

Sacramental living in a context of long-term care

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As the chaplain at Trinity Village Care Centre, Retirement Studios and Independent Living Townhomes, my ministry is unique and bears some similarities and some differences to parish ministry. Trinity Village is a ministry of the Eastern Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), a Full-Communion partner of the Anglican Church of Canada. As such, it is strongly supported by Bishop Michael Pryse at the Eastern Synod who has given permission to Bishop Todd Townshend to license me as an active cleric in the Diocese of Huron. Part of the ministry of the chaplain at Trinity Village is to continually point to the sacramental nature of the community and the fact that Trinity Village was founded by the ELCIC as a ministry, as a way of serving God, as a response to the scriptural injunction to serve the elderly (1 Tim 5:1-2 and elsewhere).

One of the key differences between chaplaincy and parish ministry is that the people I serve come from many different Christian denominations. I am also called to walk alongside people of different faiths and people of no faith at all. As such, chaplaincy is a highly pastoral ministry. While the Christian community at Trinity is very ecumenical, it is also very beautiful. One of the similarities to parish ministry is that when we gather weekly around God's table for the sacrament, the people gather because they desire to be in relationship with God and with one another. A Roman Catholic will be sitting beside a Mennonite who will be sitting beside a Baptist etc... This is a beautiful thing because it tends to reflect on this earth what the Kingdom of Heaven will look like. As is the case with Anglican theology, when we gather for Holy Communion, we know that God is sacramentally present, but we don't expend great amounts of energy asking 'how' that is. This causes me to reflect on the fact that the sacramental nature of Trinity Village is expressed not only as we gather around the table, but is also (perhaps primarily even) expressed in the

community of people. The ‘outward and visible sign’ of the ‘inward and spiritual grace’ is experienced in the relationships that residents form with one another as they come together to grow in relationship with God. Denominational adherence doesn’t matter as much as being in relationship with God and with one another does to the people of Trinity Village.

The time of COVID-19 has been challenging spiritually to many of the people of Trinity Village. This is precisely because people yearn for the communal nature of worship at Trinity Village and are unable to gather. Sacramental ministry at Trinity has had to happen on an individual basis during this time of pandemic. Interestingly though, the aforementioned principle that denominational adherence tends to not be a high priority has remained consistent throughout this time. An example that illustrates this is centred around The Sacrament of the Sick, Unction as Anglicans know it. As many Roman Catholic families are faced with the choice of a Roman Catholic priest connecting with their dying loved one via Skype or Zoom (given restrictions on outside visitors brought about by COVID-19) or having me come in person as an Anglican priest and the chaplain at Trinity, the vast majority of Roman Catholic Families have asked me to come in person to offer the sacrament. I explain that Anglicans understand the Sacrament of the Sick in a slightly different way than Roman Catholics, but what many prefer is that I come and administer the sacrament according to my tradition. I am surmising that again, this is because the sacramental nature of relationship, of actually being present at the time of death, offering prayers and anointing to God for the dying person is what the people of Trinity Village and their families want for the most part, rather than strict adherence to particular doctrinal positions.

The unique context of chaplaincy at Trinity Village means that, as mentioned, there are similarities and differences in relation to parish ministry. That said, I am able to live my vocation as a priest in very much the same way that those primarily in parish ministry do. This is because while the community at Trinity Village may be highly ecumenical, the sacramental nature of the community is expressed through the desire of the people of Trinity Village to be in relationship with God and with one another, both when we gather at the Table for Holy Communion and otherwise in the various activities that the people of Trinity Village undertake. While the COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges to ministry, the desire of the people for relationship with God and with one another has endured. Many of the residents of Trinity Village look forward to being able to gather together in worship again so as to ‘provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.’ (Heb 10: 24-25).