

INSPIRED TO SERVE

“PRAY WITHOUT CEASING” 1 THESSALONIANS 5:17

From the Director's Desk

BY DENICE FOOSE, BCC, MBA
CCC DIRECTOR

Dearest Colleagues,

Somehow writing these words I feel closer to you than previous Newsletter communication. These are painful, sorrow-filled times, not to mention the depressing days - now weeks - of social distancing. And yet, the faith-filled expression, I feel closer to you than before. I feel a deep bond with each of you, along with profound gratitude for you and your caring ministry. Understandably, your ministry has been severely restricted, but I sincerely hope you feel an ongoing sense of community. It's my prayer that our Monday "Prayerful Meditations" and Thursday "Pastoral Musings" strengthen our connection.

Like you, these days of home-dwelling have provided unexpected but fruitful opportunities for spiritual reflection. Taking a moment of personal privilege, I would like to share a couple of lessons I've learned. Or, perhaps better, important truths that have recently surfaced. The first is almost embarrassingly self-evident but painfully real -- we're the creature and not the Creator. Or otherwise put, it's not our lives, it's God's. That has been a helpful reminder for me. Indeed, the whole of creation, though diseased, is securely within God's healthy embrace. Therefore, I'm reminded of my place within the larger, transcendent context of my little house. Though the walls creep in a bit, I'm called to remain faithful...and trusting.

The second resurfacing truth is an implication of my role as God's daughter: servanthood should be my fundamental mode of relating to the world. As strong as the pull of my-self, including those self-centered interests and goals, at my best I'm outward-centered, striving to serve others. Servanthood captures the transformation of an inward love of self turned outward. You embody that transformational dynamic in your service as a Pastoral Visitor.

Pause with me and remember your pre-COVID-19 ministry. You were invested in representing Christ to those who experienced vulnerability in deep, sometimes unseen, ways.

You courageously entered the rooms of God's daughters and sons who were typically strangers, whose names were unknown to you. And yet, you moved toward them and sought to connect with them in God's name. In this time of social distancing and "work from home" order you have found ways to be creative. Your outreach with cards, gift baskets, phone calls, etc. have inspired and encouraged me. Service, servanthood are core qualities to your identity as a Pastoral Visitor. Fear not however, those days of face-to-face ministry will return!

And finally, I've been reminded of the supreme value of patience. The internal discipline to wait, trusting a re framing will occur, that a new perspective will emerge as I seek to remain grounded in God's time. My myopic vision is not God's expansive, patient vision. Tomorrow will come, tomorrow is a new day. So, while I get restless during these extended days of social distancing, I regain my balance, my spiritual center when I actively attend to God sustaining presence.

I miss each and every one of you. Bless you for your ministry. My colleague, Jim Letourneau, NACC Board Chair, said it well when he wrote to Catholic professional chaplains. His words apply equally to all of you! I modify: "Where you (Pastor Visitor) are placed in the Lord's vineyard is better...because of you. Where you are planted knows more compassion...because of you. The people you encounter daily experience God's presence...through you and because of you." God's peace. I look forward to seeing you soon.

2020 COMMISSIONING CEREMONY

Commissioning Mass will still be held at the Co-Cathedral (1111 St Joseph Pkwy Houston, Texas) on August 22nd at 5 pm Vigil Mass. The reception following has been cancelled. A publication will follow with recognition and acknowledgements.

ENRICHMENT SEMINARS

Below are the dates and topics left for our enrichment seminar series. Email kbond@archgh.org for more information.

- August 10 Creating the Space Within Part 1
- Sept 21 Creating the Space Within Part 2
- Oct 19 Creating the Space Within Part 3

An Interview With A Chaplain

WITH DAWN MALONE BY KATE BOND

Kate: Hi, Dawn! Thank you so much for taking my call. I'm so happy we get to do this... get to know the lay chaplain position better. So, what it's like, day-to-day, to be Chaplain Dawn Malone? To start, can you tell me what your day looks like?

Dawn: Sure! I start each day in, what we call, the morning report with all of the hospital chaplains and chaplain residents at Memorial Hermann. We discuss patient needs that have emerged overnight. I see to those patients immediately after report and then I usually assess the Catholic census to see who else we may encounter that day.

Kate: Is it difficult to be a member of the CCC working with mostly non-Catholic chaplains who are employed by the hospital and not the Archdiocese?

Dawn: No, not at all. I feel this department, which goes out of its way to include the CCC, does an exceptional job of collaborating to care for patients. Communication is a big priority here. So, for example, when new resident chaplains come in August, I lead sessions on collaborating with the CCC. In these sessions, we identify the needs that Catholic patients may express; we discuss how best to relay that information to our team; how our triage system works—in other words, what is considered emergent and what is not. Often and understandably, chaplain residents don't know the inner workings of the Catholic faith, but, hey, even Catholic patients and families are sometimes unsure about what is appropriate. So I'm happy to fill in the gaps, so to speak, for our MH team as well as our Catholic brothers and sisters in the hospital. We have a great relationship with the MH staff chaplain team—and that is so very important. Patients and families are going through intense trauma and loss so we need to make sure that we are working as efficiently as possible so they are not left waiting. The staff chaplains and I work well together and it's all about great communication.

