Some Footnotes on a Glorious Tradition

Richard J. Lehman

My wife says that I am a walking history book. I have been around a long time and have been privileged to witness a lot of history, particularly clinical pastoral education (CPE) history. It's been fun, and we do have a glorious tradition. I'm under no illusion that pastoral care began with Anton Boisen or Russell Dicks or even with the beginnings of CPE. There always have been great pastors. What CPE has done is to make it possible for more of us to be better pastors than we would have been.

We are all a part of that glorious tradition. I'm talking about what you and I do every day as we give pastoral care and equip others to do so. We can and should rejoice in what we have been called to do. This "glorious tradition" has a power that should never be minimized.

I was not present at the founding of the American Protestant Hospital Association (APHA) in 1946 nor the Association of Mental Health Chaplains (AMHC) in 1948, but I came on board soon after. My certificate from the APHA Chaplains' Association is dated February 11, 1954, slightly over fifty years ago.

That same year, I attended my first meeting of both associations. I recall clearly that the mental health clergy meeting was in the Hotel Blackstone in Chicago. I was one of the first persons to arrive at the hotel, and after checking in, I sat in the lobby. It wasn't long until an old gentleman with a cane walked over to me, stuck out his hand, and said, "I'm Anton Boisen." I could hardly believe my luck; I had about a half hour to get acquainted with Pappy Boisen before anyone else arrived.

Two years ago, during this same breakfast, the Reverend L. H. Mayfield asked, "Did anyone here ever shake Anton Boisen's hand?"

The Reverend Richard J. Lehman, MDiv, serves as director of pastoral care for the Long Island Council of Churches, Hempstead, NY. A chaplain supervisor, retired, emeritus, he is endorsed by the United Church of Christ. Correspondence may be addressed to 84 Hollins Lane, East Islip, NY 11730-3004 or dmlehman@earthlink.net.
hand?” I raised my hand, assuming there would be a bunch of us, but as I looked around in amazement, mine was the only hand in the air. Time has gone by, hasn’t it? I have to remind myself that I celebrated my eighty-first birthday last fall.

Not only did I like Anton Boisen, I concluded that he liked me as well when he began sending me a Christmas card every year. I’m sure that you wouldn’t be surprised to know that I still have them. In 1959, during my tenure as president of the Association of Mental Health Chaplains, we honored Pappy by establishing an annual award in his name. In recognition, we presented him with a polished brass clock, suitably inscribed, which can be found today in the Boisen Room of the Chicago Theological Seminary library. At the end of his career, Boisen returned to Illinois and again took up residence at Elgin State Hospital where he lived out his remaining years.

Charlie Sullivan, who was chaplain at that time and a confidant of the elder statesmen, was chosen to break the hard news to Anton that he was too old to drive. As Boisen’s 1959 Christmas card poignantly stated, “The closing year finds me in process of graduating from my ancient Ford to a wheel chair, but aside from wobbly underpinnings, I’m all right. But I do look at that clock right frequently.” I cherish that card.

Even though he was an ordained Presbyterian minister, Boisen had an uphill struggle to be hired as a mental hospital chaplain. Most administrators of that day saw no use for a chaplain, especially in a mental hospital. Boisen, who had suffered mental illness, was firmly convinced that chaplains would make a fine addition to the staff. After he was discharged from Westboro (Massachusetts) State Hospital, he began promoting this idea which led to his being hired by Dr. William A. Bryan, superintendent at Worcester State Hospital, also in Massachusetts. Not only did Boisen feel at ease with the patients, he also had an uncanny ability to draw them out. Bryan knew he would become the butt of some other superintendents’ jokes and is reported to have said of Boisen’s hiring, “I would be glad to add a horse doctor to the staff if it would make a difference.”

In 1925, Boisen had interested four seminarians in coming to study. Helen Flanders Dunbar was one who spent the summer at Worcester. She was an outstanding person—not only brilliant but also gorgeous—already a graduate of Bryn Mawr. Not only was she studying at Union Seminary, she also was working on a PhD degree at Columbia University. She followed that with an MD from Yale in 1930, after which she went on to specialize in psychiatry and psychosomatic medicine. One of her books, *Emotion and Bodily Changes*, is still highly regarded in medical circles. Her ability to earn three graduate degrees in seven years was made possible in part through the assistance of two capable secretaries. But even as I write this, I find myself breathless.

Anton Boisen is often called the father of clinical pastoral education. I have no quarrel with that, but others made significant contributions. A physician named William Keller established a program for seminarians in Cincinnati, Ohio. Another physician, Richard Cabot, also played a significant role, teaming up with Russell Dicks, the second person whom we honor at this annual memorial breakfast. Dicks was a Methodist pastor who became chaplain at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH). He must have been quite flattered with Dr. Cabot’s attention as the Cabot name carried quite a bit of weight in Boston society, and the doctor served as head of the Departments of Medicine at both MGH and Harvard Medical School.

