

Patrice Al-Shatti Health Ministries Articles – All Saints' Health Ministries Cares for You

August 4, 2016 The Safe Use of Pain Medication

Congress recently passed the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA) of 2016 and policy experts hope that CARA will help address the epidemic of opioid drug abuse in the United States. It's primary focus is prescription pain medicines and illegal drugs such as heroin and methamphetamine.

Opioid pain medications include hydrocodone (Vicodin), oxycodone (OxyContin and Percocet), and morphine. The National Institute on Drug Abuse reports that the number of prescriptions for opioids has escalated from around 76 million in 1991 to nearly 207 million in 2013, with the United States their biggest consumer globally. Related to this, the US is seeing an uptick in ER visits involving nonmedical use of opioid, treatment admissions for abuse of opiates other than heroin, and overdose deaths.

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/about-nida/legislative-activities/testimony-to-congress/2016/americas-addiction-to-opioids-heroin-prescription-drug-abuse>

On the other hand, these drugs improve quality of life for thousands of patients and patient advocacy organizations encourage legislators and healthcare providers to use a balanced approach, meeting the needs of patients while discouraging inappropriate use. After years of working with people in pain, I'd encourage the following approach.

First, don't be afraid of pain medications if you or a loved one needs them. Untreated pain is psychologically and physically debilitating, harms quality of life, and can impact the overall outcome of a health condition. If you experience unacceptable side effects, discuss this with your doctor. I've personally seen more problems due to undertreatment of pain than overtreatment and addiction is a psychological, as well as physical, phenomenon and doesn't generally come out of nowhere.

Second, realize that opioid pain medications in your home can be misused and sold. Keep them secured. If you suspect inappropriate use, do a pill count. The number in the bottle should be the number ordered minus the number taken since the bottle entered your home. Sometimes, if a patient has a memory problem, using a plastic mediset container prevents accidental under/over doses. If you end up with pills you don't need, dispose of them by mixing the loose pills with dirt, kitty litter, or coffee grounds, putting them in a sealed bag, and throwing this in your trash can. Don't dump in a sink or toilet.

Third, most of these medicines require a gradually tapering when you're ready to quit. Don't just stop taking them. Discuss this with your physician. Finally, if you face complex pain that isn't being resolved, consider seeing a pain management specialist. For yourself or a loved one, a balanced approach to pain management may be best.

July 21, 2016 Helping Kids Cope with World Events

For a while now, it's been extremely difficult to absorb world events, and a form of generalized anxiety is out there. "Can you believe there was another terrorist attack?" "Why all the confrontations?" "Why all the shootings?" "What's going on in politics?"

But what about our children? What are they making of all this? Parenting is always a huge responsibility, but how should we explain events of recent days to our children, when our media is blind and spills the same terrible stories, regardless of the ears that are listening? Our kids are hearing it. But how can they understand when we can't do that ourselves?

Luckily, there's good advice out there. The American Psychological Association suggests that we think about what we want to say before we say it and look for a quiet moment to talk. We should find out what they know first, before telling the whole story. Ask "What have you heard about this?" and then just listen. Lay out the facts at a level they can understand and go ahead and share your feelings. It can be a good time to weave in our faith perspective, knowing that God is still all knowing and all loving.

There are also age specific recommendations. You'll find an example at <https://www.common sense media.org/blog/explaining-the-news-to-our-kids#>.

For kids under age 7, limit video news exposure as the images can be frightening, and stress your protective role. Distraction and physical comforting are helpful if a young child is upset by something they see on television.

For kids 8-12 carefully consider their age and temperament. Be available for conversations about moral implications, as kids are developing standards at this time and tend to see in black and white. Talk about, and filter, news coverage and be aware of their internet usage.

For older kids, check in with them. They will be absorbing media separately from you and may be accessing sources you aren't familiar with. Converse with them openly and you'll get a sense of their developing views. You may also have a chance to share your insights.

And please take care of yourself, too. Take social action when it's available, and you are inspired, but remember that our sphere of concern is usually much wider than our sphere of influence, and that prayer is sometimes our most powerful response.

July 6, 2016 Everyday Creativity

Please excuse my absence from this column. I had the privilege and joy to spend June studying art in Italy. When I chat with people about my creative endeavors they generally say something like, "Wow, I'm just not artistic." God made us all artistic, however, in that we all are creators. Our educations didn't necessarily give us the tools to excel in creative activities, but we all have creative capacities, aspirations, longings, and talents. As Elizabeth Gilbert, author of *Big Magic, Creative Living Beyond Fear*, said, "Surely something wonderful is sheltered inside you."

At its heart, creativity is just the activity of transcending what exists, to make something new. It's just that many of us fail to nurture our inner innovator. Be willing to hunt for your special passions and talents, an activity that takes courage. You have to calm the voices that say you aren't talented, don't have time, that it's silly, that you'll look foolish, etc.

You can nurture creativity in everyday life simply by bringing an innovator's spirit to the normal things you do. When you face a problem, approach it with curiosity and persistence. Engage in playful experimentation and have a willingness to make mistakes. Look for unsolved dilemmas in your environment to address. "We spend so much mental energy either avoiding or unproductively mulling over problems that the idea of chasing and embracing them seems strange, and yet it is a hallmark of the creative orientation to life." notes Carlin Fiora in her article for the American Psychological Association's website, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200911/everyday-creativity>.

Outside of daily life, God has also given you special creative gifts, perhaps last used in childhood. As we head through the hot, slow months of summer, vow to spend a little time exploring what they may be. When we live creatively, we operate from internal motivators rather than from outside pressures. We also acknowledge God's blessings in our life when we seek to truly find out what He put inside us. As Elizabeth Gilbert notes, "Do whatever brings you to life then. Follow your own fascinations, obsessions and compulsions. Trust them. Create whatever causes a revolution in your heart."

Resources:

Big Magic, Creative Living Beyond Fear by Elizabeth Gilbert

Your Personal Renaissance by Diane Dreher

How to Think Like Leonardo Da Vinci by Michael Gelb

May 26, 2016 Disability and Employment

If you are employed, it's possible that Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) will someday be important to you because every day people are diagnosed with illnesses that can affect job performance. The ADA provides workplace protections for people with temporary or permanent disabilities, protects employees from discrimination, and ensures that they receive modifications in their work environment so they can perform well. The ADA isn't just for people with permanent disabilities like those in wheelchairs. People receiving treatment for an illness, or recovering from an illness, injury, or accident may also qualify.

We are covered when we have a physical or mental disability that substantially limits us in a major life area like walking, standing, concentrating, remembering, speaking, or operating major bodily functions. For instance, the person who has to use a restroom hourly because of bladder surgery or the person who can't stand for hours because of nerve pain in the feet.

When you have this type of disability you may qualify for "reasonable accommodation". If you discuss your disability with your employer, and explain the things you're having trouble doing, your employer should work with you to find ways around these problems, like modifying your work schedule or work space, letting you telecommute for a while, or changing your job duties slightly.

The ADA also protects your right to get and keep a job, the same as if you were fully healthy. You can't be discriminated against during recruitment, can't receive less in pay or benefits, and can't be limited from promotions. And during the interviewing process, employers are generally not allowed to ask you about your health history unless a specific task in the job description requires a capability you may not have, or ask about health related gaps in your work history. Your employer must know about your medical treatment or disability in order for you to receive reasonable accommodation, however, and it's helpful to get advice before you hunt for a job after a bout of illness. If you get good advice, and work smart, your job can be an important source of both normalcy and support during the stress of medical challenges.

Resources:

Find out if someone has a disability under the ADA: <http://askjan.org/corner/vol05iss04.htm>

You can receive live phone support about the ADA and your options at work during times of medical crisis by calling the Job Accommodation Network at 800 526-7234.

May 11, 2016 Thinking about CPR in the Hospital

Most of us think of people coming back from the brink of death when we think of CPR, but the reality can be quite different. In the hospital, chest compressions and breathing assistance is only the start. When someone is a “full code”, and their heart stops, they may get electric shocks, strong IV medications, a breathing tube inserted, or even direct massage of the heart after the chest has been opened. Despite all those difficult procedures, the overall success rate of CPR in the hospital is a meager 15%. These are people who survive the experience to be discharged from the hospital. Among patients with advanced cancer, recent stroke, dementia, or several other serious health problems, the success rate is 0-3%. Among people who are in the hospital for a heart attack, 25-50% survive CPR if they go into a serious, abnormal heart rhythm, and they are the lucky bunch.

Why is there this disconnect between our understanding and the real deal? One theory is the media. One interesting study evaluated medically themed television programs and found that 75% of the time, patients survived the immediate arrest and 67% seemed to survive to hospital discharge. An interesting factoid related to the real effectiveness of CPR in the hospital is a study of physicians, the Johns Hopkins Precursors Study. More than 90% of them would not want CPR if they had irreversible brain damage from an accident or injury. 80% or more also wouldn't want to be on a ventilator, or have dialysis, surgery, or a feeding tube.

Every time we go into the hospital we are given a code status and the default, unless we change it, is “full code”, meaning “do everything”. It's good to do a little research and understand what that means because our quality of life can be at risk. One study noted that at least 44% of CPR survivors had a significant functional decline at time of discharge. So code status, and CPR, are important discussions to have with family members and physicians prior to a hospitalization. Famous physician Atul Gawande puts it this way, “Sometimes we can offer a cure, sometimes only a salve, sometimes not even that. But whatever we can offer, our interventions, and the risks and sacrifices they entail, are justified only if they serve the larger aims of the person's life.”

April 27, 2016 Pet Loss Grief

An acquaintance of mine just lost her beloved Maltese to old age. Tipper was 17, just about a record for the breed, and had been her companion through the early years of retirement. She had doted on the dog and I worried about her being alone. Recently she told me that grief had driven her to a pet loss support group, and I applauded her willingness to get help.

Pet loss grief is a very real form of pain that may not be adequately acknowledged by those around us. The American Psychological Association explains that these feelings are especially painful because we are mourning the loss of unconditional love. The relationship is simple. Our pet loves us. No matter how we behave. And having a pet can feel like being a parent. We expend a lot of energy and resources to provide the best caregiving we can. So losing a pet can feel like losing a child. Our pet is also our "life witness." We tell them our thoughts and share our reactions to life in a way we never do with people. So pets provide a stabilizing presence in times of distress. Lastly, there are so many roles and routines to grieve with the loss of a pet. We don't get out for those walks, so we don't have daily chats with our neighbors and we have no reason to get up early because no one is at our bed, asking to be fed.

