



Children's National™

**Chaplaincy Services**

# Spiritual Care in the Hospital:

Support, Ritual  
and Sacrament,  
Advocacy, and  
Counsel



Many people will be available to care for you and your family when you are in the hospital. Everyone has their particular expertise – doctors, nurses, pharmacists, therapists, social workers – and chaplains.



A Chaplain is a spiritual caregiver. In the hospital setting your chaplain is a member of your multidisciplinary care team. Just as other health care professionals are working with you to find the best ways to treat your/your child's illness or injury, your chaplain works with you to help you access your spiritual strengths and resources.

We believe that if you feel supported, cared for, respected and that the spiritual, or faith, part of your life is too, you will find deeper healing.

One thing a chaplain is NOT is someone who wants to persuade

you to believe any certain way. A chaplain IS respectful of your faith and tradition. A Chaplain can help you identify how what you believe and how you practice those beliefs are a comfort for you, and a resource for finding meaning during this time in your life.

No chaplain can replace your personal pastor, priest, rabbi, imam... but a chaplain can be with you here in the hospital as an additional resource for you. The chaplain's professional training and experience in the hospital can be an important support for you.

There are several areas of service chaplains can provide.

Support: a chaplain is available to visit you to provide companionship during difficult times. To sit and listen to the story of what happened, and how you feel, what your worries are, what your hopes and joys are.

You may have questions about faith or practice that a chaplain can answer, or can research an answer for you. You may just want to talk about your faith and how it has upheld you in your life – how it has changed – how your understanding of it has changed.

Even if you do not claim a faith for yourself you may be a person who would like to talk about what things, beliefs shape your life and how they give you strength.

Finding someone to talk to about your faith helps you remember how it brings you strength, how it aids your understanding of life and life's difficulties, how it helps you make tough decisions. This may be a time when feeling that you have as many resources available to you as possible is important.

A chaplain can help you be in touch with your faith community or clergy if you would like that, but will never do so without your permission.

Prayer, Sacrament, Ritual: a chaplain is available to help you practice certain parts of your faith and to provide religious/spiritual sacraments/rituals. A chaplain is trained to pray with persons from all religious communities; a chaplain will not misuse prayer to impose a specific religious perspective. Chaplains are happy to hear your prayers, to pray with and for you as you would like them to.

Chaplains also provide sacraments. Professional training assures that chaplains are qualified and authorized to provide these sacraments. When a chaplain can not perform the sacrament you request, the chaplain will secure the appropriate clergy to meet with you as quickly as possible.

Ritual takes many forms. Certainly, ritual is a part of sacrament and prayer and there are traditional rituals for every faith/spiritual community. Chaplains can perform many of these. But ritual is also a way of marking a space, a time, and an event as holy. A hospital can be a place where rituals, different from those found in community congregations, can be designed by you and your chaplain to meet your unique needs and desires. Some rituals that have been designed by families and chaplains include:

