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November 2024 Monthly Chaplaincy Update!

It is hard to believe that November has already gone by, and we are now gearing up for the holiday season. November was an uneventful month at LA General Medical Center, and I was glad to have time for more focused visits with patients and their families. We had the *pumpkin decorating contest,* and it was enjoyable for me to visit the conference center to see the colorful displays of pumpkins from different departments in the hospital. I was also grateful for the opportunity to attend several presbytery meetings in person, particularly those in San Gabriel and Los Ranchos, which I had not visited before. I also took a few days off to attend the 2024 *Society of Biblical Literature and American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting* in San Diego, which lasted for four days. It was a busy weekend trying to get to different sessions, and I enjoyed attending those on bioethics and homiletics, which are two areas that I continue to grow in. Below I will share about some of my visits.

The Pumpkin Decorating Contest at LA General

"Talk to me about God"

One of the encounters I had this month was with an incarcerated patient in the trauma area of the emergency department. When I first walked in, I saw a young man in his late twenties with his foot chained to the bed, looking sad and tired, as if he had not slept in several days. I also noticed that he had tattoos all over his body, and some were covered with blood. Upon entering the room, I noticed an officer, dressed in plainclothes, conversing over the phone in a corner. As I usually do, I informed the patient and the officer that I was a chaplain and wanted to check on the patient at the bedside. The officer gestured with his hand, indicating that it was okay for me to go ahead. As I moved closer to the bed, I noticed that the patient's hand was also chained to it, and he seemed uncomfortable. The patient continued to disclose that he had suffered multiple injuries to his head and back and was experiencing pain. He also shared that he had been transferred from another facility where he was and was feeling frustrated because he was feeling like he wasn't being treated well and rolled his eyes to point to the officer as the "one to blame."
Since the patient had mentioned he was in pain, I thought the visit would be short, and I would ask the ED staff to follow up. To my surprise, the patient asked me to stay and talk to him about God, and I took this as an opportunity to find out if he was religious. The patient responded that he is a Catholic, and I shared with him some words of encouragement from the Bible, including that no matter what he had done, God can forgive him if he asks for repentance. As I was speaking, the patient began to cry and asked me to continue. I decided to read a passage from the Bible, specifically Psalms 23, pausing in between to offer encouraging words. After I finished, I thought the patient would be okay and allow me to leave, but he again asked me to stay and tell him "Something more about God" …. My mind immediately turned to music, and I recalled recording a song from my church using bagpipes on my phone. The

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patient listened attentively, and after the song ended, he looked up at me and desperately told me all he wanted to do was to talk to his wife, and I told him that I am not able to help him out, but the officer may probably have a way to do that.

At that moment, the officer, having completed his call, spoke up to the patient and said, "You already spoke to your wife at the other hospital." He then addressed me, explaining that the patient had "called his wife, and his whole family showed up at the hospital and started causing issues." The patient again rolled his eyes while listening to the officer, who also told him, "I think you should go back to God and stop doing the things that lead you to trouble." I then informed the patient that I had to go and would ask the ED staff to follow up about his pain. As I walked out, the officer followed me and said he wanted to talk to me. He shared that the patient was desperate to talk to his wife because she is pregnant. He went on to explain that he was in custody for armed robbery, but he did not want to go to prison due to his wife's pregnancy, so he had tried to give him money to get out of jail. The officer also revealed to me that he was also a Christian and he was trying to do his best to help the patient and had informed him that he should focus on his relationship with God and stop doing wrong things. He also noted how he enjoyed listening to the bagpipe music I played for the patient.

"Nothing wrong with the baby"

A challenging visit I had this month was with a baby who was a few weeks old. As I usually do in the mornings, I visited the emergency department and focused on my rounds. I noticed a room full of staff, including doctors, who were busy with the patient. From afar, I knew they were trying to revive the person, but I could not see them. After completing my rounds, I decided to approach the room and check if any family members were present. As I moved nearer, I noticed the staff, including the firefighters who were observing what was going on, seemed sad, and there did not seem to be any family present. At that moment, I heard one doctor announce the time of death because they could not find a pulse. He then called out for a moment to pause in memory of the person who had passed on, and as the staff started to move away from the bedside, I was finally able to see that it was a baby. I noticed that some of the staff members were trying to linger around, looking tearful and sad. This reminded me of the days at Providence when a child would die and the profound impact it had on everyone. During my check-in with the social worker, she informed me that the baby's family had not yet arrived, as they had three other children at home and had stayed behind to attend to them.

