



Sister Elaine Goodell remarks at HealthCare Chaplaincy Wholeness of Life Awards Dinner (November 10, 2009)

(Note: Sister Elaine spoke on behalf of all twelve patient care honorees from HealthCare Chaplaincy's metropolitan New York City health care institutions.)

Thank you, Jeanne!

Life is to be lived well. All of us here on the stage probably feel that it could never get better than it is tonight!

On behalf of all the honorees, we want to tell you – our hospitals – and HealthCare Chaplaincy how full of gratitude we are.

I suspect that we all find it inconceivable to have been named as recipients of this honor.

Years ago, our beloved Jack Benny was being publicly recognized and his response was something like this: "I really don't deserve this honor, but...well...I had the mumps once and I didn't deserve that, either!"

Karl Rahner has written that no person is alive for him or herself alone. Each has a function of service to perform for others that no one else can accomplish or carry out.

The Producer of the musical "The Lion King" – which is known for its exotic, colorful and imaginative staging – said that her role was not just to give an audience what they want but to give them what they do not even know they want. In other words, to go one step beyond and to connect with their *inner hunger*. These caring, compassionate honorees know how to connect the soul of their working community to the soul of the world.

This is not done easily; it is done with intentionality, listening with focused attention to the patients, their families and fellow staff members. Listening and talking are intrinsic to human existence. These honorees have been a presence and support for dying patients. They strive to alleviate pain, suffering and fear for those in and out of their sphere of work. All of them – *of us* -- leave a legacy of service.

There is a story about a wise, kind Asian man who died and went to Heaven. When he met St. Peter at the Gate, the wise man asked if, before he entered Heaven, he might first be allowed to see what was going on in Hell. St. Peter agreed. When the man peered into Hell, he was surprised to see a huge banquet table laden with all kinds of rich, delicious looking foods. But he was more surprised to see the people at the feast all looked frustrated, miserable and *hungry!* They were all holding five-foot long chopsticks that were impossible to use to feed themselves even a single bite of the sumptuous food in front of them!

The man returned to Heaven, thanked St. Peter and as he entered, saw the exact same banquet table – laden with the same delicious looking foods. Everyone was holding the same five-foot chopsticks, but unlike the people in Hell, everyone *here* looked happy, relaxed and well-fed. Because, instead of trying to feed themselves, these people were all feeding one another.

Rabbi Abraham Heschel has said, “Life is not meaningful...unless it is serving an end beyond itself, unless it is of value to someone else.”

May we also realize the words of a former mayor of Memphis: “Service to others is the rent we pay for the space we occupy on this planet, Earth.”

Again we thank our esteemed hospitals for this very special recognition and may we all continue to feed one another – but maybe with shorter chopsticks!