

In the Company of Saints



Interviews of Nine Prison Chaplains

by Donald Stoesz

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Introduction

Genesis of this project came about during a morning breakfast meeting between a chaplain and his regional manager at a family diner in Linden, Alberta. After the chaplain had explained the current work challenges in his usual convoluted manner, the regional manager in exasperation picked up a ketchup bottle during the conversation and said, “Don, sometimes a ketchup bottle is simply a ketchup bottle.”

The chaplain had to smile at this remark. He had just finished reading Malcolm Gladwell’s explanation of the intricacies of ketchup.¹ Gladwell pointed out that the Heinz ketchup company had managed to make a product that satisfied five fundamental tastes in the human palate: salty, sweet, sour, bitter, and umami.² While other ketchup brands were either too sweet, too salty, too runny, too bitter, or too sour, Heinz had managed to make such a rich combination of tomato tastes and added ingredients that other companies were unable to compete.

Gladwell’s research struck a chord. Prison chaplains have faced numerous challenges in the last twenty years. Over fifty chaplains have quit in the Prairie Region because of significant cuts in pay and an arms-length contractual model.³ There has been such a lack of focus, understanding, and management of their jobs (*sic*: careers) that chaplains have found employment elsewhere as program officers, parole officers, ministers in their denomination, spiritual care givers in the hospital, or as chaplains in the community.

This situation begs the question of the nature and role of chaplaincy. Is there a real chaplain who can be found who is illustrative of what is possible? What does that person look like? Why and how have they been able to survive and flourish while others have fallen by the wayside?

This book answers these questions through a series of eight interviews. While examples of a *pastoral approach*,⁴ *theology of ministry*,⁵ and *chaplaincy manual*⁶ have been published to address some of these issues, *interviews of chaplains* who have thrived in their work serve as illustrations of what is possible. Readers of these personal and professional vignettes will come to understand the five ingredients that are necessary for prison chaplains to be effective.

The Necessary Five Ingredients

Visible Presence, Ministry and Sacraments, Religious Education, Community Involvement, and Integration have been identified by the Interfaith Committee of

Chaplaincy as five tasks of prison chaplaincy.⁷ More recent consultations have suggested that *Leadership, Core Knowledge, Self-Awareness, Professional Spiritual Care, and Diversity* represent key elements of chaplaincy work.⁸

This book suggests that a variety of other elements denote the work of a good prison chaplain. These include being *a wounded healer* (Teresa Kellendonk), *a good manager* (Jerry Moran), *compassionate* (Debbie Fawcett), *intuitive* (Joan Palardy), *embracing streams of life* (Ramon Noble), and *creating a sense of belonging* (Jonathan Nicolai-deKoning). The reader can decide what other components are necessary for chaplains to flourish and consider prison chaplaincy a life-long calling.

Chapter One

Over and Above the Call of Duty

Joan Palardy, Retired Roman Catholic chaplain

Bowden Institution, 1989-2006



Minister of Reconciliation

Joan is a lot of things to a lot of people, making it hard to place her within the continuum of chaplaincy that is the subject of this book. Perhaps the best place to start is to consider her role as a minister of reconciliation. Numerous times in her career as chaplain, she went *over and above the call of duty* to bring healing and reconciliation to victims and offenders. One thinks of the time that she called the daughter of a man who had murdered his wife. Living in another city and unsure of how to deal with a father who had killed her mother, the young adult daughter agreed to come and visit after she learned that her father was dying of cancer. Bolstered and supported by her uncle, they went together to meet the man in prison.

This meeting culminated in arrangements being made to bury the man in a cemetery in a nearby town, along with a graveyard service that included eight inmates who served as pallbearers. A tombstone was erected in the man's memory. Joan, along with the daughter, continue to visit the grave once a year to make sure the site is being kept clean.

Joan intervened in a similar manner when another inmate she worked with was dying. Upon finding out that the man had molested his daughter when she was young, Joan phoned the daughter to see if she would like to say goodbye . . . and hopefully find some healing and closure in the process. After many conversations and demonstration of a great reluctance to come, the daughter consented to visit her father in the hospital and tell him how much he had hurt her. Fear of him as a monster and betrayer of trust loomed large as she relived the moments as a young girl when she was violated. She was barely able to speak, so afraid was she of him, many years after the fact. In his last hour she placed a rose in his hand.¹

More recently, Joan and her husband John have travelled to Africa to bring healing and hope to victims of genocide perpetrated in Rwanda, Burundi, and the Congo. They went together with Pierre and Judy Allard under an organization known as *JustEquipping*.² Pierre and Judy started this organization in 2006 to apply Restorative Justice principles adopted in their prison ministry. Joan and John met with dozens of victims to help them deal with the trauma, grief, anger, and fears that they continued to have. Joan's long-time work with inmates in grief recovery as well as John's work as a priest and social worker made them excellent resource people in this ministry. Joan was able to continue the work of reconciliation that she had started so many years ago in Bowden Institution.

Interventions in Prison Chaplaincy

The above three examples of restorative justice interventions have been replicated many times in the institution in which Joan worked. When an inmate was refused a transfer to another province to be closer to his spouse and children, he went on a hunger strike that lasted over a month. After visiting him in segregation and the prison hospital for several weeks, Joan realised that the man was about to die. Not satisfied with the warden's response to the situation, she phoned the family and told them what was about to happen. She then phoned the Director General of Chaplaincy to let him know about the situation. Within an hour after the inmate's family made a phone call to the warden of the institution, the inmate was transferred to a city hospital. Together with other hospital staff, Joan was able to convince the man to

stop his hunger strike for the sake of his family. A few months later, the inmate was transferred to the province in which his family lived.

Joan's fearless attitude and action are evident regarding her status as a Catholic chaplain. Despite three years of Religious Studies (Bible, Theology, Church History), studies to become a Registered Nurse, fifteen years as a nun with the Sisters of Charity of Saint Louis, certification as a Specialist in Institutional Ministry with the Canadian Association of Pastoral Education, Joan was asked to complete a Bachelor of Arts in Theology at Newman College in Edmonton. Amid raising four children between the ages of six and ten, and working full-time as a chaplain at Bowden Institution, Joan dutifully took several courses at Newman College.

After yet another request from the Interfaith Committee on Chaplaincy to study with Charles Taylor at Acadia Seminary in Nova Scotia to complete her studies, things came to a head. Bernie Pinet, Catholic representative with the IFC, approached the University of Manitoba and found out that Joan's previous studies, her formation as a nun, and certification with the Canadian Association of Pastoral Education in Toronto for two years entitled her to a master's degree in Pastoral Counseling. She was granted a reprieve from further studies and accepted on par with priests as an "ordained" clergy with the Catholic Church.

Her acceptance as a "full-fledged" Catholic chaplain was not yet done. When Joan facilitated a Catholic priest to come in to say Mass and hear confessions, she found out that the priest's remuneration for his services was being taken out of her salary and used for priest sabbaticals. That situation was soon rectified. After trying in vain for many years to have a Catholic priest say Mass at least once a month in the institution, she prevailed upon herself to provide an order of service every Friday evening. She was able to get permission from the bishop to serve communion in two species, with consecrated hosts being brought in from the local parish.

Personal History

The last three examples illustrate the obstacles Joan has faced with authority structures that mitigate against the idea that a woman can serve and be respected as a "full-fledged" Catholic chaplain. Joan spoke about the few avenues of service available to her when she grew up to fulfill her dream of becoming a nurse in another country. Her formation as a nun was a direct result of the fact that Catholic nuns served as nurses in a variety of foreign missions. Joan fulfilled her dream by

becoming the first nun in her Order in Western Canada to graduate as a Registered Nurse and serve in Peru and Israel with the Sisters of Charity of Saint Louis.

