

## DEATH AND DYING- POINTS TO PONDER

One thing we all have in common is that we are dying! We are a day closer to death today than yesterday. When viewed in the light, we can see death as a part of life and realize more clearly that the quality of each day is far more important than the quantity of days remaining.

Interviews with terminally ill patients, their families and those who care for them emphasized the patient's desire for complete openness and honesty in discussions regarding diagnosis and prognosis, and the reluctance of others to be that candid.

Being part of a society which (a) glorifies youth, (b) has largely lost its sense of faith, (c) has lost contact with the cycles of nature through urbanization, (d) has come to expect medical triumphs to conquer disease, and (e) has been saturated with the distorted picture of death which daily bombards us in this world of instant communication, we have become strangers to death and look on it with a sense of unreality.

We live in a death denying society in which death has replaced sex as the taboo topic of our time, and yet "Death education left to the death bed is as inappropriate as sex education left to the marital bed."

How honestly and directly we face the question of our own death is an important factor in determining how effective we are when we attempt to aid and support others in facing death.

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross has shown that we tend to go through a series of mental adjustments in coming to an acceptance of our own death or the death of a loved one. The steps may vary but in general they include denial ("not me"), anger ("why me"), bargaining ("yes me, but"), depression (preparatory grief) and finally acceptance.

When the "conspiracy of silence" is broken and loved ones talk openly about the death that is approaching one of them, their fears, needs and hopes are met more readily and the path is cleared for coming to grips with the reality they face.

A pain free state without excessive sedation can be achieved in the face of terminal illness with very few exceptions.

It is possible for the period of terminal illness to be one of achievement, reconciliation and fulfillment for the dying person, and if this is achieved, it will facilitate the return of the family to a normal life during the period of bereavement.