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CareLinks

Tis the Season to Be...

I imagine we could find any number of words to finish that sentence as the holiday season settles upon us. We could easily say, "Tis the season to be stressed" or "Tis the season to be shopping, cooking, cleaning, traveling, and exhausted!" We have so much going on and it can be so very easy to get caught up in our whirlwind of activities, not to mention the emotional frenzy they can whip us in to.

What if this holiday season we simply focus on the first five words of the carol and not worry about filling in the blank? What if this year we say to ourselves, "Tis the season just to be."

Now I realize how quaint that idea sounds compared to the reality of our day-to-day existence with its multitude of obligations. We have meetings, appointments, shopping lists, laundry, travel plans and a hundred other things jockeying for our attention. Taking time to focus on "just being" does not mean withdrawing or neglecting our daily to-dos. Instead, it suggests framing our day from a certain mental, emotional, and spiritual point of view.

Focusing on "just being" entails a purposeful shift in our attention and the things we think about in the face of our daily humdrum. As daily, weekly, and monthly tasks pile up seemingly without reprieve, it's all-too-easy to focus solely on what needs to be done. Couple these tasks with a cultural attitude that correlates worth with what you can accomplish, produce, or get done and it's a recipe for burnout, depression, anxiety, and fear of disappointing those around us (not to mention ourselves).

Practicing "just being", however, reorients us. It's a purposeful shift in our focus and our thinking from what we have to do today and how we contribute to who we are and where we are right now and the depth of blessings those entails. This type of thinking does not come naturally to us. It's easier and (seemingly) more productive to focus on the day and week ahead. But if we make time for a few quiet moments in our day and pick one aspect of our being to reflect and ruminate on we might be surprised at the little nuggets of joy, laughter, and gratitude we come up with.

I like to think of it as a kind of "active resting." It's a purposeful, contemplative resting in who you are as a person. Maybe you're a teacher reflecting on what drew you to the profession or some great students you had. If you're a spouse, a sibling, a parent, those roles certainly come with a myriad of duties, but make time to ruminate on the joys, the treasured moments that arise simply because you are who you are and you are where you are.

Trying to focus on simply being like this might not come easy, but with repetition and a little practice a small change in focus this can cast a new light on our outlook on the day and the things we need to get done.

I'm certainly not saying this practice is a be-all, fix-all to the stress and anxiety that can well up in us. I am saying that when I take a few minutes (before I get out of my car or as I sit with a warm cup of coffee) to reflect on all the things, big and little, like what my spouse did for me yesterday, packing my lunch for the day, dropping whatever she was doing to greet me as I came home, or running to the grocery store just to pick something up for me. Or I can reflect on how warm and welcoming our dinner table felt as a kid at Thanksgiving (not that it doesn't feel like that now, too) it does something to me. As I ruminate on these things, it's hard not to feel a sense of gratitude, of joy, of peace. These are precious things to take with me as I start my day

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Simply put, we know we can't fix the problems our care partners are facing, but we can make sure they know they are not facing their problems alone.

Tis the Season to Be . . .

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or head into my next appointment. I had to be purposeful about it though, intentional in my thinking and reflecting. I could just as easily sit in my car fretting about the appointment I'm walking into or planning how I'm going to get the next 10 things on my list accomplished after this quick appointment. The choice is mine.

Just two days ago I held my tiny, newborn niece in my arms. It was a precious experience, getting to hold her and be with her in her first few hours of being out and about in this world. It was exciting looking at her and imagining all she might do, the seemingly endless potential: would she be an athlete, an artist or both? Would my wife eventually try and teach her to play the piano or trumpet? As fun as it was to contemplate her future, it was quietly profound to sit and admire her for the little miracle she represents. By simply being, by merely showing up in our lives she changes everything. What she knows of the world extends no farther than her tiny little hands can reach. Yet she is loved and cherished far more than she could ever possibly imagine. You might even say she is loved deeply in spite of what she is able to bring into this world, because I was there for her first diaper change and it was profound in an entirely different way.