One day, young Chaplain Dicks became aware that Dr. Cabot was observing him rather carefully. After completing pastoral calls, Dicks would write as much of the dialogue as he could remember. Afterward, he would reread that and draw as many conclusions as he could from what was said, about any periods of silence, and about the total impact of the interview, the practice which you know as verbatim writing. I’m sure that virtually all of you have done it, but it was new to Dr. Cabot. He was particularly enthused as he concluded that the verbatim writing could do for ministers much of what the autopsy table did for doctors, the added benefit being that the patient did not have to die before the minister could learn from the experience. Cabot and Dicks eventually co-authored *The Art of Ministering to the Sick*, published in 1936.

I met Russell Dicks in 1954 at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, Michigan. At that time, he was the well-known chaplain of Duke University Hospital. I was much taken with his lecture to the medical staff on the value of having a staff chaplain in a hospital. He made me proud to be a chaplain.
as he lifted up the golden opportunities doctors have of collaborating with chaplains in the care of God's children.

As a clinical teacher myself, I believe, as Dicks did, that recording the experiences we have while making pastoral visits, is very useful. The real payoff in learning comes by exploring the dynamics and the pastoral opportunities revealed in the process, and when possible, sharing these with qualified supervisors.

In 1930, Boisen and Dunbar added a degree of structure to an organization initiated by the New England group of seminaries. The Council for Clinical Training of Theological Students (Council) was incorporated in Boston on January 21 with Phil Guiles, a graduate of Union Theological Seminary with a PhD from Edinburgh University, as Field Secretary and Interim Director.

The New England seminaries with the greatest interest in CPE were Andover Newton Theological School (ANTS), Episcopal Theological School, Boston University School of Theology, and Harvard Divinity School. In 1931, Guiles was appointed Director of Clinical Training at ANTS, which became the first seminary to offer a full-time faculty appointment in this field. Following his retirement from Harvard in 1934, Dr. Cabot taught ethics and clinical theology at ANTS until his death in 1939.

Meanwhile, personality clashes appeared within the Council, particularly between Guiles and Dunbar. Reflecting on this time, Ed Thornton wrote, “The movement split apart almost as soon as it took organizational form.” As President of the Board of Governors of the Council, Dr. Cabot did his best to keep peace, but the clashes became more acute, especially when Guiles launched a training program outside of the Council with funding through his father-in-law's Farhert Foundation.

For Boisen and Dunbar, this was the final straw, and their answer was to pull up stakes. They packed up the incorporation papers along with the meager records that had been accumulated. John Billinsky loved to tell the saga of the little black records book and how it traveled on the night train to New York. Left on their own, Guiles, and the New England group reenvisioned their task. Both Cabot and Dicks resigned from the Council and cast their lot with Guiles and the Boston group. What emerged was first called the New England Theological Schools Committee on Clinical Training. On January 28, 1944, it was incorporated as the Institute of Pastoral Care, Inc. (Institute).

The dynamics of the Council (New York) and the Institute (Boston) continued to diverge. The Council had broken away from the New England seminaries and wasn’t about to be bound again. Thus, its members were deemed “rebellious,” a title not totally undeserved. The Institute had a different set of problems as some seminary deans—bless their hearts—liked to have their way in determining training policy. In retrospect, it’s not surprising that for many years the Institute carried the reputation of being under the thumb of the seminaries.

Further, there was a competitive spirit between the Institute and the Council, which I think had a positive influence on both sides. I know that those of us on the Training Committee of the Institute in the sixties were conscious of our reputation as being “heady,” and we tried to correct that. The goal of integrating head and heart, which Chuck Hall so helpfully points to in his book, Head and Heart, defines what we were looking for, both in our supervisory candidates and ourselves.

I first experienced CPE at MGH during the summer of 1948 under the supervision of Rollin Fairbanks and Jim Burns. I followed this with two more summers: Boston State Hospital, under Bob Leslie and Bill Rogers; University Hospital, Ann Arbor, Michigan, under Malcolm Ballinger. It was exciting stuff, but fatigue finally caught up with me, and I took the next two summers off, continuing to serve as pastor of the Pilgrim Congregational Church in Elyria, Ohio.

A follow-up offer from Malcolm Ballinger led me to resign my parish in the fall of 1953 and enroll for a full-year residency at University Hospital. The following spring, I was made an acting supervisor, and in October 1954, I made full supervisor and joined the staff at Gowanda State Hospital on the western edge of New York State. I supervised my first group on my own in the summer of 1955 and continued without a break until 1995, moving to Central Islip State Hospital on Long Island in 1967. This was a much larger facility, which afforded me the opportunity to run a larger program. During my forty-one years as a supervisor, I learned a lot from those seven hundred people who came to me for CPE, and I am proud of the twelve people who went on to become chaplain supervisors.
After I got my feet on the ground as a chaplain supervisor myself, opportunities began to beckon in several directions. I then became involved in AMHC and APHA, organizations enabling both mental hospital and general hospital chaplains to band together for professional advancement. Both of these organizations have now merged to become one, the Association for Professional Chaplains (APC). Through the 1950s, I increased my involvement in the structure of the Institute, serving as a member, and later chair, of the Training Committee, which evaluated candidates for supervisor.

