

Counselor's Corner

by The Rev. Dr. Margaret McCray
Executive Director
Westminster Counseling Center

Sighs Too Deep For Words

As a pastoral counselor I am often reminded of the eloquent, moving and majestic words of Paul in the eighth chapter of Romans. He describes the "whole creation...groaning in labor pains" and the Holy Spirit as a sort of midwife who shares our pain and sighs with us as we struggle to hope for what we cannot see. We often suffer without the hope or knowledge that there could be joy beyond the pain. Indeed, far too much suffering in the world is not redemptive but is evidence of humanity's cruelty, arrogance, self-centeredness and inhumanity. Nevertheless, Paul does suggest that there is suffering in which all things work together for good.

One of the varied areas of ministry I am fortunate to experience at Westminster is the communion service that takes place every Sunday morning in the chapel at 9:30. I take turns with other Presbyterian ministers in presiding at a short communion service assisted by an elder. Usually the congregation is small, fewer than ten. One Sunday no one showed up so the elder and I decided to go ahead with the service with just the two of us. She and I sat in the chancel behind the communion table. As we started the prayer of confession a woman came in whom we had never seen before. We invited her to sit with us, exchanged first names, and continued the service.

I started to read the scripture I had chosen from the appointed lectionary texts for the day. It was the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. I had read this very familiar scripture over before the service and had made a few notes about what I would say after the reading. To my surprise I began to cry by the 2nd or 3rd sentence. As a mother of two sons, those familiar but stark words of Abraham's

agonizing journey with his son Isaac were more than I could bear. All three of us were crying by the end of the reading. I talked for a minute or two about Abraham's faith that would not allow him to disobey God, the flicker of hope that must have been there, that somehow God would spare him this agony, and of how his faith also gave him strength in knowing God was present every step of the way. Abraham was prepared to be faithful whatever the outcome.

We three women stood around the communion table and clasped hands in some profound but unspoken bond. We ate and drank and prayed. When we finished the service, the woman told us she was from out of town. She had learned about Westminster's communion service and walked over from her hotel. She had come here to be with her 17-year-old son who had been picked up on drug charges and was in jail. She said the story of Abraham, our tears, sharing the Lord's Supper, and our presence with her gave her the knowledge and hope of God's love and abiding presence. Finding her way to our chapel, hearing that scripture and telling her story were overwhelming to her. We were all awed and moved by our experience together.

Surely what happened that morning was midwived by a Spirit that heard our groans and sighs. That same Spirit assures us that our sufferings cannot separate us from God. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. This is the foundation of our hope in what we cannot see. Thanks be to God.

You can reach Margaret McCray at 612.332.7743
or by email at mmccray@wpc-mpls.org.



IN MEMORY OF

The Rev. Dr. Robert A. Morgan

Westminster Assistant Minister

from 1958-1967

died July 16, 2005

Raymond Alfred Sielaff

Westminster Business Administrator

from 1962-1977

died July 16, 2005

Wayne C. Black

died July 26, 2005

I am the Resurrection and the Life

The Westminster Town Hall Forum Turns 25!

Celebrate with us this fall as we explore this season's theme
"The Arts, Creativity, and the Common Good."

September 22: Independent Filmmaker **Mira Nair**

October 6: Playwright **Edward Albee**

October 20: Musician **Bernice Johnson Reagon**

November 10: Author **Salman Rushdie**

Musical Prelude at 11:30AM

Town Hall Forum from Noon-1:00PM

Free and open to the public.

Further information on page 6 of this issue of the News!