A place of grace

By Chaplain Douglas Vrieland

"What is it that is unique about the work of chaplains compared to the work of ministers who serve in a congregational or parish setting?" The chaplains of my denomination—men and women serving as Christian ministers not only in the military, but also in hospitals, prisons, nursing homes, and other settings outside the traditional church, asked themselves that question a few years back. That conversation led to the publishing of a document entitled, A Place of Grace: A Metaphor for Chaplain Ministry. The document, which was obviously written from a Christian perspective, begins by defining the term "grace" in a rather poetic way:

"Grace is a place where….

The gifts of God are freely recognized and honored in everything.

Everyone is free to discover life, learning to love and trust.

All experience being valued, loved, and accepted.

Men and women discover and develop the gifts that God the creator-redeemer bestows on human beings.

Every child is valued, treated with respect and dignity, because she belongs to a caring community.

Gifts within persons are discovered,explored and given expression in unlimited creative ways.

People find hope and meaning in the midst of pain and anguish.

God's justice and mercy make reconciliation possible in situations of abuse, terror and retribution.

Jesus Christ through God's Spirit brings redemption and healing.

One day all things and people will be inscribed with "Holy to the Lord."

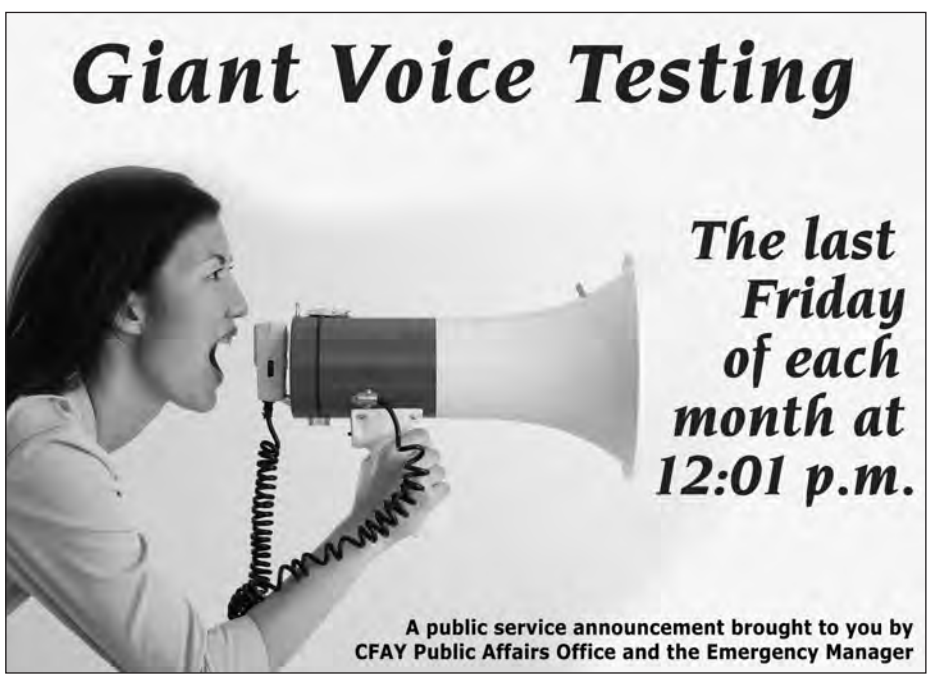
Where God is worshipped, and gratefully adored as the giver of every good and perfect gift."

Chaplains, according to this document, are called to be A Place of Grace within the secular institutions they serve. I love the idea of a Chaplain seeking to create A Place of Grace. This vision that has inspired my work ever since I first read this document.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. I appreciate the efforts of the Family Advocacy program to focus our attention on this important issue, and their desire to help us reflect on it in positive ways. This year's theme: Home is Not a War Zone: Bringing Peace to Relationships, is especially relevant for our military community. I want to take that theme one step further, and suggest that if we want to keep our homes from becoming a war zone, we need to make it A Place of Grace, a place where people are valued, loved, and accepted for who they are as unique creatures of God. The home ought to be a safe place where children can explore the world under the careful watch of their loving parents and where marriage partners can develop and grow in a mutually supportive environment.

Christian pastor and counselor Jeff Van Vonderen, in his delightful book, Families where Grace is in Place (Bethany House, 1992), suggests that family members need to free themselves from the need to control each other's behavior, something that is impossible to do. He suggests that, rather than trying to control each other's behavior, we need to empower each other to do the right thing. The key to making sure this works is for each member of the family to be in relationship with God, who is all-powerful. As A Place of Grace puts it, grace is a place "where God is worshipped, and gratefully adored as the giver of every good and perfect gift."