The grief can be especially complex if we have feelings of guilt about our caregiving, were forced to euthanize, or lost the animal due to a perceived oversight— a door left open, a delayed trip to the vet. So if you or a loved one are grieving the loss of a furry or feathered friend, be accepting of your feelings and seek support. Hospice of the Valley hosts a pet loss support group the first Saturday of every month. Find out more by calling 602 530-6970. Create a scrapbook about your pet's life, plant a tree in his name, write a little biography, or find some other way to keep your memories alive. Engage in meaningful rituals and dispose of your pet's possessions gradually, keeping those that are most meaningful. Loving someone means that someday we will have to let them go, but letting go of our beloved pets can be a little easier if we accept our feelings and share them.

April 13, 2016 A Family Member's Perspective on Heart Disease

Angela Tolleson, founder of the website ForFamilyHealth.net, is our guest Health Ministries columnist this week. Check her site for family-focused wellness information.

When my brother was diagnosed with heart disease, the doctor told him to make some serious life changes. It was scary to learn that his health was at risk — would he still be able to play with his kids? Would he have to give up eating all his favorite foods? Quit the company softball league he helped form? For a man as stubborn as my big brother, I worried he wouldn't be willing to make the necessary changes to get his health back on track. Luckily, the adjustments came easier than we expected, and it turns out that his condition is a lot more common than we realized. Nearly 12% of Americans have heart disease.

Heart problems are our body's way of letting us know that things need to change. Here are a few changes you should consider making if you want to live well and keep your heart happy.

1. Eat Heart-Healthy Foods

Your body [thrives on superfoods](#) like nuts, grains, fatty fish, and leafy greens. Eating well doesn't have to be boring; all it takes is a willingness to try new things! Find a handful of healthy recipes you love and stick to them. Because poor eating habits are often attributed to lack of time or planning, make your meals ahead of time.

2. Ease Into Exercise

Heart disease isn't an excuse for inactivity; in fact it's crucial to build exercise into your routine. Ease into exercise by opting for low-intensity workouts like walking or using the elliptical. Swimming—known for its many [health benefits](#) and therapeutic effects—is another exercise strategy.

3. Manage Stress

When you're chronically stressed, your blood pressure goes up and stress hormones rest at abnormally high levels. Stress plays a huge role in heart disease, which is why you should build healthy stress-relieving habits into your routine now if you want to look after your heart health.

4. Educate Yourself

You probably already knew that smoking and excessive drinking isn't recommended for people with heart disease. But did you know that some prescription drugs have been linked to heart problems as well? Knowledge will prove to be the greatest tool in your kit. Learn as much as you can and you'll be prepared for any signs or symptoms that might come your way.

As my brother learned, living with heart disease doesn't have to be an uphill battle. Make gradual changes and build new habits and your heart will be thanking you for years to come.

April 6, 2016 Preparing for Caregiving

One in every two American men will develop cancer in his lifetime, one of every three American women. Twenty-five percent of us will develop serious heart disease and 795,000 will have a stroke. These stats aren't meant to depress you, but rather to remind you that behind these people, more often than not, is a caregiver. We are all vulnerable to being called into caregiving because serious illness comes with our mortality, and we do what we must for those we love. 44 million Americans currently provide 37 billion hours of support and with 10,000 Baby Boomers a day turning 65, and most serious illness presenting itself later in life, experts expect those numbers to grow. And caregiving in the US involves more than cooking meals and making beds these days. Because hospitals discharge patients at the earliest opportunity, and medical care is so advanced, 60% of families must manage complex tasks such as wound care, injections, and tube feelings and 40% of the time they don't have adequate training for these tasks.

Here at All Saints', we are thinking about caregiving these days, and know that many of you struggle with the joys and strains of this job. This coming Sunday, please put the 10am education hour on your schedule. We will have a local expert share strategies for managing the challenges of caregiving in our complex healthcare environment. Samantha Williamson is a palliative care social worker at the Mayo Clinic and will share the training she provides to families at her institution.

I spoke last Sunday about resources and strategies for caregiving in life's more common scenarios, an aging parent or spouse, for instance. That presentation is stored on the Health Ministries page of our website, <http://www.allsaints-phoenix.org/index.php/ministries/health-ministries/>, along with all my past columns, and is available for downloading or sharing. If you're a caregiver now, these resources may provide essential direction as you try to build a life that includes this absorbing role. If you aren't currently called to duty, these presentations may get you thinking about your own family, and what caregiving could look like, should a medical challenge arise. Times of medical crisis, or declining health, strain the resources of every family, but many times, also seem to bring out our best. Be prepared. Be informed. So that when the time comes, you and your loved ones are ready.

March 16, 2016 Make it a Habit

Did you give up sweets? Or alcohol? Vow to exercise more? Read the Bible daily? It's the fifth week of Lent and we've been at our Lenten disciplines for a while. Personally, I went vegetarian and am finding that however you fix it, tofu is pretty much tofu. Very white. The good news in these days of sacrifice is that technically, we've changed our daily activities long enough to create habits, habits that could be long lasting should we choose.

As we move into Palm Sunday, consider taking advantage of the fact that you're used to doing something in a way that's healthier; physically, emotionally or spiritually. Without the external motivation of Lent, however, what can keep us going? Some people benefit from habit tracking and there are many good habit-tracking apps for your phone or computer, or you can set goals for daily behaviors in a simple chart where you list activities and check them off when you do them. We also thrive on external accountability, the power of the group. We are able to maintain our Lenten behavior changes partly because we know many people are doing the same. Find an exercise or diet partner, a prayer buddy, or join a study group. If you and a loved one have shared a Lenten discipline, perhaps you can maintain the practice together.

In any case, you chose the discipline that you did because you heard God's whisper in this area of your life. That means He is gently calling you toward behavior change. Why stop now? Do you feel more centered? Healthier? You don't need to go back to eating donuts or vegging in front of the TV just because we're past Easter. Many times in the Gospels after Jesus healed someone, he told them to "Go in peace, your faith has made you well." He desires our wellness, and the path to it is through our faith. Give thought to the end of Lent in the same way you did to it's beginning, and I challenge you to keep up just one small Lenten practice during Eastertide, to see if you actually like it as a lifestyle. I know that I'll have meatless meals frequently moving forward. They're healthy, are easier on the Earth and my grocery budget, kinder to the animals, and, luckily, don't need to include the white stuff.

March 2, 2016 From Doing To Being

The other day I was having lunch with a friend, bemoaning a general lack of direction in my life, when she commented that I seem to be a doer. If a doer is someone who lives on auto pilot and is run by to-do lists and a multitude of roles- parent, spouse, child of elderly parent, employee- I was definitely a doer. The problem with that, however, is that life has a way of removing the roles that drive our days. Children grow up. People die. Jobs go to China. Retirement, for better or worse, comes knocking. Health fails. If validation is based on our roles, what happens when those roles disappear? Depression for one thing.

Even when we don't have change thrust upon us by circumstances, there are times when the role driven auto-pilot loses it's allure. We become disillusioned and disengaged and force our own changes. After a time of painful struggle, we leave marriages, careers, home towns, or all three.

Is Lent calling you to pause from being a doer? Sometimes we have to detach for a while, either physically, psychologically, or both. From the perspective of holistic wellness, chugging along mindlessly in our doing, keeps us from ever stopping to contemplate what our most authentic, creative self might even look like. It stops us from hearing God's whispers. And much of the numbing that we practice- hours of media as entertainment to while away the time until bedtime, alcohol as daily relaxation, food as a soul soother- has the purpose of covering our basic discontent.

Carl Jung may have noted that "The privilege of a lifetime is to know who you truly are." But how do we figure that out? Try something new that you've never done before; paddle a canoe, bake bread. Trying new things builds our confidence and reminds us that all kinds of things are possible. Ask your family and friends what they love about you, what makes you special. Start a journal. Start saying "no" things you'd really rather not do. Spend time in prayer, asking God to light your path.

During this holy season, consider an occasional fast from your doing. The stuff that raises your blood pressure and fuels your insomnia. Spend that time in some form of quiet that feeds your soul and allows you to think, to hear God's voice, to contemplate the possibilities. He loves us for our being, not our doing.

February 17, 2016 Living with Chronic Pain

What is a helpful way for Christians to deal with physical pain that won't go away? Chronic pain affects more than 116 million Americans. As we start our journey through Lent, with its focus on repentance, what do we do with an experience that can sometimes feel like divine retribution?

On a practical level, chronic pain calls you to:

Optimize your health insurance. That means leaving a Medicare C plan for Part D drug coverage and a supplement if you possibly can. If you are employed, choose a PPO versus an HMO. And check the coverage and network before you sign up. Does it cover chiropractic, acupuncture, naturopathy, or any of the supplemental therapies? Is there a generous list of specialists in the provider directory? A shortage of treatment options or long waits for appointments will not serve you.

Consider an integrative approach to your care. Integrative medicine combines Western medicine with other modalities. So you get your cortisone shots but also research whether massage, diet, yoga, or supplements can provide relief. Find a physician who will work with you to explore a variety of treatment options.

Living with chronic pain is a tremendous emotional and spiritual challenge. Our culture advocates a war-like approach, calling us to "conquer" pain, promising medicines that "vanquish" the enemy, highlighting our culture's wider obsession with controlling and perfecting the body. And some Biblical approaches to physical maladies see them as consequences of sin, a philosophy that effectively blames the victim.

What if there's another option? Religious scholar Michelle LeWica advocates that wrestling with the meaning of chronic pain, and reconciling with our bodies' vulnerabilities may provide an opportunity for growth. Physicians Jon Cabot-Zinn and Herbert Benson both wrote classic books on the subject and encourage us to separate the physical stimulus of pain from suffering, which is our psychological response. We interpret the sensation of pain cognitively and have emotional reactions to the dire thoughts our minds conjure up. So we get more anxious and tense, and perhaps more prone to pain. Mindfulness is an important way to neutralize this cycle. Ironically, it may be in reconciliation with pain, as well as employing all the resources and self-care we can muster, that on some level, we overcome it.

Resources:

Dr. Herbert Benson, "The Relaxation Response"

Dr. Jon Cabot-Zinn, "Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness"

February 7, 2016 Decisions, Decisions

Recently I found myself in the midst of a difficult decision. I adopted a dog from a rescue organization and five days later found myself at an emergency animal hospital at midnight looking at a four-figure bill. Our days together also uncovered significant behavior issues, so he is in foster care now for medical treatment and I'm taking a breather to reconsider our relationship. The wisdom of a famous sage is relevant here. As Kenny Rogers once said, "You gotta know when to hold 'em, and know when to fold 'em."

A tough decision is so because we have a number of options, no clear best choice, and every choice has down sides. Since we can't tell the future, we don't know what to do. Our tendency, then, is to do what cognitive behavioral therapists call "catastrophize". We focus on one really bad outcome of an incorrect choice, regardless of how likely or realistic it is.

Another factor that trips us up and often paralyzes us is information overload. We are deluged with information from every corner and can get any answer to any question with the click of a mouse. And we tend to research a lot. But is it doing us any good? Trying to drink from a fire hose of information actually impairs our ability to make successful decisions according to researchers. Dr. Angelika Dimoka of Temple University notes that our frontal cortexes can only absorb a limited amount of information and then we "start making stupid mistakes and bad choices because the brain region responsible for smart decision making has essentially left the premises."

