



Sacred Stories

As CommonSpirit Health, we make the healing presence of God known in our world by improving the health of the people we serve, especially those who are vulnerable, while we advance social justice for all.

Sacred Stories convey ways our mission is being lived out by the gifted people in our ministry. We invite you to use these stories for inspiration, as a meeting reflection, or to encourage discussion with your team.

Restoring the Soul

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“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.” – 1 Thessalonians 4:13

TEXT

I first met this patient when I was the primary care physician for his aging mother; then, I became his family physician. He had a complex medical history many of which impacted his daily living. Still, he worked in mining until complications from his many health concerns, stole his stamina. With less than five years until retirement, he continued to work hard to maintain his independence, even as his health concerns mounted.

One afternoon as I worked with my clinic patients, my medical assistant knocked on my door, which only happens in an emergency. She said the patient was down on the sidewalk. It was clear that this man was very ill; we called for an ambulance. Later that evening, the emergency room physician called to inform me that he was critically ill.

The next day, he was stable but still very ill. He apologized for not coming to the clinic sooner; he had been feeling bad for a week or two, but had hoped his illness would pass. In fact, he had come to the clinic only to pick up a prescription.

Later that evening, his condition grew worse, and by early morning a scan revealed severe problems. Our talented general surgeon met me at the door to his room with a grim prognosis. The patient was a high risk for surgery, but was likely not to survive without it. We discussed the risks and benefits with him; “I want to live,” he said.

Our chief of anesthesia arrived, the operating room team was ready; the patient prepared to go to surgery. His nurse consulted with her manager, asking what else she could do.

SACRED STORY

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Her manager suggested a prayer. The nurse promptly returned to his bedside and asked if she could pray with him. He teared up, said yes, and professed his faith in Christ: something he had put off his entire life, but he realized he might not have another chance.

Later that morning, the surgeon called with startling news. Aside from prior pathology and scarring, the patient was fine.

That evening, I returned to the ICU to check on him; he remained sedated. One of his daughters and his sister were at his bedside. As I answered their questions, and shared that his prognosis was still guarded, I mentioned his pre-op prayer with his

nurse. His sister cried, saying that God had brought him to my clinic sidewalk to save him, whether or not he could be healed physically.

During the next week, he improved slowly, expressing gratitude toward his nurse and all of our staff. He seemed at peace. At the end of the week, his condition worsened, and this time he did not survive.

I thought of 1 Thessalonians 4:13: “So you will not grieve like others do who have no hope.” Sometimes our work has little to do with repairing and restoring the physical bodies of patients and everything to do with helping them restore their souls.

Submitted by

Shelley Bundy Stanko, MD

SACRED STORY
CONTINUED

How do you show empathy and kindness to your patients and colleagues?

When was the last time you were blessed for doing good?

QUESTIONS FOR
REFLECTION