

Miles to Go Before We Sleep!

Most of you are familiar with Robert Frost's 1922 poem, *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*. The poem tells a story of a person who is traveling in a buggy drawn by a horse. The earth is quiet and dark and the moon is bright providing light on the trees, the lake and the snow. The buggy rider stops long enough to take in the beauty and then reminds himself that he cannot linger because he has some distance to go before he will reach a place to lay his head for the night.

For us at St Andrew, this poetic story is a metaphor for what we have experienced since early March in the wake of COVID-19 and what we can expect to continue to experience for a number of months to come. Yes, we do not know how long it will be before we will have access to an immunization that will protect us, our families, our friends, our communities, and the world from COVID-19. Some might interpret Frost's poetic words as meaning permanent sleep. We on the other hand do have promises to keep before our current pandemic is resolved and we are able to return to a more normal life. In the meantime, how do we keep our promises to ourselves, our families, our church community, our larger community, and God?

Even though the term Health Ministries may not be on your radar screen, I believe that one's own personal health and the health ministries of the church are wound together. God's call to us to be responsible for our own personal health is only a small part of God's call to us to participate in the health ministries of the life of the church. Health ministry has always been a part of the church. It is the work of the church, the answer to the call to healing and to the community, the continuing restorative work of Christ. The congregation becomes the arms and heart of Christ to facilitate healing and restoration to individuals, families, and the community and in doing so grows more fully into the expression of our Lord inside and outside the church building. It is intentional ministry for the whole person - mind, body and spirit - individually and communally for all of God's children. It applies to stewardship for all of life, human and ecological, in the care of one another, the care of creation and the care of self.

Several years ago the Southeastern Synod of the ELCA Health Ministries Task Force identified health ministries as the following:

- H** Health/Hope: spiritual, physical, mental, social
- E** Education/Enhancement: Sharing our learning and putting into action
- A** Access: Programs, resources, communities
- L** Leadership: Responsibility to community, responsibility for self
- T** Teach/Touch: Reaching out in relationships, friendship
- H** Healing: New life, new beginnings

The novel coronavirus has certainly stretched our 2020 imagination as to how we might be thinking about our own personal health as well as the health ministries of the church. Whoever thought at the beginning of this year that we would need to participate for months to come in social distancing, staying out of crowds, wearing masks in public and sanitizing our hands frequently? As we focus on the birth of Christ during Advent and Christmas, we can be the arms and heart of Christ by finding our place in the health ministries of the church. Our church building still stands representing each of us on the southeast corner of Mack Hatcher and Murfreesboro Road. While we cannot worship safely in person with each other due to COVID-19, we can use our own resources along with the Church's resources to enhance our own health and to reach out to others in our church community and the community at large.

Hook your horse to the buggy, be safe, and find ways to participate in the health ministries of St. Andrew knowing that we may yet have many *miles to go before we sleep!*

Cornelia Pearson, RN, MN.

Reference:

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