Suffering and Grace

Patricia Murphy, RSCJ, PhD, BCC
Rush University Medical Center, Chicago
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Patricia_Murphy@rush.edu

Objectives

• At the end of this first teleconference you will be able to:
  – Identify some human needs that impact our response to suffering;
  – Name themes of God’s presence/grace in suffering;
  – Describe the chaplain’s role in ministering to those who suffer.
Suffering

- ______________________________________________________
- ______________________________________________________
- Suffering
  - Exiled from
    - Home
    - Control over our body, strength
    - Routine
    - Sense of hope
  - Physical pain
  - Mental pain
  - Spiritual pain

Grace

- What are one or two words you would use to describe grace?

- ______________________________________________________

- Our Chaplains’ thoughts:
  (After you have written your quick one or two word description of grace, look at the last slide to see what some of our chaplains said.)
The Core of Who We Are

• We are created and held by the unconditional love of God

• We start life with the experience of unconditional love by a caregiver

We Decide to Take Care of Ourselves

• We lose touch with unconditional love.
• Things do not always work out the way we plan.
• At a very early age, we set out to take care of ourselves.
• Of course, a parent is still doing most of the work.
Humanity Loses Touch with God’s Unconditional Love

Adam and Eve
But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

Genesis 3:9-10

The Tower of Babel
Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth.” The Lord said, “Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.”

Genesis 11:4-7

Abraham: Faith in Covenant

Yahweh said to Abram: ‘Leave your country, your family and your father’s house for the land I will show you.’

– Genesis 12:1
Spirituality/Religion

“Our hearts have been made for you, O God, and they shall never rest until they rest in you.”  St. Augustine

God Continually Provides a Glimpse of the Sacred

The Search for the Sacred

- Discovery
- External Factors
  - Culture
  - Parents
  - Situations
- Internal Factors
  - Some say part of human nature
  - A mix of motives

Ken Pargament, 2007
Evidence from Research Suggests Many are Aware of the Sacred

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Percentage report often/very often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I see God's presence in all of life.</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I see evidence of God in nature and creation.</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I experience a sense of God's transcendence in my life.</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sense God's presence moving in my relationship with others.</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sense that my spirit is part of God's spirit.</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 113, national survey

Doehring et al., 2009, cited in Pargament, 2007

- God is always present. We do not always know how to see.
- We walk by faith and not by sight.
- Patients might have already discovered this type of faith through past experience.
Worldview of People with a Religious Background

• From childhood on, we are exposed to religious beliefs either in our family or through the media.
• The music, stories, rules and rituals of religion tell us how and why things happen.
• As adults, we might question and adjust our worldview.
• In the face of suffering, aspects of our worldview take on a new focus.

Common Assumptions

• Life is fair;
• I am in control of my life;
• Life is good;
• There is a loving God who ensures that people get what they deserve.
• My body is (should be) sacred – limits who touches me and how I am touched
Holding on to the Sacred

Pathways to Conserving the Sacred
- Knowing - Sacred Texts
- Acting – Rituals and Practices
- Relating to others
- Experience

adapted from Ken Pargament, 2007

Suffering: A Threat to Our Worldview and Sense of the Sacred

Ken Pargament, 2007
In the Face of Stress People Turn to Religion to Cope

A parent of a child with cystic fibrosis (qualitative)

“Everything we’ve been through, we haven’t gone through alone; God has been there. He has given strength to us.”

Grossoehme et al. 2010

Patient samples (quantitative)
8,805 Cancer Survivors

- Very much: 50.46%
- Somewhat: 13.71%
- A little bit: 8.38%
- Not at all: 9.2%
- Quite a bit: 18.25%

My faith or spirituality has helped me through my cancer experience

- Not at all
- A little bit
- Somewhat
- Quite a bit
- Very much
A Note About Research

• Most of us go through the day aware in the back of our mind of how patients we meet use religion or spirituality.
• Research helps us find out if it is just us or if others have a similar experience.
• Information about research can be used in representing the need for chaplains to hospital administrators.

Suffering: A Threat to Our Worldview

Ken Pargament, 2007
Common Assumptions

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The Crucifixion: A Contradiction

For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning.

Hebrews 4:15
A Note About Theology

- There is much interest in the role of spirituality/religion in coping with illness.
- Research comes from psychology, nursing, sociology, and chaplaincy.
- If chaplains forget their role as theologians, those trained to reflect on the written word within the practice of different cultures...the conversation will lack depth.

The Crucified God

Whoever suffers without reason always feels at first that he is abandoned by God and all good things. Whoever cries to God in this suffering, however, joins fundamentally in the death-cry of Jesus. But then for him God is not only a hidden object to whom he cries. In a very personal sense, he is rather the human God who cries with him and in him and who intercedes for him where he in his misery grows silent. The suffering person thus enters into the full situation of God.

Moltmann (1974)
The Crucified God

“The God of success and the apathetic man of action completely contradict what we find at the core of Christianity: the suffering God and the loving, vulnerable man.”

Moltmann (1974)

This Weekend

- The feast of the Cross
- Yom Kippur
- Our Lady of Sorrows
Preferential Option for the Poor

A call to listen
A call to respond

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
Mt. 5:3

What do Chaplains do?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chaplain behaviors</th>
<th>Spiritual or Religious</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seemed to care about the patient</td>
<td>.54***</td>
<td>.48***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Really listen to the patient</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.28***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray with the patient</td>
<td>.19*</td>
<td>.31***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help tap inner strength/resources</td>
<td>.38***</td>
<td>.47***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.001

Flannelly et al, 2009
### Why Patients Want to See a Chaplain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remind me of God's care and presence</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer support to family or friends</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be with me at times of particular anxiety or uncertainty</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray and/or read scripture or sacred texts</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to me</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administer religious ritual or sacrament</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counsel me regarding moral/ethical concerns or decisions</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Piderman et al, 2010
The Chaplain’s Role

• Be present during times of suffering
• Listen to sources of suffering for the patient
• Listen to sources of strength in the patient

The Chaplain’s Role: Sacraments

• Baptism (especially perinatal)
  — Baptism, naming, blessing – recognizes the reality of this short life
  — Assurance that the child is held by Love
• Eucharist
  — the broken Body of Christ
  — Connects the person to a community
  — Reminds that the physical is sacred
• Reconciliation
  — For some, a sign of forgiveness
• Sacrament of the Sick
  — Physical touch representing severity of illness and reality of God’s care
  — Turning point for families struggling to let go
• Marriage
An Intervention for Pain

• **Breathing Relaxation** with a sacred Word
  • Wacholtz and Pargament, 2008
• Music
• Conversation as a shift of focus

Next Session

• The role of the prophet
• Mental pain
• Religious Struggle
• Transformation and struggle
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Grace</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our Chaplains’ thoughts:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Pure gift.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– A gift upon a gift (nature).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Boundless generosity; inherent basic goodness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Prevene (goes before my efforts), god’s love, thanksgiving, bedrock.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Unceasing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Freely given with love and unearned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Pure gift, something we receive gratuitously, something we cannot earn or deserve.....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Messy, vulnerability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Untangled. contentment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>