

## Chaplain Update on Ash Wednesday, 2018

By Rev. Elizabeth Gibbs Zehnder

Ash Wednesday Thank you!

Rev. Karen Claassen, Bong Bringas, Rev. Rafaat Girgis, Rev. Shin Hwa, Rev. Paula Mann, Rev. Kikanza Nuri, and Rev. Wendy Tajima. They joined a volunteer team that came alongside the chaplains and offered the blessing of an ash cross to over 1000 patients, family members and staff at the medical center.

Lent is my favorite liturgical season and of course it follows that Ash Wednesday has always been an important day, but at LAC+USC Medical Center it takes on heightened significance. This year, as you know, Ash Wednesday fell on Valentines Day, the day of love. People lined up all day long asking for ashes- in the chapel, in the halls, in the pharmacy waiting room, in the elevator...we said the blessing over and over *From dust you come and to dust you shall return, repent and believe the Gospel –Amen.*

When I closed my eyes at the end of that endless day, all I could see were the eyes of those who had sought out the blessing, looking through me so intently for God as I traced the sign of the cross on their forehead...*From dust you come and to dust you shall return...*

The blessing invites us to confront our mortality. Especially in the hospital where so many were already seeking hope and healing, already confronting their mortality in their illness, in their treatment, in their prayers for their loved one's recovery... And in that fragile moment, they sought to align themselves with God.

In that moment, after the cross was formed, as I lifted my thumb from their forehead, and rested my hand on their head and said amen, our eyes would meet and I could see the presence of the one we serve, Jesus the Christ smiling back at me in love.

May you be blessed as we make our way through Lent,  
Rev. Elizabeth Gibbs Zehnder

Chaplaincy at LAC+USC Medical Center is a witness to God's love for all people made possible by your support through Presbyteries of the Pacific, San Gabriel, San Fernando and Los Ranchos and the Synod of Southern California. Your prayers and financial donations are always welcome. To find out how you can be involved, please contact Chaplain Elizabeth Gibbs Zehnder at [Elizabeth.GibbsZehnder@gmail.com](mailto:Elizabeth.GibbsZehnder@gmail.com).