

YOUR FAITH LEADERS

Often times the medical team is focused on physical symptoms - such as controlling pain or limiting the progression of an illness. Yet, those with a serious illness, along with their families, can experience emotional and spiritual pain as they face the loss of function or even anticipate the loss of life. Faith leaders can play an integral role in addressing the unmet needs

related to spiritual and emotional pain.

Decisions regarding suffering and end of life are deeply personal and should be reflected in thoughtful conversations with our loved ones as well as the advance directives that follow. We should also consider how our faith influences our personal understanding of suffering and death.



Faith leaders can help us understand how to align our current condition with our faith though this may include a time of questioning our faith. Even in this situation, faith leaders can help support and guide us as we find more solid ground.

"Have you ever lost someone you love and wanted one more conversation, one more chance to make up for the time when you thought they would be here forever? If so, then you know you can go your whole life collecting days, and none will outweigh the one you wish you had back."

—Mitch Albom, *For One More Day*

Learn More:
MyLifeMyChoices.org

THE ROLE OF SPIRITUAL CARE

Spiritual leaders, whether layman or clergy, can serve as navigators and guides early in one's illness. They can provide guidance on how we can still serve and stay connected throughout our illness. Regardless of the limits of one's life, it is important to feel useful and needed.

ADDRESSING PAIN & DOUBT

We may experience spiritual pain or even doubt during life's journey with a chronic condition or serious illness. Often, faith leaders approach this through prayer. If you find that you need more, it is okay to ask for extra help in expressing the depth of pain and/or doubt. Faith leaders are there to help provide clarity and reassurance during the most difficult times.

OTHER AREAS OF SUPPORT

Beyond relationships, both with God and with your loved ones, there are a number of other areas where faith leaders can provide support. These areas include, but are not limited to...

UNDERSTANDING:

taking an inventory or review of our life; helping us to resolve fears of death and/or dying; resolving concerns about suffering; helping us have hope; and helping us recognize the significance and value of our life.

COPING:

helping us have a sense of control over our life; helping us cope with our illness; helping us stay spiritually connected through attendance to religious services; maintaining religious and/or spiritual practices; strengthening our prayer life; bringing greater understanding of our personal faith; providing encouraging and other useful scriptures.

OTHER ACTIVITIES:

helping us have insight into the dying experience; offering comfort; offering intercessory prayer; encouraging others to support us by scheduling meals, providing respite, childcare support or providing rides or companionship to appointments.



Having a good talk(s) with our faith leaders can help us and our loved ones find meaning and peace and promote a sense of connection in the face of suffering. This is an important step in the advance care planning process.

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“Forgive yourself before you die. Then forgive others.” — Mitch Albom, *Tuesdays with Morrie*



THE FOUR THINGS THAT MATTER MOST

Spiritual and emotional pain is often related to those relationships that are broken or fractured and require healing or, at minimum, one final attempt at connection.

In the book *The Four Things That Matter Most: A Book about Living*, the author paves a way toward emotional wellness, connectiveness and potential healing.

Our faith leaders can help support individuals and families in dealing with the unfinished business related to relationships.

The Four Things That Matter Most focuses on life-affirming words. Saying these words alone may not bring healing; however, it may lead to personal emotional wellness. It is also a first step to connectiveness and possible healing.

Those words are...

PLEASE FORGIVE ME

Our lives may be full of fractured relationships in need of mending and forgiveness. Asking our faith leaders for support and guidance in navigating the waters of forgiveness can be a necessary step to spiritual and emotional healing. Sometimes we are the offender in need of forgiveness. This is very different from reconciliation. Reconciliation is focused on restoring a broken relationship. However, it may take some time to restore a relationship where trust has been broken. We may also need help in forgiving ourselves for things done in the past.

I FORGIVE YOU

Once we have addressed our own need for forgiveness, we may need to seek out others who need our forgiveness. Remember, it is possible to forgive without having immediate reconciliation. Again, faith leaders can help guide and counsel us on the appropriate way to do this. Talking face to face may not always be the best solution in some cases; perhaps a letter is more appropriate.

THANK YOU

We often have endearing and enduring relationships, and yet, we sometimes fail to express our appreciation to those who have helped or supported us. A simple ‘thank you’ can help to reestablish a connection that may have been lost or express things that have long gone unsaid. This thankfulness in relationships can be shared via a note or a conversation.

I LOVE YOU

Another part of those endearing relationships is expressions of love. Your faith leader may be able to help you identify those important relationships in which you should express your love and affection. Again, this may be through a face-to-face conversation or through a written note.