



Issue 3

GWish News

News Briefs from The George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health



Winter/Spring 2003

GWish Announces the Year 2002 Recipients for

**John Templeton Spirituality
and Medicine
Curricular Awards
\$25,000 Award Recipients:**

Linda J. Rufer, MD
**Medical College of
Wisconsin,
Milwaukee, WI**

Nehad El Sawi, PhD
**The University of
Health Sciences,
Kansas City, MO**

*Abraham Verghese, MD,
MFA, University of Texas
Health Science Center,
San Antonio, TX*

GWish would like to announce
the new cycle for the following
John Templeton
Spirituality and Medicine
Residency Awards:

Psychiatry, Due March 3

Primary Care, Due March 31

Awards are for the amount of
\$15,000 each. Please visit
our web site, www.gwish.org,
for additional information



A Note From The Director

Since our last newsletter, GWish has expanded its staff, programs and scope of influence. Our two new staff members are Tammy Galentine and Amy Welter. Tammy is responsible for the medical school award program as well as coordinating office operations of GWish. Amy has taken on all advancement projects such as event planning, marketing and fundraising. These two new staff members as well as Nina Fry, Inez

Lee and Ed O'Donnell and our faculty and students continue to make GWish programs stronger and enable us to have a great impact on medical education as well as the practice of medicine.

This impact has occurred in some of the conferences we have been in as well. I have been privileged to speak in Grenada at the White Coat Ceremony at the St. George's medical school. It was so moving to be part of the special community of students and faculty at St. George. I also spoke at two other programs in Canada, the First International Conference on Spirituality and Health in Ottawa, Canada and the International Palliative Care Conference in Montreal. Canada has many interesting new initiatives in spirituality and health. We hope to award medical schools and residency programs in Canada in the future.

In December, GWish co-sponsored the annual Harvard Mind Body Institute Conference on spirituality and health. It was a great honor for me to co-direct this conference with Dr. Benson, who has served as a very important mentor to me as well as to GWish. This year's conference was on forgiveness. This conference was timely and relevant given the current climate of terrorism and fear. The tremendous interest and passion for spirituality and health was evident in all the conference participants. There is a strong need for more attention to spirituality and values based medical care. GWish has a role in fulfilling this important need in healthcare today.

Thank you for your continued support and encouragement.

Christina M. Puchalski, M.D.

My journey living with AIDS
a reflection paper
by W. Maxwell Lawton

I began to show symptoms in 1991, at the time that I entered the Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC, Center for Art and Religion, in an innovative new program working as a visual artist. Four months later I was admitted to the hospital with advanced PCP and a zero T-Cell count. At the hospital I was diagnosed with end stage AIDS and given three months to live. I was also allergic to the medications. The doctors called my family members, who came from around the country and said their goodbyes. I was told to “put my house in order...”

After my family and friends returned home, I was left alone to face my ‘death sentence.’ The hospital chaplain stopped by periodically, to counsel me and help me to accept my condition. Instead, I asked him to pray for my recovery. I had seen many of my friends die horrible deaths from AIDS while at VCU School of the Arts in Richmond, Virginia, and didn’t want to face the same. But I knew my request was not a welcome one when the chaplain said he could only pray for my transition into death, not my recovery. That is when I told him not to let the door hit him as he left my room. Somehow, I knew it was not yet my time, and was not going to let anyone convince me otherwise.

The next day a woman who identified herself as a ‘candy striper’ visited me. She told me she was not there as a candy striper, however, but that she had heard the hospital had told me I was going to die. Then she told me she was a seven-year cancer survivor, who had been given the same death sentence. She reminded me that I didn’t need to believe the doctors, because they were not God. And she encouraged me by telling me I could choose to live with AIDS, just as she had chosen to live with cancer. Shortly after her visit I called the seminary, and the students and faculty there came and rallied by my side. Then an Episcopal priest, Fr. Jerry Anderson, came by and asked me if he could pray with me, as he had heard I was asking for healing prayers. He was an AIDS chaplain and was contacted by the seminary staff, and for two months he came almost every day. To the doctors’ surprise, I lost my allergy to the medications, and they began to work!

Later I asked the nurses when the candy striper would be back, and they laughed and said they hadn’t had one in years. I was too medicated to realize she was more than she appeared to be. She gave me hope in one of my darkest hours. From that moment onwards, people with cancer became my heroes and provided me with numerous examples of survival, at a time when people with AIDS were dying by the thousands. My candy striper had given me hope and permission to choose life.

Over the years, I have learned to live one day at a time, as I have faced one opportunistic infection after another, including TB, PCP (again), and CMV in my right eye, not to mention AIDS Wasting Syndrome, and numerous mysterious illnesses. I also learned to pray over my medications, asking for them to work better than they were designed too. I entered drug trials and continued my seminary studies, graduating in 1996 with a Master of Theological Studies.

When the new medications came out, I continued to pray over them, and remain on AZT and Crixivan today, in combination with nearly twenty other pills. I have a new T-Cell count of nearly 400, and a non-detectable viral load. I fast and pray at least three times a day, which keep me on a strict compliance schedule, allowing the medications to work uninterruptedly. Having AIDS has really taught me how to pray and meditate.

This year I celebrated my tenth year of living with AIDS, and my twentieth year of living with HIV – one day at a time – witnessing grace working in my life and my art, and the impact my artwork evokes in others. This past January I was diagnosed with malignant melanoma skin cancer, which was successfully removed, and now I can also say I am a cancer survivor as well, for which I give thanks. And I give thanks for all the angles, dressed as candy strippers, priests, and strangers, and for Siloam Ministries, who have helped me and so many others with AIDS to heal.

Maxwell