



CROSSINGS Connection

WHERE THE GOSPEL MEETS OUR DAILY LIVES

PENTECOST 2019 | Vol. 134 | From the Crossings Community, Inc

Hospice Chaplain's Call to Mercy Management

By Bruce K. Modahl

Mercy Manager is a term I heard Ed Schroeder use on numerous occasions. In an hour-long phone interview with the Rev. Ruth Hanusa, mercy manager is the term that best describes her work for St. Mary's Hospice in Reno, Nevada. Those attending the 2019 Crossings Conference in late January of this year heard her speak about her ministry.

Most of her work is with the unchurched. "Eighty-five per cent of the people in Nevada are unchurched," she explained. "Alienation runs deep. People cite the displays of wealth among the TV preachers and the sexual misconduct scandal in the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, my first visit is to get acquainted and build trust. At the end of the visit I ask if they have any concerns."

The plain fact is they are overwhelmed, Ruth says. "In many cases they've endured one procedure after another. After years of this, facing the fact of death in a manner of months is stunning to most people. They're distracted by grief. Their affairs are not in order. They're losing control over their lives, even their own bodies. They are dying at home with a daughter or spouse as care giver. They take out their anger on the one doing the most for them."

I asked Ruth what is the value of having a chaplain on the hospice team. She responded with stories. "I was visiting with one man who was running the numbers on his life."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked.

"It is something most people in this situation do," she responded. "The world operates on a system of reward and punishment. We earn one or the other by the things we do. Do your homework and you get a good grade. You get what you've got coming to you for good or bad. People believe God is obligated to act this way as well."

Ruth continued, saying, "As most people in hospice do, this man was trying to figure out if he had done enough good to outweigh the bad.

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The Rev. Ruth Hanusa lets grandson Yoey (Paul Josef) try on a pair of her glasses as they pose for the camera.

... this man was trying to figure out if he had done enough good to outweigh the bad.

He asked me, 'So, which way am I going, up or down?'

Co-Executive Directors' Corner

I have been blessed enough to be involved with the Crossings Community for 10 years now. For the first few years, as a seminary student, I was lucky enough to be “brought up” on the good Law/Gospel theology I heard at Crossings Conferences. Being a local, I was able in those first years to attend presentations at every conference. But I didn’t say much then, I was content to listen...which is not normal for me, but normal when I am intimidated by good theologians! When I entered ordained ministry, I began to speak up more at conferences and make use of the weekly offerings in my sermon preparation. It was getting easier to feel like more of an “insider,” and with that feeling, the sense that Crossings was for me. Not “me” in the sense that Christ on the cross died for “me,” but “me” in the sense that the work Crossings does was for people like me — clergy who had taken the time to learn from the best theologians and could now be trusted to share it in their sermons.

Aarrgg. Saying it out loud makes it sound even worse. I missed the boat. And it was clear to me I had missed the boat when I got a letter a few years ago from the Crossings Board asking me to present a “Slice of Life” at an upcoming conference. I noticed on the bottom left edge of the envelope the words describing Crossings’ work, “Theological study for people’s secular callings.” I was nailed by these simple words and realized finally how meager it was to simply offer homiletical reflection on the Gospel on Sundays. This flimsy envelope put me on solid ground — the gift of the cross was meant to be proclaimed by all the baptized. Good theology belonged in the hands of lay theologians, for use every day. Crossings was not for *me the ordained*, it was for *us the baptized* to make use of in every baptismal calling.

And so, this year at our Conference, when Jerry Burce honored our dear and longtime Executive Secretary, Cathy Lessmann, I was both convicted again and encouraged to remember the words on that envelope. For they were echoed when Jerry said of Cathy, “I think you all know Cathy, if only as the person who greeted you with so warm a smile when you arrived for this conference and has now and then been popping up in our ensuing conversation to tug the theologians back to earth where ordinary people live.” And I looked, with joy, on the faces of several parishioners from my own congregation who were in attendance for the first time this year. I knew they would hear good Gospel and I knew they would learn how to make use of it in their daily lives. And I give thanks for Cathy and those in the Crossings Community like her who keep me focused on the work of Crossings and in my leadership role here — to equip the baptized, all of them!

