

Tribal Messiahship Through Chaplaincy

William Selig
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William Selig, chaplain resident at the Medstar Washington Hospital in Washington, D.C. and Unificationist, is a member of the spiritual care team that provides support to patients, family members and hospital staff. On any given day he visits with patients of various races and faith traditions. It is through this work of loving others that William is able to fulfill True Father's desire for us to develop our tribal messiahship locally.

“As a Unificationist,” says Chaplain Selig, “I couldn't ask for a better mission—to practice what True Father calls ‘living for the sake of others.’ I'm

called to deal with people who need spiritual support, perhaps before surgery, at the loss of a loved one, or for someone who just needs a hand to hold. A hospital is an amazing place to grow in heart. I feel my faith enhances my sense of empathy, because if I truly believe that each person is in the image of God, then they deserve all the respect and attention I can offer, no matter the color of the skin, their religion, gender, etc.”

Washington Hospital, located about 3 miles from the White House, is the largest hospital in D.C. and serves a very diverse inner-city population. There are 16 chaplains (full-time, residents and interns).

In addition to the routine visits to his assigned units in cardiology and behavioral care, he is responsible to lead morning service once a week and to also serve as the on-call chaplain for a 12-hour shift once a week.

Catholic priests and rabbis are available upon request, although when a patient is experiencing spiritual distress, Chaplain Selig says, most “simply appreciate a warm and nonjudgmental presence, regardless of the chaplain's faith.”

In times of sickness and death, most people want presence more than rituals. “A few days ago I sat with a mother and daughter. The father had been brought to the hospital for surgery to repair a heart valve, but the patient also suffers from Parkinson's disease. The doctors told the family that an operation would neither add years nor enhance the quality of life. Essentially they were told to go home and wait for the inevitable. It was a heart-wrenching moment for the family, particularly when we had to tell the patient himself. We held hands and prayed for strength, comfort and assurance. I always pray to Heavenly Parent, which is not such a common term, but people accept it because it makes sense and because it conveys what they need: God's love,” Chaplain Selig says.

“I'm frequently called to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) to be with a family whose loved one is about to have their life support removed. It is a profoundly emotional and traumatic time for the family, but also very sacred. In my prayers with the family I always share about the three stages of life, and that this loved one is transitioning to the spiritual world where what matters will be the love-based relationships we carry with us, and most especially with our Heavenly Parent,” Chaplain Selig says.

“My journey to this point began with the Seonghwa (Ascension) ministry, which follows the teachings of the Unification faith in matters of life after death, taking care of my aging parents, being a hospice volunteer, and then returning to the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS), where I received the doctor of ministry degree in 2012. I did my dissertation on ‘Spiritual Care at the End of Physical Life and the Beginning of Spiritual Life.’”

Chaplain Selig and his wife, Donna, are Unificationists living in Rockville, Maryland. Donna is a hospice volunteer with Montgomery Hospice and a genealogist who specializes in connecting families with their ancestors. Bill and Donna received the Holy Marriage Blessing of the Unification Church on July 1, 1982, at Madison Square Garden in New York City.