It can be better to just sit on it. Sleep on it. Pray about it. Let your unconscious lead your gut. And really consider your highest priorities for this choice, aside from all the data you collected. Focus on these elements. Look at your fears. Are they really realistic? What evidence do you have that X will happen if you do Y? We can get trapped in the availability heuristic, a common mistake that our brains make by assuming that the examples which come to mind easily are also the most important or prevalent things. Sometimes, though, they are the exceptions rather than the rule.

Making creative and useful decisions that serve us is an important skill to nurture as we move through life, and an important one to teach our children. Observe your habits and tweak what isn't working for you. And as for the dog? I'm leaning toward folding.

Resources:

· Sharon Begley. "The Science of Decision Making". Newsweek Magazine. 2/27/11

<http://www.newsweek.com/science-making-decisions-68627>.

· The Art of Choosing by Sheena Lyengar

January 21, 2016 The “Get Them Done” Challenge

Happy New Year my brothers and sisters in Christ. For my first column of 2016 I offer you a challenge. I have written about completing your advanced directives and spoke at our Sunday education hour on the same topic. Are yours done? And if they are done, have you registered them with the Arizona Advanced Directives Registry? Here are common reasons people tell me “no”.

- “I’m healthy.” Well, healthy people have accidents and sudden illnesses all the time.
- When I worked in oncology I often heard, “But I never felt healthier.”
- “I’m young.” My youngest patient was an eighth grader. There’s no such thing as too young for a medical crisis. Any adult 18 and older needs these documents done.
- “I’m busy.” Were you too busy to buy auto insurance? Covering your needs in a crisis, any crisis, is the first priority of a responsible adult.
- “It seems complicated.” It’s actually super easy and costs nothing.

Here’s how you do it.

1. Go to <https://www.azag.gov/seniors/life-care-planning> and download and print the Durable Healthcare Power of Attorney, Living Will, and Durable Mental Healthcare Power of Attorney for the State of Arizona.
2. Get together with two people who can be your witnesses (not family members or your healthcare providers), print the instructions, and fill out the forms. Have your witnesses sign them or get them notarized. Your bank may do this for free.
3. Give a copy to your medical proxy and your doctor.
4. Go to <http://www.azsos.gov/services/advance-directives> and print out a registration packet for the Arizona Advanced Directives Registry. Follow the directions and send them a copy of your completed directives. You will get a wallet card explaining that an electronic copy of your documents is registered with the state. Any emergency healthcare provider can access it through the registry’s website. This is a very important step unless you plan to carry your documents around with you.

Ready to get them done? Do it between now and the end of February and tell me about it! I will keep the congregation posted on our progress as we ALL should have this task under our belts, for the sake of our futures, and the peace of minds of our loved ones. Email or call me if you have questions or need help.

December 17, 2015 Gifting when your loved one is in long term care

When a senior in your family lives in an assisted living community, nursing home, or other long-term care environment, it's tough to decide what to buy them when Christmas gift giving comes along. I've worked in several of these kinds of facilities and can offer a few ideas. Steer toward items that bring them physical and emotional comfort, don't give anything that's obviously expensive, make sure food gifts are allowed on their diets, and put their name on everything you bring in. The most important gift, of course, is your time, and if it's possible, and you live nearby, it can be priceless to include the children and pets in the family in your visit. (Check first with the facility about this.) Here are a few other ideas.

- + Hair products that include shampoo and conditioner in one.
- + A chain for eyeglasses to hang around their necks.
- + Cookies in an airtight container so they can be kept in a dresser.
- + A simple CD player and a few CDs of their favorite music if your relative has the fine motor coordination and cognitive skills to appreciate this.
- + A framed photo of the two of you together that can be hung on the wall.
- + A manicure set that contains a file and a pair of clippers.
- + Knee length warm, thick socks.
- + A subscription to an easy-to-read ladies magazine and/or a newspaper if eyesight and cognition are good.
- + If you can find one, a wall hung photo of him or her when they were young. It is a terrific conversation starter between the resident and the staff.
- + Nice body lotion.
- + A large wall calendar for the new year with family events noted. Even more special is a calendar you have made up from family photos.
- + Boxes of prestamped greeting cards with a list of family addresses, if your relative has the skills to use this gift.
- + And last but not least, flowers, are always a hit.

December 3, 2015 Living Mindfully Through the Holidays

With the first Sunday of Advent behind us, it's off to the Christmas races. So much to do and so little time to do it as we add holiday tasks to our bulging to-do lists. An outcome of this holiday stress is that colds and flu are common this time of year, as our frazzled bodies meet up with viruses in the environment. Moderation is difficult to strive for this time of year, but I encourage us all to take a second look at our days, as they unfold this month, and make breathing space, prayer space, even grieving space. We celebrate a sacred mystery, when it all comes down to it, and honoring Christ's birth requires a kind of mindfulness that is counterintuitive during the holiday bustle.

For many of us there is also an undercurrent of sadness that just seems to bubble to the surface this time of year as we are reminded of Christmases past, relationships lost, and circumstances changed. We need both solitude and gentle companionship to articulate these thoughts and feelings, and we need balance and moderation to fully enter joyfully into the holiday tasks that we really want to take on.

Scott Stoner, founder of the Living Compass program reminds us that "to live mindfully, we need to remember to create times to pause, times to reflect on whether we are trying to do too much, buy too much, or eat too much. Creating living pauses will help us to not arrive at Christmas stuffed and exhausted." Creating pauses in our day, prioritizing our activities, moderation; these practices will help us move with joy and energy through the next few weeks and arrive at Christmas Eve in good health, filled with the grace of the newborn Son of God. Blessings to you this season.

November 19, 2015 A Reflection on Gratitude

With Thanksgiving upon us, it must have been serendipity that I found the intriguing research on gratitude posted at the website of the University of California Berkeley, Greater Good Science Center, <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/gratitude>. I encourage you to explore this site. Researchers have proven that the more gratitude experiences we identify in a day, the more positively we rate that day. Days with more gratitude generate more positive emotions and fewer negative ones and when people thought others had put great effort into benefiting them, as opposed to minimal effort, the positive impact on their day was significantly stronger.

I've spoken many times about the physical benefits of positive emotions as mediators of the stress response, so it is extremely likely that while you are having that grateful day, your blood pressure is lower and your cognitive functioning sharper. In general, positive mood states are enormously beneficial to our bodies. Gratitude also has been proven to reduce the risk of depression, improve intimate relationships, and increase stress resilience.

One key to fostering a grateful outlook is to focus on the idea that people have free will, and the actions they take are intentionally designed to help you, at some cost to them. Here are four other ways to cultivate that attitude of gratitude.

- + Count your blessings. Every evening, note three events of the day for which you are grateful. One study found that completing this exercise every day for one week led to increases in happiness that persisted for six months.
- + Try the "It's A Wonderful Life" strategy. Think about a major positive event that happened in your life in the past, and consider how things would have been different had that not occurred. This can counteract the tendency to take positive events for granted and see them as inevitable.
- + Try abstaining from a small pleasurable activity for one week. When you return to it's you'll appreciate it more because we tend to adapt to things that are routine.
- + Practice grateful behaviors regularly. Write an email offering thanks. Send a gratitude letter. Make a phone call.

I wish you all a joyful Thanksgiving and am extremely grateful that God has allowed me this ministry, where I can practice my skills to benefit this wonderful community. "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." (Colossians 3:17).

November 5, 2015 What Does Not Destroy Me

...makes me stronger. Friedrich Nietzsche's words turn out to be true. In the past two decades researchers firmly established that severe traumatic stress can lead to a type of personal renaissance called post-traumatic growth. Since one in five of us experiences a trauma in any given year, that's tremendously hopeful news.

Post-traumatic growth happens what we work through grief, anger, and fear to arrive at greater wisdom and wholeness, a process that can take months if not years. Recovering from change and loss you realize how vulnerable you are. You realize that you're mortal. You realize that you are always one step away from tragedy. The result of this knowledge is that you don't sweat the small stuff. Your relationships deepen; you resist ruts and habits and seek out new possibilities because you appreciate your one precious life. You know your strength because it was tested and you find yourself seeking God in new ways.

My work in oncology taught me this before I could give the concept a name. My patients who survived often said that the cancer was, in some ways, an important and positive turning point in their lives. They didn't have time to waste any more and priorities were a lot easier to see. But what do you do if you or a loved one is still struggling to absorb a traumatic loss? Researcher Stephen Joseph gives us six self-help steps.

1. Take stock of where you are. Get the medical, psychological, and/or legal help you need. Are you eating, sleeping, and exercising? Are you aware of the things that trigger negative emotional reactions, resisting avoidance of your issues, connecting with others, and tuning in to your emotions?
2. Are you harvesting hope wherever you can find it and setting goals for yourself?
3. Are you mentally rewriting your story to see yourself as a survivor?
4. Are you celebrating small positive changes as they present themselves? The first time you slept through the night. The day you finally stepped into your deceased spouse's closet in order to start emptying it.
5. Are you valuing the changes you see in your life and focusing on your well being?
6. Are you taking practical action to become more self-accepting and autonomous?

If you're interested in learning more about post-traumatic growth in your own life you can take the Post Traumatic Growth Inventory at http://www.emdrhap.org/content/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/VIII-B_Post-Traumatic-Growth-Inventory.pdf.

October 15, 2015 Understanding Traumatic Stress

My prayers go out to all of you who have friends or relatives studying at NAU. The tragic shooting in Flagstaff reminds us that bad things really do happen. Researchers estimate that about 75% of people experience some form of trauma over the course of a lifetime and 20% of us will experience a traumatic event in any given year. The word “trauma” comes from a Greek word that means “wound”, and life traumas are literally wounds that tear at the psychological skin that protects us.

Scientists used to believe that only extreme experiences like combat could harm us but now we know that trauma is in the eye of the beholder and that all types of events cause traumatic stress. What matters is our perception and interpretation. If you felt that your life or health was in danger, and your response involved fear and helplessness, you are vulnerable to intrusive thoughts, images, or sounds, avoidance of things that remind you of the trauma, and physiological arousal when memories of the experience are triggered. A description of Post Traumatic Stress is here,

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml>

Many of us respond to traumatic life events with short term versions of these symptoms, and that is called Acute Traumatic Stress. For instance, it is well known that after cancer treatment, many people respond for a while with avoidance and hyperarousal to sights and smells that remind them of chemotherapy. Auto accidents are another common trauma. In my own case, a serious accident left me hyper-aware of every driver around me, I dreamt of sirens, and hated being the passenger in someone else’s car.

