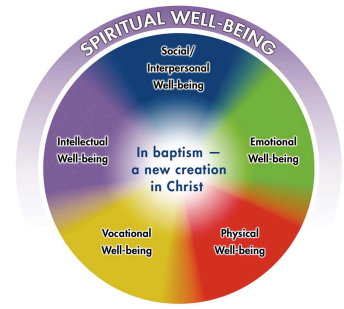


## Engagement

### From the Bethany Lutheran Church Health and Wellness Cabinet

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ... he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. – (Philippians: 2:5,7)*



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Another theme for Lent at our church this year is “The Blessing of Being Engaged.” The word engagement is used to signify commitment in the sense of betrothal, but it also is used in the larger sense of our connections with one another. In particular, it’s about intention, about focusing on and responding to others with a high degree of commitment. It can also be about committing yourself to helping others heal in a way that brings truth to the idea that we are the body of Christ, bringing His power to those around us. As the ELCA slogan puts it, “God’s work, Our hands.”

Currently my thoughts on the word engagement have been around losing it, not having it. Think about having to become disengaged from your family. Imagine yourself being sent halfway around the world into a combat environment and having to engage in a completely different set of relationships. And you put your heart, mind and soul into doing so, because you understand that in this alien, hostile environment you are totally dependent on these others, as they are dependent on you. Often, you experience things that challenge your basic spirituality and sense of yourself. And you become engaged with your comrades in a way that goes beyond mere commitment. And all this can be very difficult to communicate, even to a loving spouse or parent.

And if you survive the experience, you are then required to disengage from the unique intimacy of survival relationships and quickly re-engage with your family. It must be the ultimate irony that the military uses the term “engagement” to mean a fight. It’s as if the necessity of surviving and performing in a job like combat requires us to turn such essentially intimate terms completely around from their meaning in everyday life.

Today, our men and women of the armed forces face this struggle, to varying degrees, when they return from combat areas. It has been this way for generations of them. It is at the very least a challenging and lonely process, and at most can produce terrible suffering. And current conflicts are unique in that many of these souls end up going through the process multiple times.

Thanks to newer technology and policy, another fairly recent development is the sometimes daily communication you can have with your family at home. This can, of course, be a source of comfort. But even attempts to remain engaged with your distant family have the potential to produce stress. Married military people report a sense of helplessness as their families struggle with a whole different set of challenges, such as anxious children who are falling behind in school or extra financial or legal burdens that fall on their spouses to solve. Couples must operate independently from one other, and this can increase disengagement. Many families need help to re-engage.

We have been called to help in this need by ELCA and church leaders. Groups at our church have been working hard for the past few months to discern the potential we have to create healing ministries that can compliment and enhance the growing efforts of the military and medical communities to help these men and women and their families. What they are finding is that our opportunity to engage is about healing spirits, because it’s not just about healing bodies and minds. – JL