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A First for Everything

There is a first for everything. This first was the first time to lead worship as president of the Northern Illinois District. The place was Bethlehem, River Grove. My wife, Marie, and I headed to the big city from Belvidere.

We left early and arrived early. After making sure we were where we needed to be, we headed off for a walk. The day was beautiful and there is nothing like walking around a community, especially one new to you.

Just down the street from the church a car pulled alongside us and a man started talking to me. He said, "Father, can I talk to you?" (I was wearing a clerical collar.)

Marie kept walking, and I walked up to the car. To be honest, my thought was that I was going to be asked for money. I was considering what kind of cash I had in my wallet and what else I might say.

But, to my surprise, I was not asked for money! "Father, my brother was buried yesterday. Could you give me a blessing?" To be honest, I was almost shocked at his request.

"What was your brother's name?"

"Martin," he said.

"What is your name?" I asked.

"My name is Scott."

The Lord gave me a few words to speak to him. We thanked God for Martin's life and prayed for Scott's life and connection to the Savior Jesus. There, while he was in his car, and I was leaning near his window, I offered him the Aaronic blessing, words you know well, I am sure. "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine on you, the Lord look on you with favor and give you peace." (Numbers 6:24-26)

He made the sign of the cross and took off. For me, that was a first.

What I missed saying, I admit, was that right down the street, less than a block away, there is a church where the comfort of Jesus is given each Sunday and at other times. A place where a community gathers around the Lord's gifts. The Lord makes our congregations a hospital for sinners and the sorrowing, not a museum of the perfect.

My goal is to intentionally have people in my life who do not know Jesus. They remind me what non-churched people are talking and asking about. For me, these places are at the Belvidere YMCA, the local fire department where I continue to serve as Chaplain, and other locations. There are some strange ideas out there about God, faith, salvation, heaven and hell, and yes, about the local church. Out of a relationship, they will ask me questions. It's safe, I guess.

Sometimes, people will surprise you and God will surprise you. Be ready.

The Apostle Peter, guided by the Holy Spirit writes, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." (I Peter 3:15)

Jesus met people where He found them, but never left them there. He did not leave you or me where He found us either. Thanks be to God!

As I begin this new adventure and service, my family and I would like to thank you for your prayers and words of Godly encouragement. "In Christ, we are in this together."

Rev. Dr. Allan R. Buss, President
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