If you or a loved one are experiencing traumatic stress, it’s important to seek mental health intervention. Look for a therapist who specializes in traumatic stress, particularly one who is well versed in Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing or Systematic Desensitization. In my opinion, these are some of the most promising treatments at present. Also, consider the addition of medications for sleep, depression, or anxiety if you struggle to cope with daily life.

Traumatic stress occurs because the mind is faced with the task of processing the fact that the world really isn’t what we thought it was. We are vulnerable, out of control, and, in fact, very mortal. The good news, however, is that effectively working through it can lead to better things. More about that next time.

October 1, 2015 To Err is Human

To forgive is divine, or at least divinely inspired. A very special small group experience is coming to All Saints' next month, in preparation for the social gatherings of the Holidays and our celebration of Advent. Finding Forgiveness, is a short, four session program based on a Living Compass curriculum offered nationwide, and its goal is to guide participants through steps to ease hurts and transform our hearts in our most challenging relationships. We all have someone we need to forgive. Or, perhaps, we know we need to nurture a forgiving spirit more consistently in our daily lives. And it's good for us physically, as well as spiritually, to find ways to let go. It's also an imperative of our faith, modeled by our Savior who forgave all, including his executioners.

Forgiveness is an important faith response, but also a step toward holistic wellness. Various research studies have found that the suppression of anger appears to harm us in a myriad of ways. It aggravates the experience of depression among chronic headache patients and worsens anxiety, depression, and physical complaints among entrepreneurs. It negatively affects diastolic blood pressure among both African Americans and Caucasians, and even predicted depression in a sample of adolescent girls. It is, in fact, a factor in conditions as diverse as ulcers and cardiovascular disease. Researchers call it "anger-in" in that the feelings are generally suppressed, running in the background of our lives, and it's as dangerous to our health as "anger-out", the type that results in verbal aggression.

As forgiveness research evolves, it clearly compels us to come to the conclusion that forgiving transforms us in all ways. In *Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness*, psychologist Fred Luskin writes, "In careful scientific studies, forgiveness training has been shown to reduce depression, increase hopefulness, decrease anger, improve spiritual connection, (and) increase emotional self confidence."

Dr. Desmond Tutu, a victim of both family violence and systemic discrimination, states that "In the end, science will prove what people have known for millennia: forgiving is good for you. Health benefits are only the beginning. To forgive is also to release yourself from whatever trauma and hardship you have experienced and reclaim your life as your own."

Join us for Finding Forgiveness, four Thursday evenings from October 22 through November 12, 7:00-8:30pm. There is no charge. Email me at palshatti@allsaints.org to let me know you are interested. I'm excited to join this journey with you.

September 17, 2015 Measuring Success

As we start a new school year our kids navigate an educational system and culture that is focused on the drive toward success. Standardized testing is the norm and parents can check grades online. College preparation starts in middle school and the admissions process is increasingly competitive and complex, so kids fill after school hours with sports and extra-curricular activities, hoping to improve resumes. AP classes. PSAT prep. Homework, homework, homework.

Where is all this leading and what are the effects? According to the American Psychological Association, today's kids report more anxiety than did children under psychiatric care in the 1950s, and many studies find that their academic performance actually erodes under stress, as does physical and mental health. To complicate things, children don't usually express anxiety in a straightforward manner. They respond behaviorally with insomnia, eating disorders, cheating, social withdrawal, physical complaints, and loss of interest in favorite activities. Unfortunately, when they get to college the trend doesn't change. A recent study by the Center for Collegiate Mental Health at Penn State found that among 100,000 students nationally who visited campus health clinics, more than half cited anxiety as a health concern.

Parents often intuitively know that something isn't right with all this, and the pressure bleeds over into their lives, also. But what should we do? One study found that when kids received the message from parents that learning is sometimes really hard, and therefore failure is OK, that confidence improved, as did working memory, a key requirement for learning. Kids also need the same work-life balance that adults do. And down time isn't had in competitive extra curricular activities, but rather unstructured open time, hopefully a little of it unplugged.

For the curious, more information is available at www.racetonowhere.com. A documentary film that premiered in 2009, A Race To Nowhere, has been screened in community settings around the country and sparked a grassroots movement calling for educational and cultural reform to redefine student success and achievement. We all want our kids to be happy and successful adults, but what does that mean? In the drive to succeed, are we remembering the true roots of happiness? A contented life calls for resiliency, creativity, a commitment to wellness, strong social ties, and a spiritual focus. Let's work to instill these priceless qualities in the young people in our care as we navigate 21st Century demands.

September 3, 2015 So They Say You Need Surgery

Since sooner or later, most of us will need surgery, there's a new website that you might want to bookmark for yourself and loved ones, ProPublica's Surgeon Scorecard, <https://projects.propublica.org/surgeons/>.

Choosing a surgeon is an important decision that many patients leave to their primary care doctors, but tools are available to help us weigh in. Choosing a doctor who practices at a high quality hospital, doesn't guarantee good care so it's important to proceed carefully. Medical errors may be the third leading cause of death in the US, after heart disease and cancer, according a recent study in the Journal of Patient Safety, and some surgeons have a notable and consistent record of errors compared to others. Furthermore, patients who suffer injuries or mistakes during medical care rarely learn about it, according to a recent study at Johns Hopkins University.

It pays to do some research prior to making that appointment:

- Check ProPublica's Surgeon Scorecard if you are having one of the eight common procedures they studied.
- Check the Arizona Medical Board website, <https://www.azmd.gov>, "Doctor Search" to learn more about a provider you are considering.

At the appointment:

- Find out how often the doctor does your procedure. Quality and quantity aren't always related, but it's likely that the surgeon is more skilled at procedures he or she does frequently.
- Ask about common and rare complications, and how often they happen. Ask about deaths.
- Take notes, and take someone with you. It's likely that a sidekick will remember things you don't. After all, it's surgery you're considering, and that's stressful for all of us.

Dr. David Axelrod, in the article "Maintaining Trust in the Surgeon-Patient Relationship"* noted that "the invasive and potentially life-threatening nature of surgical therapy fundamentally shapes the relationship between a surgeon and his patient and requires an extraordinary degree of trust from the patient and, correspondingly, ethical action by the surgeon...Initially, it is the patient who controls the relationship by choosing to visit the physician and to enter into treatment. Eventually, it is the surgeon and her operating team who assume total control during the operation." Trust in your doctor is always important, but even more so when you face surgery. Practice due diligence prior to treatment, then trust your doctor, his team, your family, and God to get you through it successfully.

* Archives of Surgery. 2000;135(1):55-61.

August 23, 2015 In the Middle

With an aging population and a generation of young people hit hard by the Great Recession, middle aged adults often feel the squeeze of providing emotional, practical and financial support for two generations of loved ones. If you're in this situation, know you aren't alone. The Pew Research Center published "The Sandwich Generation" in 2013 and found that nearly half of all adults in their 40s and 50s have some level of responsibility for an aging parent and a child. 73% provided financial support to a grown child, and 27% were their child's primary support, up a lot since 2005. 21% provided financial support to a parent.

Sandwich Generation adults are more stressed for time, and may not be saving adequately for their own retirement. Family caregivers who provide physical assistance to a loved one face even more difficult pressures. A study by the AARP Policy Institute in 2012 found that half of family caregivers do complex medical tasks that were once only done by professionals, such as tube feedings and wound care. If you are feeling pulled between the needs of your kids and older relatives, here are a few survival tips:

With Your Children:

-There is a fine line between helping and enabling. Make decisions about financial support with the feedback of trusted others, and consult a counselor if your situation is complex.

-Do not spend your retirement funds on your child as you may be putting your own future at risk.

-Discuss your expectations and needs with them and have clearly articulated boundaries, especially if a child wants or needs to move back home.

With Older Relatives:

-Get a medical power of attorney and living will completed. This is the most important step you can take.

-If a relative is generally of sound mind, but needs additional help and won't accept it, manage your expectations and frustration.

-If you are a long distance caregiver, research practical ways you can help.

-If you provide physical care, investigate community resources.

-Do not spend your retirement savings to pay for care or housing for the reasons I mention above.

For Yourself:

-In both cases, try to remember your boundaries; what you are and are not responsible for.

-Keep your spiritual and social supports strong.

-Focus on your physical well-being through diet, healthy sleep, and exercise.

Resources:

The Sandwich Generation, by the Pew Research Center, 2013.

<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2013/01/30/the-sandwich-generation/>

National Institute on Aging booklet about long distance caregiving

<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/so-far-away-twenty-questions-and-answers-about-long-distance-caregiving>

Caregiver Action Network

<http://caregiveraction.org>

August 9, 2015 Making Choices for your Healthcare, Part 2

At age 65 we have, in Medicare, guaranteed health insurance, regardless of our circumstances. Medicare is complex, but let me share a few things I've learned from patients who made choices that later caused them considerable stress.

Sign up for Part B. Even if you have other coverage, if you could possibly lose it, sign up.

Sign up for Part D drug coverage unless you have a guaranteed source for life, i.e., VA. Sign up even if you don't take medications. Signing up later, when you are in a medical crisis, comes with heavy penalties.

This is personal opinion, but I encourage people to purchase a Medigap policy rather than sign onto a Medicare Advantage Plan (Part C/MAP). MAPs are all HMO's and come with the access limitations I mentioned in Part 1 of this series. I've seen many seniors develop serious illnesses, and find themselves unable to consult the providers they want to. MAPs work best for healthy people, but even healthy people are vulnerable to unexpected serious illness, so plan your insurance coverage around the worst case scenario.

Buy the best Medigap policy you can afford. This is usually a Plan F, which covers any gaps between Medicare's agreed payment for a service and the provider's actual charge for that service.

If your income is low, you may qualify for government help with Medicare costs. There are three programs available through the Arizona Healthcare Cost Containment System (AHCCCS). This link describes eligibility and benefits:

<https://www.azahcccs.gov/applicants/Downloads/ApplicationForms/DE-103.pdf> and you can get help understanding your options by speaking to a volunteer with our State Health Insurance Program. Locations and times are listed here: <http://aaaphx.org/wp-content/uploads/List-of-Counseling-Locations-20151.pdf>, or you can call the Senior Helpline at 602-264-4357 to learn more.

Use the Medicare website, www.medicare.gov. It's a great resource for choosing a hospital: <https://www.medicare.gov/hospitalcompare/search.html>, finding a good skilled nursing facility: <https://www.medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare/search.html>, and choosing both a Medigap and Part D drug plan. It's user friendly and has lots of additional information.

I know this topic is a little dry, with an alphabet soup of issues to understand, but it pays to do your research and get the best insurance you can afford. Then head off for that hike, or dinner for two, and live in today, knowing that tomorrow is covered.

July 26, 2015 Making Choices for Your Healthcare

Choosing insurance is the biggest healthcare decision you make. If you are under 65, you sign onto an employer sponsored plan, a private policy, a policy through the Healthcare Marketplace, or some other option. How do you choose? My recommendations are personal opinion, but based on many years experience advocating for patients with insurance problems.

