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Special Gifts & Memorials



Save the date:
Annual Delegate Meeting
November 7
St. Mark's, Watertown

NEWS

Are We Communicating Value

There have been several times when prison or jail inmates have hit me with this challenge question: "Are you a volunteer, or do you get paid to come and talk with us?" What I tell them is this: "I get paid. And the reason why I get paid is because there is a group of churches and individuals out there who believe you are so important that they pay my salary so I can come in and share God's grace with you full time. That's how valuable and precious you are to these people." And the response I generally get then is wide eyes and "Whoa!"

These days, I believe God is hitting all of us with a different challenge question: *Do people realize they're valued and precious?* I've been hearing some people respond to the phrase "black lives matter" by saying, "all lives matter," but I think it misses the point. People who are truly hurting don't need to hear some generality about "all lives." What they need to hear is "YOU matter – You matter to God and you matter to me!"

Do people realize they're valued and precious? I once spoke to a church women's group about the need for churches who will welcome the people Institutional Ministries works with when they are released from their facilities. One woman in the group made this comment: "I know just how important it is to feel welcome. When I first came to this church, I was the only black person here. Nobody said anything hostile to me, but nobody went out of their way to let me know I was welcome, either. The only reason I stuck around was because I was too stubborn to let them push me away." And all the white women in that group nodded: "Yup, we blew it," and "Yup, she stayed, and we're sure glad she did." Her story reminds us how important it is to communicate to people that they are *valued and precious*.

The shepherd in Jesus' parable (Luke 15:3-7) didn't take a Bo Peep approach to his missing sheep - "Leave them alone and they will come home..." He valued that missing sheep and he acted on that value. The shepherd's actions of search and rescue demonstrated to that sheep just how valuable it was to him. I'm grateful to all the Institutional Ministries' supporters, like you, for supporting our search and rescue efforts in institutions. *Do people realize they're valued and precious?* Let's keep communicating this important truth – You matter to God and you matter to me! – with the people who desperately need it!



by Chaplain Philip Merten

And the Answer Is...

When he graduated from high school, Aaron enlisted in the United States Marine Corps. After serving four years, he decided to leave the Corps and was honorably discharged. As Aaron told me, leaving the Corps was a mistake, a BIG mistake!

Once back in civilian life, Aaron began to make bad choices. One bad choice led to another, and they were fueled by the abuse of alcohol and drugs. It all came to a screeching halt with his arrest, conviction on numerous felony charges, and a sentence of twenty-five years in prison.

I first met Aaron early in 2006. He told me that he had grown up Lutheran but that he stopped going to church before he was confirmed. Each time we met, Aaron had lots of questions for me, very specific questions, questions which I answered from the Word of God.

One day, as we began our visit, Aaron seemed a little more troubled than usual. He thanked me for answering all his many questions and then wondered out loud if there was an answer for every question he had. When I said, "Yes, 42," his expression changed dramatically. I could see his surprise as he asked me if I had read *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. I told Aaron that I had, and I quickly added that Douglas Adams (the book's author) was, of course, all wrong. The only true and reliable answer to "the ultimate question of life, the universe and everything" (the question given to a supercomputer to solve in Adam's book) is actually God's Word and the good news about our Savior Jesus.

A week later, Aaron and I began an intense study of the most important teachings of God's Word. Since that day, it has been my joy to "watch" as Aaron grows "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18 - EHV). Through the Holy Spirit's work, Aaron and I now share the same faith, as we look forward to life everlasting in heaven.



by Chaplain Charles Iles





*“The Lord
calls all
of us to
carry each
other’s
burdens”*

Hope vs. Hopelessness

Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ... without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace (Eph. 2:12-14).

There are two kinds of hope. There is spiritual hope and earthly hope. For Christians, spiritual hope is based upon Jesus’ saving death and resurrection. It keeps us going in times of crises. Even death cannot rob us of spiritual hope. On the other hand, earthly hope can suddenly disappear and leave us feeling helpless and confused about the value of life, itself.

Eugene was a troubled high schooler. When his girlfriend ended their relationship, Eugene spiraled downward into earthly hopelessness and decided to kill himself. While attempting to hang himself, Eugene changed his mind and tried to stop the process. Unfortunately, he couldn’t get the rope off his neck. He tried calling his sister with his cell phone, but she didn’t answer. Next, he called his ex-girlfriend and told her what was happening. The ex-girlfriend called his sister. The sister called 911 and ran into the garage to help. Eugene was still alive when he was taken to the hospital. Tragically, Eugene’s life could not be saved. I did not know if Eugene had any Christian faith or hope, so all I could do was point his family to Jesus for spiritual guidance and renewal.

Carl was a farmer, active in his Lutheran church but lost his earthly hope. He took a shotgun, put it to his mouth, and pulled the trigger. Thankfully, his aim was off, but he did terrible damage to the left side of his face. He spent weeks in the hospital. Through my chaplain visits, the Lord renewed Carl’s spiritual and earthly hope. He went home to restart his life with Jesus’ comforting strength.

The Lord calls all of us to carry each other’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). For people struggling with thoughts of suicide, that may mean asking the difficult question: “Are you thinking of killing yourself?” We can persuade that person to get help. We can refer that person to the needed help. Saying, “I want you to live!” offers them earthly hope. Saying, “Jesus loves all sinners, including you!” offers spiritual hope.

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and, by his grace, gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. (2Thess 2:16-17)



by Chaplain Kenneth Wenzel

