

Ministerial Region of the Good Shepherd Parish

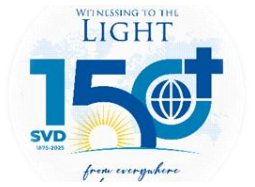
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Parish Priest: Fr Joseph Reddy Dondeti SVD

Assistant Priest: Fr Joe Jacob SVD



Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary time – Year C 9th and 10th August 2025

Servant and served

She was trained to offer comfort and hope to the sick and vulnerable.

Then she found herself in need of such care herself.

Melissa Florer-Bixler is a Mennonite minister. Her training as a student pastor included a summer assigned to hospital ministry in Philadelphia. As part of her student chaplaincy, she was asked to visit a mum and her baby. The child had been born with life-threatening allergies, the extent of which was still unknown. At the time, Melissa was pregnant with her second child. A recent ultrasound had revealed a cyst on the foetus' choroid plexus. The cyst would likely resolve itself, but there was a chance its presence could lead to a life-threatening chromosomal difference.

Despite her own time of waiting and worry, Melissa kept her appointment with the mother. As she made her way to meet the mum, Melissa remembers wondering, *What am I doing here?*

"I had no business offering comfort or counsel to the people inside the room. I gathered myself before pushing open the door and stepping inside.

"The mother of the baby sat in a chair texting while her son played on a blanket. He smiled up at me as I walked in the door. As I sat down the boy's mother caught my eye. 'Are you okay?' She placed her hand on my shoulder as I explained how vulnerable this place made me feel and how I felt like I was letting her down as a pastoral presence.

"She smiled and gently reminded me that [the hospital] was a regular part of their lives. She was surprised to see me — 'We're here all the time.'

"Any illusions I harboured as to my role in caring for this family evaporated. They didn't expect an answer that unravelled the riddle of human suffering. My image of the pastor — comforting a distraught mother, stepping outside herself as a pillar of strength — disappeared. I was one link in a chain of care that began the moment this baby was born, when church members brought meals, when they rushed to babysit the first time the family called 911, when emergency turned to routine.



Now a pastor, Melissa writes, "I've preached good sermons and mediocre sermons, knowing that a hundred more opportunities to preach lie before me. While sometimes I have known just what to say, I have also discovered that, at times, having no words is what the Spirit offers."

[The Christian Century, July 2025.]

God has entrusted each one of us with our own gifts, talents and blessings not for our own uses and aims but to selflessly and lovingly use them for the benefit of others, without counting the cost or expecting a return. The faithful disciple will devote whatever he or she possesses to bring God's reign of hope, justice and compassion to reality in this time and place of ours — but the reality is that sometimes we are the ones in need of the "ministry" of others. As Melissa Florer-Bixler discovers from a mother "who's been there," the "thread of service" and care for one another is central to following Jesus. Humility is the grace to be grateful for what we have as gifts from God and to realise our responsibility to put those gifts to the service of the whole "household." Jesus promises that such "faithful and prudent servants" who keep the kingdom of God before them in all of their relationships, who lead and influence others by the example of their own humble service, who place the common good before their own interests, will find places of honor at the master's table at the banquet of heaven.

Act Justly, Love Tenderly and Walk Humbly with God. Micah. 6:8