Unable to continue her calling as a nurse because of a spinal fusion that she underwent when she came back from Peru, Joan found a pamphlet in a hospital chapel about the Canadian Association for Pastoral Education. Open only to ministers who had completed their Master of Divinity, the Anglican priest in charge of CAPE in Toronto accepted her application after she wrote a paper outlining her theology and vision of ministry. The two years that Joan spent there, rubbing shoulders with other pastors in ministry, brought personal healing as well as a renewed sense of mission.

Upon returning home to Alberta, Joan was hired to be the Coordinator of Pastoral Care for the Calgary Roman Catholic Diocese. Travelling from parish to parish to do her work, she bumped into a Catholic priest who had been mandated to support Family Life initiatives. Joan and John facilitated workshops throughout the diocese. Occasionally, they gave presentations at the same place on the same day. Over time they fell in love. Joan met with the head of her order to let her know that she would not be completing her final vows. John received a dispensation from the pope after a review of numerous documents demonstrated questions and doubts that John had about his calling to ministry as a priest.

Joan and John were married in Ottawa during the time that John was enrolled at Saint Paul University to complete a Master of Social Work degree. Upon completion of this degree, the couple found themselves back in Alberta, with Joan taking care of their young children and John becoming employed as a social worker with the Province of Alberta.

When their youngest child was six years old and in Grade 1, Joan received a call from the Prairie Regional chaplain, asking her whether she would consider becoming a Catholic chaplain at a nearby prison. After reading the Mission Statement of Correctional Service Canada, which spoke about the dignity of the individual and the potential for inmates to become law-abiding citizens, she accepted the position upon the condition that she could walk her children to school in the morning and have them accepted into an “After School Program.” Thus began a chaplaincy ministry that would span the next seventeen years.

Prophet, Priest, and Pastor

The above descriptions provide ample evidence of Joan as a prophet, priest, and pastor. She has courageously and prophetically spoken of the legitimate role of

woman “priests” with the Roman Catholic church, about the role of restorative justice within and without the prison system, and about the effects of gender discrimination and harassment in her role as a woman staff person within a predominately male prison. Joan has not been shy to speak about each of these aspects of ministry because she practices what she preaches and believes that healing and hope are possible when each of these issues is confronted.

Joan’s role as a “priest” has been abundantly evident. Her weekly worship services included communion in order to make the mystery of Christ real for each of the men that she served. Her invitation to inmates to share about Scripture passages read during the service provided a safe place for the men to speak about their faith and life.

This sacramental ministry was extended throughout the week when Joan counselled men, conducted a grief recovery program, facilitated a volunteer-led Christopher Leadership course, and encouraged the work of Islamic volunteers in their education of Muslim inmates. Joan was significantly present in each of these activities, understanding what was needed in each instance for the work to be effective and transparent.

Joan’s gifts of intuition and compassion are accented in her work as counsellor, pastor, confidant, friend, and wounded healer. Her ability to speak as prophet to authority and priest to parishioners is exemplified to an even greater extent in her work as a minister. Any inmate who has met Joan will tell you that Joan is willing to call a spade a spade when necessary. Hiding behind religious language, minimizing the amount of harm done, talking superficially about one’s faith, being disrespectful of others, taking one’s family for granted, or simply being lazy about one’s attitudes in life provide Joan the opportunity to speak into that situation. She will do so in a manner that is gentle, mindful, intelligent, and sincere, making the inmate who entered her office a different person when he leaves it.

One example of this pastoral presence will suffice. An aboriginal inmate came to Joan and spoke about his estrangement from his family, his offence, his childhood, and his problems in the institution. After a series of sessions, Joan suggested to the inmate that something had happened in his past that was affecting how he was coping. Joan gave the inmate two weeks to think about whether he wanted to share about what had happened. Upon his return, the inmate did not feel comfortable sharing. Joan asked whether she could tell him what she thought had happened. The inmate agreed. Joan told him that he most likely had been molested by a Catholic priest. The inmate’s eyes opened wide. He cried inconsolably for some time after. Joan had been able to identify something that the inmate assumed was hidden from

view. This intuitive ability within a cocoon of compassion is what has made Joan a great chaplain.

Conclusion

Micah 6:8, “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God,” and Matthew 5:14, “You are a light to the world,” are Scripture passages that have come to define Joan’s ministry. A Service song, sung many times in the chapel as part of ecumenical services, would also be apropos. The song goes like this:

We are made for service to care for each other;
We are made to love each sister and brother.
Love that lasts through sorrow and pain,
a love that will never die with strain.

God sent His Son to show us the way;
One who shared His love every minute of the day,
One who gave His life that we might live
And his Spirit to help us through the years.

Life can be so lonely when nobody cares;
Life can be so empty when nobody shares;
But if we give ourselves both time and again
The happiness of Christ will live within.³

Joan’s boundless capacity to give to others, even to those who have been less than kind to her, along with her natural curiosity of people, and her willingness to name those perceptions, sets her apart.

Chapter Two

The Insulating Warmth of Compassion

The Story of *Rev. Debbie Fawcett*

Ordained Minister with
Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada
Women's Reintegration Chaplain,
Mustard Seed, Edmonton, Alberta



Wearing a Black Shirt of Identification

When I asked Rev. Debbie Fawcett to describe what chaplaincy is, she suggested that she represents the *warm and comforting insulation that construction workers fill in between the door frame and wall of an opening*. The door represents the client with whom a chaplain is working. The frame represents the form within which this person's self-identity, faith, restoration, hope, and love are nurtured. The surrounding wall represents the world of challenges that the client has faced for many years: mental illness, addictions, poor choices, broken homes, inadequate training and work habits, homelessness, poverty, criminal behaviour, deprecating view of self, and isolation.

Rev. Fawcett sees herself as the healing buffer between this person and the world of challenges. She tells the story of a woman whom Debbie was driving to the Mustard Seed to pick up some new clothes. Recently released from prison, the woman had been wearing the same black shirt for an interminable length of time. When the woman asked who Debbie was, Debbie replied that she was a chaplain, a minister. "Oh," the woman said, "I have been praying that I would be able to wear something else than this black shirt for Christmas. Could this be the answer to my prayers? You are my answer to prayer!"

A self-proclaimed unbeliever, this woman recognized something magical that had just taken place. Debbie had provided the wherewithal to give a sense of incarnational hope to this situation. The woman no longer had to wear a black shirt, so in vogue among the socially starved peers with whom she had lived. She could get on with her life in a much more colourful and emotionally fulfilling manner.

Debbie's example is apropos for another reason. The woman with whom Debbie came in contact was a survivor, a self-made woman who had accessed social services and other resources for much of her life. She knew what it was like to move from homelessness to prison, from prison to a shelter, from the shelter to gainful employment, from gainful employment to care for her son, from care for her son to restoration of other familial relations, and from restoration of family to a sense of accomplishment and self-worth.

The woman provides a lesson about the resilience of human beings. She appreciated the divine intervention of an angel in this instance, even though she may never see another angel again. Heaven touches earth in a fundamentally existential and transient fashion, a manner that is very familiar to anyone who was worked as a chaplain. The woman recognized the worth of the help that had come along. Lives and connections and material things become infinitely valuable when one is deprived of them for any length of time.

The woman provides insight into the role of chaplains. Debbie represents a person who accompanies this woman, provides insulation from despair, and helps the woman to open her own door to a new chapter and colour in her life. This approach is different from enabling, co-dependent support, and saving the woman. Walking together as equals provides a mutually gratifying benefit that is experienced by both parties. This covenantal bond represents a surplus value of socialization, fellowship, care, and commitment that goes beyond a contractual relationship.

Debbie as Women's Reintegration Chaplain

Rev. Fawcett tells a second story that illustrates her role as an ordained woman minister with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. There is an episode in *Modern Family*, when the gay couple featured as two main characters in the television drama series are on a plane and they hear the pilot introduce himself at the beginning of the flight. One of the gay men turns to the other and says, "I am alright with the fact that it could have been a woman pilot, but I am relieved that it is a man."

