

Module 1: The Foundation

*They are like a man **building** a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation **on rock**. When a flood came, the torrent struck that **house** but could not shake it, because it was well built. Lk 6:48*

This passage from the Gospel of Luke speaks of the need for a solid foundation in anything we do. Undoubtedly this has even greater significance when we are called to serve the spiritual needs of God's creatures.

To use a more concrete illustration, I will transport you to my high school and college summers when I worked for my Uncle Leo, a mason contractor. At the time, he was in his late sixties and I was about 19. Not only did I have difficulties keeping up with him, but to increase the challenge, he did not believe in cement mixing machines. The only cement mixer was "yours truly." What was most amazing about Uncle Leo was that he only needed one glance at the cement I mixed to determine if it was acceptable or not. Believe me; I worked hard to make sure it was!

This little story illustrates the best path you will build as an Animal Chaplain. Your cement or foundation must always be mixed well because with one glance people will see if you are sincere or not. And once trust is lost it is irrecoverable. As a matter of fact, animals only need one glance as well. They are very much aware of, and in tune with a human's true feelings.

Our first module will focus on some characteristics that are mixed together to make up our foundation. This will be important for those we serve and will help us attain and maintain a state of inner serenity, as we further develop our serving spirit.

Called by Name

On October 3, 2011, eighteen dogs were loaded into a gas chamber in Florence, Alabama to end their lives. After thirty painful minutes, the chamber door was opened and all had been dreadfully euthanized, except for one Beagle mix. The operator's job was to put the surviving dog back in. However, the gentleman had second thoughts. Instead, he named the pup Daniel after the biblical figure who survived the lion's den, and called for assistance.

Within days I rescued, and eventually adopted Daniel who is now part of my family. Please feel encouraged to research his amazing story and mission to date.

In the years that he has been living with me, Daniel has turned his miraculous survival from a near tragedy into a life of giving back, through service to others. In fact, I am proud to say, he is responsible not only for thousands of animal adoptions, but for motivating and inspiring, men and women of all demographics, children and teens to overcome adversity in their lives and live as survivors not victims!

God called Daniel by name to fulfill his purpose.

God has called each of us by name as well. In listening to the call, you have chosen to enter a rich and rewarding life, and I am happy for you, knowing it will be a richly gratifying experience. This journey will include many events and inspirational experiences. It's a journey that led you to this point.

Compassion

I had the pleasure of meeting Mother Teresa, a truly unforgettable, humbling experience. In my opinion, this physically diminutive woman defined phenomenal strength and compassion more clearly and correctly than most individuals. What struck me most was her incredible ability to focus. (Yes, a component of Assignment number one!) As I approached I was rendered speechless. It was

evident that in her mind and heart, no one was more important than me in that special moment. I had her full and undivided attention. She was truly a woman called by God, a woman who heeded the call and stepped into her purpose.

About ten years after meeting the now canonized St Mother Teresa, I met Shelby, a brutally abused and abandoned Pit Bull left starving and badly injured tied to a fence at a gas station. She was brought to a shelter where I was a volunteer at the time. When our eyes met, Shelby and I established an immediate bond so powerful I brought her home to meet my family-- human and canine. Shelby required extensive surgery on both her hind legs to repair the damages from the abuse. During her rehabilitation, I noticed she had a gift for compassion in spite of her trauma and pain. I trained her to become a therapy dog. For ten years Shelby served people in need ranging from special needs children to terminal oncology patients. She motivated me to write *Shelby's Grace*, to chronicle her story, empower others caught in obstacle paths, and clear up the bias and injustice associated with breed profiling, while shedding a light on the true nature of the Pit Bulls.

Spiritual nourishment

If we do not nourish ourselves there is no way we will have the means to nourish others. This applies to physical as well as spiritual nourishment.

Each morning I start my day serving breakfast to the dogs in my family. While I sit with them, I pray for everyone who requested prayers as well as for the needs of the world.

Afterward I am off to the gym where my activities are more oriented toward mental strength than physical needs or vanity.

In the evening, I spend as much time as possible (before falling asleep) reading something inspirational or spiritual.

This is my routine as of this writing. However, I am always looking for ways to improve and I am always open to personal growth and change.

Module 1: Assignments

Assignment Number 1: The Foundation

For each of the following three attributes, please discuss a specific animal or a species (research, if necessary) who adds value for you.

1. Character
2. Integrity
3. Ability to focus

Assignment Number 2: Called by Name

Briefly describe how you feel God has called you by name. Explain any circumstances or situations you believe helped bring you here, and how and why God has specifically inspired you to serve.

Assignment Number 3: Compassion

Discuss how you can improve your ability to focus. Mention three ways you can sharpen this important skill.

What is it about Shelby's story that can help you reflect on your own life and determine how compassion can be brought to a higher level?

Assignment Number 4: Spiritual Nourishment

Briefly discuss your spiritual nourishment plan and your initial thoughts on how you can fortify it.

Congratulations!

You have successfully completed Module 1.

Please take some time to celebrate this accomplishment and refresh yourself before moving on to Module 2.