

Reflections of a Marine Provide Insight for Ministry

by Amy Blumenshine, *Coming Home Collaborative*

Pastoral care providers in the veterans recovery movement are searching for recovery pathways that will help address the moral and spiritual wounds experienced by some veterans. Upcoming events provide opportunity to tool up to engage in veterans ministry.

In these ministry efforts, the deep and honest – if painful – reflections of the armed forces members themselves are instructive. The articulate soul-searching of veterans like Tyler E. Boudreau provides a window to understanding common conflicted feelings among veterans. Boudreau writes of his experiences over 12 years as a Marine, including his time in Iraq.

His memoir, *Packing Inferno: The Unmaking of a Marine*, uses Dante's *Inferno* as a metaphor. Boudreau claims that for him war was just the foyer to hell. Hell is what he experiences after war.

Boudreau describes living with his own easily triggered rage. Dropping a bottle of salad dressing, his child screaming or being honked at can feel like “a prelude to war.” Writes the retired captain, “Suddenly all noise, all pressure, all responsibility becomes too much to bear. My whole body tightened up. I felt the adrenaline surging into my muscles.” He writes that rage “feeds on the emotional disarray of its host [like a parasite], sucking away its life until there's only energy left for itself. When the energy for rage is exhausted, despair often enters into the vacancy, pulling all thoughts down into a relentless feeling of isolation.”

He also talks of the need to “unpack” the “inferno” that he carries. “My ability to cope depends, not only on assembling my narrative, but on finding people to listen to it, a whole community of people. If a man comes home to a world of deaf ears, he can feel alone in the most crowded of room. The ethical problem of war is no small issue and demands the attention of all people, yet so many find themselves ill-equipped or unable to enter the discussion because they have limited access to the true nature of battle.



Forgetting the horrors or stuffing them down really doesn't clear the conscience; it just quietly contaminates the soul.”

Boudreau describes the thrill, even joy, of his first firefight, and how he and his comrades began to “crave the elation of the kill.” He explains, “Embracing the violence was not a choice; it was a necessity. On the battlefield, a soldier must befriend the darker side of his nature to participate in the fight, to survive, to win, to pull that trigger – he must degrade his own humanity.”

“Soldiers desensitize themselves in war, all in their own ways, but they all do it because they know that they must in order to survive, to push through the killing and to accomplish the mission, whatever the mission may be. They push the humanity out of the enemy and out of themselves, and soon become mere bodies of instinct and survival. What is often discovered only later, sometimes too late, is that one's humanity can be quite difficult to recover once it's been evicted.”

Boudreau yearned from his youth to be among the Spartan, tough, noble, and proud Marines. He developed love and loyalty for the Marine Corps. Eventually his sense

of obligation to protect the troops under his command conflicted with accomplishing the missions assigned—especially when he could not justify the missions. Check out more of Boudreau's thoughts at www.deeperthanwars.blogspot.com.

Upcoming Events

Calvary Lutheran in Golden Valley will host a training for lay and rostered pastoral care providers in how to accompany returning veterans and their families. The workshop will be 9 a.m.- 2:30 p.m. (registration starts at 8:30 a.m.), Saturday, February 28, at Calvary Lutheran Church, 7520 Golden Valley Road, Golden Valley. Register no later than February 20 at www.calvary.org. Registration is \$10 and includes lunch. Scholarships are available by contacting Darlene Wetterstrom at 651-212-0943.

The Veterans Ministry Roundtable meets for lunch (noon-1:30 p.m.) the second Tuesday of every other month for networking and presentations at Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, 2315 Chicago, Minneapolis. The next one is March 10.