This statement represents Debbie's experience as a woman pastor within a largely male world. Debbie began her journey thirty years ago, when she studied for ministry, served as a pastor in various Pentecostal churches in Ontario, became ordained in 2003, is serving as a member of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada oversight committee for pastors, and became a women's reintegration chaplain for Mustard Seed in 2010.

Debbie's point in all of this is that even though congregations and leadership are theoretically in favour of women pastors, they are not always existentially

comfortable with a woman serving as their own pastor. Similar to the gay couple who wanted acceptance of their own lifestyle but were blind to their sexism in regard to women in authority and leadership, Debbie suggests that this blindness regarding gender issues is relevant to her situation.

Debbie may have “fallen into” chaplaincy work because of these underlying factors regarding women ministers. She is one of only a few women pastors who have led (as an interim pastor) PAOC congregations. Her continued call to ministry has provided her with a unique opportunity to serve in a chaplaincy role. The fact that she has been called to help women may have inadvertently resulted because of her deep empathy and sensitivity to the place, role, status, authority, and influence of women in society and in leadership.

Solidarity with the Poor and Homeless

Rev. Fawcett tells a third story about her work as a chaplain. About six years ago, Mustard Seed Alberta abandoned its employment of reintegration chaplains because of financial restraints. Debbie was tasked with informing her clients of the end of Mustard Seed support. [She kept doing the work.] Upon hearing the news, a client in the passenger seat of Debbie’s vehicle shrank further into herself, bowing her shoulders in resignation. “Why do they always do this to the little people?” she asked. “It is always us poor people whom society forgets about first.”

This poignant story points to the seamless whole that Rev. Fawcett represents within the broader mission of Mustard Seed Alberta. After a hiatus of a few years, chaplaincy was reinstated within the organization and given new life, especially regarding people who had been incarcerated. Rev. Fawcett is part of an integral team of people who are committed to working with the poor and homeless. Mustard Seed is a provincial-wide organization that has devoted over fifty years of its mission to this cause.

The analogy of insulation is apropos. The insulation between a door frame and wall is largely invisible because of the moulding that covers it. Chaplaincy is largely invisible because it serves such an ephemeral purpose. Its presence or lack thereof only becomes evident when people begin wondering where the cold is seeping in. Despite its invisibility, insulation is an integral part of any construction project. It saves hundreds of dollars on the energy bill on a yearly basis.

The fact of the matter remains, as Jesus has said, that the poor will always be with us. The number of homeless and poor on our streets shows how many doors need to be insulated in order for a seamless whole to emerge from the degrees of

difference between the many walls that we face as human beings and those walls that have caused people to end up on the street. Debbie notes the integral link between her work as a chaplain and the mission of the Mustard Seed.

Sacramental Presence within Secularity

When I suggested to Rev. Fawcett that a lot of her work appears to be that of a social worker, she responded with yet another story. Once a month, various volunteers meet with clients in a church for an evening of fun, celebration, activities, a meal, and prayer. Known as the Reintegration Support Group, this group has become a community of socialization and fellowship. The clients are looking for a support network that will enable them to stay in the community. The volunteers are from a variety of churches, dedicated to becoming friends and family to these women.

During an evaluation of the program, staff were interested to hear from the clients about the effectiveness of this initiative. They were surprised that the “breaking of bread” and prayers were some of the most meaningful aspects of the evening events that the women mentioned. There was something about asking God into the room and into their lives that the women were deeply touched by.

This story reminds me of a conversation that I had with a staff person in another city where chaplaincy services were being provided in the context of serving meals to the poor and homeless. When I asked whether the chaplain provided a worship service in this context, I was told that the chaplain encouraged the people present to attend a nearby church.

I smiled at this suggestion. Why do we think that God is present only in a church? Why do we think that the congregation in question knows how to handle the homeless who darken their church door day and night? Would it not be better in this instance to bless the congregation that is present in the fellowship of meals being served than ask the givers and receivers to become part of a congregation somewhere else?

A change of theology is necessary in order to see the gathered group of people receiving and serving meals as part of the body of Christ. There is something holy going on in this place that needs to be blessed. That blessing is something that I would call sacramental, despite the fact that I know very little about the meaning of this word.

Rev. Fawcett’s sacramental theology was evident throughout the interview. In the same way that she saw her spiritual and social work as one and the same, she saw the “sacramental” nature of ministry taking place in areas other than in congregations. She cited her husband’s profession as an example. After serving as a

pastor of a church, her husband became a professor of Old Testament at a local Bible College. Over the years, various colleagues have asked him if he has considered going back into ministry. The implication behind this statement is that congregational ministry is where God is most visibly present. A broader understanding of the porous and perforated reality of the divine enables the people in the Reintegration Support Group to be truly blessed, along with Debbie as their pastor, mentor, friend, and shepherd.

Conclusion

Rev. Fawcett is a person at ease with herself, with her role as chaplain for women who have been recently released from prison, and as a pastor who knows how God's healing and holy presence has become a fellowship in the streets on which she works. To push the analogy of insulation to another level, the air pockets within the foam are what provide the buffer zone of warmth from the cold. While invisible to the eye, these ephemeral bubbles are what chaplaincy is all about.

Chapter Three



Value-Added Management of Prison Chaplaincy

The Story of Rev. Jerry Moran, Married Catholic Priest

Roman Catholic Chaplain at the Remand Centre, Edmonton, Alberta

Introduction

Jerry Moran has a wonderful way of channeling people's ministries and hitching those wagons to the broader educational goals of chaplaincy. This has happened twice to me, first in regard to a workshop I conducted several years ago for chaplains in Alberta provincial correctional facilities, and again last week when I interviewed Jerry for this article. Two hours before the interview, I found myself sitting with five other chaplains in the Edmonton Remand Centre, discussing the nature and challenges of prison work. Several chaplains were entirely new to the system, unsure of their role and place within the large institutional setting known as corrections. We spent two insightful hours together, sharing about chaplaincy over freshly-made donuts and coffee that Jerry had provided.

These two hours were Jerry's way of adding value to the professionalization of chaplaincy. While he was more than happy to be personally interviewed about a

lifetime of ministry, he felt that he had not done his job if he did not provide a social and public setting for a mutual sharing of insights. Jerry considered his work to be complete once we had finished visiting at the Remand Centre. The interview was a bonus, like adding gravy to the mashed potatoes.

Muslim Prayers, Bible Reading, and Catholic Mass

The value-added nature of Jerry's ministry is evident in several ways. At the end of the spiritual retreat I conducted several years ago, government managers were invited for an afternoon of sharing about the current state of affairs of chaplaincy. Jerry outlined how it had taken several months of discussions with correctional managers for Islamic prayer beads to be accepted for use by inmates. The same thing happened last week. There we were, standing in the hallway with a correctional officer, discussing how prayer rugs were preferable to using bed sheets for Friday afternoon Islamic prayers. Not satisfied with how the conversation had gone, Jerry returned to the institution after our interview on a Friday afternoon at 3 p.m. to see if he could be of further assistance.

Jerry provides an *encadrement* (framework) of care to the work that he does. He includes a list of instructions when handing out Bibles to inmates. He recommends a *lectio divina* form of meditation, in which a passage of Scripture is read, reflected upon, and followed by prayer. He follows a similar procedure in preparing Catholic believers for Mass and recitation of the Rosary. He or another chaplain meets with offenders so that the order of service, which includes confession, Scripture readings, a sermon, recitation of a Creed, the Lord's prayer, and communion, is understandable to them. Partaking of the Eucharist and saying the Rosary are enhanced through this process of education.

