One Vision. . .

Chaplaincy Today, the Journal of the Association of Professional Chaplains, is a semiannual publication whose mission and vision is to connect all of us who do the work of chaplaincy by giving voice to the individual expression of our collective experience in order that we may more effectively care both for others and for ourselves.

. . . Two Voices

Editors

The last issue of Chaplaincy Today was sent to print before September 11, 2001. Almost three months after those events, I feel obligated to speak to all of our readers about that tragedy. I, like you, can remember the shock, disbelief, and horror I felt as I saw videotape replay the ending of thousands of lives. As I learned more about the cultural, political, and religious beliefs of the men who carried out these acts, I wondered about our role as pastoral care providers.

In the days and weeks that followed I was aware of many of our interfaith organizations working to assist families, healthcare workers, police, and firefighters. I was impressed with the reports that came in about chaplains in the New York area responding to many of those touched by this tragedy. I was aware of chaplains in hospitals all over the country leading interfaith prayer services for hospital employees.

As one who serves a hospital in suburban Chicago, half a country away from the sites of the September 11 tragedies, I have found that I, and indeed many of my colleagues, have a foot in two worlds.

On that particular Tuesday morning, there was the immediate reality of the woman sitting next to me in the ICU waiting room, whose mother teetered at the edge of cardiac arrest. As the daughter told me of the ER doctor’s unexpected diagnosis of a terminal condition and his conclusion that her mother only had a few weeks to live, the television screen before us recorded the crash of the second plane into the south tower of the World Trade Center.

My mind calculated the distance between my daughter’s apartment and the WTC at about one mile while at the same time registering the fact that she should be on her way to work uptown or, hopefully, already at the office.

There was no time for further speculation. My focus returned to the woman next to me, to her mother’s precarious
Williams voice...

York City; Washington, DC; and Pittsburgh. Yet, on that day, I counseled four employees in our hospital who had family or dear friends in the Trade Towers or at the Pentagon. I was reminded again of how closely interwoven we are as a national family, as a human family. I was reminded again of the special calling and training of professional chaplains that let them work well in the midst of this kind of shock and despair. In all, I was gratified to be a part of an organization of people dedicated to caring for others in the bleakest hours of their lives.

Chaplaincy Today will be devoting an upcoming issue on the many ways that chaplains work with disaster. Whether it be a disaster created by flooding, earthquake, or the result of human hands, chaplains around the world respond at those times. I encourage you to reflect upon your recent or past events in working with those forever changed by disaster. What encouraged you? What informed your pastoral care practice? What sustained you?

In the mean time, most of us continue the daily care for the sick and the dying. My hope is that these events have caused you to reflect again on what keeps you in this form of ministry. I hope you are finding within yourself a rekindled commitment to our profession, our calling, and the people whom we serve. The Journal in your hands is committed to assisting you to do that work the best way you know how.

William R. DeLong, Ed.D.
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Rozann’s voice...

condition, to contacting her pastor, and to obtaining some food to sustain her through her watch.

Throughout the day, I observed my fellow staff members move in much the same fashion: voicing concerns for family and friends living in New York, Washington, or Pennsylvania; weeping throughout a prayer service; asking, “How will I explain this to my children?”; and then swallowing their fears, drying their tears, and returning to care for the patients in their charge.

This split psyche feeling lingered a week later as I flew over the eastern half of the country on my way to New York. The Bette Midler song, “From a Distance,” echoed in my mind, and I was amazed at how peaceful things looked from thirty thousand feet.

Even walking the streets around my daughter’s apartment revealed little of what was taking place further south. To the casual observer it appeared as though people were going about their business as usual, as if nothing had changed—at least until one noticed the flyers taped to every available space and was reminded that each represented a loved one still unaccounted for.

Weeks later, as I write this looking out at an oak tree which stubbornly clings to its leaves, the feeling remains. The peace that pervades my small space seems farther than ever from the wider world.

It is often said that each generation has its defining moment when innocence is lost forever, the moment that is recalled by what one was doing “when....” For my parents it was Pearl Harbor, for me it was John F. Kennedy’s assassination, for my daughter it undoubtedly will be September 11, 2001.

May the pages of this journal continue to explore the effects of such moments both on who we are and on what we do.

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