

## **PASTOR-IN-CHIEF**

*"I will not leave you comfortless..."*

My gut reacted to a photo.

It was of the President greeting a shooting victim's family member. He and Michelle had gone to yet another somber gathering of grieving people.

It got to me. I don't think many understand what it takes to walk into that kind of a situation. I've been there. And so have most pastors and some others.

It is what President's do...too often. It's very pastoral.

A President is Pastor-in-Chief.

Nobody likes that kind of job. If you are a pastor, it's not a question of whether you want to go or not. You go. Presidents must feel the same way.

I have responded to those calls where death news is still raw and grief is overwhelming. Thoughts of the unspeakable tragedies flood back. A natural death brings real grief. But there are many other kinds of death that simply jar the soul.

I've gone to doors many times thinking *"There's no way to pay me enough to go up to that door and face what's inside."*

So here is the photo of a grim-faced President going to meet one-on-one with families of children killed in a school shooting. Or, recently to any of the tragic moments we all read about in the paper. Some will suggest that he is just doing the politically correct thing. He can't be present everywhere. We never hear of his personal phone calls when it's impossible for him to be there.

I was trained to deal with grief. I have read all I could about how to deal with hard situations. I know words and prayers and all the things one is supposed to offer as help and comfort. What can I offer that matters? Every situation is different, but in some ways they are the same. I represent more than who I am. I'm not sure what that "more" is. God? Jesus? Church? Minister?

I am a presence. A pastoral presence.

The truth is that such moments don't fit any pattern. Forget trying to do or say the right thing. You feel the hurt. You listen. I suppose my counseling training helps, and my years dealing with the grieving process also helps.

Being "ministerial" is not on my mind, any more than the President thinks of being "presidential."

I watch the President greet, embrace, hold, listen, feel. I suppose he comes in behalf of the whole grieving nation to let people know that someone cares. He's more than President. He represents more than himself.

He can't feel any better about getting out of Air Force One and going into the midst of grief than I felt getting out of my car to walk to grief's door. You don't do such things for money or for publicity. Some things come with the job. And it's not easy.

We are reminded that the President is elected to be Commander-in-Chief. Do we ever remember that the President will also be Pastor-in-Chief?

Art Morgan, July 21, 2016