

## LA General Chaplaincy Update- January 2025

**N**ew Year Greetings! I know this comes a little late since it's already been a month since the year started. But if you are like me, you probably feel overwhelmed with everything that has happened in January, especially the wildfires that we have had here in the Los Angeles area. I still remember that first week of January on a Thursday, when I came back home and found my neighbors were all getting ready to evacuate as we could see the fire approaching over the mountains in Encino. As a few of my neighbors left, some of us stayed behind, waiting for the orders to leave, with our cars ready to leave at any time. I am grateful that we were safe but also sad for those affected by the fires. As a chaplain, I have been checking in and providing support to staff members affected by the fires. So far, I only know about three staff members who lost their homes in the Eaton fire. The hospital has mobilized resources, including time off for the staff who have been impacted, and we have been receiving daily updates through email about the fires. During one of my lunch breaks, I walked to the Wellness Center to see what resources were being offered to the community for those impacted by the fires, and the staff members told me that they had not received anyone who was impacted by the fires. All they had were telephone inquiries about what resources they were offering. January has been a challenging month due to the fires, but the ministry at LA General has continued to go well, and I will share about a few of my encounters below:



*A view from my apartment during the LA wildfires- the Palisades Fire*

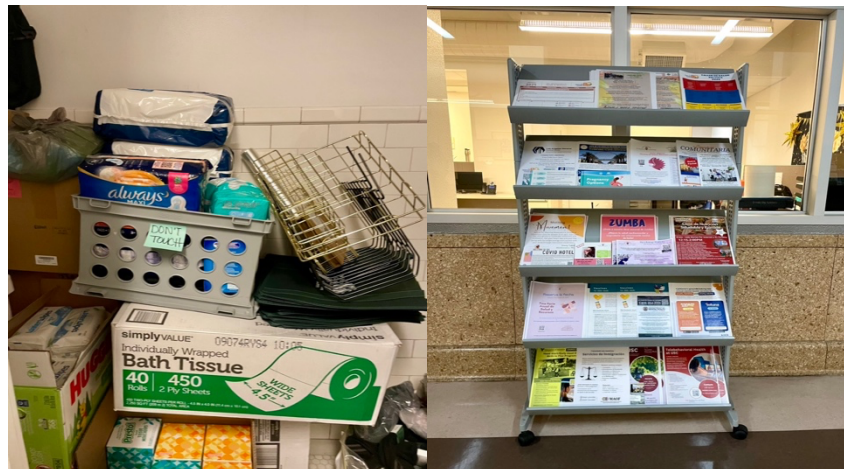
### **“Give me a Hug”**

**I**nitiated a visit with Bart’s family after he was brought into the emergency room, unresponsive and with resuscitation in progress. When I arrived, he was still busy with staff, and various procedures were being done. I had a conversation with one of the doctors, who gave me an update, letting me know that he had informed his family about the current situation. Later I visited with his family—wife and daughter—in the waiting room and offered support. They were sad, tearful, and concerned about Bart (pseudonym). The family confirmed that they had just received an update from the medical team, and they were waiting for more tests. As I did a life review with the family, they narrated how Bart woke up and was not feeling well and was planning to go for his normal dialysis appointment before he collapsed. They also shared that he has several health issues going on, including diabetes and heart failure, and is an amputee. They noted that it’s been challenging for him

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dealing with several medical issues, including when his leg was amputated, and worried about being a burden to his family.

The family also shared that on Bart's side of the family, he has lost several family members to the same issues that he was dealing with, including his twin sister in her fifties. He still has two brothers who are alive, and they had informed them of what was going on. They were also expecting Bart's other five children and some of his seventeen grandchildren and great-grandchildren to visit, though some of them lived out of state. As I observed the wife, I noticed she looked sad and expressed her concerns about Bart's recovery and fears that he may not recover. She noted how the previous night he was tearful and had asked her to give him a hug, which surprised her. She wondered what was going on. However, she concluded that she remained optimistic about his recovery while noting that they had been together for over 42 years. As I explored spiritual needs, the family said that Bart is Catholic and some of the family members are Christian. I shared with the family about our chaplain services and later escorted them to wait in the main lobby after Bart was transferred to the critical care units, and they appreciated the support.