First, I believe you are wise to choose a PPO (Preferred Provider Organization) over an HMO (Health Maintenance Organization). HMO's are cheaper for a reason. Your primary care provider (PCP) is a gatekeeper for services, and access to specialists is dependent upon that person's referral. Some HMO's are known to discourage PCPs from referring out, using both incentives and disincentives to sway decision making. PPO's do not have this structure, so you can generally see any doctor, as long as the doctor is contracted with your insurance company and the service is covered.

Contracts are extremely important. Doctors and facilities contract with insurers to see patients at negotiated rates of payment and you want an insurance plan with a large provider network, so you have many choices, especially for specialist care. If you have few choices, you wait longer for an appointment, and it implies that the insurance company may not pay its providers well. Good doctors, who are popular with patients, often don't want or need low paying contracts. Insurers with great provider networks in Maricopa County, in my opinion, are Blue Cross/Blue Shield, Humana, and Cigna.

Be aware of cost sharing, the deductible, co-pays and coinsurance for which you are responsible. Review the out of pocket maximum for the year. Is it a number you could hypothetically pay? Co-pays are usually not subject to the out of pocket maximum, meaning the sky's the limit on how much you could owe. If you develop a serious condition, you might see specialists once or twice a week, and these co-pays add up fast. Coinsurance is usually a percent of your bill for a given service, and is limited to the out of pocket maximum, after which your care is usually free. It starts once you meet your deductible. Also realize that one of the benefits of insurance is that even during your deductible phase you won't pay full price for care, but rather the price negotiated by your insurer with the provider.

All these basic considerations apply also to the federal government's Healthcare Marketplace. The companies mentioned above all offer plans inside the exchange and both HMOs and PPOs are offered. More insurance questions? Please email or call me. Next time we'll talk about those of you with Medicare.

July 8, 2015 Rediscovering Your Relationship With Food

Love it or hate it, your relationship with food is ever-present. We have to eat to live, and sometimes may live to eat, but one way or another, food is rarely far away. What does it mean to eat mindfully? We could ask what it means to eat mindlessly, a habit many of us have honed. We eat without thought for the kind of hunger we're trying to satisfy, without awareness of the tastes and textures we are experiencing, without understanding why we sought food, without regard for the temple of the Holy Spirit we are nourishing, and without thought to the resources that went into every bite.

Eating mindfully is the opposite, and is a deeply spiritual experience. Eating mindfully engages your heart, soul, body, and mind in a practice that requires your full participation in choosing, preparing, and eating food. It frees us from anxiety about the future or past, strengthens our relationship with God, and more fully celebrates the gift of table fellowship. It's a simple gift we have access to multiple times a day, if we learn how.

We are delighted to bring a short program in mindful eating to All Saints' and I encourage you to consider this opportunity for learning and connection:

In the All Saints' Mindful Eating course you will:

- +Learn about the seven types of hunger, only one of which involves your stomach.
- +Learn about conditioned responses that lead you to eat when you're not hungry, often choosing foods you know aren't healthy.
- +Explore cooking and sharing food as a holy activity.
- +Learn techniques to improve your ability to ask why you want to eat and what your body really needs.
- +Receive a thumb drive with audio meditations to strengthen your new behaviors.
- +Receive handouts to support learning.
- +Find a small group of like-minded people who will share this journey of discovery with you, now and beyond the scope of this four week class.

Mindful Eating starts August 5th, 7-8:30pm, every Wednesday in August, ending the 26th. We will meet in the Church Office conference room and there is no charge for the course. You can join the group through Realm, or email me and I will enroll you. We will cap membership at 10, so space is limited for this special small group experience.

June 25, 2015 When Good Work Hurts, Part II

I received a lot of feedback on my recent article about compassion fatigue, so I thought we could explore the issue of job burnout, a related, but different problem. Compassion fatigue is caused by repeated exposure to pain in other people's lives. Job burnout is a special type of stress caused by a number of factors that results in psychological and physical distress.

According to the Mayo Clinic, job burnout is due to:

- **Lack of control.** An inability to influence decisions that affect your job.
- **Unclear job expectations.** A lack of clarity about the degree of authority you have or what is expected from you.
- **Dysfunctional workplace dynamics.** Like office bullying or micromanaging.
- **Mismatch in values.** You are uncomfortable with the way your employer does business or handles grievances.
- **Poor job fit.** If your job doesn't fit your interests and skills.
- **Extremes of activity.** A job is always monotonous or chaotic, making it difficult to focus.
- **Lack of social support.** Feeling isolated at work and in your personal life.
- **Work-life imbalance.** Your work takes up so much of your time that you don't have the energy for other things.

What are the symptoms of job burnout? They may include feeling cynical or critical, not wanting to go to work, becoming impatient with co-workers or customers, impaired productivity, little satisfaction from your achievements, feeling disillusioned, and leaning on food, drugs, or alcohol to self-soothe.

From a faith perspective, these symptoms are God's whisper to you that things are not right, and that your wellness is at stake; heart, mind, body and soul. If you don't attend to the whispers, and make changes, the shouting will start, because He always gets our attention. A short list of the consequences of untreated job stress include chronic fatigue, insomnia, depression and anxiety, substance abuse, heart disease, type II diabetes, and stroke. Another way to look at job burnout is through the lens of life transition. Long before we gather the courage to make a big change, we have the feelings that signal the beginning of an ending. As Transitions program alumni will tell you, this includes a sense of disengagement, disenchantment, and disidentification with the role with which you are struggling.

If any of this is you, think in terms of a FAITH step you can take to work your way toward a better future. Spend time in prayer and discernment, and come up with a small change you are willing to make to reduce job burnout and improve your quality of life.

Choose a goal that is:

- + **Focused.** A small, specific change.
- + **Action Oriented.** You will do something measurable and observable.
- + **Inspired by your relationship with God.**

- + Time specific, with a completion date.
- + Heartfelt. This is a change you really want to make.

Resources:

Mayo Clinic on job burnout: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/burnout/art-20046642?pg=2>

Scientific American, Are You On the Path To Burnout? Quiz:

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/quiz-are-you-on-the-path-to-burnout/>

June 10, 2015 Sometimes Good Work Hurts

It's extremely meaningful to care for people as a part of your day to day job, but if that involves interacting with hurt and traumatized individuals, you may be at risk of compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue is the cumulative effect, physically and psychologically, of exposure to the traumatic stories and events in the lives of other people. Employees in many types of work are at risk including healthcare workers, teachers, police officers, fire fighters, emergency medical responders, clergy, social service workers and therapists, elder caregivers, attorneys, even news reporters.

Certain habits put a person more at risk. Are you routinely skipping lunch due to client problems? Do you refuse to take a break when you know you need one? Do you give your patients your cell phone number? Are your students chronically encroaching on your personal time? When doing your job well means barely doing anything else, it is a fast track to trouble.

The following are common signs of compassion fatigue:

- + Feeling like the resources available to you are chronically outweighed by the demands of the people who need you.
- + Feeling demoralized and questioning your professional competence.
- + Withdrawing socially.
- + Becoming emotionally detached from the people you serve.
- + Difficulty investing in your intimate relationships.
- + Becoming pessimistic, cynical, irritable, and angry.

Here are a few tips if you're concerned that this may feel familiar. The key elements of self-help are awareness, balance, and social connectedness.

- + Use your health insurance benefits or employee assistance program to see a counselor, to sort things out.
- + Debrief with a coworker when you have a particularly bad day, and a traumatic incident stays in your mind.
- + Learn strategies to calm the fight-or-flight response.
- + Focus on your spiritual life to maintain the awareness that God is ultimately in charge and that you don't have to do it all by yourself, and are only a piece of the larger puzzle.

Left unaddressed, compassion fatigue will make you much less helpful to the people you serve, and will start to damage your health. Good work can be difficult, but it shouldn't hurt. Need more information?

The American Institute of Stress has additional reading: <http://www.stress.org/military/for-practitionersleaders/compassion-fatigue/>

An interesting self-test is at: <http://www.compassionfatigue.org/pages/cfassessment.pdf>

May 28, 2015 Kids Need Free Play

It's officially summer! In Central Arizona, that can be a particularly tough time to be a parent. It's hot. They're bored. Everyone is getting on everyone else's nerves. If a parent works full-time, there's childcare to arrange and if circumstances do not allow for a vacation somewhere cool, it can mean many difficult and uncomfortable weeks to count down until school and cooler weather arrive.

After you find the nearest pool, please remember the value of free play. It can be tempting to try to keep kids highly scheduled in order to cut down on bickering and boredom, but research tells us that there is great value in free play. Scientists have found that play develops the connections of the neurons at the front end of a child's brain. Without plenty of play experience, this doesn't happen, and these changes are critical to help wire the brain's executive control center, which has a critical role in regulating emotions, making plans and solving problems. Therefore play is what prepares a young brain for life, love and even schoolwork, according to Sergio Pellis of the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada. But to produce this sort of brain development, children need to engage in plenty of free play. No coaches, no umpires, no rule books.

The American Academy of Pediatrics promotes free and unstructured play as essential for helping children reach important social, emotional, and cognitive developmental milestones as well as helping them manage stress and become resilient. A loss of free time in combination with a hurried lifestyle can be a source of stress, anxiety and may even contribute to depression for many children, according to this association of pediatricians.

Research and simple observation tell us all that free play isn't what it used to be several decades ago, and that our children spend much less time than they used to unwired, unscheduled, and unmanaged. As we move into June, and the long hot days of summer, please keep in mind pediatric researcher Kenneth R. Ginsburg's advice. "When play is allowed to be child driven, children practice decision-making skills, move at their own pace, discover their own areas of interest, and ultimately engage fully in the passions they wish to pursue."*

*The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds. PEDIATRICS Vol. 119 No. 1 January 1, 2007 pp. 182 -191.

April 16, 2015 Managing Seasonal Allergies

Isn't it a beautiful spring this year? Easter was glorious and we are enjoying the last days of great weather before the heat comes. The trees are in bloom and Phoenix looks it's best. But the beauty comes at a price and heavy rain earlier in the year has experts predicting a difficult season for the 35% of Phoenix residents who experience allergies, also known as seasonal allergic rhinitis. In our part of the state, seasonal sneezing, congestion, and irritated eyes are caused by a combination of pollen, dust, and pollution and there's good advice available on how to cope.

To manage pollen sensitivity, start by consulting a pollen count forecast like the one on Weather.com <http://www.weather.com/forecast/pollen/l/Phoenix+AZ+USAZ0166:1:US>, limit your outdoor activity on the worst days, and take allergy medicine before you need it. Mayo Clinic also suggests:

- Delegating gardening chores if you can.
- Changing clothes when you come in from outside.
- Using a clothes dryer versus hanging clothes outside.
- Wearing a dust mask if you do outside chores.
- Keeping your doors and windows closed.
- Avoiding outdoor activity in the early morning.

