Addressing the Wounds of Soul Injury
by Chaplain Frank Harris

The soul can be described as the essence of our being, our personhood, or our identity. Our soul is who we are at our core and it serves as the basis for how we relate to our environment, others, and/or the eternal Other.

The term “soul injury” is used by Deborah Grassman to describe what she witnessed as a nurse practitioner and director of the hospice program at the Department of Veterans’ Affairs in St. Petersburg, FL. In that capacity, and over the span of a 30-year career, she observed intense emotional suffering as she tended to the needs of more than 10,000 dying patients. Based on that experience, she defines soul injury as “a penetrating emotional wound due to insidious grief or unmourned loss that separates us from our personhood.” Exposure to loss or trauma can have the residual effect of distorting identity and causing a person to feel defective, inadequate, or unworthy.

Addressing soul injury means facing our pain and fear. Grassman says, “Fear of emotional pain can be worse than the painful emotion itself.” She also says, “There’s a vast and fiercely strong part of us deep inside that is capable of carrying our pain. It’s called our soul.”

Dealing with our pain through creative expressions such as art, reflection, journaling, or music are some suggested ways to reconnect with parts of our emotional selves that have become fragmented due to difficult experiences.

When soul injuries are addressed, an opportunity to live life passionately is rekindled. Our identity is regained as we learn how to bear peace within ourselves and in connection with others. For further study, or to find resources connected to the topic of soul injury, go to soulinjury.org.

Editor’s Note: Chaplain Harris will be our facilitator for Health Care Theater on May 23 focusing on the topic of Soul Injury. See below for details. Please join us.
Get to Know a Chaplain

In each issue, we will focus on a different member of MUSC Pastoral Care team.

Rev. Dr. Terry L. Wilson, MDiv, DMin

What do you do to relax? “Read, walk, teach a Sunday School class with my wife, Jeslyn, at Providence Baptist Church on Daniel Island, watch college football, and tell stories to my nine grandchildren.”

What is one thing you wish people knew about chaplains that most don’t? “At this time we are the most productive, economically sound, and innovative that we have ever been as a support service. We offer six bereavement services annually, two bi-annual Health and Spirituality Rounds, bi-monthly Caring Spirit newsletters and monthly Health Care Theaters, Institute of Psychiatry spirituality groups twice weekly, and crisis debriefings or memorial services as needed for staff. We are on campus 24/7, responding to all adult and pediatric traumas and codes, facilitating Advance Directives, acting as notaries for staff and patient needs, and five of our chaplains serve as Living Donor Advocates. We are accessible by pager and through Get Well Network, available 24/7 for patients, their families, and staff.”

Interesting/fun fact about you: “When I was six years old, I fell into an open grave and could not get out for about half a day.”

Editor’s note: After 23 years at MUSC, Chc Wilson will be retiring in May. Please join in his retirement celebration on April 25.

Intergenerational Dynamics

by Chaplain Stacy S. Lawton

At a conference I attended not long ago, I had the chance to be part of a seminar on intergenerational dynamics. We learned about the needs of various generations, whether “the greatest generation” in their 70s and 80s or Millennials in their 20s.

My favorite parts of the seminar were when we were given discussion topics and told to talk them over with a person sitting next to us. The man in the chair to my left was part of a generation very different from mine. He could remember the Great Depression, and was deployed overseas during World War II. Hearing his stories and thinking about how much the world has changed during his lifetime allowed me a glimpse into another era that we rarely get.

By the end of the seminar, when we had time to discuss our conversations with the larger group, we found that we all had some important things in common. No matter what generation we were born into, we all relished this time of hearing another’s story and being heard. The stories we told one another revolved around simple things—family, friends, holidays, memories, faith—not high-tech gadgetry or other new developments that can sometimes drive a wedge between older and younger generations. We all longed for genuine human connection, a universal need and desire.

How can you form those connections with someone of a different generation, perhaps a patient or coworker? You can start by asking one of the questions we did:

- What is the first gift you received that “wowed” you?
- Who were your childhood heroes?
- What is the biggest change you have seen in the world in your lifetime?
- Or simply say, “Please tell me your story.”

Both the listener and the storyteller will be blessed in these small acts of sharing. Every generation has something to learn from other generations, and each generation has something to teach as well.

Chaplains are available 24/7/365

Contact Chaplains at MUSC | Main Hospital pager #18089 | Ashley River Tower (ART) pager #17265 | Chaplain Services – 24/7/365