

December 15, 2017

The Rev. Dr. Lee B. Spitzer  
General Secretary, ABC-USA  
P.O. Box 851  
Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851

Dear Rev. Spitzer,

First, context. I have enclosed information regarding the Coalition to Transform Advance Advanced Care including the agenda for their most recent national summit. Within this organization there is the Committee on Interfaith and Diversity. This Committee's primary role is to frame and advocate the role of faith in the journey of living with advance illnesses and ultimately the end of life. The Committee is made up of representatives from many Christian denominations, Jewish organizations, and Muslim entities and seeking other faith traditions. Four years ago the Rev. Dr. Tyrone Pitts (ABC ordained) who is co-chair of this Committee asked Roy Medley to send representation to the Summit from ABC-USA. Roy asked the American Baptist Homes and Caring Ministries Association to represent ABC in this capacity.

For the past three years, as Interim Executive Director of ABHCM I have attended the Summit on behalf of ABC. Unfortunately the Summit has always taken place after the BGM meets in November so I have not been able to make a verbal report. That being the case the following is my written report to you and the BGM. Next year the Summit is scheduled in October so I should be able to make a verbal report to the BGM.

This is a very high level research, medical field, advocacy oriented organization. Much of the program is focused on technical advancements made, political advocacy, and focus on family care givers. The following are some take-aways that I think have some significant opportunities for our denomination, its congregations, and other entities.

1) As a people of faith we do not bring the "what" questions to end of life, but we bring the "why" question to the decisions around the end of life. Asking that question and the resultant discussion is of great value not only to the person facing their end but to their family and to the medical professionals who are doing the "what".

Point being that pastors, faith leaders should play a significant role in making sure those discussion take place. Therefore, we should promote high level training for our clergy members who in turn should establish safe environments in their congregations for the open discussion of issues around making decisions on treatment at the end of life. One pastor said, "we clergy are really good about talking about after death, but not so good at talking about how we get there, about the dying".

2) 90% of the care giving that is done in the U.S. at the end of life is done by family caregivers. Many of those care givers are sitting in the pews of our churches. We should encourage our churches to develop ways of supporting folk who are in that role which sometimes lasts even for years. It is also an opportunity for community outreach by forming support groups that are open

to the larger community. There are wonderful resources that will aid pastors and churches in the ways in which they can be support to care givers from organizations like AARP and the Alzheimer's Society which are accessible on the internet. There is also an opportunity for congregations to capture the experiences of former care givers which would enrich any support program they might put in place.

3) There are three books that the denomination might want to strongly suggest that clergy and church leaders read.

"When Breath Become Air", Dr. Paul Kalanithi.  
"Driving Miss Norma", Tim & Ramie Bauerschmidt  
"Being Mortal", Atul Gawande

4) Several faith based organizations around the country have gone one step farther. They have partnered with health care professionals who train lay persons to be non clinical care guides. These folks go into the homes of folk who are dealing with advanced illnesses which gives the medical professional eyes into the whole person and their living environment. And they are equipped to assist with connecting individuals with community resources that are not medical, e.g meals on wheels.

It would seem to me that we as church have a similar opportunity to train lay persons in our congregations to be not only non clinical guides but pastoral/spiritual guides. In my thirty two years at Fairport Baptist Homes Caring Ministries our pastoral care staff worked with all staff to assist them with listening skills, knowing how to ask the questions that matter, how to be present when no words are necessary, etc. In that way all staff has a role in spiritual care. The impact was enormous and included families of residents.

5) Finally there are two much more difficult issues that are pressing given the advancing technology and the demands that persons are making at the end of life. These are moral/ethical questions that need serious thought and discussion because they will come up when pastors and other faith leaders are at bedside with end of live congregants. The first is, "right to try". This legislation that has been passed in some states gives persons with advance illnesses the right to try experimental therapies (drugs, biologics, devices, etc.) that have completed phase 1 testing but have not been approved by the FDA. The second is "aid in dying". Again, many states have passed legislation that allows medical professionals to provide a competent individual with a prescription for a lethal dose of medication which the individual intends to use to end their life. There are no easy answers here, but a broader awareness of the issue is necessary and certainly faith leaders, clergy need to be prepared to address them when individual circumstances occur.

There is also a third which is highly controlled therapies that involve the use of hallucinatory drugs in the course of advanced illness treatment. The evidence from John Hopkins has shown that these treatments are very effective with enhancing the quality of life of those who are terminally ill, reducing depression, assisting people with living life to the fullest right to the end. It is also suggested that making connections with ones spiritual self is heightened for some individuals who have been in the studies. Again, as the Boomers age, this issue will come up for spiritual guides such as pastors, rabbis and other faith leaders.

Open, honest, non judgmental conversations are critical to faithful spiritual guidance in each of these emerging directions.

Respectfully submitted.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Garth E. Brokaw', written in a cursive style.

Rev. Garth E. Brokaw

Interim Executive Director

The American Baptist Homes and Caring Ministries Association