

Chaplaincy Spring Update, May 2022
By Rev. Elizabeth Gibbs Zehnder, Chaplain

As we settle into Eastertide, COVID continues to unwind its grip on Southern California. We still see the impact of the pandemic at LAC+USC Medical Center. It seems that folks are showing up at the hospital with more advanced disease, sometimes too late for successful medical intervention. As always, chaplains accompany patients with active listening, but particularly in these situations, I find myself leaning into deep listening.



Patients tell me about their latest medical update - just saying the words out loud helps them begin metabolizing the difficult news. Sometimes I just listen as they struggle to repeat the words that only exist in the worst kinds of medical conversations - *oc-clud-ed* - *fis-tu-la* - *poorly dif-fer-en-ti-at-ed* ...and then our time together turns to searching for a snitch of hope or meaning or connection. I wonder with them about the ways God is showing up. “God is guiding my doctors” they’ll say. “The nurse is so gentle and kind, she is an answer to my prayer”, “my son’s phone call gets me through the day”.

As the visit unfolds, I can almost see how the screeching flock of distress and overwhelm cease their churning around the room and begin to settle in to where they will perch until the next round of test results or the next wave of pain. As the air clears, almost every patient remembers where their help has come from before. They will tell me stories of God’s answer to their prayers. It could be a wayward child’s return 20 years ago or a miracle of protection and provision, or a rescue from a situation of unbelievable distress.

We’ll often pray together at the end of the visit and give thanks for what God has done, asking for healing and wisdom to navigate the challenges that lay ahead... It goes without saying that these visits are not the end of the journey. In these situations the doctors return again and again with more bewildering updates that rouse the flock of worry and fear from their perch, but each time, when we listen, the experience of God grows and takes hold.

Thank you for your prayers and support!
Elizabeth

Rev. Elizabeth Gibbs Zehnder serves as Presbyterian staff chaplain at LAC+USC Medical Center. Chaplaincy at LAC+USC is a witness to God’s love for all people made possible by your support through the Presbyteries of the Pacific, San Gabriel (special thanks to San Marino Community Church), 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 .