CommonSpirit

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.

Compassion Inclusion Integrity Excellence Collaboration

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.

Uncle Jim

TEXT

"Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing to his name, for he is gracious."
— Psalm 135:3 NRSV

SACRED STORY

As a hospital chaplain, I had worked for years with a registered nurse who I'll refer to as Mandy, who was a very comforting presence to her patients in the medical/surgical unit. I also knew her from church, where her beautiful voice would ripple out to the congregation, sending peace to everyone who heard her. I didn't know that one day I would understand the roots of her talent, and the reasons why it was expressed in such ethereal music.

One day, Mandy's father, whom we all called "Uncle Jim," was brought to the hospital. Uncle Jim was dying. He was in bed and would never get out of bed again.

At the hospital, Jim's large brood of sons and daughters surrounded him. Each came to make his or her peace and say goodbye. The children had grown up in a musical family; Jim taught each one to sing and play instruments. They were used to making beautiful music together.

When Jim saw his daughters crying, he gave them a gentle push in a different direction. "Don't cry when I die," he said. "Sing!" And sing they did, their father singing with them before he passed. It sounded like a choir of angels had gathered on the medical/surgical floor. They were sorrowful, but they were joyful, too.

Continued on next page...

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Continued from previous page...

Uncle Jim

SACRED STORY CONTINUED

Staff members closed the door to Uncle Jim's room so other patients wouldn't be disturbed, but many patients and staff members sang right along with Jim and his family.

I know that when a child loses his father, it's a sorrowful time. It was such a comfort to see Jim's children helping him make his journey. He was ready to go; he was just waiting for God to be ready for him. In the meantime, he wanted his children to sing.

In the end, when Jim died, the nurses formed an honor guard and sang "How Great Thou Art" as they wheeled his body down the hall. Many staff members wanted to share in this ritual, and many patients sang right along. Jim and his children had provided patients and staff alike with a truly uplifting experience. As long as I live, I will never forget this prayerful, musical family and the gift they gave to Jim, our patients, our staff and me.

From the Sacred Stories Archive

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

How can we use our gifts and talents to help ourselves and others through difficult situations?

Reflect on a time when you were both sorrowful and joyful. What helped you see joy in the sadness?