Kate: Up until recently, you had a whole team at the hospital. It was you, Fr. Peter, and a team of Pastoral Visitors. Can you explain to me how those relationships worked?

Dawn: Well, I am one who likes to work proactively. The days sure looked different before COVID suspended volunteer services in the hospital! Every morning I would assess the census and determine which patients needed a visit from us—Father Peter to the ICUs and Pastoral Visitors to the intermediate and standard care units. I would make custom assignments to the Pastoral Visitors, who were each assigned to a specific unit—pediatrics, cardiac care, neuro, medicine, trauma. The Pastoral Visitors are trained in empathic listening. They helped patients process the grief, anxiety, and sometimes trauma that they experience. Often the Pastoral Visitors would come back with a patient story that really impacted them. In order for ministers to continue this intense work without burnout, they need a minister—imagine that!—to allow them the same space to debrief and defuse that they offer to their patients. So I got to be a Pastoral Visitor to my Pastoral Visitors! I miss that so much now that they're gone. Losing them was huge for me. Getting them back on campus is a daily prayer! And certainly, there are sacramental needs and I alert Fr. Peter and give him the benefit of my assessment. I often run ahead of him and meet the patient, family, and staff, gather the details of the situation, and then hand off that information to him so he understands what he is walking into. It was and is my job to make sure things flow smoothly, to make sure that Fr. Peter isn't being called on referrals that Pastoral Visitors are trained to handle so that he can focus on sacramental needs, and to make sure everyone has a great working relationship with the hospital staff. With this model, we are able to see a substantial amount of Catholic patients, a great deal more than before...

Kate: So it seems most of the work you did was organization and Pastoral Visitor support. Now that the Pastoral Visitors are gone, what is your ministry like?

Dawn: It's interesting you ask that. Back in November, one of my MH colleagues asked if I wanted to be trained for a program called "Code Lilac." Code Lilac is a program for staff who need support. It is designed to provide care to our nurses, doctors, as well as non-clinical staff when they've experienced a traumatic case, have witnessed great suffering or a loss, or are having some other emotional struggle. But it is more than offering support to one person or a group—it's also a grassroots movement to empower the staff on how to listen empathically and offer support to each other. So, as you can imagine, we have been getting more and more requests for Code Lilac since March. In fact, they now have a scheduled Code Lilac once a month for the entire hospital. So once a month, my chaplain colleagues and I will join a Zoom meeting with about 100 staff members and break out into groups. In these small groups, we facilitate sessions in which the staff has the opportunity to process some of the stress and grief they are going through. I feel like I was trained for Code Lilac "just in time." I am so grateful for God's timing there! Even as my ministry seemed gutted when my Pastoral Visitor team had to leave, it was really God making room for me to be able to serve His children in a different way.

Kate: So changing gears a bit, I know emotions are high when loved ones are passing. I can imagine this being heightened now. Can you explain your role in an end-of-life referral?

Dawn: Of course Fr. Peter is there to offer the sacraments, but I often have a part too. When a patient or family is requesting a Catholic chaplain specifically, I will visit to determine what is needed. If the patient is still capable of receiving sacraments, I make arrangements for Fr. Peter to visit. But often, the request comes after the patient is unconscious so Holy Communion and Reconciliation is not possible. If the patient has already been Anointed while in the hospital or if the patient has died when we receive the referral, I am usually the one who responds. I offer Prayers of Commendation of the Dying, or Prayers after Death. I usually spend some time talking to the family and helping them process. Sometimes that is facilitating storytelling, sometimes that is encouraging them to speak directly to the patient...sometimes, well, many times, it is standing as a silent presence, just bearing witness to their grief. And now in the COVID era, many times I am offering that ministry by Zoom with family members who cannot be bedside. But live or digital, it's always, always extremely impactful to me. It sounds odd to say it, but end-of-life ministry is one of the best parts of my job. Truly meaningful moments just overflowing with the presence of God.

Kate: Truly, Dawn, you're amazing. I am completely inspired by you and everyone else working during this pandemic.

Dawn: I don't know if I'm amazing or not! I'm just trying to serve the God I find in His people.

Prayer ministry

Consider being involved in our Prayer Ministry led by Pastoral Visitor Maria Buzek. Commit to an hour of private prayer on Monday, Wednesday, and/or Friday! For available times, please email kbond@archgh.org.

COVID-19 - The Catalyst for Creative Ministry

Pastoral Visitors Sharon Brown and Joyce Converse wanted to do something to help those who suffer most from isolation, those in nursing homes. Every few weeks they put together baskets of prepackaged treats, along with notes of encouragement, for residents and staff of Park Manor in Conroe.

"Thank you so much for all of the wonderful snacks for the Residents and staff!

You guys are such a blessing! And thank you also for the prayer coverage.

We sure do need all we can get.

The Residents are enjoying the special snacks so much. They are on 14 day quarantine again and cannot come out of their rooms so this is really a blessing. Most of all thank you for the prayer support. We need both! God bless you guys!"