You are not a newborn baby, but you are no less miraculous. Chances are you wear many hats and have any number of roles in a given day. Each of those roles, that multifacetedness you possess, is worthy of reflection. You're a parent, a grandparent, a teacher, an engineer.

You're a spouse, a widower, a caregiver. All of our titles, our roles, come with responsibilities and obligations to be certain, but they are also worthy of reflection. They all contain nuggets of joy, encouragement, and peace. Practice this not only for yourself, but for other people in your life whose mere presence has made it that much brighter. They might be interested to hear your reflections.

Lastly, consider for a moment what "just being" means for the people we love and serve. If you've been serving on a Care Team with Interfaith Care Partners for a time, you've more than likely heard the various ministries described as "a ministry of presence." Simply put, we know we can't fix the problems our care partners are facing, but we can make sure they know they are not facing their problems alone.

I've spoken with many Care Team members who are concerned about saying the wrong thing or are unsure of what to say at all to someone who is suffering. They're aware that their simple words and utterances can do little to bring lasting comfort. One thing I like to remind team members (and caregivers): you can't say the wrong thing if you don't show up. And absence in time of illness or crisis speaks volumes more than an awkward attempt at encouragement or a foot-in-mouth statement. Mere presence is validating, it tells them you care and that they matter enough and are important enough for you to show up and be present with them.

Presence goes a long way. Tis the season just to be.

—Kevin Perkins, LMSW

Important Dates in 2015

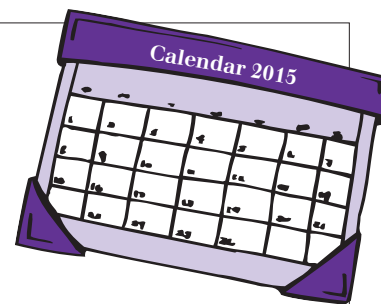
We are grateful that we have had another year of exciting events, conferences, and educational offerings for the general public, and are also excited to announce some important dates that are coming up in the New Year. Stay tuned for more information!

February 18, 2015: 28th Annual Sweet Charity; Westin Memorial City

April 18, 2015: Caregiver Conference; Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, 18220 Upper Bay Rd, Houston, 77058

May 2, 2015: 2nd Annual Kentucky Derby Party; Venue TBD

**Other conferences and educational offerings are being scheduled.*



A Gift for Everyone's List

It's that time of the year again. Black Friday, stringing lights, turning on the heater (then the a/c, then the heater, then the a/c), pulling the tree out of the closet, replacing light bulbs, buying eggnog, watching Charlie Brown, hosting in-laws, outlaws, friends, and animals. Harried, hurried, tired, toiling. Sometimes it's amazing that so many people call this their "favorite" time of the year!

And, yet, it's not that amazing. In spite of the endless loop of seasonal commercials, the stress of the crowds, the quest to make everything "perfect," this is the season when we take time spend with others. We remember loved ones or friends that we have lost. We volunteer our time, we donate our clothes and food, we go to services of remembrance and worship at our synagogue or congregation. We focus on the *good* more than the *goods*.

We probably think about others significantly more during these couple of months than we do for the rest of the year. And when we think of others, we often try to find that one gift that we know would be meaningful for our loved one or friend. Maybe it's a picture from that trip you took together last year, or a book and a mug of hot chocolate. Whatever the case, we want our gifts to be valuable to their recipients. Not pricey, necessarily, but valuable. And we frequently give our own "wishlist" to someone who would like to give us a gift.

Marlene Pyle writes in a column from Today's Caregiver ("The Value of Friendship"¹) about her experiences caring for her 85-year

old grandmother. She learned everything that she could in order to better be of service to her grandmother. Things such as "which supermarkets offer senior citizens' discounts on which days of the week." But one of the things Ms. Pyle realized was that, in an effort to take excellent care of her grandmother, she had neglected to take care of herself. She quit exercising, spending time with friends, volunteering, and doing the things that she loved. Perhaps her story sounds familiar to you or sounds like someone you know who is in a caregiving role.