Jerry's role as a Catholic chaplain underlines the uniqueness of his ministry. Jerry prepares the candidates for communion so that a Catholic priest can come in, bless the elements, and say Mass. The fact that Jerry is a married Catholic priest means that he can provide the wherewithal for a Catholic order of service to be conducted while leaving the actual blessing of the elements to his colleague. Differentiation of roles and unity of spirit come together in Jerry's identity as Roman Catholic priest, marriage partner to Jan, former manager of provincial prison chaplaincy services, and chaplain *par excellence*.

Historical Background

A word about Jerry's personal background is necessary to understand how he has been able to integrate the above-stated goals and accomplishments of ministry. He grew up in Saskatchewan and attended seminary at the Holy Redeemer College in Windsor, Ontario during the heady days of Vatican II. Jerry credits this 1960s world-wide Catholic conference of bishops as providing the wherewithal for his commitment to ecumenism and inter-faith accommodation. The Council's openness to other Christian denominations and world religions, acceptance of their expression of faith as valid within the larger purposes of God, and embrace of Christian Catholicism as part of the larger body of Christ was instrumental in Jerry's ongoing personal development as a Catholic priest, marriage partner, and manager of health and chaplaincy services.

Jerry was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1966 after studying in Windsor and another seminary in Wisconsin. He served in this capacity for seven years, before marrying Jan in 1973. He received a dispensation from Pope John 23rd just before John Paul II was elected Pope. He became a manager within Alberta Health Services for the next twenty-eight years (1973-2000), setting up a methadone program to help approximately 15,000 drug addicts manage their dependencies. He continued his education through Athabasca University, an on-line educational facility that helped him develop his management skills. Jerry's constant attention to the bigger picture along with his firm belief in evidence-based practices are clearly evident as a result of the training and experience that he received during these years.

After retiring from his management position with AADAC in 2000, Monsignor Bill Irwin approached Jerry about becoming provincial chaplain with Alberta Correctional Services. This call afforded Jerry the opportunity of dovetailing his former work as a Catholic priest with the broader scope of faith-based initiatives within a prison environment. Jerry read as much as he could about chaplaincy, starting with Canon James' historical consideration of chaplaincy within the Service, *A Living Tradition: Penitentiary Chaplaincy* (Ottawa: Chaplaincy Division of CSC, 1990), and continuing with Catholic encyclical and pastoral documents that had to do with prisoners.

Jerry continued this management of chaplaincy until 2016, when the provincial contract for chaplaincy was awarded to a non-profit agency, Bridges of Canada. Since then, Rev. Moran has continued his work as a chaplain in the Remand Centre, providing oversight and advice to the various chaplains who have come and gone in the last three years.

Concluding Reflections

Rev. Moran's management skills are evident through the many subtle and deliberate ways in which he harnesses the unique gifts of chaplains who have been called to prison ministry. Many challenges await a minister who wants to become a chaplain. As the saying goes, "although all chaplains are ministers, not all ministers make good chaplains."

After working for sixteen years under a denominational model, in which chaplains were hired on an individual contract basis with their faith groups, Jerry is now convinced that a different model is required. A visible outline of this approach remains sketchy. Rev. Moran is not convinced that the Alberta government is willing to hire chaplains as government employees (as is the case in Manitoba and British Columbia). He also remains non-committal about the current one-contractor model, largely because of a lack of adequate training. Educational opportunities and professionalization of the service are part and parcel of Jerry's identity.

Rev. Moran has exemplified this commitment to competencies through his own work, upgrading skills through education as needed, dipping into the deep resources of ecumenism and inter-faith accommodation emanating from his own faith tradition, and becoming a true shepherd of other chaplains as they find their way through the myriad of challenges and joys of prison ministry.

Chapter Four



John de Vries

Christian Reformed Chaplain in Quebec and Ontario, 1975-1991

Church Representative on the IFC and the CCJC

Introduction

John DeVries came to Canada in the early 1950s with his Dutch family. After attending Calvin College and Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, John served as a pastor of the Regina Christian Reformed Church from 1971 to 1975. While in Regina, John's visits to the provincial jail nurtured his passion for prison chaplaincy.

After four years of congregational ministry, John saw an advertisement for a chaplaincy job with Correctional Service Canada. Those were the days when chaplains were hired as government employees and received language training. After taking French lessons together with a Baptist colleague, Norm Barton, John and Norm became chaplains respectively in Federal Training Centre (Centre Federal de Formation) in Laval, Quebec, and Etablissement Cowansville in Cowansville, Quebec.

John worked together with the Catholic priest, Father Romano Guilmette, conducted worship services in French and English, and facilitated the involvement of volunteers in his ministry. Reflecting on this time in ministry (1975-1979), John felt that citizen involvement in visiting inmates provided a normalization of relations for offenders. Inmates could establish friendships and share more confidentially about their lives in the safety of a chapel setting. These encounters balanced the overriding emphases on security that were a normal part of prison life.

When federal chaplains as government employees were terminated in 1979, John moved to Ontario. For twelve years, he worked as the Regional Coordinator of Provincial Chaplaincy Services for Southwest (English sector) and Northeast Ontario (French sector). He was responsible for hiring, coordinating, and overseeing the work of various institutional chaplains.

This was a time when multi-faith chaplaincy was coming to the fore. The *Interfaith Committee on Chaplaincy* had been established in 1968 to provide input on various faith groups for Correctional Service Canada. The *Ontario Provincial Interfaith Committee on Chaplaincy* was formed in 1972 to help the province with similar types of advice. In 1992, the committee became known as the *Ontario Multi-faith Council of Spiritual and Religious Care* published a book entitled *Multifaith Information Manual* (Toronto: OMCSRC, 1995). This book provided information about essential religious items, rituals, dress, beliefs, holy holidays, and contact information about over twenty different religious groups.

Another group established during this time was the *Church Council of Justice and Corrections* (1972). These were the heady days of reform when the abolition of the death penalty was being debated in parliament. The Council influenced a variety of Members of Parliament to help bring about the passing of this bill. This bill can be viewed as a high point of the winds of reform that were sweeping the justice system in the 1960s and 1970s.

John has served as a Christian Reformed representative on the *Interfaith Committee on Chaplaincy* for many years. He has served as a Board Member with the *Church Council of Justice and Corrections*. Reflecting on his involvement with these committees, John notes the disconnect between the vision of these committees and the involvement -- or lack thereof -- of churches. While hospital chaplaincy receives more attention because most church members are affected by health concerns at one point in their lives, incarceration is less of an issue in John's middle-class denomination.

John makes an important sociological point. Life in prisons represents a marginalized existence and continues to carry a stigma with which many believers

are uncomfortable. While congregations are generally in favour of compassion and justice, they are less sure about what this means in practical terms, for example, in their advocacy of chaplaincy.

In summary, John has been a long-time advocate of prison ministry, in his work as a Quebec institutional chaplain, in his regional role as provincial chaplain in Ontario, and in his faithful service as committee representative and board member on the IFC and CCJC. His passion and vision for chaplaincy bodes well for others who are willing to take up the torch.

Chapter Five



Speaking into the Streams of Life

Ramon "Snowy" Noble

Evangelical Covenant Church of Canada,
Prison Chaplain, Drumheller and Edmonton
Institution for Women, 1994-2017

Men's Reintegration Chaplain,
The Mustard Seed, 2018-.

Introduction

Together with his wife and two children, Ramon "Snowy" Noble came to Canada from Zimbabwe on May 5, 1990 with \$1000.00 and visitors' visas in their pockets. Snowy planned to prepare for ministry by studying for four years at Prairie Bible College in Three Hills, Alberta. He managed to do that, obtaining a student's visa the following year and graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Sacred Music (BASM) and a minor in ethno-musicology in 1995.

