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September 5, 2003

Posted: 9/5/03

Offering puts agent of blessing in hospital

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BEAUMONT—A hopeful “agent of blessing” walks in the shadow of death, and he comes back for more each day.

People die every day at hospitals, and Memorial Hermann Baptist Hospitals are no different. About 400 people die annually at the Beaumont facilities, where David Cross serves as chaplaincy director. He witnesses the last moments in many of those people's lives and helps the families in any manner he can.

The work is not all about stereotypically bringing divine understanding and hope to the situation, Cross said. Getting a family member to understand God continues to work may be improbable, especially when the loss is unexpected.

“The cliché is that you hope that God is glorified and they find God is sufficient,” he said. “The reality is sometimes people are angry.”

On one occasion, a woman cursed out Cross shortly after a relative died and screamed that she didn't need him or God. Cross nodded, helped her as much as he could and went about his day.

The woman later apologized for her harshness and now visits him every time she comes to the hospital. She requests that he see every friend or relative she knows receiving treatment in the facility.

People need an avenue to express the heavy emotions they deal with immediately after a death, Cross has found. As a chaplain, he provides that sounding board.

“Sometimes the best thing is to be a visible representation of the God they are so mad at, so they can verbalize those feelings,” he explained.

In other situations, friends and family members are relieved when someone dies after a long battle with a painful condition, the chaplain noted.

No matter what the family is feeling, Cross attempts to step inside their shoes to the point that his “emotional presence would be riddled with that same feeling.”

The skill of knowing what a family is feeling and empathizing with them is what Cross tries to instill in his students in Hands-On Ministry classes, a volunteer chaplain training program funded by the Mary Hill Davis Offering for Texas missions.

The offering also funds opportunities for vocational chaplains and pastoral counselors to fellowship, network and obtain continuing education through the Baptist General Convention of Texas chaplaincy relations office.

Cross teaches volunteers to see the subtle changes that indicate how people are feeling, such as slight facial movements or voice inflections. People can sense when chaplains authentically care, and sincere compassion makes all the difference, he said.

Cross works to be an “agent of blessing,” wanting to see God work each time he walks in the room, he said. At the end of each visit, he would like to

say his work pleased God and helped others.

“I hope that people would look back and say, 'He really cared,'” Cross explained. “And I hope that looking back on it I would say I pleased God with how I attended to people.

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