

An Invitation to Wait

Waiting is Advent's predominant theme. The Israelites wait for the promised land. Parents await the birth of a beloved child. We wait as we anticipate the joys of the Christmas holiday. It is a time of joy and expectancy, yet life calls us to deal with other, darker emotions as well.

On any given day in the health care ministry, we encounter persons who are waiting and filled with a host of emotions. Consider an accident victim waiting in the Emergency Department, or family members gathered as a loved one undergoes surgery. Expectant mothers move through pregnancy with anxiety and joyful hope. Patients and their families may experience one set of emotions while they wait for test results and a totally different set of emotions once they know what the tests reveal.

Throughout our times of waiting, we know that God is always with us. The prophet Isaiah tells of God's promise: *"For I, the Lord your God, hold your right hand; it is I who say to you, "do not fear, I will help you."* As family members wait with a loved one who is dying, they may cycle through a host of emotions, feeling sadness that their loved one will no longer be close and also a sense of relief that the suffering may be over. A loving daughter described her family's experience this way: *"In the days before my mother's passing, as she lay in her hospice bed, countless visitors came to be with us to pass the long hours that stretched out endlessly. They brought food and gifts, conversation and caring, and they walked with us through all the emotions of our family's vigil."* God is always present in the loved ones and friends who walk the journey with us.

In the Scripture narratives associated with Advent, we are reminded that God calls us to support one another as we go through life. The prophets offer glorious visions that inspire the people's trust in God. Mary travels to be with her kinswoman Elizabeth, and they ponder the miracles that have happened to them. During this Advent season, when we are present to each other, and especially to those who wait, we bring the light of God into the world.

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