

Chaplaincy: Availability, Listening Presence
By Sister Kathleen Foley, SND

How do these deceptively simple words describe chaplaincy/pastoral care services at Campion Center? First off, the recipients of Pastoral Services are Jesuits - men who have espoused, cherished and lived the spirit of the Spiritual Exercises all their Jesuit days. They are men who have stood out as giants in their respective professions and ministries. Their influence and impact remain. Without doubt, generations to come will be blessed by these Jesuits' contributions in countless disciplines and arenas of life.

Then, as we know, life progresses, peaks and eventually the inevitable diminishments make themselves felt. These changes sometimes take the form of acute, cyclic, chronic or terminal illness. Each brings with it unique physical challenges and spiritual needs.

Sharing Campion's common mission in collaboration with other departments, Pastoral Care Services endeavor to promote the over-all well-being of each Jesuit resident. Chaplaincy's challenge is to recognize the multiple and unique losses experienced by each man. Through availability and listening presence, chaplains try to companion residents in this unfamiliar and new phase of life to find continued purpose, meaning and fulfillment. This unfolds differently for each individual. For example, how important to recognize in the man experiencing dementia his need for attention, affection and interaction, as much as anyone else. How important to find ways to connect with residents who can't respond on a cognitive level. We believe in faith that attentive, faithful presence day after day has an effect. With the person who is dying, the chaplain offers increased presence and assurances that they are not alone during their end days. Throughout the dying experience, chaplains offer support and prayer. In some cases, this ministry is extended to family members. Of course, this task is shared by the Team of nursing, social services, activities. A strong Team approach exists at Campion, each with its own area of focus. The chaplain seeks to enter into another's world and journey with them as an active companion until that final moment when God calls them home.

So, you see, it is all about offering relationship to another and facilitating any continued healing that may need to come about. Isn't that what Jesus

did in his own ministry? He moved among the people, entered into relationship with them, embodied for them in his own way God's promises and called forth their goodness to be shared with others.

I am often reminded of this when I see Jesuits "visiting" with one another, offering their friendship and continued companionship.

The effectiveness of chaplaincy can be hard to see or to measure. The same can be said about grace it seems. But you know that it is there, alive and active. Chaplaincy provides an essential service, very especially in a nursing facility where most folks experience vulnerability, and, understandably, some fear of an unknown future. But isn't that true at all stages of life - each with its specific task and challenge?

For nursing staff and activities, chaplaincy sponsors on a monthly basis a prayer gathering in the spirit of the 18th Annotation. Included in the monthly theme is a suggested Spiritual Practice which can be shared with family members and friends. Some of the participants say they have saved all of these and return to them on a regular basis. The overarching hope for these prayer gatherings is that folks will grow in a deeper intimacy with God and become more and more sensitized to God's powerful presence and action in their everyday lives. Some will follow up and say: "That was just the word that I needed to hear in my life today." Often they will continue to share with chaplains what life is like for them right now with its multiple challenges. So, ministry to the Staff is another aspect of pastoral care services. It is the hope that the Staff returns home strengthened in mind and heart and with the deep belief that their ministry to the Jesuits is crucial and that they, indeed, share in the Jesuit mission by caring for them out of their competence and deep compassion. These women and men are surely Jesuit partners- in- mission.

So, you can see that it is the goal of the chaplaincy team to provide the kind of availability and listening presence that assists Jesuit residents to stay present to the moment's experience and to move into the future at peace with themselves, with others, with God. It reminds one of the often repeated words proclaimed with great gusto by Jamaican-born Fr. Alwyn Harry, SJ who passed on recently: "Live until you die." Being part of the Campion Care Team is inspiring, a privilege and a joy. What better way to spend one's days?