

United Methodist Hospitals Ministry
BULLETIN BITS

Coast to Coast Connectionalism

Late on a Friday afternoon I learned a young man from Washington State was in surgery. I went to the waiting area to find his wife. When I introduced myself as the United Methodist visiting chaplain, her eyes lit up! The couple and their toddler son had recently moved to Washington because her husband loved to climb mountains. Due to leg injuries, doctors referred him to a surgeon in Wisconsin. She shared they were looking for a new church home and had attended four or five rural UM churches, which were very different from the church home they just left...a thousand member congregation in Atlanta GA. We talked about UM connections, the book she was reading, and missing her little boy. We prayed. For those minutes, she wasn't alone while she waited, halfway between two coasts she called home.

No Words Required

As a visiting chaplain, I do not know why a patient is hospitalized. So, when I stepped to the bed of this kind gentleman, I discovered it would be a challenging conversation because his speech had been affected by his illness. When I asked if he would like to have a prayer, I reached my hand forward, offering to take his hand. He reached out with both hands, taking both of my hands into his. He held on tight and closed his eyes. I prayed for him and his healing, I thanked God for the medical team caring for him and I prayed for all those who surrounded him with their compassion and love. When I concluded the prayer and opened my eyes, there were tears rolling down his cheeks. No more words were necessary.

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Dealing a Winning Hand

One afternoon I found a circle of United Methodists from Northern Illinois sitting in the waiting area at UW Hospital. Back home, their congregation was holding an all day prayer vigil at their church. They were holding two patients in their prayers...the donor and the recipient of one kidney. The donor played cards with the recipient's parents. He had watched as his card partners suffered the loss of a daughter a few years earlier. When he heard they had another daughter who needed a kidney, he offered to be tested as a possible donor. The match was perfect. These families all belonged to the same congregation and the church was not letting them go through this alone.

It's a Small, Small World

50 – 60% of the persons visited by the United Methodist Hospitals chaplain do not belong to a UM congregation. Many, though, fondly recall their early years in (usually) a small, rural congregation. That was the situation I experienced when I called on a patient who shared with me about growing up in a small, rural congregation. It was similar to my roots, so we talked about life in a small church. When I went to leave her room, I gave her my card. She looked at the card, she looked at me, she looked at the card and said, "We know each other." We didn't recognize each other. Yes, we grew up in the same country church in northeast Iowa, our families knowing each other for years and years. I sat down and we started the conversation all over again.