

COVENANT

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MAY
10
2018

Annual Benefit Dinner

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Province Co-Leader

Sisters of St. Ann,
Pacific Northwest

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An Exercise in Hope

By Greta DeLonghi, MA, DSD, Spiritual Director



A palliative patient in a hospital taught me something about hope. And I came to see how an ancient spiritual practice might help engender it.

The patient was 93 years old. He had no faith background, his wife was unable to visit, his only child living overseas and disabled. During my first visits, he cried out repeatedly, "I'm lost. I'm alone. What have I got to live for?" I felt powerless to help. I reached out to my supervisor, who suggested I try some life review. On my next visit, I asked the patient about his proudest moment. He told me about his four years as a tank driver during the Second World War. "Hot in the summer, freezing in the winter." We talked about his endurance and courage in such trying and often lonely conditions. Through that memory, he found some meaning, consolation and hope that he would get through this trying and lonely time, too.

Reflecting on that experience, I came to see how looking back can help us look forward in hope. And by hope, I mean actively engaging in the promise of new life. As a spiritual director with a particular interest in Ignatian spirituality, I have practiced - and suggested directees practice - the daily awareness examen that St. Ignatius included in his Spiritual Exercises some 500 years ago. The examen is a practice of prayerful reflection on the events of the day in order to detect God's presence and discern his direction for us. It can help us to see God's hand at work in our whole experience. (www.ignatianspirituality.com). I think the awareness examen also exercises the muscle for hope.

I myself was slow to understand the power of the examen, even after I discovered the richness of contemplative prayer with the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. My prayer life seemed crammed with grace - my daily life, not so much. So, I began engaging in the examen with more intention. The practice helped me to look back on my days with more gratitude and trust and less judgement and to have a felt sense of God's presence in the ordinary moments of my life. I grew to see the colour and richness of my daily life.

The practice itself is not complicated. A helpful book is *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* by Dennis Linn, Matthew Linn and Sheila Fabricant Linn. As the Linns describe the practice, you begin by coming into God's presence. Ask for God's light to help in reviewing the day and bringing to your heart the moment(s) you were most grateful for. If you could relive one moment what would it be? Ask yourself what was said and done in that moment that made it so special. Breathe in the gratitude and receive again from that moment.

Now ask God to bring to your heart the moment(s) you were least grateful for. What made it so difficult? Be with whatever you feel without judging or trying to fix it. And ask God for help. I think the part of the power in looking at these moments is

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in attending to rather than suppressing or pushing away the uncomfortable. It also helps cultivate a more transparent relationship with God.

As a spiritual director once suggested to me, I suggest to directees that they ask for a grace in the morning and then at the end of the day and look for when they received it. One directee with addiction issues reported that even on those days when he struggled, he could see moments when he received that grace. It helped him to avoid black-and-white or all-or-nothing thinking about his days. He said he felt more hopeful.

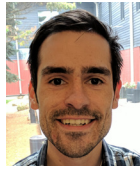
Looking back to look forward may sound counter-intuitive, but it finds resonance with post-modern psychotherapeutic approaches, such as narrative therapy and solution-focused brief therapy, each of which has a question or conversation dedicated to looking back at a time when the problem was not a problem and using those experiences as touchstones for recovery.

In Sleeping with Bread, the authors tell the story of children who were orphaned and left to starve during the bombing raids of the Second World War. The fortunate ones were rescued and placed in refugee camps where they received food and good care. But many of these children had lost so much that they could not sleep at night. They feared waking up and once again finding themselves homeless and without food. Nothing seemed to reassure them. Finally, someone hit on the idea of giving each child a piece of bread to hold at bedtime. Holding their bread, these children could finally sleep in peace. All through the night, the bread reminded them, 'Today I ate and I will eat again tomorrow.'

The daily awareness examen helps provide that bread for the future, one day at a time. ■

Having and Holding Onto Hope

By Derick Valadao, Ph.D. Psychologist
(Supervised Practice)



Anybody who struggles with mental illness is likely to experience some significant change in terms of how they function at home, at work, socially, or with family. These are often aspects of our lives that we cherish and value deeply, which can make it all the more demoralizing when we notice the disruption and impact these difficulties have on our lives. That is why one of the biggest challenges to maintaining wellness and resilience in treatment and recovery is a lack of hope that things can get better again.

One of the key tasks to instilling hope is to recognize, first and foremost, that individuals are not defined solely by the challenges or difficulties that face them. Sometimes they get caught in this trap by just looking at the words they use. For example, there is a big difference between saying "I am an anxious person" and "I get anxious in certain situations." Each and every one is both endowed with, and has the ability to develop talents, skills, and experiences over the course of their lives. These skills and abilities help to solve problems and face challenges, which can help to form a sense of self-esteem and confidence.