## Wellness Center Resources for the Community

### “A Prisoner in My Own Body”

Another visit I did was with a patient- Noah (pseudonym) while rounding in one of my units. He was awake when I arrived and was busy watching TV. I offered extended listening support as he shared about his health challenges for the past one and a half months that he has been in the hospital. Noah described how it all started when he fell and injured his knee twice outside where he was living. He later had challenges with seizures and ended up in the ICU in a coma. He went to share how he had a near-death experience where he felt like he saw two birds and heard some voices that were telling him to go back, and that's when he later came back. Now that he is awake and out of ICU, Noah's main challenge is that he has necrosis (rotting) on his hands and feet and is no longer able to use them due to lack of circulation. He is still trying to come to terms with the fact that he can no longer do the things that were once simple for him, like walking or eating. He noted that he likes to cook and is a good chef, which is also something he will never be able to do again. He was sad while noting that he must think about a new career. As I did a life review, Noah shared that he is originally from Chicago and moved to LA recently because his cousins kept

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on telling him to come and visit. He also has other family members living here, including his aunt, who visits on a regular basis. Noah was looking forward to having his mom visit from Chicago in February and was hoping that she could help him those things he hasn't been able to do like retrieving his personal belongings from the hospital safe. Noah also confirmed that he is religious and grew up as a Baptist. Noah also shared how his faith has been important to him during this season, though he wonders if he should have not come back from the "dead" because he now feels like he is a prisoner in his own body. I helped Noah drink some lemonade that was brought in for his lunch, as he noted that sometimes the staff take long before they come to feed him. I also checked in with a staff member who was near the door, who agreed to come in and feed Noah his lunch. As I walked out, I informed Noah that I would keep him in prayer and had a plan to follow up and visit. Noah noted how grateful he was to have had someone to talk to about everything he had been through for the past forty-nine days because his life had been altered so much.



*LA General Staff Chaplains, Chaplain Interns from St. Camillus and Good Samaritan Hospital*

### **“Without Counting the Cost”**

One of my interesting visits this month was a referral from Palliative Care to visit with a patient and his family who were exploring the options of hospice or taking him home. When I arrived, Peter (pseudonym) was awake, and at the bedside were his mom and sister, who were visiting for support. As I observed, he seemed very restless and anxious and could hardly find a place to be comfortable on the bed. Peter was able to acknowledge my presence when I introduced myself as a chaplain and, a few times, attempted to engage in conversation but was too restless and weak to talk. I provided support to his mom and sister, and they took turns sharing about his illness and their own coping mechanisms while supporting him. Esther, mom (pseudonym), shared that Peter was her only son and the baby of the family. She described how he got sick and noted that they did not know much about what was going on since they live out of state. He had called her a few months ago and informed her that “things did not look good”, and she had tried to do everything she could to help him get the treatment he needed. Esther spent time talking about Peter while growing up and his love for playing sports such as football and basketball. His dad had made a small basketball court for him outside their house while he was growing up. The sister also shared that he liked computers and was working in the tech industry before he became sick. He was also a talented singer, and the last family event Peter sang at was one of his sister’s weddings. At the end of the visit, we spent time in prayer, and I

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allowed the family to continue supporting Peter while they waited to see if he would be discharged to a hospice.

I made a follow-up visit the next day after I received a referral that Peter had passed on and the family was requesting for me to visit. When I arrived, the family was at the bedside, sad and tearful, and the staff, including a doctor, were present to confirm that Peter had passed. I stayed present with the family and offered extended grief support. They continued to process their grief through stories about Peter, who they said had only been very sick for a few months and their sadness about not being aware. Esther (mom) was grateful that they had spent time with him, and she shared photos of how they traveled out of state so that Peter could visit and spend Christmas with the family. She described how she had tried to give him everything he wanted without thinking about the cost. I helped the family think through the next steps, including liaising with the staff to help them with information about autopsies and cremation. Towards the end of the visit, we spent time in prayer and read some scriptures—Ecclesiastes 3 and Psalms 23—as requested by the family. Then I allowed the family to have some privacy to say their goodbyes while waiting for a close friend of Peter to visit. Though sad, still in shock, and deeply grieving the loss, the family appreciated the support, including the prayers and scripture. They shared that Peter had requested not to have a memorial or service, and so the prayers and scripture reading I offered were the final form of service that they would have to celebrate his life.



### *More Resources from the Wellness Center for the Community*

#### **Prayer Corner:**

Continue to pray for our patients, families, and staff at the hospital. Pray for healing and recovery and for the families as they support their loved ones who are sick. Continue to pray for all those affected by the wildfires, including the staff at the hospital. Pray for those who lost loved ones, homes, schools, churches, businesses, and their communities, and for those who were evacuated and are dealing with damages from the fires. Pray for me as I prepare to preach at three churches this month of February—for my sermon and delivery. Pray for renewed strength as I serve at LA General and for the extra engagements that I am involved in, including my Bioethics Fellowship. Pray for God's continued provision for this ministry of chaplaincy at LA General and for the individual chaplains who serve in the different units at the hospital. Pray for our five chaplain interns as they continue to learn about chaplaincy that the winter unit will go well.