The family settled in Rosebud. Before long, Snowy was providing ministerial leadership to a small independent church comprised of Baptists, Pentecostals, Lutherans, and non-denominational believers. He started going into Drumheller Institution, a federal prison not far from the college as part of his internship mandate and volunteer time. He found that his preconceptions of inmates as a bunch of rough and jaded individuals were misguided. The Bible studies that he together with other volunteers facilitated were well received.

The warden approached Snowy and asked him why he was spending so much time in prison. The warden suggested that he could pay Snowy for some of his work there. Snowy readily agreed. He became known as the minority-faith chaplain's assistant, largely because the needs of Pagan, Islamic, and Buddhist offenders were not being adequately met. Ramon arranged to meet a Pagan representative in the community, connected with Mr. Armagan, an Imam who was willing to facilitate Friday prayers, and was able to locate a Buddhist nun who was willing to provide

meditation rituals. He served in this capacity on a part-time basis for the next twelve years, from 1994 – 2006.

Joining a Larger Church Conference and becoming a Prison Chaplain

Snowy's adaptability in regard to prison work was evident in his pastoral leadership. After a difficult internal conflict, the congregation decided to join a larger conference that could give pastoral and leadership support. While courting the Baptists and Pentecostals, they found out that over half of the congregation would need to be rebaptized according to these denominations' procedures and beliefs. The Evangelical Covenant Church Conference accepted both infant and adult baptisms as legitimate forms of initiation and so became a good fit for the church.

On the basis of this ecumenical gesture on the part of the church conference, Snowy decided to be credentialed as a minister with this denomination. This credentialing process became important as Snowy continued to pursue prison chaplaincy opportunities. In 2006, he applied for a chaplaincy position at the Edmonton Institution for Women and was accepted.

Snowy viewed this opportunity as a chance to unwind and take things a little easier. He had worked with over six hundred inmates at Drumheller Institution. EIFW had a population of one hundred and thirty women. Snowy was in for a surprise. At Drumheller, offenders would come back to see him after a month or so hiatus. The time in between interviews was shortened by quite a bit at EIFW. In his first week there, Snowy was approached by a woman inmate who was curious about his work. After Snowy explained the nature of his ministry, the woman brought back a friend of hers after lunch. The next day, two more women joined this small group. Snowy was more emotionally exhausted after one week of work at EIFW than he had been in a month at Drumheller Institution.

Part of the reason for this draining experience had to do with the fact that many female inmates had been traumatized and misused by men. Snowy was particularly sensitive to the fact that he represented a male figure with whom the women had a lot of past reasons to be suspicious. His work blossomed, largely because of Ramon's ability to be compassionate, understanding, and a good listener. He continued to work at EIFW for the next eleven years, from 2006-2017.

Philosophical Underpinnings

One of the things that surprised the interviewer was Snowy's natural ecumenical and inter-faith spirit. It takes time for Protestant chaplains from evangelical and

fundamentalist traditions to be open to facilitating Wiccan, Islamic, and Buddhist rituals.

Snowy's reflections made this broader interest in the various religious streams of life understandable. He informed me that he was baptized and confirmed as a Roman Catholic during his youth. At age thirteen, he was moved by a gospel message at a local Methodist Church and made a personal surrender to Christ. Over the ensuing years, Snowy connected with various Protestants before coming to Canada. The fact that he was raised in a different Christian denomination from the one that he and his family adopted later in life made some of this empathy for "otherness" explainable.

The fact that Ramon is black and a cultural minority as a Zimbabwe Canadian also helps to explain his sensitivity to other religions and cultures. Discrimination and prejudice are sometimes just below the surface of interactions among believers and leaders of faiths. Snowy's openness, transparency, compassion, and adaptability are clear answers to some believers' tendencies to retreat into camps, tribes, and sectarianism in order to "maintain" and "sustain" their own faith traditions.

Snowy suggested that his job as a chaplain is to bring out the best in an offender. Because the person has been created in the image of God, his ministry consists of helping this person realise their God-given potential, even if the person is an atheist or non-believer. The meaning of life can be discovered deep within each person. A chaplain represents a facilitator who can nourish this life-source.

Snowy served for many years as chaplain representative on the *Interfaith Committee of Chaplaincy*. He made the IFC aware that working with female and male inmates is quite different. He helped implement a variable chaplain/offender ratio in the Memorandum of Understanding between IFC and the Correctional Service Canada to consider this gender difference.

Mustard Seed Community Chaplain

In 2017, Snowy's chaplaincy contract with his denomination was coming to an end. He was reluctant to continue under the one-contractor service model for CSC chaplaincy. Snowy was contacted by Mustard Seed, an Alberta provincial-wide relief organization that combats poverty and homelessness, to see if he wanted to become their reintegration chaplaincy for men. Snowy gladly accepted the offer. It represented yet another opportunity to serve, albeit in a slightly different way. After a year on the job, Snowy said that the work has been very satisfying. He has continued to develop his pastoral care skills through counselling hundreds of

offenders. There are always many offenders and ex-offenders waiting to see him. They know that Snowy can be trusted, is accepting of their situation in life, and will help them find a way forward.

What's in a Name

The reason for Ramon Noble's nickname "Snowy" had to be part of this discussion. People are always surprised when they meet Snowy after talking to him on the phone. Expecting an English gentleman, they look around in confusion when they find Ramon standing in the room. The difference that otherness makes becomes palpable in that moment. The assumption that we are able to cross ethnic, cultural, religious, and gender lines in order to communicate effectively and compassionately, to stand in solidarity and in fellowship with each other, and to affirm mutuality of faith, purpose, love, and friendship all come together in that single "ah, ha" experience.

The reason for Snowy's nickname makes this experience all the more moving. When Ramon was born, his blond hair and fair skin made it seem to the nurse in the maternity ward that he belonged to the white mother who was anxiously waiting to breastfeed her baby. When Ramon's mother received an infant daughter to nurse, she pointed out to the staff that she had just given birth to a son, and that he was sitting in the other mother's lap. Thus was the name "Snowy" born, with all of the ironies and paradoxes that come with that reality. The purpose and joy of commonality beyond all differences are summed up in that experience, an experience that is all too real and relevant in the exigencies of chaplaincy.

Streams of Life into Which we are Born

Snowy returned again and again to speak of the streams of life of which we are a part. One is reminded of the fresh water flowing from the altar in the Temple down to the salt sea, mentioned in Ezekiel 47. Trees and fish flourish in the river and on its banks. Snowy represents a similar source of refreshment and joy in his chaplaincy work.

Chapter Six

Empowering (Ex) Inmates to Belong
The Story of *Jonathan Nicolai-deKoning*
Christian Reformed Chaplain with Mustard Seed,
Program Director of The Micah Centre,
The King's University



Jonathan started his post-secondary education by taking a Bachelor of Arts degree from King's University in Edmonton, Alberta, with a major in religion and minor in political science. He spent six months in Haiti with World Renew and MCC doing community development work, as part of an internship program. Jonathan obtained a Master of Divinity degree from Regent College in Vancouver. He finished his ministerial formation at Calvin Seminary in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and was ordained as a Christian Reformed pastor.

Political science had as much of an influence in Jonathan's career as his calling as a pastor. During his time in Vancouver, Jonathan was drawn to working with people in the inner city, setting up urban gardens, advocating for people with HIV, and addressing the issues of homelessness and poverty. Jonathan found himself doing the same thing when he moved back to Edmonton. He, together with his wife, joined the Mustard Seed organization, helping to feed the poor and to empower them to live fulfilling lives. He became a community chaplain, visiting inmates in Grierson Centre and Bowden Institution to help with their release plans. He became part of The Neighbour Centre, a downtown drop-in centre that helped transient people with health issues, jobs, and a place for them to live.

