.

What is post-traumatic stress disorder and how do you address it? What is spiritual injury? What is moral injury and how do you address that also? What are the differences among the three? The black chaplain groups are vital and necessary towards explaining; how to write spiritual assessments that will be helpful to doctors and nurses charting. How do you write spiritual assessments in a way that explain those experiences, and to support systems in a diverse way based on social, economic and theological examination? One of the greatest reasons I would think you would need a black chaplaincy group is to know how to do intervention at every level—workers, nurses, doctors, cooks, contractors. Sometimes intervention is necessary and the black chaplaincy group is a group that can help the chaplain to intervene at all levels.

It is still true that different cultures have their own experiences, and someone has to teach how to share specific experiences without being seen as angry, incompetent, disconnected people. Thank God that we have these chapters and groups. There should be even more groups for women and certain people where there are obvious disparities.





**If you have been blessed by the content of this publication and would like to see it reach more people, please consider making a donation to the National Black Chaplains Association.**

**We are grateful for your support and look forward to helping more people.**

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**Why Donate to the NBCA?**

- ▶ To help bridge the gap and celebrate all race relationships.
- ▶ To heal one's view of self, others, and how we are uniquely tied to each other no matter our family of origins.
- ▶ To appreciate and celebrate cultural diversity.
- ▶ To recruit writers and new members from every sector of the globe.
- ▶ To inspire patients, veterans, families, chaplains, and all others with hope, love, and joy and a determination to make a difference and a contribution in the earth.

**The Purpose of Donations**

- ▶ To broaden the multicultural perspective because everyone is important and has something beneficial to offer.
- ▶ To support the upward mobility efforts of all Chaplains.
- ▶ To strengthen the Executive Board and their committees to plan, organize, train, teach, and host Annual Conferences.

**How Will Donations Be Used?**

- ▶ To develop training for Chaplains and non-Chaplains to effectively tackle issues together such as the Opioid crisis, MST, women's issues, and medical and health issues that impact everyone.
- ▶ To educate and network with churches and other organizations or professionals that desire to work with the NBCA to make their communities better, especially those with veterans.
- ▶ To sponsor those individuals who have a financial hardship to conferences hosted by the NBCA.

**What is the Impact of Donation?**

- ▶ The ability to change lives through knowledge and by example.
- ▶ The ability to learn from others and even better oneself in the process.