“It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual one.” 1 Corinthians 15:44

From the beginning, we are created as both physical and spiritual beings. Genesis Chapter 2 verse 7 tells us, “The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.” We are dust and the breath of God. In the Resurrection of Christ, the ultimate unity of body and spirit are glorified and become our hope in the face of illness and death.

As the Church’s ministry of health care, we affirm that each person is an inseparable unity of body and spirit. To treat one effectively we must consider the other. As neuroscience uncovers the deep connections between the mind and the body, what we known to be true spiritually is affirmed scientifically. In her book, Molecules of Emotion, neuroscientist and pioneer mind-body researcher Candace Pert concludes, “I can no longer make a strong distinction between the brain and the body.”

Physician and Director of the George Washington University Institute for Spirituality and Health Christina M. Puchalski tells a story familiar to many of us. An 88-year patient lies in the intensive care unit. He is on a ventilator with end stage pancreatic cancer. His family wants to do everything they can while hoping for a miracle. It was only after the chaplain and ethics consults that they are able to reframe their thinking and come to believe that perhaps the miracle they were waiting for was a peaceful death and union with God. This kind of respect, understanding, counseling and relationship are emblematic of what it means to care for the whole person.

Attending to the whole person happens when a housekeeper feels empowered to pray with patients, or when a nurse asks about a family’s spiritual practice. It happens when colleagues can express their vocation and what gives meaning to their work.

In offering care, the Catholic health ministry has a deep responsibility to honor God’s plan for creation by tending to each patient as a unity of mind, body and spirit with a lifetime of emotions and experiences that all play meaningful roles in the care that will return them to wholeness.

(over)
For Reflection

Thomas Merton said, “A life is either all spiritual or not spiritual at all. No man can serve two masters. Your life is shaped by the end you live for. You are made in the image of what you desire.”

- Do I / we integrate spiritual care into the physical care process?
- Do I / we take opportunities to provide compassionate presence and spiritual care to those we serve?
- Do I / we honor the spirit and vocation of those with whom we serve and seek spiritual meaning in our days?
- Do I / we attend to our personal and collective spirituality?

Prayer

Let us pray together,

God of all Grace, you create us to be a dynamic unity of mind, body and spirit just as you are a three in one – creator, redeemer and sanctifier. Deepen our call to care for the whole person. May those we serve know your healing through our compassionate care and loving presence. In this season of reflection and prayer, give us the graces we need to more fully follow you and become who we claim to be in your name. Amen.