



Parish Health Ministry

Refresh Your Soul Conference Inspires Many on Belief in God, Heaven and Healing

By Jeanne Palcic MGS, RN, Program Manager, ERH Parish Health Ministry

Upon asking a number of attendees for their reflections on the Refresh Your Soul Conference on March 1st and how it changed their approach to ministry and/or life, I was inspired. Hearing the attitudes and impressions of these people gave me hope and lifted my spirit, a welcome “after conference” renewal for my soul.

Lisa Hughes, member at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, attended the conference along with 527 others. She reflected on the keynote speaker, Dr. Eben Alexander, author of *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon’s Journey into the Afterlife*. She shared, “Dr. Alexander’s talk and vivid stories about his near death experience of heaven, and the audience response to him, was one more confirmation that God loves, cherishes, and forgives us, no matter who, no matter what. I spoke to a friend after the conference, telling her about the Esquire article questioning the validity of Dr. Alexander’s story and how receptive the people at the conference were, a group of intelligent people in a variety of jobs and professions. They are believers. They know the truth of what he says. I am a believer, too. I believe in Heaven, and that we all go to Heaven, that God forgives, and that Heaven is here on earth. I experienced it in the people at Refresh Your Soul, all present to each other, sharing their stories, helping each other out, all were friends and friendly, kindred spirits.”

Angela Horne of Ascension and Holy Trinity Episcopal Church stated, “I read Dr. Alexander’s book *Proof of Heaven* prior to the conference and was both intrigued and inspired by the fact that he is a neurosurgeon and that his experience was different from most near death experiences. I believe these are the facts that made his presentation so impressionable. He was very clear and honest about how difficult it has been for him to digest, understand and interpret what he experienced, despite his extensive base of medical knowledge.”

Pam Ward, Parish Nurse at Knox Presbyterian Church, shared, “Once again, as it has for many years now, the Refresh Your Soul Conference was meaningful to me. Connecting heaven and healing is something I believe in, and the information that was shared at the conference validated and strengthened that belief for me.” When reflecting on the miracle of Dr. Alexander’s experience, Pam noted, “Knowledge of these miracles allows me to minister to those who are ill with hope in my heart. When I encourage people who are suffering anxiety due to a new diagnosis or difficult transition to pay attention to their thoughts, and, if they find themselves visiting those darkest, scariest possibilities that they are sure to do, to remember that a good outcome may be equally possible. To give the dark and the *light* at least equal time. These are not just words coming from me, I believe it, and they can tell. Hearing of Dr. Eben’s experience has strengthened that for me. Hearing his story has given me another tool to share when encouraging and nudging hope for those I serve.”

Sandra Morrow, an ERH staff member, stated, “As Christians sometimes we tend to have a very polarized view of life, with science on one end and spirituality on the other. Dr. Alexander suggested that science can be used to support the idea that there is a spiritual existence beyond our physical existence, as he explained in his experience with gram negative meningitis. Another thing I took away

from Dr. Alexander's talk is the idea that difficult people and difficult circumstances are designed by God to be our greatest teachers in our life's journey, so we should embrace them and try to learn the lesson that God is trying to teach us through them. These are both things that will influence the way I live my life and how I engage with others in ministry."

Ordained clergy and member of Stratford Heights Church of God, Rev. Rhonda Johnson BSN, RN, shared her thoughts about Dr. Alexander's presentation, "He described how time flow in the heavenly realm is much different. The heavenly realm is reality, and our time flow is an illusion. He also described our spirit as being concrete and real. We are spiritual. The central theme of his message is that we are so loved with an unconditional love; deeply loved and cherished forever. We are here on earth to love unconditionally; we are the conduits of such love. If we realize our love, love neighbors as self, we have no fear. Gratitude fuels everything. We are here to teach our soul mates, others in the world, about this love. Dr. Alexander challenged me to put an even greater emphasis on the message of how much God loves His creation. My hope is not only to verbalize the message but to also live out the message as I walk alongside those who are hurting or in need!"

While reflecting on the second speaker, Dr. Richard Johnson, PhD, Lisa Hughes stated, "Dr. Johnson's message opened me to the truth that each of us is spiritually gifted with specific and complementary spiritual strengths to be used for healing." Rhonda Johnson was impressed with this concept from Dr. Johnson: "The personality is the tool to communicate what God has placed in you. In his book, *Discover Your Spiritual Strengths*, Dr. Johnson states that you are known to yourself and to others only by how you use your personality; use it well and you'll come to know yourself and find healing from whatever brokenness or illness that may have befallen you, use it poorly and you'll remain confused and ill equipped to deal with life's challenges." As a result of hearing Dr. Johnson's presentation, Rev. Johnson shares that she hopes to implement his Spiritual Strengths model into her practice as she helps people journey into wholeness.

Pam Ward states, "I respect the concept Dr. Johnson has developed regarding Spiritual Strengths and their shadows and compulsions. I find it fascinating. After identifying my own spiritual strengths using his survey, I was able to recognize these things in myself. I believe that having this new knowledge will increase my awareness of when I may be straying too far from my own centeredness. He has given me red flags with this knowledge to help me recognize when it is time to pay attention and do what I need to do for myself to move back toward the center. My internal dialogue has already been impacted in a positive way. I plan to explore his ideas further."

"What I learned from the Refresh Your Soul Conference is that it is vital to our well-being to 'live in the moment', that is, to appreciate each and every moment of our lives and to not waste any of the precious time allotted to us. I also learned that each of us has a purpose for our lives, given to us by God, and we have to search for it in order to fulfill our true lives." stated Angela Horne. She adds, "How this knowledge will change my life/ministry is to reinforce for me the necessity of being present/empathetic to others in pain, sickness or other troubles confided to me and to try to step into their shoes momentarily to envision a way to be of help, support to them in their earthly journey. Also important is to not forget to share in their joys and accomplishments in overcoming perceived obstacles in their lives."

When asked how the conference changed her approach to ministry and to life, Lisa Hughes stated, "The harmony of the two speakers' messages continue to resonate. When I pray The Lord's Prayer, I pray 'on earth as it is in Heaven' with more gusto. I'm a little less fearful, a little more confident, have a bit more

courage, faith, and trust. I am more likely to see life as ministry, that God has gifted each of us spiritually. My job is to polish those gifts and shine them as part of God's healing light in the world. I invited a friend and colleague who treated this as part of her Sabbath because the experience and speakers fed her; according to her she feasted and will be back next year."

The Refresh Your Soul Conference is sponsored annually by ERH Parish Health Ministry. This year it was partially funded by the Faith in Life grant of the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio. Much thanks to the diocese and to all the sponsors including the Title sponsor, Home Care by Blackstone.



Mindy Wendling from Blackstone, Dr. Eben Alexander, Jeanne Palcic





Doug Spitler, Dr. Eben Alexander, Kathy Ison, Ken Paley



Anna Adkins in crowd responding to Dr. Alexander's presentation



Planning committee and some of the volunteers from left to right:
Missy Hanzel, Sandra Morrow, Rhonda Johnson, Rebecca Schroer, Mary Ellyn Pusz, Jeanne Palcic, Ellen Schneider, Rose Lindeman, Susan Brokaw, Pam Ward, and Bryan Reynolds