SBL& AAR Annual Meeting in San Diego

Following the incident, one of the ED doctors summoned the staff to an empty patient room for a debriefing, where we all met, including the firefighters who had brought the baby in. I found the debriefing helpful as the doctor went through what they did after the baby was brought in and

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how much they had tried to revive him and had not succeeded. I had an opportunity to speak with the doctor and the sheriffs and learned that they had not seen any specific signs of trauma that would have caused the baby to pass on. As we normally have reflections at nine in the morning, I informed the doctor that I would be back to support the family, and he noted that it would be helpful to have a chaplain there. As I walked to St. Camillus for our reflection time, I could not help but think of how challenging it would be for the parents when they received the news. I requested for another chaplain since I had two incidents going on in the emergency department and was given another chaplain who is also doing her CPE and is in her fourth unit. It was a good thing, as when we got there, we learned that the family speaks Spanish, and she was able to help with translation for all the people, including the sheriffs, as they spoke to the family. An official translator was present when the doctors briefed the parents after their arrival.

Outside the San Diego Convention Center

During the visit, we supported the parents who were overwhelmed by grief, and they were both sad, tearful, and distraught. They both took turns to share how the baby, who was sleeping in their bed, seemed okay earlier and that during a doctor's visit a week earlier, he confirmed that there was nothing wrong with the baby. When they woke up that morning, they found the baby in a far corner, not breathing, and they struggled to understand what could have happened. I coordinated with the unit staff to arrange a memorial box for the family and was present when the other chaplain led a prayer in Spanish for them. We continued to offer support as the parents were waiting for the medical examiners to arrive, and the mom shared with us photos and videos of the baby, who was only born three weeks earlier. She later disclosed that the baby was born prematurely and spent a few days in the neonatal intensive care unit before they were discharged. In between supporting the parents, I also offered support to emergency department nurses who wanted to gather for a moment of silence in honor of their colleague who had a stroke the day before. I had visited her earlier in the ICU and she was awake though having a difficult time talking.

"A Love for Motorcycles"

Another visit that was challenging was with a young man who was unresponsive in the ICU. I found out about the patient, Kevin (pseudonym), while responding to a request for a Christian chaplain to visit and offer a prayer. Upon calling the unit for assessment, I learned that no family was present at Kevin's bedside, apart from the father who had visited a day earlier. The nurse confirmed that it was the mom who had requested prayers for her son since she lives out of state. Before visiting Kevin, I decided to call the mom and offer extended support over the phone. She shared that she was living in another state and was only receiving updates about her son, Kevin, through phone calls with the medical team. The mom who was sad and tearful described how her son was involved in a motorcycle accident while going home from work a few days earlier. They were still waiting for further details, but the mom had heard that somehow his helmet had fallen off, trapping him

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beneath a truck, resulting in severe injuries, including his head. At the time, the mother revealed the difficult news she had received, and they were just waiting for the results of the brain death tests to confirm Kevin's passing.

I helped the mom process her grief over the phone as she shared her son's love for motorcycles, which he was riding for more than ten years. She expressed her concerns about the incident, given that her son had always worn a helmet. The mother also mentioned that her decision not to visit and see her son was partly due to the recent loss of three family members, including her husband and a grandchild a few years prior. When I inquired about other family members who might be planning to visit, the mom revealed that Kevin's dad, who lived in California, had already made a visit. She also mentioned that one of Kevin's sisters was planning to visit California to follow up on what happened during the accident, as they were still awaiting answers. After confirming that the mom is a Christian, I visited Kevin at the BS, where we spent time in prayer and read some scripture. The mom was very tearful and sad over the phone, and when she calmed down, she expressed her gratitude for being able to be present for the prayers. Since he was a registered donor, I called the mom again for support prior to his transfer to the One Legacy facility for organ donation. I was still in the ICU when some of Kevin's colleagues came to visit on the final day, and I escorted them to the bedside. As I offered them support, they shared that the grandchild who had passed on was Kevin's daughter and that one of the tattoos on his hand was in her memory. They also noted that Kevin had moved to California after losing his daughter, who mistakenly took some illicit drugs, and the loss was difficult for him to handle.

Prayer Items

- Continue to pray for our patients at the hospital and those I meet in the emergency department who are dealing with different forms of trauma. Pray for their families and friends who often have a difficult time during the visits or dealing with grief after they pass on.
- Pray for the staff who continue to dedicate themselves to serving at LA General. Some days are challenging due to the number of patients we serve or the cases that we deal with. Sometimes the staff are also dealing with their own challenges such as health issues like the nurse who was hospitalized for a stroke.
- Pray for our incarcerated patients who also deal with a lot of psychological issues for many reasons including being separated from their families. One of the patients I have been supporting was compassionately released from the jail unit after forty years and is now able to have visitors since he is on hospice.
- Continue to pray for the work of chaplains at LA General. Pray for continued strength and wisdom as we support the patients and their families everyday. Pray also for God's continued provision to support the chaplains and other ministries including AIN.

Give Thanks to the Lord. For He is Good: His Love Endures Forever!
Psalms 106:1

A Memorial Plague Outside the Emergency Room!