Jonathan's political consciousness was evident throughout this time. While relief of suffering has been at the centre of Mustard Seed's mission, Jonathan has always seen himself as an agent of transformation. He has walked alongside inmates and ex-inmates for the last ten years, helping them find a place to belong in a society that may or may not want them back. He continued a community group called *Saturday Night Count* that met every two weeks at First Baptist Church for a meal,

fellowship, and activities. This group was established by former community chaplain Kris Knutson. One third of the group consisted of community volunteers, one third, inmates from Grierson Centre who were there as part of an Escorted Temporary Absence, and a third ex-inmates who were finding a place to belong as part of their reintegration.

The genesis and genius of this group lies in the fact that it represents a fellowship of peer support, unencumbered by the embedded nature of individuals' past. Devout church members, former criminals, faithful citizens, hopeful participants, and various tagalongs mingle as fellow compatriots in the mix that is called life.

The transforming nature of this visible community is evident over and beyond the individual roles that Jonathan as community chaplain, inmates on their way to reintegration, ex-inmates on their way to finding a new normal, and volunteers deeply committed to faith and practice represent. Each person becomes part of a community of safety and belonging that unconsciously lessens preoccupation with their own "self-stylized" roles and identity. The elder and younger sons in the Prodigal Son story mingle as equals, accepting and loving each other despite past prejudices. Jonathan plays the role of the father in this story, empowering each person to be a resource to the other within an atmosphere of reconciliation and comradery.

The surplus value of this social and emotional bonding can be illustrated by a contrasting example. About six years ago, a facilitator was hired in Edmonton to serve as the coordinator of *Circles of Support and Accountability*.¹ COSAs entail regular meetings of a small group of volunteers and core member (former inmate) to ensure the safety of the community and mutual support of each other. Although gifted in terms of education, knowledgeable of crime cycles, and able to provide the ex-offender with insight in terms of their reintegration to society, the coordinator was unable to fulfill the community portion of this assignment. He had no idea why anyone would volunteer to become part of these circles and where these volunteers could be found.

The faith-based motivation of many volunteers, combined with a general interest in keeping society safe, represent indispensable components that makes community chaplaincy what it is. Jonathan understands how community works because of his formation within and adherence to a community of faith. His understanding of group dynamics enables volunteers to become inadvertent worshippers in this fellowship community, participating in a reality that is greater than their familial and friendship allegiances. They go to church each Sunday

because they believe that the lion and the lamb can sit together. *Saturday Night Count* represents a similar miracle of opposites attracting.

Jonathan's academic tendencies were evident throughout the interview. He referred to the fact that he had consulted a variety of resources in his work as a community chaplain. Alf Bell's dissertation on prison ministry (he served as CSC Regional Chaplain in the Atlantic region), Rev. Dr. Pierre Allard's lectures,² and Howard Zehr's writings on Restorative Justice³ influenced the way Jonathan approached his job. So too did the community group that was established by Rev. Harry Nigh in the Toronto area. Originally started as a COSA project, it became a social group of surplus value in which belonging, fellowship, and peer support blossomed from the seeds of contractual relationships between individual client and service provider. Jonathan used this concrete example of community reintegration to furnish the philosophical underpinnings of his own group in Edmonton.

Jonathan has gone on to become the director of Micah Centre because of his belief in transformation. The Centre's global mission of responding to issues of hunger, poverty, and development dovetail nicely with Jonathan's previous overseas experience and inner city work. He has found a home within his calling as political scientist and pastor.

Chapter Seven



Empathy and Compassion Wrapped up in a Fierce Independence

The Story of Teresa Kellendonk

Department Head, Pastoral and Parish Services
Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton

Introduction

An irony of prison chaplaincy has to do with the fact that clear boundaries, settled sense of self, grounded view of reality, transparent understanding of one's faith and mission, and ability to confront are prerequisites for showing genuine empathy and compassion to offenders in a prison setting. The chaos, dysfunctionality, blurred taboos, and general confusion that are an inherent part of working in a prison environment means that chaplains and staff alike have to be self-aware of what is taking place in their encounters with inmates. Called emotional intelligence, chaplains and offenders can become human and humane, respectful and deeply empathetic, spiritually devout and religiously expressive once an arena of safety, sacred space of being, and mutual rapport have been established. Flowers can blossom in such a hot house of nourished soil, refreshing water, and beaming sunlight.

Such is the case with Teresa Kellendonk, who exclaimed half through the interview that she felt that she had "arrived home" when she started her chaplaincy fifteen years ago in Edmonton Institution, a maximum-security federal prison in Alberta. To use a 1970s colloquial expression, this article attempts to "unpack" what Teresa meant by this statement. What was it about the above-described atmosphere that Teresa could relate to on a deeply empathetic and compassionate level?

The answer lies in something Harville Hendrix has identified in his work with couples who are considering separation or divorce. He suggests that couples are initially attracted to each other because of deep wounds that they recognise in the other person.¹ They feel that they, too, have arrived "home" because they are

able to identify on a deeply empathetic level the variety of emotional, social, spiritual, and personal ways in which the other person is interacting with them. Called phenomena of recognition, timelessness, reunification, and necessity,² this “déjà vu” experience is the result of all of the experiences that this person had while growing up.

To take a stereotypical example, a daughter of an alcoholic father is attracted to her future husband because he displays the emotional characteristics, defects, and attributes of her father. While perhaps not an alcoholic himself, this man has a similar personality make-up with which the woman unconsciously identifies. The woman loves this person partly because she knows how to cope with this person on a deeply emotional and personal level. Having lived with an alcoholic father, with his many ups-and-downs, emotional tirades, and abusive behaviour, she knows “how to handle,” so to speak, her future husband who has many of the same character traits.³

Wounded Healer

Having grown up in a dysfunctional home in which her mother abused her when she was ten years old, Teresa felt “instantly” at home in Edmonton Institution because she recognized the variety of power and control issues that were an inherent part of staff-inmate, manager-staff, and colleague-colleague relationships. She could identify with the many dysfunctional behaviours in the institution because she had lived through them herself. She had to make many choices along the way, learning how to disengage herself from her mother while becoming a mature, independent adult.

This process of maturation proved invaluable to Teresa in her work with inmates and staff. They felt comfortable coming to her because of her ability to provide a way out of the dysfunctional situations in which they found themselves. After an inmate murdered another inmate, tensions were high and staff were on edge. They came to Teresa and shared personally about the many conflictual feelings they were having.

In another situation, Teresa was able to have another inmate transferred to a psychiatric centre when he shared that he was going to commit suicide. The rapport that Teresa had established with the offender made him feel safe in sharing his deeply personal struggles and grief over the death of his sister.

Called to Prison Chaplaincy

The experience of being wounded in order to bring healing to others brings up the question of whether chaplains who have not experienced personal abuse and dysfunctionality are able to identify with and minister effectively with inmates.⁴ Highly effective chaplains have shared with this interviewer how their personal struggles and experiences of life shaped their ministry. While theology, clinical pastoral education, pastoral experience, biblical training, and a genuine interest in others are prerequisites for becoming a prison chaplain, this interviewer has been surprised how many times a “déjà vu” experience such as Teresa’s is necessary for a person to be called to prison ministry.

To take a personal example, this interviewer “fell” into prison chaplaincy because of the challenges that presented themselves. He stayed in prison chaplaincy because it spoke directly to many issues in his personal life. Having grown up with a mentally ill uncle, who received a lobotomy in 1952 in Hamilton Hospital on the Hill, this nephew lived with the “invisibility” of dysfunctionality that had been part of his mother’s life. Never addressed in an open manner, this interviewer had to search for his own answers. He had to come to terms with his own poor coping skills in order to be effective in ministry. The pain and suffering of the inmates with whom he worked spoke directly to his own personal struggles. He had to make the choice of whether he was willing to delve into and share his own personal emotional and spiritual make-up in order to be effective.