What is your home like? Is it a battle zone—perhaps not one where physical violence is present, but one where the family members are trying to control each other. Or is it a place that brings peace to relationships, a safe place where people can develop and grow? Is your home a place where the family members try to manipulate and control each other, or is each member held accountable for his or her own behaviors and actions? Is you home characterized by the demons of blame and shame or by the virtues of love forgiveness? Are the members of your family there to support each other? Is God a member of your family? Does your family include daily prayer and weekly worship in its schedule? Is your home and family A Place of Grace?



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With turnover complete the oncoming shift assigns different responsibilities to each nurse and corpsman covering a variety of scenarios.

"Every day we assign roles in the event of an emergency," said Burns. "Say if there was a code blue (cardiac arrest) we know who would be the first person to initiate CPR and who would bring the crash cart. If there is a fire we know who's in charge of getting patients out and who is grabbing charts.

While Burns finishes going over a few final details about the day's events with the other nurses Santana goes to meet their patient for the day.

"I walk in and introduce myself and ask them how their night was," said Santana. "Next I'll take their vital signs and give them any medications they may require. After that I ask them if there is anything they need," she said.

Next Burns will come in and do her assessment.

"I'll introduce myself," Burns said. "Next I ask how are they're doing. I also take in visual cues. How do they look? Do they look like they are in pain? Then we start at the head and work our way down, which normally starts with a neurological exam. Then we move on to a physical exam. The corpsmen are right next to us during all this. We use it as a teaching tool.

This hands on teaching approach is something one will see a lot on the ward. Not only does it play a vital role in strengthening the professional relationship between nurses and their corpsmen but allows the corpsmen to gain valuable firsthand experience they will need later in their careers.

"If we come across some things we don't see that often we will pull them in and do some one on one teaching," said Burns. "The biggest thing is to expose them to as much as we can and get them to be as efficient as they can be because eventually they are going to go out to the fleet. They are going to go off to the ships or the Marines, so now is the time to teach, train and expose them to things so when they are out there working more independently they can function and still provide high quality care," she said.

That open rapport between nurse and corpsman has been a special one for Santana.

"The relationship between the corpsman and nurses is really unique," said Santana. "They are really inspirational. They have a lot of knowledge and they pass that information on to us. The officers and enlisted Sailors gel really well together here on the ward. They can answer all our questions about the officer side of the Navy or about being a nurse. They are really open to teaching us everything they know," she said.

Likewise Burns appreciates the important role corpsman play in caring for those residing on the ward. In a job where lives could potentially be on the line at any moment the teamwork between nurse and corpsman is of utmost importance.

"The corpsmen are really phenomenal here," said Burns. "It's a team effort from 6:45 in the morning to 6:45 at night. We need to stay close to each other because if the corpsman is in with a patient and something happens they need to be able make us aware of it, or if we are in there and we see something that would make a great teaching opportunity we can bring them in. Most importantly if we need to respond to an emergency we each know our roles."

Not every situation is a life threatening one though. In fact a lot of the job deals with making patients feel comfortable while they call USNH, Yokosuka home. For example monitoring a patient's intake and output of fluids can be a helpful diagnostic tool. A tool some patients may understandably may be a little uneasy with.

"Sometimes we have to tell the patient it's OK," said Santana. "They are kind of uncomfortable doing some of this stuff, but for me it's just another day, and it's going to help us better care for the patient," she said.

And just like every other day on the ward the staff's mission is to provide the highest quality medical care possible to their patients.

"I think the most important thing we do here is, whether it's the active duty Sailor that's admitted or a family member and the Sailor is out to sea, hopefully we can give them the peace of mind knowing that they have a great team working for them that's going to help get them or their loved one healthy again," said Burns. "We want to get the Sailor back to the fleet, or if it's a family member get them back home and give that service member out to sea some peace of mind so they can focus on the mission," she said.

The sun is starting to give way to nightfall as another day comes to an end. But the work never stops for those working on the Ward. Burns and Santana have just finished filling in their nighttime counterparts on the day's events. The pair will be back in 12 hours for the start of another shift. The hours may be long but neither one of them would have it any other way.

"The job is awesome," said Santana. "Unfortunately people will always get sick, but I'm happy that I get to play a role in helping them get better."

Kinnick Sports

Week of Oct. 19 - 25

Volleyball

Oct. 23	ASIJ at Kinnick	5:30 p.m.

Tennis

Oct. 24-26	Japan DoDEA	TBD