

From the Director's Desk

Greetings! I hope the hope, peace, joy, and love of Christmas continue to warm your heart and encourage you in your ministry as we enter into the New Year.

In this edition of UpDATE, we offer you the second installment of Sr. Therese Anne Kiefer's article on pain and pain management. You may recall that Sr. Therese Anne discussed in her first article the multi-disciplinary approach to pain management that is available in our program. She highlighted the role of the physicians, psychologists, and physical therapists. In the present edition, Sr. Therese Anne explores the spiritual dimension of pain, considering the way in which a client's faith influences his or her response to pain and suffering. Sister Therese Anne expresses well the comprehensive, wholistic care a person receives when she or he becomes a client of the Behavioral Medicine Institute's Program for Psychology & Religion.

Along that line, I want to share with you that the Headache & Pain Management Program has engaged a new director. Tim Grove, Ph.D. a Licensed Psychologist who has been practicing at BMI for several years, recently accepted the position.

Dr. Grove has extensive training and clinical experience in pain management. He completed a one-year rotation in pain and headache management at the Dwight D. Eisenhower VA Medical Center in Leavenworth, KS; completed a practicum in Pain Management at the Rusk Rehabilitation Center in Columbia, MO; and founded and managed for six years a Headache and Stress Reduction Clinic at Adams State College in Alamosa, CO. He has also taken workshops in Advanced Biofeedback, Brain Wave Training, and Advanced Brain Wave Training at the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, KS.

As director of the Headache and Pain Management, Dr. Grove leads an interdisciplinary team in integrated diagnosis and treatment. They work together to implement empirically supported techniques in a plan that is always individually tailored.

When clergy or religious are referred for assessment and/or treatment of pain, Dr. Grove and I work closely to insure that each one is recognized as an individual with a unique relationship to God and community, which must be integrated into the plan. The goal is to empower the client so he or she can take reasonable control of the pain and thereby cope more effectively.

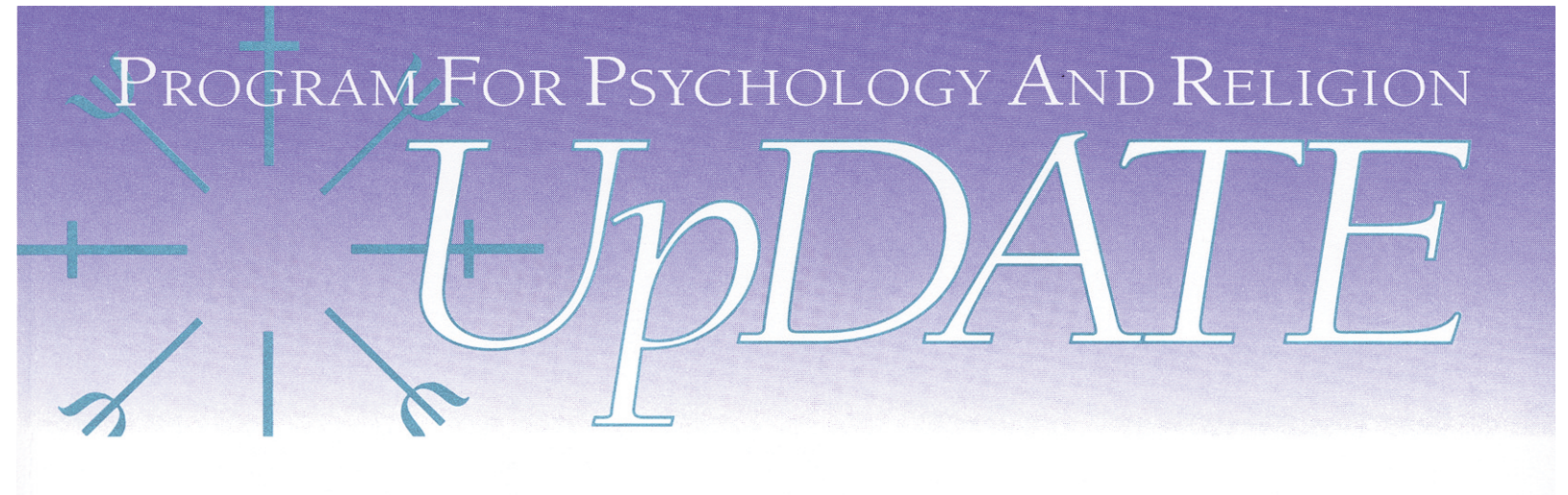
One other note: I want to remind you that the next Renewal Week for former clients of our intensive program is scheduled for January 25th – 28th. Clients and their superiors should have received the schedule and registration information in November. It is not too late to register. Contact Sue Mertens at 314-289-9407 for more information.