A conclusion drawn from the above discussion is that while maturation through personal struggle is not a prerequisite for becoming an effective chaplain, the emotional turmoil that one has had in coming to terms with one’s own personal life makes it easier to empathize and feel compassion for inmates and their struggles. This inner personal resource is highly effective in providing real options for offenders in find healing and moving forward in their life. The fact that a chaplain has been able to emerge victorious in their own lives provides hope and meaning to others who are finding their way.⁵

Personal Journey toward Chaplaincy

Teresa shared how she “fell” into prison chaplaincy during her internship as a hospital chaplain with the Clinical Pastoral Education program. She read an article by Stephen Hall, entitled “A Working Theology of Prison Ministry.”⁶ Hall identifies six themes that are pertinent: Inherent Worth of Humankind, Hope, Ministry of Presence, Forgiveness, Power, and Inclusiveness. Each of these topics intersect with

each other as chaplain work with inmates. Forgiveness becomes very important as inmates deal with the guilt of their crimes. Hope becomes paramount when offenders face long periods of incarceration for what they have done. Their inherent value as a human being is validated in order for them to see themselves as more than the offence that has come to define them. Presence and inclusiveness are chaplaincy prerequisites in order for inmates to feel safe in reaching out to another person for help.

Power, in turn, lies at the source of what has gone wrong. Offenders have used power against other people for selfish reasons and in order to gain back control. Many people have been hurt in the process, something that inmates have to come to terms with, both in terms of the harm that they have done as well as the hurt that they are carrying because of the many ways in which they have suffered in life.

Teresa was drawn to the article precisely because it identified so clearly the power and control issues that she had to deal with in life. Hope, forgiveness, and inherent value were very real on a deeply personal level. Teresa was able to reach out to others because she had found healing for all of these things in her own life.

Prevention and Commitment to No More Harm

The continuity of purpose in Teresa's ministry was evident when she shared about the challenges of her current job as Director of Pastoral Services with the Catholic Diocese. Her primary task has been to prevent abuse through education of priests and laity about establishment of proper boundaries, responsibilities in their roles as trusting caregivers, awareness of power imbalances between adult and child, and general understanding of the effect that they as clergy and laity have in their interactions with people (emotional intelligence). Teresa's commitment to keep people safe is similar to what she was doing as a chaplain, establishing rapport with offenders and staff alike so that no more harm would be done.

Prevention of abuse can be referred to as a secular value, adopted by the correctional service in order to help offenders reintegrate into society. Prevention of further abuse in the Catholic Church is similar in this regard. It has to do with ethical values of mutual respect and humane interaction. It has to do with protection of the vulnerable, whomever they may be.

Embrace of this value of no (more) harm represents an inversion of the normal reasons that a chaplain begins their ministry. Trained in theology and the Bible, counselling and spiritual care, worship and religious education, a chaplain believes

that these theological resources can be brought to bear on the lives of inmates and staff.

Halfway through their ministry, chaplains realize that the secular mission statement of the service, namely, to safely reintegrate inmates into society has become the paramount reason for their ministry. While faith and purpose and meaning inform and undergird adoption of the value of no more harm, chaplains have inadvertently based their “new” theology on this very ethical value of mutual respect and rapport. While the chaplain began their ministry with the idea that their theology and ministry training would inform the service, the needs of the service, namely, to keep society safe with the successful reintegration of offenders, has now become the basis of their theological and chaplaincy vision. This is, in any case, what happened to Teresa as she grew in her ministry. This interviewer would say that the same dynamic has occurred regarding his ministry.⁷

Conclusion

Teresa’s recent interest in becoming a professional investigator, in continuing her advocacy work with victims of abuse, and her work with preventing harm and bringing healing and hope to those who have committed harm, speak volumes about her calling as a pastor, chaplain, administrator, Catholic, and Christian. She continues to use her fierce independence to good use, proclaiming the liberating aspects of the gospel along with the forgiveness and reconciliation that are possible for all.



Chapter Eight

Singled Out for Ministry:

The Story of *Hank Dixon*

Chronology of Events

From the volunteer who introduced him to faith, to the chaplain who suggested that he should consider pastoral ministry, to the Catholic sister who encouraged him to become a prison chaplain, Hank has been singled out for ministry. More than forty years ago, Hank was arrested and convicted of a murder for which he received a life sentence with eligibility for parole at ten years. He was nineteen years old at the time, heavily involved in using drugs, and mixed up in criminal activity. Five months after his incarceration, the fog began to lift and Hank realised the consequences of what he had done. It would take another three years before Hank was able to make a serious commitment to changing his life. These latter years included a conversion experience,¹ a return to drugs after his father died, and a deepening of his faith as he was mentored by chaplains, teachers, and peers alike.

Upon his release from prison on parole, Hank enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts program at Mount Saint Vincent University in Nova Scotia. Having completed his degree, Hank married Linda and began a Master of Divinity degree at Providence Seminary in Otterbourne, Manitoba.

Hank was offered three pastoral and street-ministry positions in the Prairie region when he completed his Master of Divinity. Hank and Linda nevertheless returned to Nova Scotia and accepted a call by the Atlantic Baptist Union to a three-point charge in a rural area. It was demanding work. Hank worked with a parishioner who had been severely assaulted several years previously, with a church member in the middle of an affair who was abusive to others, and with a deacon who refused to allow women in lay ministry. Years later, a member of the Baptist Board who had hired Hank confessed that the Board felt that Hank's storied past would serve him well in dealing with these situations. Hank was not sure how to thank him.

Hank's growth in ministry was not yet complete. After six years in parish life, Hank was offered a chaplaincy position in Renous, New Brunswick, a maximum-security federal prison. Five months after accepting the position, two riots broke out in January of 2000. Hank notes that these events changed the way he did ministry.

These experiences on the East Coast earned Hank yet another opportunity to serve. He decided after four years to take a chaplaincy position in Stony Mountain Penitentiary, a medium security prison in Manitoba. Thus began the next phase of Hank and Linda's lives, a journey that would take Hank through three different jobs and yet another degree to augment his professional development as a chaplain.

To begin with the academic degree first, Hank enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program at Providence Seminary, his alma mater, and began research on the way in which inmates grieve.² After completing his degree and serving as a prison chaplain for eleven years at Stony Mountain, Hank answered a call in 2014 to become the regional chaplaincy manager for the Prairies. The Correctional Service Canada had recently changed its administration of chaplains from an enhanced partnership model with denominations to a single-service provider. It awarded the federal prison chaplaincy contract to Kairos Pneuma Chaplaincy, a private company based in New Brunswick. While initially sceptical of the arrangement, Hank dived into this new opportunity. He wrote a chaplaincy manual³ for the company and began hiring several chaplains for prisons in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.

When KPC lost the chaplaincy contract to a lower competing bid by Bridges of Canada in 2016, Hank was employed by Open Circle, a program of Initiatives for Just Communities, to match volunteers with offenders as part of a visitation program. He has done so ever since, while beginning to write and publish about his life in ministry.

Reflections on Hank's Call and Ministry

The above narration of events gives glimpses into the times when Hank has been singled out for ministry. The mentoring that Dennis Veinotte did as a chaplain, that Charles Taylor did as a therapist and chapel volunteer, and that Sister Teresa Currie did in suggesting prison chaplaincy to Hank represent providential times when Hank was led to deeper service. Providing ministry in the same environment from whence he had come was not easy. Countless Lifeline workers were hired over a thirty year period from 1979 to 2009 to provide peer support to fellow lifers in a federal prison program. Few if any of them worked out. Why would anyone be called to go back

into a place in which it took ten to fifteen to twenty years of hard work to be released? One is reminded more of what one left behind than the possibilities of transformation. Any yet there was Hank, serving for over fifteen years as a prison chaplain. This requires some unique gifts.