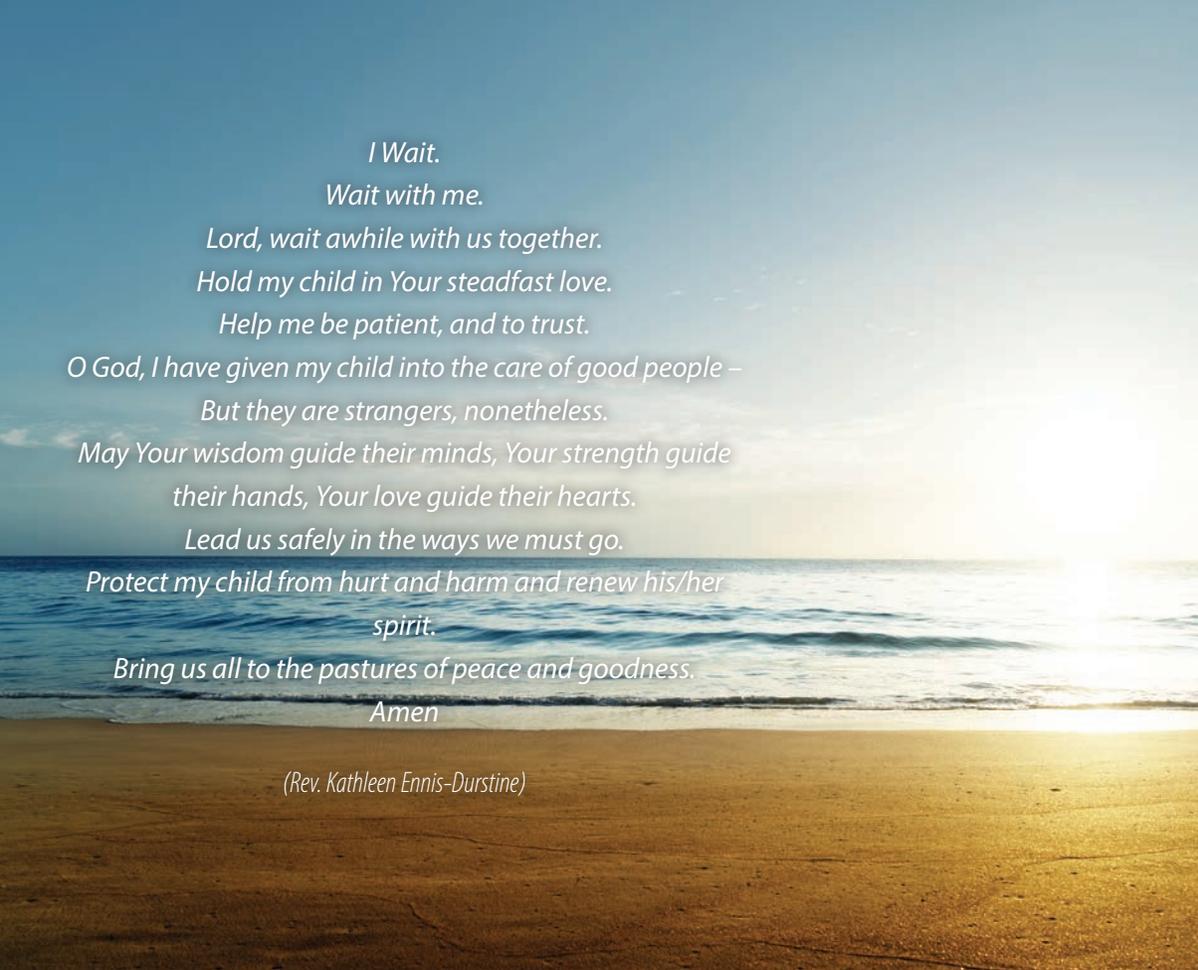
- Blessing of stem cells before they are infused
- Blessing and thanksgiving for a child coming off ECMO
- A family prayer and healing ritual where each one's prayer for the person who was ill was said, sung, written on a slip of paper and the strips made into a chain to decorate the patient's room

Advocacy is a part of the chaplain's role as well. Chaplains are trained to be deeply knowledgeable about most of the world's faith/spiritual traditions. A chaplain can assist you in describing to other health care professionals what is important to you and how the practice of your faith will be something you wish to continue while you are in the hospital. Chaplains will encourage staff to understand, respect, and make accommodations appropriate to your need, the hospital setting, and your treatment program. For instance, a chaplain can advocate for a schedule that, as much as possible, does not interfere with daily prayer times.

A chaplain can help educate staff about the important practices of many faith traditions that may not be frequently encountered in the hospital. A chaplain can assist in explaining how your faith/spiritual

perspective influences the way you believe and feel about health care and health care decisions. A chaplain is a resource to you to assist in your being most fully understood and respected during your stay in the hospital.

Chaplains are trained spiritual and pastoral counselors. They are available to you to listen to your thoughts, concerns, and beliefs that influence the way you are coping with this hospitalization. Chaplains can assist you in thinking, or working through feelings, about difficult decisions. A chaplain may be able to assist in better communication among family members or between family and other hospital staff.



*I Wait.  
Wait with me.  
Lord, wait awhile with us together.  
Hold my child in Your steadfast love.  
Help me be patient, and to trust.  
O God, I have given my child into the care of good people –  
But they are strangers, nonetheless.  
May Your wisdom guide their minds, Your strength guide  
their hands, Your love guide their hearts.  
Lead us safely in the ways we must go.  
Protect my child from hurt and harm and renew his/her  
spirit.  
Bring us all to the pastures of peace and goodness.  
Amen*

*(Rev. Kathleen Ennis-Durstine)*

There are many ways a chaplain can be a special resource to you during a hospitalization.

Support and comfort; helping you discover or re-discover the parts of your faith that bring you strength and solace. Facing, together with you, the parts of your faith that trouble you. Ensuring that your spiritual perspective, tradition, needs are understood and respected. Assisting you in developing or holding times of unique ritual or traditional sacrament as ways to both comfort and make meaning of this time.

Please call upon a chaplain as one of the valuable resources available to you at this hospital.



**For more information, contact your chaplains  
Children's National Medical Center**

**Washington, DC**

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