

Presence in a Healthcare Setting: Sacred Time, Sacred Space and Sacred Touch
Spiritual Directors International Conference: April 17, 2009
Presenters: Hannah O'Donoghue and Scott Quinn, Seton Cove Educators, Austin, TX

Spiritual Direction with the Seriously III

A. Jewish Attitude Toward Healing

1. Jewish belief is that you are within community and that your sickness is an expression of the sin of family or community.
2. Ecclesiasticus (Sirach 38:9-12)
 - a. Pray for deliverance
 - b. Look within to see where you missed the mark, then repent
 - c. Make an offering
 - d. Finally submit to physician
3. Psalms

B. Jesus as Healer proclaimed the power within the individual for healing. He put into words and gestures what the person was experiencing.

1. After Baptism, Jesus had a new authority in his voice. His words compelled his listeners to change their lives
2. One-fifth of the content of the Gospels is about Jesus' healing ministry
 - a. Jesus healed by word, action, and compassion
 - b. Jesus restored people back to community

C. Jesus as a reflection of the presence of Divine is model for Spiritual Director.

1. Spiritual Direction with the sick is to be a listening presence without looking for results.
2. The curing model of being an authority is opposite the healing model of accompanying

Curing Model

- ◆ Goal—eliminate symptoms
- ◆ Separation of being
- ◆ Whole—sum of parts
- ◆ Basis for model: fear, judgment
- ◆ Practitioner is ultimate authority/healer
- ◆ Practitioner seen only when individual is in a state of symptomatic discomfort
- ◆ Cure is an event
- ◆ Individual in “victim” consciousness

Healing Model

- ◆ Goal—integrate body-mind-spirit
- ◆ Integration of being
- ◆ Whole sum of parts
- ◆ Basis for model: trust
- ◆ Individual is ultimate authority/healer
- ◆ Regular practice of individual insures integration of mind-body-spirit
- ◆ Healing is a process
- ◆ Trust, initiate, encourage

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For a Nurse

Your mind knows the world of illness,
The fright that invades a person
Arriving in out of the world,
Distraught and grieved by illness.
How it can strip a life of its joy,
Dim the light of the heart
Put shock in the eyes.

You see worlds breaking
At the onset of illness:

Families at bedsides distraught
That their mother's name has come up
In the secret lottery of misfortune
That had always chosen someone else.
You watch their helpless love
That would exchange places with her.

The veil of skin opened,
The search through the body's night
To remove tissue, war-torn with cancer.

Young lives that should be out in the sun
Enjoying life with wild hearts,
Come in here lamed by accident
And the lucky ones who leave,
Already old and in captive posture.

The elderly, who should be prepared,
But are frightened and unsure.
You understand no one
Can learn beforehand
An elegant or easy way to die.

In this fragile frontier place, your kindness
Becomes a light that consoles the brokenhearted,
Awakens within desperate storms
The oasis of serenity that calls
The spirit to rise from beneath the weight of pain,
To create a new space in that person's mind
Where they gain distance from their suffering
And begin to see the invitation
To integrate and transform it.

May you embrace the beauty in what you do
And how you stand like a secret angel
Between the bleak despair of illness
And the unquenchable light of spirit
That can turn the darkest destiny towards dawn.

May you never doubt the gifts you bring;

Rather, learn from these frontiers
Wisdom for your own heart.
May you come to inherit
The blessings of your kindness
And never be without care and love
When winter enters your own life.

For a Position

May your work excite your heart,
Kindle in your mind a creativity
To journey beyond the old limits
Of all that has become wearisome

May this work challenge you toward
New frontiers that will emerge
As you begin to approach them,
Calling forth from you the full force
And depth of your undiscovered gifts.

May the work fit the rhythms of your soul,
Enabling you to draw from the invisible
New ideas and a vision that will inspire.

Remember to be kind
To those who work for you,
Endeavor to remain aware
Of the quiet world
That lives behind each face.

Be fair in your expectations,
Compassionate in your criticism,
May you have the grace of encouragement
To awaken the gift in the other's heart,
Building in them confidence
To follow the call of the gift.

May you come to know that work
Which emerges from the mind of love
Will have beauty and form.

May this work be worthy
Of the energy of your heart
And the light of your thought.

May your work assume
A proper space in your life;
Instead of owning or using you,
May it challenge and refine you,
Bringing you every day further
Into the wonder of your heart.

John O'Donoghue in *To Bless the Space Between Us*