

COUNTY-WIDE CHAPLAINCY

"There to Help
When it Hurts"

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Dear Friends of Chaplaincy,

I sat down at my desk at 7 am this morning, and as I looked out the second story window I saw the sky ablaze with "fire-like" colors as the sun peaked over the hills. Yesterday was a beautiful clear sunny day, but it took an overcast of clouds to make possible the beauty of the sunrise that I enjoyed this morning.

Later, as I sat at the breakfast table eating my half bagel and 1/2 banana (yes, I'm still watching the numbers on the scale) and reading the paper, I was again struck by the terrible news it brought into our home. A man found dead after a long search, Taco Bell no longer able to put green onions on their stuff due to E. coli, a school teacher trading good grades for cash and wine, Vice President Cheney's gay daughter pregnant and can't marry her partner in the state they live in due to fact that her dad is against same-sex marriages. But the one that really got to me was, "NASA data: Vital link in food chain frays as oceans warm."

Apparently some satellite has let scientists know that the plankton and the phytoplankton and the zooplankton are the basics that all marine life depends on, and now the whole ocean, and probably the whole world, is in trouble. (That is a reader's digest version of an article that I really don't understand at all!)

Suffice it to say, there is a lot of bad news in our world - not just out there somewhere, but right where we live. Yesterday I was called to a home where the mail carrier noticed that mail was piling up in a box on her route. She went the "extra mile" and went about a half mile to the house to see if anyone was home. There she discovered the 44 year old man on the floor of his garage. He had ended his life 3 months ago. Apparently he was somewhat of a recluse, and no one had missed him. How sad! The poor mail lady now has to deal with the visual impact of it all, and the medical examiner needed to find some next of kin who might take responsibility of the whole or-

deal, including personal effects, and what to do with his remains. One wonders what drove him to that point of desperation.

I just got home from meeting with a young lady whose father divorced her mother when she was three years old. He struggled with mental issues all his life; and at the age 64, his health broken, he had a fatal heart attack. I asked some questions to try to get a feel as to who her father was, but she knew very little about him due to his illness and estrangement. Again a very sad situation.

This afternoon I got a letter from a friend whose son ended his life some time ago. He was a very bright boy and somehow couldn't see living as a real good option. The mother told me that she is in a grief support group; and out of 130 parents who lost children to suicide, she was the only one who had a positive report about the way she was informed of his death and how she and her husband were supported in the days following. She so appreciated the compassionate way the medical examiner informed her of what happened and answered her questions, and then the fact that I was there to help as well. I pass this on to let you know that you as my supporters help to make this all possible.

At this Christmas season, I'm again so glad for the message of the Angel to the Shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem "**Don't be afraid. I have some very good news for you - news that will make everyone happy. Today your Savior was born, He is Christ the Lord.**" I'll take this news any day over this mornings headlines!!

Thanks for standing with me this past year, and a very Merry CHRISTmas to you and yours.

Joyfully serving together with you,
Chaplain Landis Epp