About.com has a comprehensive article about allergies in Phoenix at <http://phoenix.about.com/od/health/a/allergy.htm>. It lists trees and plants to avoid in your garden and has great suggestions for managing dust:

- Vacuum often with a HEPA filter system.
- Use wet mops and wet dust cloths, never dry ones.
- Keep pets out of the bedroom and off the bed.
- Reduce the amount of carpet in your house.
- Don't use feather pillows or comforters.

The best way to handle the pollution in Phoenix is to consult the Department of Environmental Quality's daily forecast at <http://www.azdeq.gov/environ/air/ozone/ensemble.pdf> and employ the same strategies as you would for pollen or dust. Avoid a lot of time outside when it's bad.

Certainly, consult your doctor if your symptoms are severe and don't ignore your body's symptoms. Seasonal rhinitis can become chronic, or evolve into asthma. If you have an interest in complementary and alternative approaches to allergies, a reliable guide is on the University of Maryland Medical Center website at <http://umm.edu/health/medical/altmed/condition/allergic-rhinitis>. Stay well!

March 19, 2015 Just in Case

God is so good. My son recently walked away from an auto accident that totaled his car and I am reminded that this can happen any time. What about the accident that you don't walk away from? The one where you are removed from the scene unconscious? Are you prepared? Here are a few things you can do so that you get the care you need and quickly have your loved ones at your side:

* In your cell phone, list your primary contact as "ICE", not by name. If you were alone at the time of the accident, the emergency room staff will go through your wallet and phone and will understand that ICE is "in case of emergency". Don't make them take the time to figure out who your emergency contact is.

* If you have completed your advanced directives, register them with the Arizona Advanced Directives Registry, a program of the Secretary of State's office. This is especially important if you do not live with your medical power of attorney. The process is easy and free, and the website address to download an application is <http://www.azsos.gov/services/advance-directives>. You will get a wallet card that gives medical staff a website where they can download your directives for your hospital chart. I have this card, carry it always, and it gives me great peace of mind.

* If you have special needs, have this information on you. If you are diabetic, have an implanted device, a drug or latex allergy, complex health problems, take a number of medications, or have or a severe food allergy, there are several ways to inform emergency medical staff. Make a wallet card with this information, laminate it, and keep it with you. Wear a medic alert bracelet. Wear an interactive Road ID bracelet. This last idea was passed to me by a friend and is terrific. Find out more at roadid.com.

For the same reasons that we buy auto insurance for our cars, it's important to plan for our health and welfare needs should the unexpected happen. So if any of these ideas call to you, please heed that whisper. And here's to many happy and safe driving miles for you and your loved ones.

Correction to the “Just in Case” Article

Last week I advised everyone to enter an ICE contact into your phone for emergency medical staff. An astute parishioner reminded me that if you lock your smart phone to protect your personal information, your ICE contact would not be accessible.

People with Apple iPhones running the operating system iOS 8 have a new medical ID feature that can be accessed from the lock screen. This brief article <http://appleinsider.com/articles/14/09/24/how-to-set-up-your-emergency-medical-id-with-ios-8s-new-health-app> explains the feature. The new Medical ID button will show the user the medical information you choose to list, plus emergency contacts (and their relationship to you), with the ability to call these people. For folks not using iPhones with iOS 8, there appear to be applications you can download that let you make custom wallpaper for your lock screen to show your emergency information. Thank you, Jim Foster, for this important update, and please continue to me send feedback and ideas for content you'd like see in this column.

March 5, 2015 The Power of Habit

Have you faltered in your Lenten discipline or has your motivation been strong enough to keep you faithful to your goal? Habit is powerful. Often it keeps us circling in behaviors that don't serve us, but we are capable of harnessing it in ways that lead to greater wholeness and wellness. If we understand it.

"The Power of Habit," by Charles Duhigg, is an interesting read that seems especially appropriate at this time of year. In it we learn that the brain is always looking for ways to save effort. Left to its own devices, it will make almost any routine into a habit because habits allow our minds to rest. The process whereby a behavior becomes a habit is a three step loop. First, there is a cue, a trigger that tells your brain to go into automatic mode, and tells it which habit to initiate. Then, you do whatever routine is part of the habit. Then, there is some type of reward, which is the part of the loop that helps your brain want to remember this routine in the first place. Ultimately, the draw of the reward becomes a craving, and that's what makes our habits so extremely difficult to change. The craving for the reward builds over time because the cue and the reward become intertwined and a powerful feeling of anticipation develops.

For instance, I come home from work and my mind is racing from the day's events (cue). So I reach for the remote, click on the TV, and park myself on the couch (behavior). My mind calms and empties as I focus my attention on the changing sounds and images coming from the screen (reward). One of the keys to habit change is to acknowledge this feedback loop and look for new ways to use a different routine to get the same reward. What if I felt that tension, came home, and immediately put on my running shoes? Or planned a conversation about the day's events with my spouse on the back porch? Or had a brief period of prayer and meditation? Lots of options might land me at the same reward and over time I would crave the new behavior as much as I did the old one.

Habits are powerful. It's worth evaluating why we do what we do if we know it's not good for us. Learning about habit is a first step, and I highly recommend this book. I also recommend the Living Compass program currently in process as the Living Compass process helps participants forge new habits. May you have a holy Lent and a lifetime of helpful, healthful habits.

February 19, 2015 The Living Compass: Your Heart Point

I wrap up this series of Living Compass articles to talk about the compass point that may be most challenging for some of us, Heart. Heart is the aspects of your being that involves the way you handle your emotions and relationships. We get into all kinds of trouble in these areas, and they can cause us our biggest heartaches and headaches. Feeling and expressing your emotions in a healthy and helpful way is emotional intelligence, is learned in childhood, and is key to adulthood. How do you deal with your emotions in a day to day way? Do you allow yourself the full range of feelings, sadness as well as anger? Fear as well as confidence? It's the vulnerable emotions that we tend to mask, sometimes even to ourselves. Do you feel comfortable talking to others about your feelings and do you have a repertoire of healthy coping strategies to comfort yourself? And I'm not talking about alcohol, food, or binge TV or web browsing, three of our favorites in this culture. We know from research that suppressing emotions, or venting them inappropriately, results in the buildup of stress hormones and the breakdown of our physical functioning over time.

Author Jim Rohn also noted that "The walls we build around us to keep sadness out, also keep out the joy." If you aren't authentic with yourself, inside your own head, how can you hope to have authentic relationships with other people? God designed us as social creatures, and our biology is such that isolation is deadly over time. In 1 John, we are told that "If we love one another, God lives in us, and His love is perfected in us". Do you value and purposefully spend time nurturing relationships, or are other things higher on your list of priorities? Can you identify any long term friendships in your life? If you needed practical help would you have it? If someone in your life needed this help would you give it, or are you too busy?

When we talk about our emotions and relationships, the key is this. Persist in a desire to grow in this area because it may be the most important thing you do, outside of growing your relationship with God. Join us for the Living Compass Lenten series and get support and guidance to reflect, create goals, and make real and lasting change.

February 12, 2015 The Mind Compass Points: Vocation and Organization

This week I will introduce you to the two “Mind” points of the Living Compass, vocation and organization. Romans 12:2 exhorts us to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” and Albert Einstein encourages us in a similar way. “Out of clutter find simplicity. From discord find harmony. In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.” If you have a job that leaves you feeling dissatisfied or stressed, are not living out your best gifts, or don’t even know what those are, have too much time on your hands and not enough meaningful activity, or are very busy but little of it matters, you should listen to God’s whisper this Lenten season and examine your vocational life. When you attend Living Compass you will ask yourself, “Do I have a clear sense of the gifts and talents God has given me and am I using them?” Often in our work, schooling, or community service we do what’s expected, what we’ve been doing, or what’s convenient, but this is living a false self. “Our deepest calling,” states Quaker writer Parker Palmer “is to grow into our own authentic self.”

And the tedious stuff of life: errands, bookkeeping, and general clutter cleanup, may not exactly be the path to enlightenment, but problems here cause general chaos and impair growth toward true self hood. If you don’t have a budget, are late to everything, and are generally poorly organized it will stress every other point on your compass and make it impossible to live well. In Genesis, God brought order out of chaos and, as people of faith, we believe that this process continues in the world, and that we best live our Christian lives when we are good stewards of our time, money, relationships, health, and material goods.

When we gather together in community during the Lenten series, we will each assess our strengths and challenges in the areas of vocation and organization, as well as the other compass points. Working with your facilitator and group members, you may identify areas of wellness where you feel inspired to explore change. Consider the program to be a personal retreat for quiet reflection. A time out from routine habits and ways of thinking. Here you will experience the creativity to design action plans to get you going in the direction of balance and wellness. Your faith CAN make you well. Join us!

February 5, 2015 The Living Compass: Your Strength Compass Point

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.” 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. Since God clearly teaches us that healthy living is an important spiritual practice, why is it so hard to follow the lifestyle suggestions that come us from doctors and the media? More vegetables, less sugar. You know what I mean.

The strength compass point focuses on care of the body and stress resiliency and helps us identify the reasons we are blocked from making the changes we say we want to make, the impact of poor habits on our daily lives, and new ways in which we feel called to live more healthfully. Care of the body and regular stress management practices are truly part of a Godly life, not separate from it, and we know this intuitively. In fact, many of us focus on a few of these areas during Lent with commitments like “I will give up dessert” or “I will walk daily”.

Instead of promising to give up dessert, only to dig into it after Lent, along with those burgers and fries, why don't you give up a few of your Thursday nights to understand yourself and your health practices a little better? Then any changes you make are bound to be permanent ones because they are based on your true aspirations, with goals you design yourself, with insight into the barriers that usually stump you.

- Do you address your health problems or try to avoid thinking about them?
- Are you handling your emotions or are they handling you?
- What are your thoughts about your food choices?
- Are you a stress “junkie”, thriving in high stress environments?
- Do you have a hard time bouncing back when life throws you into change?

Join us for the Living Compass Lenten Series and explore these and other questions in a supportive small group setting. Your Lenten discipline may just follow you into the rest of the year as you receive the insight and support you need to make lasting change. Sign up for the 2015 Lenten Series in the Narthex between services, email Lindsay Wood at lwood@allsaints.org to sign up, sign yourself up in Realm, or email me at palshatti@allsaints.org.

January 29, 2015 The Living Compass: The Soul Point

This week I'd like to talk to you about the Soul point of the Living Compass, time you spend in rest, play, and spiritual practice. Regular spiritual practice of some type is definitely connected to rest, as we can't be quiet and be with God if we don't take to time to pump the mental and physical brakes. Jesus calls us to rest many times in the scriptures. "Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28.