Those were exciting years for us. We were growing by leaps and bounds, and I know, for a fact, that those of us on the Training Committee were working our heads off. After Vatican II, more and more Roman Catholics enrolled in CPE. Soon we found priests and nuns applying for supervisory training. I heard similar stories of overwhelming work from my colleagues at the Council, as well as the Lutheran Advisory Council, and the Southern Baptist Clinical Pastoral Educators. The merger, which ultimately formed the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc. (ACPE), transferred the workload to a larger number of persons.

Before that could take place, we had to build trust among the four groups, the area of certification being the most difficult. First, we all needed to find out that we were looking for similar qualities in our candidates. Then we began the touchy process of letting each other in on how we did it. We began the process in 1961 and by 1964, we had four Joint Accreditation Committees functioning, chaired by Henry Cassler, Lutheran Advisory Council; Maurice (Bee) Clark, Council for Clinical Training; John Smith, and me, Institute of Pastoral Care. It worked better than we dared hope as all of us were a bit jittery about it at the beginning.

Meanwhile, an increasing number of women had entered the CPE process. At first, it took some courage for each one to hold her own in a group in which she was a minority. Louise Long was an early Council for Clinical Training supervisor, but in 1967, when the process of merger was legalized, only two women had standing as supervisors. They were Helen Terkelson and Florence Lewis, both coming from the Institute of Pastoral Care, Inc. Our current national director is a woman, Theresa Snorton, and a vast number of women are sharing leadership throughout the organization.

The same process of integration has occurred with respect to other faith groups. In addition, both the Racial and Ethnic Minority (REM) Group, begun in 1981 by George Polk, and the Gay/Lebian Task Force have steadily gained strength and influence.

It would take much more time and space than I have, to elaborate on the myriad details that needed attention before the actual merger that took place. I would have to mention the Committee of Twelve that was formed in the 1940s that evolved in the sixties to the Advisory Committee on CPE. This group, in turn, organized a series of terrific national pastoral conferences, beginning in 1944.

Adequate standards for the new organization got a lot of attention. I know that story from the inside, for Al Sherve and I were named Co-Chairmen of the Joint Standards Committee. Over a year's time, we held four three-day meetings of our committee in Chicago, and two shorter ones at Atlantic City. Our efforts built in us a new appreciation for standards, an important means for quality control in such an undertaking.

Similar effort went into building a budget for the new structure, and the means for administering it. Defining regions and their boundaries were to be an important part of ACPE, as were creating the House of Delegates, and a structure for overall governance of regions and of the national organization. When the decision was finally made to retain New York City as the site for the headquarters, and Kansas City as the site for the 1967 organizational meeting, all experienced a sense of relief.

By the time we gathered in the fall of 1967, all the national and regional structure was in place. John Smith had been elected Executive Director for the New York office. We were all slowly realizing that we had to give up our old organizations such as the Lutheran Council, Southern Baptists Educators, Institute of Pastoral Care, and Council for Clinical Training. We had a new umbrella over our heads, and it was called the Association For Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc.

In closing, I wish to lift up a few of the CPE personalities who especially impressed me over the years:

Henry Cassler, with his rare sense of humor, will always be remembered for a prayer he gave at an ACPE conference. It was so delightful that the whole room broke into applause and laughter at the end.
We were only sorry that it was not recorded.

Helen Terkelson who went to seminary after her family was raised and on their own, became an Institute supervisor and later was elected to the national ACPE Executive Committee. Her comfort with her own sexuality and leadership was an inspiration and model to men and women throughout our organization.

Anton Boisen’s intricate personality carried within it a spark that mental illness could not extinguish. I will always think affectionately of him—to use his own words—as “a living human document.”

Phil King first impressed me when he did his supervisory training with me at Central Islip. Even cancer could not deter him from pursuing a PhD and having a second family. He retired from MGH as chaplain supervisor only a week before his death.

John Smith was one of my best friends. I admired him as a great leader, a clear thinker, a good pastor, with a wonderful capacity to enjoy life, even while continuing to be amazingly productive.

Emil Hardt was a quiet, steady person, who never flaunted his intellect. Over the years, he conducted so much significant research that deserved to be published although so little was.

Chuck Hall, recorded so much of the ACPE history in which he participated, fleshing out many moments and events that otherwise would have been lost to history.

John Billinsky had a keen mind as well as a gift for controlling situations that was both impressive and maddening. Still, he was a person who respected those who stood up to him.

Helen Flanders Dunbar was a person whose brilliance still scintillates, whose conflicts apparently drove her. It appears that even her psychoanalysis by Helene Deutsch failed to enable her to enjoy the fruits of her labors.

It may be a mark of timidity on my part that these nine people are no longer living. With the exception of Dunbar—who fascinates me still—I knew all of these persons quite well, and I doubt that any of them would be one bit surprised about what I have said about them here.

Finally, all of us are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses whom I believe continue to bless us—some through the heritage they have left and others through their work in the here and now. I thank God for this treasure and the tradition that is ours.

Author’s note:

I am grateful to Ed Thornton for his careful reading of the minutes of the New England Theological Schools Committee, which he summarized in Professional Education for Ministry, and for making available to me the material he gathered in for this book.