You can read Jerry’s full recognition of Cathy on behalf of the Crossings Board online at: <https://crossings.org/library/conference-papers/2019-papers/>

Candice Wassell
Co-Executive Director



Jerry Burce honoring Cathy Lessmann

Hospice Chaplain's Call to Mercy Management

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He asked me, 'So, which way am I going, up or down?'

"The social worker was there when we were having this conversation. A disaffected Catholic, she told him, 'So what, you don't go to church, you've been a good husband and father and have been active in the community doing many good things for others.'"

He looked at Ruth for her answer, who said, "It's alle, alle oxen free."

"Do you believe that," he asked.

"I trust it," I said. It was enough for him. In fact his response to that was 'OK, then.'"

We talked about alle, alle oxen free. It is what we said as children at the end of the day when our parents called us home. It meant "Game over, no winners or losers." We said it when playing hide and seek after someone was found. It meant, "Someone else has lost; you are free to come out of hiding." Ruth pointed out the origin of the term may be from the German *alle, alle auch sind frei*, "everyone, everyone also is free."

I asked, "How would you answer those who will say this sounds like cheap grace?"

"They also are running the numbers, aren't they?" she said. "First we have to repent, or express our faith in Jesus Christ and then we can hope we have the way free to God's open arms. Grace is balm for wounded souls and he was a wounded soul. This man trusted the promise, at least for that moment. When the promise takes hold in us then we are changed. He was visibly changed by the promise he heard. When we trust the promise we become free for the neighbor. But we don't always trust it. By repentance we return again and again to the baptismal font, dying and rising with Christ over and over."

Ruth was one of those speaking at the June 1 memorial for Ed Schroeder sponsored by the Crossings Community. She was working on her presentation when we spoke. She quoted an

Edism, "When you add a lot of whiteners and brighteners to the gospel you no longer have the gospel."

A deaconess student at Valparaiso University in the early 1970s, Ed had already left Valpo for Concordia Seminary. Ruth didn't take many of his courses in seminary, but she called theirs a "sweet and tender relationship." She said she always wore her deaconess pin when she was first at Seminex in the Master of Arts in Religion (MAR) degree program. Ed consistently challenged her, "When are you going to switch over to MDiv and become a pastor?" After her first year in seminary she did just that.

She graduated from Seminex in 1979. She served for three years as campus chaplain at the University of Nevada — Las Vegas and as a parish pastor for five and half years in Carson City, Nevada. She has been a hospice chaplain since 2006. Ruth has three children, Benjamin, Rachel, and Jonathan, and three grandchildren, Tz'porah, Paul Josef, and Silvia.



Edward Henry Schroeder 1930 – 2019

Thank you to all attending the funeral for Ed Schroeder and the June 1 memorial, sponsored by the Crossings Community at Christ Lutheran Church in Webster Groves, Missouri. We invite your contributions to the Edward H. Schroeder Memorial Fund at Crossings and express our thanks also to all who already have done so.

The theme for the June 1 event, *Blazes in the Dark*, fits a man, who, as pastor, professor, and friend, touched the lives of many around the world. His passion for the gospel and the mission of the church, along with his unparalleled ability as a teacher, positively shaped the lives and ministries of many.

Pastor Jerry Burce, the president of the Crossings Community, said at the funeral that one day in class, "Dr. Edward Henry Schroeder flipped a switch that made the light, capital 'L,' go on. I suddenly saw as never before how Christ was good for me, and I felt it deep down too, with a spasm of joy."



The Reverend William Yancey preached for the funeral of Dr. Edward H Schroeder at Bethel Lutheran Church in University City on March 13, 2019.



Dr. Schroeder's wife, Marie, greeted the many friends, family, students, and colleagues of her husband who attended his funeral.



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QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

PENTECOST 2019

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