Warm regards,
Christopher S. M. Grimes, Psy.D.
Director, Program for Psychology and Religion
Assistant Clinical Professor of Family & Community Medicine at St. Louis University



Saint Louis Behavioral Medicine Institute is an affiliate of Saint Louis University Health Sciences Center

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Pain and Suffering: Part 2: The Christian Experience

by Sister Therese Anne Kiefer, ASC, Spiritual Coordinator

It is about letting go. It is about hope. It is about mystery, the Paschal Mystery.

In Part 1, we shared the wisdom and clinical experience of various health care professionals in our Institute, especially with regard to the medical treatment and behavioral management of pain.

Their insights are very important, but there are yet deeper questions, questions that dwell in the depths of the heart, each one a psalm.

Why is God doing this?

Why me?

What have I done that I am being punished for?

Why do the good suffer and why do the "bad" seem to prosper?

How can I make sense of any of this?

How could a good God allow this?

We are turned upside down and inside out because pain takes away any illusion of control to

which we might have clung. We must learn to surrender; we must find meaning, but how? That is the age-old question.

We have the answer in the stories of life, suffering, death, and resurrection that have been told since the beginning. Consider the example of a simple seed that has all that it needs in itself to grow to become a huge tree that will bloom and produce more seeds. But the seed has to die to be transformed; life flows from suffering and death. This is the rhythm of all that exists.

This is the story of Jesus of Nazareth. He came to show us how to live, how to suffer and how to die. His Gospel teaches us that new life came from his own death—the hope and mystery of the Resurrection.

If we read the book of Job and his struggles from the perspective of chronic pain, we find that 'pain is a "wise advisor." C.S. Lewis said, "God speaks to us in our joy;



God shouts to us in our pain." We know also that suffering is a universal experience; it unites us as nothing else does. Suffering slows us down and teaches us that productivity, success, and achievement are not the essence of life.

These are gifts in the pain, but pain is not a good in itself; we do

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not seek pain for its own sake or for the sake of these gifts.

How shall we relate to pain; how do we persevere?

There are many experiences in life for which we do not have answers. We cannot logically explain these mysteries. One important aspect of the spiritual dimension of pain management is, to borrow the words of Rilke, "We learn to live with the questions."

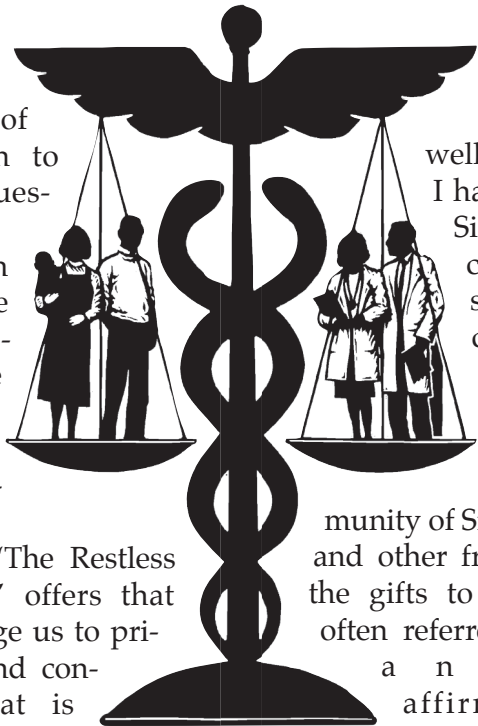
Living with questions is the mode of the student. Pain, the "wise adviser," can teach us much about ourselves.

John Shea, in "The Restless Widow, Year C," offers that pain can encourage us to prioritize our life and concentrate on what is most important. It challenges us to deal with unfinished business, relationships that need reconciling, and people who need to be thanked. We consider what is the center of our being, that about which we are most passionate? What is essential in life, and of what can we let go?

Pain invites us to learn a "new normal." Life will never be as it has been, and clinging to what has been results only in more pain. Yet, the same teacher holds out the promise in the mystery, the sense that there is more to come.