Our busyness is a powerful pull these days, more than ever before in history, I believe. Never has our attention been divided in so many directions. And our digital connectedness may help and entertain us, but is also a new source accountability as we attend to work email, home email, work cell, home phone, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter accounts, work intranet groups, Meetup distribution lists, professional group email lists, e-newsletters, etc. Remembering our passwords alone is a major undertaking. William Powers, author of "Hamlet's Blackberry" puts it this way. "Our screens are conduits of everything that keeps us hopping— mandatory and optional, worthwhile and silly, if you have a mobile number, and internet browser, and an email address, endless people and organizations are within your reach. And you are within theirs."

As you attend to all your responsibilities, and the distractions out there in the larger online world, where is your time for quiet, unplugged rest in nature? Time for prayer, reflection, and study? Time for your hobbies, reading, a game of ball with a child or a conversation with a spouse or friend? What kinds of habits or practices might help you experience rest for your soul?

And are you spending any time in your day or week to deepen your connection to God beyond Sunday services? Just as a robust plant requires a rich soil, our health, happiness, and productivity is rooted in our relationship with the Creator. Our spirituality is the inner compass that directs and guides every aspect of our lives. Is your relationship with God as strong as you would like it to be? All Saints' has many tools and small groups to help you explore this central aspect of your being. As we approach Lent, consider your Soul compass point. Is it a strong anchor for the rest of your wellness?

January 22, 2015 Living Compass Coming to All Saints'

From now until the start of Lent, I will be speaking with you weekly about the Living Compass program. As you consider your Lenten practice this year, I want to introduce you to concepts that can help you make real and lasting positive change in your life. Living Compass will bring small groups of All Saints' parishioners together with trained lay facilitators to have genuine healing conversations about lifestyle and balance. Why lifestyle and balance? As Christians we understand that our lives are precious gifts from God and that we are called upon to treat our bodies as temples of his loving presence. We cannot act as faithful servants in our daily lives when our choices impair our best functioning, thus, we should strive for wellness in the same way we strive to be charitable and patient.

The small faith group is the key to the Living Compass program, as community is the cornerstone of our faith, something Jesus calls us to routinely. If you aren't usually someone to spend time talking in small groups about your "real" life, I encourage you to consider Living Compass a stretching exercise, a challenge you submit yourself to in this coming season of sacrifice. You will not be asked to contribute more than you are comfortable, and you may find that you enjoy the experience.

What will we be talking about, in our small groups? We will explore the places in our lives where God is whispering, or maybe shouting, to us to change direction. Our system of healthcare, as well as our own inclinations, tend to focus on illness rather than wellness, whether that illness is physical, emotional, or spiritual. We often don't address things until they are big problems. When our lives are out of balance God tends to whisper to us through subtle signs that we need to make changes. If we don't do make them, he will then shout at us through the presence of significant symptoms, and if we ignore these, we are sure to face a crisis of some type. Through, Living Compass's process of self-assessment, and compassionate small group conversation you may find yourself identifying an area of your life where you feel motivated to make real and lasting progress toward a healthier and more vibrant life.

I hope you get as excited about our upcoming Lenten series as I am. The program is being adopted by Episcopal congregations around the country, you can learn more at LivingCompass.org, and you can get a jump start by doing your own wellness assessment online. The "compass" for the program points us toward four interconnected, and interdependent, dimensions of our being: Soul, Mind, Heart, and Strength. Next week we will talk about Soul and I'll share ideas about spiritual practice and time spent in rest and play.

[Click here to see or print Patrice Al-Shatti's PowerPoint Presentation from January 11, 2015: If Something Happens To Me; Planning For the End of Your Life](#)

January 8, 2015 Grieving A Loss

If someone you care about is grieving the loss of a loved one as we start this new year, here are some ideas to help you be of support. Grief is one of life's most difficult challenges, and it's hard to know how to respond. It may be helpful to know a little about the grief process, because there are ways you can be of support.

In the first six months or so after a loss, a grieving person may experience physical and cognitive changes, as well as strong emotions. Common physical symptoms of grief include profound fatigue and sleep changes. Cognitive problems are common, and the person you care about may struggle to stay organized or remember things. Sometimes people have trouble keeping up with the mail, getting nutritious meals, and other kinds of self-care due to low energy and lack of motivation. Sometimes the irony in grief is that just when we are mentally least able to handle demands, we are called upon to manage the complexities of a loved one's financial and legal affairs, as well as cope with our feelings and adjust to changed roles and living circumstances.

The emotions of grief ebb and flow in unpredictable ways. Sometimes your griever may need distraction and fun, and sometimes he or she may need to sit and cry. It's very helpful if you can handle both. Strong sad feelings often come suddenly, and that's OK. Grief "attacks" can be triggered by anything- like a song, a bit of conversation, a special food, or place. Perhaps we grieve in bits and pieces like this because our psyches aren't able to handle it all at once. So God allows a slow process of peeling away the layers of change and loss, like the layers of an onion.

It is also useful to be able to recognize bereavement that gets off course. When someone severely neglects themselves, chronically drinks too much, self-isolates for long periods of time, talks about suicide, or exhibits any other extreme self-destructive behavior, it is time to call in a family member or help that person schedule a doctor's visit. These behaviors don't tend to self-correct.

The most important thing you bring to your relationship with your griever is a spirit of love and an openness to whatever comes your way. You are able to bear witness to tears when that's needed. You're able to get the person out for a meal and a movie, or go through paperwork when that's needed. You know this is a process and you're in it with them for the long haul. That is love in action, and will come back to richly bless you.

December 4, 2014 Transitions Program Coming in January

Welcome to the Holidays! Since the echoes of Christmases past come readily to mind, this month can be a roller coaster of joyful activity, a painful time mourning life losses, or anywhere in between. If you're in a phase of transition in your life you will be reminded of it and All Saints will soon have a small group experience designed to support you, uplift you, and help you confidently move forward.

From January 7th to March 18th, consider joining us for Transitions, an educational journey from an old life to a new one. Twice a month on Wednesday evening at 7:00pm we will gather to prayerfully explore life changes and read William Bridges' book "Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes". Bridges is a nationally recognized expert in guiding adults through painful transitions and we will study this work, as well as related scripture.

We will look at transition through the life span, the predictable process of personal change, transitions in relationships and work, and explore what it's like to know that we aren't where we used to be, but aren't yet where we may need to go. If you've experienced career change, relationship loss, have moved, retired, or graduated from school, have started or stopped caregiving for a loved one, or experienced any other significant life change, the Transitions program will help you stay centered on God's will for your life, meet fellow travelers, learn about the change process, and think more clearly about your past, present, and future.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 reminds us that "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven." If you find yourself in a season where you feel a little disoriented, a little disheartened, or just unsure of next steps, connect and learn with your All Saints community. Call me at 623 242-4692 to learn more or to enroll.

November 20, 2014 Friendship Through Serious Illness

I counseled people with serious illness for many years. They taught me what they needed from friends, family, and me, and I wanted to share it with you as we enter a time of year that can be challenging when you're sick. Here's a list of do's and don'ts, straight from the experts.

Don't use warrior language. Don't tell me I've got to stay positive and that I'm going "beat this thing" because I don't want to worry that my attitude may make me sicker. Sometimes I feel positive but sometimes I'm just really angry and terribly afraid. I'd like to think that I can share those times with you as it may ease my burden and make me feel less alone.

Don't bring me your recommendations for doctors, alternative treatments, or your stories of other peoples' illnesses, unless I ask you. It can be terribly stressful and confusing to choose a treatment plan when faced with a new diagnosis of a serious illness, or progression of an existing diagnosis, and sometimes the doctors I see don't even agree. Having extra information, that may be contrary to what I'm already being told, is only confusing.

Don't ask me if I need anything. Assume that I do, but that I may be too tired, stressed, sick, or independent to think through specific suggestions.

Do learn a little about my personal situation and offer specific assistance. Make it easy for me to say "yes" to you. "Mary I'm going to the grocery store and am going to pick you up a couple of things. What's been easy for you to eat lately?" Another way to help is to find the person in my social circle who seems to know what's going on with me and what's needed. If there isn't anyone like that, maybe you can be that person. Everyone facing serious illness needs a personal navigator, someone to help meet needs and see that things stay organized.

Do stay in my life. Many of the people who gathered around me in the beginning have moved on, but I need help and support now more than ever.

Do make sure someone is going to important doctor's appointments with me. Accompany me when you can. I will feel more relaxed, and will remember the information I'm given better if I have a caring person with me.

Do spend time with me just having fun, doing things that don't have anything to do with being sick. Just recognize that I may have physical limitations that affect the kinds of activities we can pursue together, and I may not have energy at night or for long periods of time.

Do check on my family caregiver. Encourage that person to get out regularly, and offer to hang out with me so that he/she can get some respite time.

Do remember that the holidays are especially tough, for a lot of reasons. Maybe I'm not feeling jolly. Maybe I don't have energy for my usual holiday roles and feel guilty about that, maybe I'm

feeling sad or anxious because I wonder if I'll see another Christmas. Be with me. Love me. Pray for me. Laugh with me. We're both here now, and love crosses all boundaries.

November 6, 2014 The Living Compass

I recently returned from Chicago and Congregational Wellness Advocate training with the Living Compass program, sponsored by the Samaritan Family Wellness Foundation, and hosted by the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago. It was a fantastic experience and I'm excited to bring the program to All Saints. Living Compass, grounded in Scripture and the tradition of the Church, is a faith-based wellness ministry that provides resources, coaching, education, and support to individuals, families, and congregations as they seek to live the abundant life God intends for us. The Church is the original "wellness center", after all, so when our church has a comprehensive focus on wellness and wholeness, it is a practical return to our roots as Christians.

The Living Compass self-assessment and group experience helps you focus in on heart, soul, strength, and mind, and discern the areas in which God is calling you to make positive changes. You consider this path toward greater wholeness in community with others, and we do this work together, as brothers and sisters in Christ. Thus, participating in a Living Compass educational event will help you connect with fellow travelers, deepen your spiritual practice, and support you to make the changes you want to make to your physical, emotional, social, and spiritual health. The Case for Connection workshops that Pastor Anne Ellsworth and I are leading will introduce you to Living Compass, and I encourage you to attend. We will also bring Living Compass ideals to Advent with devotional guides to enrich the season for you. Please look for them in the pews and the narthex. During Lent we will experience the work of Living Compass together as we prepare ourselves for Easter.

Reverend Scott Stoner, developer of the program, explained best the profound impact engagement in this process can have in your life. "Just as a navigational compass is acted upon by a force outside of itself, the inner compasses of our lives are also acted upon God, who calls us to greater wholeness, gently reminding us when our course in life needs correction. On the journey towards wholeness, we soon learn that we are not the only ones who are doing the seeking; God is seeking us as well. Living Compass materials encourage us to be still and listen to God's whisper."

