
Pastoral Care: A Sacred Space

**An article for the *Cathedral Times*
By the Rev. Deacon Juan Sandoval**

Jesus calls us to pastor those in need, sickness, or any other reason. The Gospel according to John (21:15-16) guides us as he says, "feed my lambs, feed my sheep, take care of my sheep." Again, in the Acts of the Apostles (20:28), "keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers."

Pastoral care reaches to all of God's people within the church, the community, and the world. We often think of pastoral care as that which is provided by the clergy of a church, but indeed it reaches far beyond that. Brothers and sisters, every Christian is called to follow Jesus Christ, to serve God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit. God calls us to a special ministry of servanthood to serve all of God's people. In the name of Jesus Christ, we are to serve all people, particularly the poor, the weak, the imprisoned, the hungry, the sick, and the lonely. Pastoral care extends to worshippers, their families, visitors, and those in vulnerable conditions.

Pastoral care reaches into individual's sacred space. It is an honor to be at the person's side to walk with them, talk with them, and assist them to the best of our abilities when they are in the best of times and when they are in the worst of times. I know that when I have been visiting someone and when it comes to the transition from our earthly life into eternal life, it is a very sacred time and space for me to be there with the person. Pastoral care takes us to deep and privileged places that often no others are invited to enter. We are in sacred and holy space.

There have been occasions when I am visiting someone in a hospital, nursing home, or assisted living facility and a stranger comes up to me and asks if I will pray with them or pray for them. We are the bandages, and we are the healing ointment for those in need, be it of the mind, body, or soul.

My diaconal ministry has been rich and fulfilling. Working with bishops, priests, pastors, rabbis, and imams with common goals in serving *immigrants*, the *incarcerated*, and the *destitute*. Working at free clinics to provide health care to the *underserved*. And feeding the hungry by *servicing meals* to them in various free kitchens.

As a registered nurse, I have cared for the sickest of the sickest, the most wounded of the wounded, and the sweetest of the sweet. Working in critical care units, I found that some patients often returned for recurring ailments and others for intense transitioning issues. I remember some of those patients and how honored I was to provide them pastoral care which included spiritual and physical care. Over a period of years, I had the privilege of caring for Opal. Opal was in her seventies, suffered from recurring lung issues, and often required some time on a ventilator to assist her breathing. Opal was a religious person, but not of a particular denomination. As Opal came close to her time of transition, she asked if I would read passages from the Bible to her. I read to her for a while as she looked over at me and took my hand and closed her eyes for the last time. It is a privilege and a sacred honor to comfort and pray, whether ordained or not, for the Opals of this life and also for those who continue on their earthly journey.

The mission for pastoral care at St. Philip's is to provide care with grace, excellence, and hospitality. We believe pastoral care is rooted in the Grace of Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The pastoral care team at St. Philip's is truly an amazing team composed of our clergy, staff, parishioners, volunteers, vestry, and our wonderful counseling center. I am amazed at the depth of pastoral care we offer at a church of this size, and I have been graced to serve others along with the wonderful people who assist in caring for all God's people.

We are always here for you. Should you need pastoral care, please call us at the pastoral care emergency line: 404-365-1003.

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