

WHY ME?



By: Rev. Sue Conrad Howes, M.A., M.Div.

told, if I pass the five-year mark, my chances of experiencing a much longer remission (10-20 years) is very high. When I reached my five-year anniversary of being cancer-free, I had a party, with cookies and a cake shaped in the number “5.”

So, when my leukemia returned a few months ago, seven years after remission, I was shocked. In fact, I was even more shocked and angry than when I was initially diagnosed. I thought I had beaten the odds. This was not what I expected. My anger manifested into depression and bitterness to the world around me. It was not fair. Life is not fair.

Over the next few weeks, I processed my anger and grief with some close friends and a counselor. For years, I sat with people as they processed their own traumas and disappointments, asking the question, “Why is this happening to me?” Now, I was the one asking the question. And, of course, no one had any answer. Nor should they. I am grateful no one said, “Everything happens for a reason,” because that is not true. Sometimes awful things happen, and there is no reason.

I began to ask the question differently, “Why should this *not* be happening to me?” Why did I think I was any more special than anyone else? Life is hard. Sometimes things happen that we have no control over. No matter how well we live, how many good things we do, no matter how many casseroles we take to our neighbors in need, how many prayers we pray, life can still sometimes throw us a huge curve ball combined with a sucker punch. It doesn’t mean we need to be happy and upbeat when bad things happen, but we don’t always have to figure out the why.

As a hospital chaplain, I often encounter people on some of the worst days of their lives. As I sit with patients and/or families as they receive difficult diagnoses or updates or need to make challenging decisions, one question that is often posed to me is, “Why is this happening to me?”

After years of being present with people through a sudden death of a loved one or physical pain that exceeds anything ever experienced before or the prospect of facing a disability that will forever alter their life, I have yet to have an answer to the question of why.

It’s logical, when life feels so illogical, to want some reason, some explanation as to why. Sometimes people wonder if there was something from their past that they did that explains this current situation. Sometimes, they need some sense of clarity when the world feels anything but clear and simple. I get it.

A couple of months ago, I was diagnosed with leukemia. Seven years ago, I battled leukemia and, after chemotherapy, fortunately entered remission. My doctors told me that my leukemia was not curable, but treatable, so the chances of recurrence was extremely high. Most people, they explained, experience recurrence within one to five years, but I was

So, I began thinking about other things in my life. I didn’t ignore my leukemia, but I realized I never asked why something is happening to me when things were going well—like when I did not need to complete my full chemo regimen seven years ago because, amazingly, my leukemia went into remission before all of my chemo cycles were completed; or, when we sold our house two years ago, the buyers offered to pay us \$25,000 *more* than asking price; or, when I met my amazing husband

and got married for the first time at age 40 when statistically, some say, I had a better chance of getting struck by lightning than getting married. I didn’t ask *why* any of those times, but I celebrated and gave thanks.

Is it possible for me to not ask why when bad things happen in the same way that I don’t ask why when good things happen? Am I able to honor both and, in doing so, give thanks for all my days? Am I able to say that I am no better or worse than another

person—just that my life circumstances are different?

How I accept and strive forward with those circumstances is what makes the difference. Now I spend time asking “*What am I going to do about this?*” rather than asking why it’s happening. Suddenly, the question now gives me an opportunity to give an answer, rather than saying, “I don’t know.”

Now I know. And for that, I give thanks.

Rev. Sue Conrad Howes, M.A., M. Div., has over 14 years of pastoral and chaplaincy experience. She is a chaplain for St. Luke’s University Health Network and currently serves as a staff chaplain at St. Luke’s Penn Foundation. Sue earned her MA in Speech Communication from Penn State University and her Master’s of Divinity from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Sue is ordained in Mennonite Church USA.

In July 2021, Penn Foundation joined St. Luke’s University Health Network, creating one of the largest fully integrated networks of mental health and addiction services in eastern PA and NJ. Together, our staff of 400 compassionate professionals serves more than 17,000 individuals each year, providing integrated, holistic care designed to meet the unique needs of each person. For more information, visit www.PennFoundation.org.

St Luke's
UNIVERSITY HEALTH NETWORK

PENN FOUNDATION
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

Instilling Hope. Together.

**Penn Foundation is the newest member of
St. Luke’s University Health Network!**



807 Lawn Avenue, Sellersville, PA 18960 • 215-257-6551 • pennfoundation.org