Part of establishing hope is to recognize that it is these skills and abilities that define people, not the problems or difficulties they face. Reflect back on your own experience; how have you managed to overcome significant challenges in the past? What does that success say about your ability to think creatively, solve problems, and make use of the supports you have in your life? It is also important to recognize that these abilities and experiences can help to face future challenges.

By focusing on what individuals are good at, and what they have shown themselves to be capable of in the past, they can begin to believe in their ability to solve new problems. They can begin to see themselves as having control over their lives and the goals they want to achieve. Once individuals can acknowledge the control they have over challenging situations ("I can do this!"), they can begin to ask the all-important question of "how do I get there?" Consider for a moment that by even beginning to honestly ask yourselves "how," you take an important step away from seeing the problem as an impossible one to solve. This is because of a significant change in the thought process, which allows people to focus on pathways to change that they have control over, rather than on barriers that they don't control or can make a problem feel impossible to solve.

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This is why instilling hope is a key step to success in early treatment. By using the supports and treatment resources available, the residents can begin to learn new ways of coping, try new activities, take new risks, and learn from all of it. A therapist may be helpful in orienting them to what would be helpful to change, what tasks might accomplish this, and support them along this journey. However, success will likely depend on the belief that these tasks are within their abilities and that their efforts are likely to bring about the desired change.

While hope is critical to help residents set and pursue goals in treatment, resilience is their capacity to retain hope, courage, and motivation in the face of adversity. This is an important component of long-term well-being, no matter where they are in their stage of life or recovery. Life can challenge individuals through loss, heartbreak, failure, and setbacks, and it is how they respond to these challenges that help shape how well they will be able to continue meeting their goals.

One important factor to safeguarding resiliency is to notice how and when one is being challenged by situations, particularly when they find themselves slipping back into old and/or unhelpful ways of coping. These red flags will likely be different for everybody, but it will be important for residents to identify theirs and keep a look out for them. For some, this may mean falling back into

Part of establishing hope is to recognize that it is these skills and abilities that define people, not the problems or difficulties they face.

old patterns of avoiding anxiety-provoking situations. For others, it may mean losing interest in particular social or leisure activities. Whatever these look like to them, it may be helpful to keep those written down somewhere, or share those with a trusted support person. That way, even though not everyone may be aware that circumstances have begun to challenge them once again, they are more likely to notice that they are reacting to them in unhelpful ways. This can serve as a reminder to check-in with friends and family for support, think creatively to solve a persistent problem, or consider reaching out for more help.

There are some practical steps that people can take to improve their resilience every day. Attending to self-care by eating healthy, getting enough exercise, and sleeping well can provide the energy and composure needed to handle daily stressors. Having and maintaining a healthy social support network of family and friends can help ease the burden by sharing it and receiving support from others. Even if others may not be able to help solve the problem itself, they may help serve as a reminder of the qualities and abilities the person already has that can help. Finally, taking opportunities to develop and learn new skills can help improve confidence and reinforce the belief that a person can tackle new challenges. ■

FROM MY DESK TO YOURS:

My time at Southdown was a passageway through darkness back into the light. The caring staff who walked with me enabled me to see hope and believe that I was lovable and had worth as a human being.

- alumnus



The excitement and hope of the 2018 Winter Olympics is now part of our memories. We watched “from the edge of our seats” as athletes from around the world put their heart and soul into each event. They came to the Olympics with hopes and dreams—some for gold and some just to be a part of a great experience.

Hope is one of the most important mental health traits we can hold in life. It reduces feelings of helplessness, boosts happiness, reduces stress, and improves our quality of life. The opening quote from an alumnus speaks to the motivating factor of hope in the Southdown program—to look on the future positively, and to see opportunity in challenges; in other words, to “look on the bright side of life.” In their articles, Greta and Derick address many ways we live and model hope.

So many times in our lives, we have reason to reflect on hope. Whether we are ministering with others who are struggling to hold hope or addressing our own disillusionment, hope provides that spark or zest to see the potential in what is occurring at the moment. This does not imply denial, but rather the ability to see gift. We know growth comes with change and challenge, and we rely on hope as the foundation for seeing that growth, that gift.

The theme of hope will be continued at our Annual Benefit Dinner on May 10, 2018 with our speaker, Sister Marie Zarowny, SSA. Your support in sharing our desire for Healthy Ministers for a Healthy Church strengthens our Mission and fosters hope for all who seek our assistance.

I look forward to seeing you at our dinner on the 10th of May. If you are unable to attend, please remember us in your prayers.

Have a blessed Easter Season.

Dorothy Heiderscheit, OSF, MSW, ACSW, RSW
CEO, Southdown

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Covenant is produced and published by The Southdown Institute. Its purpose is to inform and educate the readership about clinical issues that surface in our work and to invite integration of the emotional and spiritual aspects of our lives.



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