Pain leads us into deeper relationship with our communities. Very recently, Jose Feuerherd, for-

mer publisher of the National Catholic Reporter, summarized his journey with the quip, "Serious illness is not something you can do alone." When we accept the invitation to deeper relationship, commu-



nity itself helps to heal us.

I remember very well the conversations I had with one of the Sisters in my own community. She suffered with cancer—the disease and the treatments—for two years. Having a nurturing community of Sisters and relatives and other friends was one of the gifts to which she most often referred. Their positive

and affirming attitude, and that of the physicians and health care providers, instilled in her a sense of confidence. She was convinced that each of them, in their communication and their prayer, enhanced her healing.

The formal prayer in which she had engaged all her adult life was now difficult for her. This is a common experience of many who struggle with serious illness and

its pain. In some cases, she gratefully let others speak prayer over her. In general, she came to see

that her particular prayer was to surrender to her experience: giving into her greater needs for sleep, turning the long times alone into reflective solitude, allowing the memories to come to her as they would.

From this base, my Sister grew also in compassion. She spoke of being moved to tears when, going for her regular treatments, she saw so many others, especially children, suffering with her. She felt with the parents as they held their children during chemotherapy, knowing full well that the aftereffects would bring more pain and discomfort.

It was to this whole Body of Christ that she referred when she prayed, "Into your hands."

Though we live in mystery, we are not abandoned.

John Shea, in "The Restless Widow, Year C," offers that pain can encourage us to prioritize our life and concentrate on what is most important.

And so it was that in this prayer of surrender she did not lose hope, but gained new hope. In the pain and in the shadow of death, she continued to live mindfully in the present moment. In that moment were all these persons who walked with her. And in that moment was the Lord: entering into the pain and the anxiety with her.

How different it all was from the early days of her religious life

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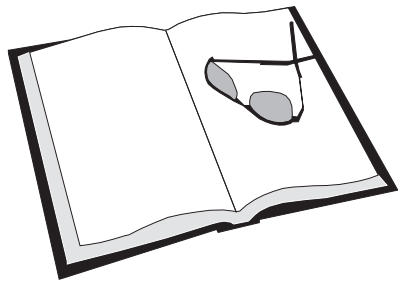
when she was taught to respond to pain and suffering by "offering it up," and yet in some essential way, how similar.

Is she cured of cancer? For the moment: yes. Was she healed in many other ways? Forever: yes.

The future is impossible to predict. Disease and pain may recur. What this Sister does know is that she cannot control the most important events of her life, and she can live with that. In so doing, she is free to embrace the gifts of her life. She is free to be a woman of great compassion.

Here is the lesson for all of us. Whether one is suffering in the context of a life-threatening illness or with a chronic condition or in the course of everyday life or even with the "disease" of aging, there is always in the pain an invitation to surrender. This is what it means to be creature, and to be creature, to be one's self, is to find peace.

Though we live in mystery, we are not abandoned. Though we stand weeping in the company of Mary Magdalene, it is the Lord who appears to us and gives to us new life.



**BOOK
REVIEW**

***"With the Dawn Rejoicing:
A Christian Perspective on
Pain and Suffering"***

S. Therese Anne Kiefer, ASC

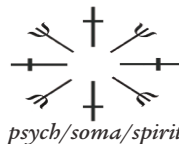
S. Melanie Svoboda, SND, is a former Provincial of the Sisters of Notre Dame of Chardon, Ohio, a prominent author and retreat director, and a person who continues to live with chronic, sometimes debilitating pain.

She speaks from this experience in her writing, asking many of the same questions that have arisen in others struggling with prolonged adversity, and sharing the answers she has received.

This is an excellent book for prayerful reflection from which one might hope to draw strength from the Lord's love and grace. S. Melanie offers her own prayer from the depths of suffering and does not hesitate to suggest specific actions that she believes will help others embrace pain of whatever type.

This is a book for those ready to engage in honest conversation with God about real troubles, but always with the hope of relationship that will sustain through it all.

Published by Twenty-Third Publications, One Montauk Avenue, Suite 200, New London CT. 06320-2008 (www.23rdpublications.com). ISBN-13: 978-1585956999; List price: \$12.95.



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- Chronic Pain/Headache

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CORRECTION

In our last issue of the Newsletter, there was an incomplete address in the reference to the tapes on mindfulness by Jon Kabat-Zinn. Dr. Kabat-Zinn can be reached at:

Sounds True
P.O. Box 8010,
Boulder, CO 80306
We regret the error.