

I had expected my first E-pistle after our Diocesan Convention to focus on issuing a clarion call for us all to build on the work done at Convention so that we could “Walk in Love” as a diocese in the coming year. But as all of you reading this have no doubt heard, events overtook my plans.

On October 22, my ten-year-old son, Nathan Linman, suffered a significant brain hemorrhage. Through the quick action of the paramedics and the neurosurgery team at Phoenix Children’s Hospital, Nathan has survived, but he has a long road of healing in front of him. He is slowly regaining the use of his left side, and it will take many more weeks of inpatient rehabilitation, outpatient rehabilitation, and at least one additional surgery to bring him back to health. We still do not know what caused the stroke, and are going through additional testing to see if the doctors can resolve whatever it is, so that we will not live in fear of it happening again. Nathan’s father arrived on the first plane from New York City on October 23, and is going to be here for a significant portion of Nathan’s recovery.

There are two aspects of this event that I want to share with the whole diocese. The first is the most pragmatic:

I am working with the Rev. Canon Anita Braden, Canon Cathy Black, and the Rev. Canon Dan Tantimonaco, President of the Standing Committee, to pull together a roadmap of how the diocese is going to navigate the next few months while I have limited availability to be physically present in congregations and at meetings. Based upon our conversations so far, we do not believe we need to bring in a visiting bishop at this time, but we will reevaluate as time passes and we know more both about Nathan’s health and about my own ability to juggle my responsibilities. Once we have put together that roadmap, we will share it with the diocese so that you will know who is handling the portions of my ministry that I am not currently able to do. I cannot fully express my gratitude to the diocesan staff, and local clergy and congregations who have offered to help out in my absence.

Thank you.

The second is to reflect a bit about the power of prayer.

I have never in my life felt so supported by the prayers of the faithful. There were many moments in the last two weeks that the most basic and primal of prayers: “Help,” “Please,” and “No,” were all I was able to say. I love the language of our Prayer Book, but sometimes just a single raw word is all

we can offer to God -- and God hears both the word and the “sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26).

Though I have been inarticulate, the community has been amazing in both word and deed. Dean Troy Mendez and Canon Anita Braden were with me the first night, holding my hands, wiping my tears, and building a strong wall of prayer around me and my boy. Bishop Deborah Hutterer, the ELCA bishop of the Grand Canyon Synod, has been a frequent visitor with communion and prayers.

My General Seminary classmates have taken to occasionally praying Compline and Noonday Prayer with us online via Zoom. My bishop classmates have a text chain going with updates and prayers. Extended family members drop by for prayer and support, and friends showed up one night with a delicious dinner and bottle of wine. And for once, social media has been a complete blessing. Reading through prayers and well wishes from friends and colleagues all over the world on Facebook supported us when hope was hard to come by. Messages that entire dioceses were praying for Nathan made me teary, but warmed my heart.

And you, this wonderful diocese, you have all contributed stacks of cards, prayer quilts, care packages, flowers, and stuffed animals. (This is not a request for more!) I've read every card, Nathan sleeps under a rotation of quilts, and when he couldn't hold his head up, an assortment of stuffed animals did the work for him. We read him a book someone sent, and I've been savoring the toiletries from another package during my overnights at the hospital. So many things that I hadn't thought about needing, you have supplied, and it has brought joy and comfort to me, Jonathan, Nathan, and my whole family.

All of this to say: prayer is not an individual endeavor. When Jesus teaches the disciples to pray, he begins with the word “Our.” We pray not just for ourselves, but for those around us, and we pray to the God who connects us and loves us all. When we are lost, or cannot find our way, the prayers of those around us can sustain us and help guide us forward.

Which in a sense brings us back to the theme of our convention, “Walk in Love.” We have walked in love together on an unexpected journey these two weeks, but it is a holy walk. Jesus never leaves our side on this journey, but sometimes the reminder of Jesus’ abiding presence is a quilt, or a card, or a text. My own prayer today is that every family who experiences such a tragedy or event will be

similarly supported by their own communities; and my commitment as a Christian is to be ever more faithful in my own prayers for those who are ill or injured.