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What in God's name would make me run towards the banging and yelling in that room? Everyone else was either standing still or looking stunned as they looked in the direction of the auto shop, or they were hurrying in the opposite direction of the sounds.

Fatigue controls my memories of that day. Whenever I think about the events of May 25 or talk about it to anyone, I begin to feel exhausted. Trauma will do that to a person. Only certain highlights remain clear and, for the purposes of this article, I will speak to one specific memory of the day that an explosion occurred in our school auto shop.

Following the impact and unfolding of events that day, I found myself standing in the library of our neighbouring high school. While I was still in "look-calm-and-in-control phase" of the incident, I saw the former school chaplain standing at the top of the stairs waiting to receive me. I could feel a shuddering in my gut and for a brief second the shock I had been containing (or had been containing me) began to surface.

We went into the Librarians' office and sat down. I have no recall of what I actually said to her in that brief moment of respite, but I do remember that she was looking at me and *responding to me*, not what I was telling her. That evening after returning to school from the hospital, she helped me to prepare the chapel to receive and hold the depth of sorrow and fear that was to deluge that sacred space.

The following morning was overwhelming. I was at school because my own well-being required that I be there with everyone else. I was in no way "present" to anyone, especially myself. I wandered the Atrium, embraced students and teachers and cried with them. Then as I stood leaning on a concrete pillar just outside the chapel door, I saw them. They had quietly entered the scene, greeted people, stood with some, walked with others and all the while circling me so that I was never alone. The chaplaincy team from my school board was present and they were holding space for me.

In that moment, I experienced our ministry from a new perspective. As I looked all around me I witnessed the subtle movement of the Spirit as it was channeled through these ministers. The flow of love and prayer was humble and compassionate and, its impact, on the surface, gentle. However, beneath that mantle of calm was the steadfast power of God that, to this day, continues to sustain my community and especially, me.

On the day of the incident, a few of us had run to the site and thinking that we were tending to an injured boy. I have since been asked if I thought that those who responded and ran into the scene had possessed the grace to go there in-spite of our fear. I have answered "no". It was Grace that moved within us to guide us and it was our sense of duty to protect that

enabled our bodies to run into the room. Grace does not always inspire something within us; sometimes it shocks us into action.

In hindsight, I realize that those of us who were present were not there to tend to the wounds of an injured student. A young soul was returning home and we were called by God to be present to this boy. We were holding space for him and each other. In that moment, ours was the job of *presence* in its purest, most raw form. Sometimes ministry is ugly.

Sometimes we are challenged to be in places that require our presence and we have no intention of complying. In those times, Grace moves through us and does the work that our vulnerable, fearful selves cannot face. When we do finally respond, it is with the help of professionals that we can process and integrate the experience. My colleagues in chaplaincy are among the professionals that accompany me on this walk. This time of accompaniment is forth-day ministry. It can only be truly experienced after the immediate crisis and for me that process is ongoing and I walk with good company.

We are engaged in ministry because we are believers who are committed to sharing the Good News. At least that is how I processed my vocation in the early days of school ministry. It is thanks to my Board Chaplaincy Team, that I have matured enough to recognize that authentic accompaniment is hard and sometimes dangerous work.

Throughout the school year, we prepare our communities for emergencies through lock downs, evacuations and secure school drills. Try as we may, we can never fully imagine the drama that could potentially unfold on our own turf. That is why we repeat our drills so that when darkness calls we can effectively respond. The logic of drama is different from the reality of place and time and herein lays the essential service we call Chaplaincy.

Without adding to the drama by storming the scene, as others in leadership must do, chaplains are the subtle presences that serve as the lightning rod to ground people thus diminishing the chaos that can be all consuming. They are purposefully present, absorbing the shock and releasing calm through grace – pure grace. Chaplains need not be front and centre in crisis, in fact doing so would lessen their capacity to be a meaningful presence. There is no room for the ego to storm and perform in an emergency.

It is a ridiculous task to balance the panic, shock, anger, fear, grief and trauma of others, and ourselves, and have the presence of mind to clear your own heart and head so that you do not become overwhelmed by these same reactions. Yet Chaplains serve in that precise role and typically without any acknowledgement of expertise. Education, formation, experience and active engagement on your own faith journey are entry-level requirements. In the darkest moment of a community's life, Chaplaincy is crucial to the restoration of the community's soul. This is no small miracle and it is not for the faint of heart.

Chaplaincy is an essential service in a school community. If a Chaplain is not an integral component of the Crisis Response Team, then the team is woefully incomplete. The Chaplains who entered into my school community did so with absolutely no fanfare and they

placed themselves in the toughest corners of my school. They carried within themselves the Light of Hope and they spread that light through prayer, service and steadfast faith.

My experience of Chaplaincy, from the receiving end, has been restorative on many levels. As I stated earlier in this article, my colleagues continue to accompany me. To say I am grateful to each of them is a huge understatement, but I am. Will I run into an emergency again? I have no idea. I just pray that I am open to the movement of Grace within me so that my presence in school and with my colleagues will continue to be meaningful.