Conclusion

Hank's show of indebtedness to a fellow officer upon his retirement from chaplaincy serves as a second-to-last snapshot. In the scrum of officer comradery that becomes so necessary in the reality of prison life, Hank made it known that this correctional manager had helped Hank become more professional in ministry. Despite constant demands and overtime work that was required, this officer remained respectful to all who came to see him, answering each query with reasonable responses. This officer modelled for Hank the best practices of pastoral care.

Prayer was an item that cropped up frequently during the sharing of his story. Hank mentioned how often he had to pray before he accepted the call to ministry, how often he had to pause before he would rush forth with righteous zeal, how frequently God had to intervene in order to provide a way out of messy situations. This simple self-advice has done Hank wonders. Hank has continued to grow and flourish in ministry, taking each turn in the road as an opportunity to deepen his faith and deepen his service. Hank can only be thanked for what he has been able to give . . . back.

Chapter Nine

”You are not alone!”

Amanda Strain’s call and commitment to ministry

Chaplain at Edmonton Institution for Women

Edmonton, Alberta



Christian and Missionary Alliance pastor, Baptist minister, hospital chaplain at the Mental Health and Rehabilitation Hospital in Edmonton, and now prison chaplain at EIFW in Edmonton, quite a journey for Amanda Strain. After graduating from Canadian Bible College in Regina, Saskatchewan, Amanda moved together with her husband to Owen Sound, Ontario to start ministry as a children’s pastor in an Alliance Church. She did this ministry for a number of years before moving back to her home community of Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta. She and her husband began attending First Baptist Church, Edmonton. Before long, she was ordained as a Baptist minister and served for five years in various roles in that congregation, where she remains as an active member.

She completed a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education and began her work as chaplain in a long-term care facility in Sherwood Park. In 2018 a chaplaincy position opened up at the Edmonton Institution for Women. Amanda was hired by Bridges of Canada and has been working for the last two years at the multi-level security facility with a population of about one hundred and eighty women.

Her love for the women and capacity to serve is very evident. She referred to Gregory Boyle’s emphasis on kinship in his book, *Barking to the Choir*,⁴ as a key to forming a sense of belonging and solidarity with the women with whom she works. The emotional bonds and social network that are formed by her relationship with the women represents the basis on which she builds her work as a chaplain. The bottom line for her is that no-one is alone! We are all connected to each other.

When asked to prioritize the variety of tasks in which she is involved, Amanda named her therapeutic relationship with the women as driving a lot of what she does. Early on in her ministry, she was invited to sit in on Grief Recovery sessions led by staff from the psychology department. Amanda realized that the number of losses and amount of trauma the women residents had experienced represented key factors in how the women were coping – or not – in the present.

This collaborative effort has become part and parcel of finding her place within the larger picture of corrections. Amanda spends quite a bit of time providing pastoral care on a one-to-one basis. These individual sessions are an integral part of the broader programming that the Correctional Service provides in order to prepare inmates for parole. Amanda assists the women in understanding the nature of their behaviours as well as how to access internal and external resources to move ahead.

Besides her clinical work, Amanda facilitates a variety of volunteers who provide Sunday worship services and other forms of ministry. Volunteers from her church as well as other congregations come in on a regular basis to provide worship. Other volunteers work together with Amanda to facilitate a Prisoner's Journey course, sponsored by Prison Fellowship of Canada. She coordinates her work together with two other chaplains at the facility.

Ability to empathize and relate to inmates whose life experience is often so different is not a given within the calling of some chaplains. When asked about her own motivation, Amanda shared that the death of her own child at eighteen months several years ago took her on a long grief journey that has made her relook at the faith resources within herself to cope with this loss. Nothing is the same after such a tragedy. Amanda's growth in spirituality and maturity in ministry are abundantly evident as she has wrestled with the innumerable whys and unnameable wherefores that such a tragedy elicits.

Amanda's ability to access her own grief regarding her very personal loss has made her effective as a prison chaplain. She acknowledged the deep darkness that this tragedy has caused in her own life. Her suffering and pain have allowed her to empathize with the many experiences of loss that the women with whom she works have gone through. Amanda has felt privileged to accompany other women as they find meaning in their lives.

In conclusion, Amanda shared that her personality type as a Giver (2) within the Enneagram Diagram may have something to do with her calling and commitment as a minister and chaplain. She comes across as vivacious, generous, caring, and deeply devout. Her theological reflections about faith and wonder at life should stand her in good stead as she continues to grow in her work as a chaplain.

Endnotes

Introduction

- ¹ Malcom Gladwell, *What the Dog Saw* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009), pp. 32-50.
- ² *Ibid.*, pp. 44ff.
- ³ Paul Vanderham has reflected on some of the reasons that he resigned from prison chaplaincy, *Why I'm No Longer A Federal Prison Chaplain*, unpublished article, 2019, 25 pages.
- ⁴ Donald Stoesz, *Glimpses of Grace* (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2010);
- ⁵ Donald Stoesz, *Magic of Fiction in Illuminating Transformation* (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2019);
- ⁶ Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual: The Canadian Context* (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2020), forthcoming.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, Appendix 1.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Chapter One

- ¹ This story is recounted in Joan Palardy's autobiography, *From the Heart* (2018).
- ² Information about this organization can be found on the website, http://www.justequipping.org/index_e.html.
- ³ *Glory and Praise* (Phoenix, Arizona: North American Liturgical Services, 1987), p. 216.

Chapter Six

- ¹ Wilson, Robin, Franca Cortoni, and Andrew McWhinnie. Circles of Support and Accountability: A Canadian National Replication of Outcome Findings. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*. 2009:21. 412-430.
- ² Some of this information is provided in chapter two of Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual: the Canadian Context* (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2020), forthcoming.
- ³ Howard Zehr, *Changing Lenses*, 3rd edition (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 2005).

Chapter Seven

- ¹ Harville Hendrix, *Getting the Love You Want*, revised edition (New York; Saint Martin's Press, 1988, 2008), pp. 45-46.
- ² *Ibid.* pp. 50-52.
- ³ The issue of whether this is genuine love is, of course, an open question. We are attracted to members of the opposite sex because of something we recognise in them that speaks to our woundedness. We believe that the other person can heal us of the lack of intimacy, lost sense of self, and dysfunctional ways in which we operate. Hendrix says that true love can blossom once these unconscious reasons for mutual attraction have been uncovered.
- ⁴ Henri Nouwen has written about this aspect of ministry in *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Image Doubleday, 1972).
- ⁵ Courses on *Grief Recovery*, *Codependency*, *Relationships*, and *Celebrate Recovery* speak directly to the many feelings of inadequacy and dysfunctionality that inmates experience.
- ⁶ Stephen Hall, "A Working Theology of Prison Ministry," *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counselling* (Vol. 58, No. 3, Fall, 2004), pp. 169-178.
- ⁷ Commitment to *Circles of Support and Accountability* has been a natural extension of chaplaincy because it undergirds the *Mission Statement* which is committed to keeping society safe by holding inmates accountable and providing them with support.

Chapter Eight

- ¹ This story is told by Hank in his autobiography, *Conversion on the Inside*, 2019, Unpublished manuscript, 25 pages.
- ² A summary of his dissertation can be found in Hank Dixon, "Loss, Grief, and Mourning in Inmate Populations," chapter twelve in Donald Stoesz with Hank Dixon, *A Prison Chaplaincy Manual* (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2020), forthcoming, pp. 96-110.
- ³ Hank Dixon, *Manual for Canadian Prison Chaplaincy*. New Brunswick: Kairos Pneuma Chaplaincy, 2014. Unpublished manuscript. 42 pages.

Chapter Nine

⁴ (Simon & Shuster, 2018). Cf. *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Free Press, 2010). Amanda mentioned that Richard Rohr's books on spirituality have also been helpful.