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The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month
by Alicia Kirkpatrick-Bremer



Wholeness

When I was pregnant with my first child, I read every book I could get my hands on to increase my understanding and knowledge of what it meant for me to grow life within me. I attended classes on birthing, nutrition and well-baby care.

Right away there was this intense awareness that I carried a life with me everywhere; a life nourished by everything I took into my being, a life that lived by every breath the world had to offer. The earth suddenly got smaller.

During my pregnancy, events on the other side of the planet seemed as if they were happening in my backyard. U.S. troops were ordered to Panama. A gunman opened fire at a California schoolyard, killing and wounding children. Exxon Valdes ran aground in Alaska. Thousands of students protested in Tiananmen Square.

My pregnancy became informed and affected by our shared existence. Our fractured world felt a heartbeat away. I had longed for a whole world, but now my blood pulsed with intensity for its reality.

Before long, there was no hiding it. The life grew in me so all could see. As I walked across seminary campus, others were visually aware that I was pregnant. During this time of gestation I came across an unfamiliar term, "parish nurse." Growing up in the Sandy-Creek tradition of Baptists, I was just becoming comfortable with the synonym for church, "parish." But to turn parish into an adjective for nurse was firing untapped neurons.

I soon discovered that a parish nurse is a registered nurse who focuses on promoting health within a faith community and the community it serves. Set within the context of church, health began to have a broader meaning than physical well-being. As I prepared for church ministry, another life, of sorts, was growing within me.

When I reflected on my church attendance as a child, I realized how important the offering envelope was to me. On the outside of the envelope a checklist was offered to note daily Bible reading, bringing a Bible to church, attendance, inviting someone and giving. It was an attempt to measure and encourage discipleship. On most Sundays I liked the checkboxes as a way of keeping up with my faithfulness to God.

When I began my ministry in the church, I became aware that something was missing on the offering-envelope checklist. I knew those who checked the tithe box, but obviously ate more than their share of food. I encountered a woman who could check perfect attendance, but had a difficult time loving herself and others. Another brought his Bible to church, but had trouble with pornography. I too was able to check off most of the boxes, but this didn't necessarily reflect my all. The small, separated checkboxes lacked a "wholeness" of being faithful to God.

Christianity holds within its understanding that the presence of God dwells within us. Jesus said, "You in me, and I in you" (John 14:20b). If you will allow me the comparison, as Christians, we are all pregnant with the presence of God. Therefore, should we be any less concerned about our minds, bodies, soul, strength and neighbors than an expectant mother? Awareness and intent of our well-being, and that of others, is vital to the life of Christ known today.

After a decade of church ministry I read that our local hospital was offering grants for a parish nurse program to congregations in the community. The bells went off! After several phone calls, letters and interviews, my church reached a formal agreement with the hospital. A registered nurse in our church felt the call to respond. The hospital arranges for our parish nurse to leave work early for our church's midweek service. We share a meal, pray for the world, study scripture and have

our blood pressure checked.

What I appreciate most is that our parish nurse's presence intentionally keeps before us the entire person — body, mind, spirit, emotions, relationships, environment. Through this ministry we are reminded of our need to offer our whole lives to the Life we proclaim lives within us. Together our church is discovering wellness is more than the absence of illness. Together we are seeking well-being for all.

Not every church will have the opportunity to offer the ministry of a parish nurse. Encouraging wholeness can happen through other means. I recommend beginning with Howard Clinebell's *Anchoring Your Well Being: Christian Wholeness in a Fractured World* (Upper Room, 1997). In this workbook, Clinebell suggests there are seven dimensions of life:

1. spiritual well-being
2. mental well-being
3. physical well-being
4. relational well-being
5. work and play well-being
6. crisis and loss well-being
7. environmental well-being

Those of us who like a checklist will love this resource. Each chapter includes a thought-provoking and thorough checklist, biblical perspective, objective and themes, awareness exercise, practical examples and helps. The book can be used alone or, as recommended, with other resources.

As a people of faith, we are called to live fully into our faith with our whole beings, integrating spiritual, physical, psychological and social aspects of who we are as a people of faith, desiring peace, healing and wholeness for ourselves, others, the environment and the world. May we, with the passion of a mother-to-be, seek to nurture and grow healthy ways to bear and birth our family name — "Christian." **BT**

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