October 23, 2014 October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

I've heard a lot lately about domestic violence in the NFL as a series of players behaved very badly, some in public places. October is domestic violence awareness month, and it's easy for us to see this as the problem of others, particularly wealthy young men who are violent for a living. But it's not, and I want to remind us of that.

One in every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime. The United States Department of Justice defines domestic violence "as a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner... This includes any behaviors that intimidate, manipulate, humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, coerce, threaten, blame, hurt, injure, or wound someone."

Domestic violence, then, is a continuum of behaviors, not just the dramatic knockouts that make the news. The person who constantly criticizes a partner, yells, and engages in name calling is operating from the same state of mind as the person who hits. This type of abuse is extraordinarily common and happened in my own life. We can be well educated, financially comfortable, professionally successful, and still live day to day with someone who leaves us feeling frightened. Abusers can be beloved and respected in the community and still come home to systematically control intimate partners because the payoff is profound.

Look at this list of clues and see if any feel familiar in your own life, or that of a loved one:

- Do you walk on eggshells around your partner?
- Do you often find yourself "in trouble" with your partner and aren't sure why?
- Does your partner seem to get angry just when things appear to be going well?
- Does your partner treat you poorly in private, but praises you in public?
- Do friends or family distrust your partner or express concern to you?

These are all red flags that the relationship may be abusive. Partners may or may not be willing to change, but if any of this feels uncomfortably familiar, I encourage you to call the National Domestic Violence Hotline and talk to someone, 1-800-799-7233(SAFE), because an emotionally abusive relationship can turn physically threatening at any time. God designed our closest relationships to mirror that of Christ and the Church, and respect, love, and abuse can't coexist, whether or not the media is watching.

October 2, 2014 Health and Wellness on Four Furry Feet!

Let's talk about our pets this week as we celebrate the Feast of St Francis of Assisi with All Saints' annual pet blessing. We have known for some time that our animals make us feel good, but research is starting to back this up. Psychologists at Miami University in Ohio and St Louis University studied more than 200 people and found that pet owners enjoyed greater self-esteem, better physical fitness, less loneliness, and less anxiety than non-owners. A large study funded by the National Institutes of Health found that people who walked a dog regularly were more fit and less obese than those who don't. And another study found that among patients with coronary artery disease, pet owners exhibited a greater 1-year survival rate than non-owners. Pets have also been shown to reduce our cholesterol, triglycerides, and blood pressure.

Pet ownership, like any loving relationship, does involve a certain level of stress. Illness can be spread from pets to people, so we should take precautions, and the Center for Disease Control has a terrific website, Healthy Pets Healthy People, www.cdc.gov/healthypets/pets/, where you can review the recommendations for your type of pet. Another source of pet related stress can be financial. Although we love them, pets can be expensive, and when times are hard that's sometimes difficult. Here are a few resources to keep and share:

Empty Bowl Pet Food Pantry

www.emptybowlpetfoodpantry.org

888-679-1109

Distribution cites throughout Maricopa County.

Chuck Waggin' Pet Food Pantry

www.chuckwaggin.org

602-686-8104

Provides pet food and pet service referrals.

American Animal Hospital Association

Helping Pets Fund

www.aahahelpingpets.org

866 4HELPPETS

Can provide veterinary care for sick or injured pets even if they have been abandoned or if their owner is experiencing financial hardship. Funds are limited.

Care Credit

www.carecredit.com

(800) 859-9975

A credit card company for health care, including veterinary care. They offer a variety of plan options and monthly payment plans tailored to the individuals budget.

Red Rover Relief

www.redrover.org/program/redrover-relief

916.429.2457

Financial grants to care for animals in urgent need of life saving medical treatment.

September 21, 2014 “Gradually and Suddenly”

This week I’d like to share an article **written by the Reverend Scott Stoner of the Living Compass program**. We’ll talk more about Living Compass during this program year, and I think you’ll enjoy this way of looking at your wellness. In the meantime, let’s think about how change happens in our lives, and you can learn more about Living Compass at livingcompass.org.

“In Ernest Hemmingway’s book *The Sun Also Rises*, a character is asked how he went bankrupt. He answers, “Gradually, then suddenly.” Most problems, including bankruptcy, develop gradually and then...suddenly. Most of the time when we experience a “suddenly” in our lives, that “suddenly” follows weeks, months, years, or even decades of “gradually.” As problems develop gradually, it is easy to choose not to have the conversations that need to be had, or to make the changes that need to be made. It seems easier in the short run to ignore the whispers and hope the problem will go away. Problems never seem like a big deal in the “gradual” stage. “Gradually” can easily be minimized because each step of “gradually” does not seem that significant at the time.

The problem only becomes a big deal when “gradually” becomes “suddenly.” That “suddenly” could be when a person gets a DUI arrest, a partner has an affair, a person loses their job after years of under performing, a child is suspended from school for using drugs, or a person experiences a health crisis following years of ignoring warning signs. Whenever a “suddenly” happens, things can no longer be minimized and must be addressed to move forward.

It is also worth noting that this same truth applies to growth and positive changes that we make. It may seem like any of the following happen “suddenly.” A person gets the promotion they have been working for years, a person learns to play a complex piece of music, or a congregation “suddenly” experiences growth. The reality is that while these changes may appear to happen “suddenly” they are in fact due to many small choices and changes that were made “gradually” over a longer period of time.

Is there a “gradually” in your life that you are avoiding that needs to be tended to before it turns into a “suddenly?” Might it be related to work, family, a friend, or your own well-being? Is there a positive “gradually” that you would like to start in motion somewhere in your life? If so, why not start today? Keep positive even if your progress seems slow and gradual, because in the end, there really is no other path to “suddenly” than “gradually.”

August 26, 2014 Are you lonely?

If you answer honestly, about a quarter of you would tell me that you have no one with whom to share your deepest concerns. If we remove your immediate family members from consideration, more than half of you would say you have no one in whom to confide. These sad findings were recently published by a research team from the University of Arizona and Duke University.

We've known for a long time that loneliness is terrible for well-being. More people than ever live alone, according to the Census Bureau, and the internet has made it easy for us to live fiercely autonomous lives. The average adult spends over five hours per day online, on nonvoice mobile activities or with other digital media this year, then 4 hours and 31 minutes watching television, according to market research. Even our long work days work against us at times. That Duke/U of A team found that every ten minute increase in a worker's commute time led to a ten percent decrease in time spent building and maintaining relationships.

We can be lonely in a crowd because talking isn't sharing, and we can be lonely but oblivious, if we tell ourselves that we value our independence more than anything, and that being in control is preferable to reliance on any sort of social network. But, altogether, this social isolation is leading to alarming trends, including an unprecedented rise in suicide among the middle aged.

God designed us physiologically and psychologically for community, for interdependence, not independence, a spiritual truth supported by research such as that published by "Bowling Alone" author Robert Putnam. He found that joining and participating in just one group would cut a person's odds of dying in the next year in half, a surprising statistic.

We start the All Saints program year next Sunday, and I encourage you to commit to growing your social connectedness this Fall, for the purpose of enriching your own physical, mental, and spiritual well being. Find a program at church that interests you, sign up, and commit to showing up. You will find many opportunities to connect, learn, pray, and serve with other caring people and you will never regret having turned off the TV, or stepped away from the chores. Join us!

August 14, 2014 EQ & IQ

This Sunday we bless our children's backpacks and send them off to a new school year, with all the support they need for intellectual growth. Are you also considering ways in which to help them build emotional intelligence? Emotional intelligence, or EQ, is at least as important as IQ, and children who learn these skills become adults who can successfully navigate the challenges of adulthood. It's particularly important to mentor our boys in emotional intelligence, as certain aspects of male biology, and much of what our culture teaches them about manhood, runs counter to these principles of emotional awareness. As you face this busy week, please think about how you can help your kids grow in this important way.

To build emotional intelligence, children need skills in two basic areas, and much of this mentoring is done by parents during daily interactions.

Emotional Skills: Kids need to learn to identify and label what they feel. Anger is different than frustration, for instance. They need to learn to express feelings, figure out how intense they are, and manage difficult feelings in a healthy way. This doesn't mean stoicism, but rather figuring out ways to feel better, ie. talking to a relative or friend, exercise, listening to music, art, etc. Kids need to learn the difference between feelings and actions. It's OK to feel mad, but not to behave aggressively, for instance. They need to learn how to delay gratification, control impulses, and figure out strategies to handle life stress.

August 14, 2014 EQ & IQ

Thinking Skills: Kids need to learn how to talk to themselves inside their heads when stressed in a way that is realistic and emotionally helpful. They need to learn to read social cues from other people, understand the perspective of others, understand what is and isn't acceptable behavior in different situations, develop a positive attitude toward life, learn healthy problem solving, and build realistic self-awareness about their strengths and vulnerabilities.

This is a big list, but these are the essential building blocks of healthy adulthood, in which life losses, challenges, and disappointments are met with positive action. These skills will also help your children build their own healthy relationships as they mature, leading to loving marriages, deep friendships, and robust social support, which buffers against emotional and physical health problems.

Best of luck this start of the school year, and remember EQ is as important as IQ!

July 30, 2014 Caregiver 101

Many members of our congregation are caregiving older or disabled family members. Nationally, 21% of households are impacted by these responsibilities and 90% of all long term care is provided by family and friends. Let talk about the A-B-C's of healthy and effective caregiving.

A. Strongly encourage the person you are caring for to have advanced directives completed and keep a copy of those documents. If you are assisting with medical decisions, make sure you named as a healthcare proxy.

B. Have regular conversations with your loved one about their views and values near end of life. What type of care do they want, and as importantly, what type don't they want. The Five Wishes document has great ideas for this conversation and I have copies.

C. Attend medical appointments periodically, especially when new health problems arise or decisions need to be made, and make sure your loved one's medical power of attorney is on his or her chart, so you can call in and speak to someone about medical care.

D. Seek out your experts. Whatever you are dealing with; dementia, cancer, physical caregiving, etc, there is education and support out there. For example:

If you are providing a lot of physical care check out the Foundation for Senior Living Caregiver House, They offer practical hands on training for family caregivers.

<http://www.fslcaregiverservices.org/the-caregiver-house/002>

If you are dealing with difficult dementia behaviors, contact the Desert Southwest Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. They offer free caregiver education and care consultations.

http://www.alz.org/dsw/in_my_community_15608.asp

If you are coping with a loved one's cancer treatment, the Central Arizona branch of the Cancer Support Community offers free family support groups to learn care and coping strategies.

<http://cscaz.org/>

E. Time for fun. I cannot overemphasize how important it is to take a break. Caregivers are at risk for declining physical and emotional health and the primary way to hang in for the long run is to get periodic respite from your duties. Try to learn how to ask for help.

F. Long distance caregiving. It is really difficult to be separated from someone you love, and to still find ways to assist in their care. The National Institute on Aging has a great booklet to help you called Long Distance Caregiving-Getting

Started. <http://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/long-distance-caregiving-getting-started>