

Sister Virginia Schmitz

The American Heritage Dictionary defines CHAPLAIN as follows:

“A member of the Clergy attached to a chapel, legislative

assembly or military unit.” I would not describe my role as Chaplain at Strong Memorial Hospital fitting into anyone of the above categories!

Throughout my nearly 60 years of being a Sister of St. Joseph I have loved every ministry I have been assigned to, or, as the case may be, that I have chosen. My years of teaching were very happy and energizing; my many years in Parish/Pastoral ministry, both here and in Brazil were very enriching. And, some 20 years ago when approached to consider Hospital Chaplaincy, I knew that this was a call that had been stirring within me for a long time. My YES response of those 20 years ago has brought me much joy and has been very fulfilling.

My role as Chaplain through the years has brought me face-to-face with just about every facet of the human condition, embracing the first moments of new life to the threshold of end-of-life and the moment of death. The expanse in between has beckoned me to multiple numbers of folks, young and old, and to a wide variety of situations. Rarely a day passes without a summons to the Emergency Department and Trauma Units, frequently resultant upon acts of violence such as stabbings and gunshot wounds, suicide attempts, drug and alcohol overdosing, heart attacks, and the list goes on.

Every day there are calls from someone(s) requesting prayer before surgery or some medical procedure; there are the frequent calls to the neo-natal units requesting Baptism for a frail and struggling newborn; daily the requests come from those wishing to receive Holy Communion as well as the Sacrament of the Sick, ( we cannot always provide the latter for lack of priest coverage); the needs in the hospital never seem to diminish. And, it is not always the needs of the patient that require attention and response, but so often the families of patients and the hospital staffs, i.e., the nurses, doctors, students, housekeeping and maintenance personnel, walk-ins from the street – the days are full of trying to be a hopeful, loving, compassionate presence to those who suffer and struggle in so many ways.

Many years ago I was asked to define my working definition of Pastoral Ministry and for me it still holds today: “To reach out, to touch, and to enrich the lives of others.” Hopefully as a Hospital Chaplain I serve as a healing presence among the sick and struggling, focusing on the whole person – spiritual,

physical, emotional, social – i.e., bringing God’s healing presence to one and all without distinction. Each day brings its array of challenges, and I am so grateful for the good health and energy with which God has blessed me to carry out my ministry at Strong Memorial, a multi-faceted institution of caring and curing.

As I further reflect on my ministry of Chaplaincy I am daily enriched by so many people whose lives I have been privileged to enter into. As so often happens after an encounter with a patient I feel I am the one who has been ministered to, realizing that I receive far more than I give. To quote St. Francis’ Peace Prayer: “It is in giving that we receive...” Truly I have experienced the promised “hundredfold” over and over.

Some years ago I was in a Health Care facility that portrayed itself with the acronym PRIDE which translates into Performance – Respect – Integrity – Dedication – Empathy. Herein lies the Vision of our Founders; herein lies the SSJ Spirit - alive and well today - the Spirit of Love, Peace and Joy, the Spirit of Gentleness, Patience and Compassion.