What Pyle came to realize was that she derived value from the time that she got to spend with her friends. Granted, this time was significantly reduced after her grandmother moved in, but she began to understand that by allowing herself to spend time with friends, even occasionally, she saw the value of not shutting herself off from the outside world.

This year, if you are looking for the perfect gift for a caregiver, offer the gift of friendship. Be there to help with transportation, meals, or to be a sounding board. As Kevin suggested in the above article, "just being" with someone is far more valuable than the priciest gift you can purchase. And if you're a caregiver, don't be afraid to add "friendship" to your gift list. Tell people what you need. By doing so, you are positioning yourself to be a better caregiver to your friend or loved one.

I hope this is a truly memorable season for all of you.
—John K. Burk, President



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¹ http://www.caregiver.com/channels/stories/articles/value_of_friendship.htm

Family Caregiver Facts

Since the last issue of *Carelinks*, we celebrated National Family Caregivers Month (November). This month is, by presidential proclamation, a month of national focus and recognition on the role of family caregivers. As our population lives longer and ages-in-place more effectively, and as we realize growing changes in health care, the role of family caregivers is going to be more and more recognized as a lynchpin to the healthcare system. To that end, consider some of these facts about family caregivers and their significance in our society:

- 90 percent of people older than age 65 would prefer to age in place. Family, friends and neighbors provide 80 percent of the care which allows that to happen.
- 39 percent of all adult Americans are caring for a loved one who is sick, disabled or frail from old age. That's a 30 percent increase from 2010.
- Almost half of all caregivers perform sophisticated medical or nursing tasks for loved ones, and up to 70 percent manage medications.

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CarePartners Together, the subsidiary of Interfaith CarePartners, is now fully operational. This fee-based service offers in-home, practical care for a competitive rate. The service is designed to assist individuals whose needs have progressed beyond the scope of what volunteers can provide. If you or anyone you know is interested in learning more about CarePartners Together, please contact Veronica Seivwright at (713) 263-7277.

Family Caregiver Facts

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- 37 percent of men now say they are caregivers, compared to 40 percent of women, and 36 percent of people between ages 18 and 29.²

Those are pretty startling statistics for most of us. But they also point to the fact that organizations like Interfaith CarePartners with its core of volunteers like you are going to continue to be instrumental for providing quality care as we move into the future. As we pause at the end of this year to count our many blessings here, just know that we count all of you among them. Thank you for all that you do.

² Statistics take from "Celebrating 90 million family caregivers," in *Aging Today*, November-December 2014, volume xxxv number 6, p. 6.

Happy Anniversary!

Care Team Anniversaries Since the Last *Carelinks*

Alzheimer's Care Team®

Memorial Drive UMC (21)
 Grace Presbyterian (21)
 St. John the Divine Episcopal (14)
 St. Anne's Catholic Tomball (7)
 Bellaire UMC (7)
 Kingwood United Methodist Church (6)
 Fountain of Praise (5)
 Clear Lake United Methodist Church (4)
 Congregation Beth Yeshurun (3)
 Clear Lake Presbyterian Church (2)

Second Family Care Team®

St. Martha Catholic Church (10)
 Holy Cross Lutheran Church (10)
 Gloria Dei Lutheran (7)
 St. Cyril Catholic Church (7)
 Hosanna Lutheran (19)
 St. Ignatius Loyola Catholic (5)
 St. Anne Catholic – Houston (17)
 Woodlands Presbyterian Church (16)
 Epiphany of the Lord Catholic (16)
 Our Lady Of Guadalupe Cath.
 – Rosenberg (12)
 St. Francis of Assisi Catholic (12)

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