

## **Rhonda Waters reflects on her CPE Course**

My clinical pastoral education (CPE) program used a model for learning that can be summed up as supervised sinking or swimming. I arrived at the Foothills Hospital in Calgary expecting an introduction to the work of a hospital chaplain, perhaps a few days (weeks?) of shadowing a staff chaplain or a series of lectures and workshops. Instead, I received a couple of days of initiation to the hospital and its procedures, introductions to the chaplaincy team, and orientation to the programmatic pieces of CPE. By Wednesday of my first week, I was sent off to my units to provide spiritual care to all who were admitted, visiting, or working there – like I had any idea how to do that! Thursday morning, however, offered me a lesson that grounded me and my work for the rest of my summer..

The Foothills chapel is a beautiful space with one wall of picture windows looking out over the foothills to the Rocky Mountains beyond. Tucked slightly out of the way from the hospital chaos, it provides much needed quiet for the patients, families, and staff members in need of prayer and peace. The chapel book invites people to record their prayers and collects the individual petitions into one volume. Every Thursday morning, before beginning rounds, the chaplains gather in the chapel for a prayer service in which the prayers added to the book over the past week are read aloud, prayed again by the chaplains on behalf of the individuals who first shared them with God. The experience of praying not only for someone else's concerns but with their actual words was deeply moving. We prayed names of people we did not know. We prayed for forgiveness of sins we did not commit. We prayed for healing and for strength and for peace. We prayed in thanksgiving and in anger and in despair. We prayed in languages none of us spoke and in handwriting none of us could read. The prayers, without ceasing to be deeply individual, became the prayers of all of the people in the hospital who were in need of forgiveness and health and wholeness. And in so doing, we performed the priestly ministry of the baptized, gathering God's people together and offering them to God. As the weeks passed, I grew more skilled at listening, questioning, sitting in silence, and praying but those Thursday morning services taught me that these skills were of only secondary importance. These were God's people and God was taking care of them – my most important task was to bear witness to that good news even in the darkest moments of life and of death.

I left the hospital that summer exhausted but also renewed, with a vision of the ministry in which we, as the church, serve as chaplains for our communities, our cities, and throughout the whole world. God's love knows no bounds - neither should God's people.