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Healing through Spiritual Care

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***Sacred Living, Sacred Dying:
A Guide to Embracing
Life and Death.***

Sharon Lund
Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2006
127 pages/softcover

Sacred Living, Sacred Dying: A Guide to Embracing Life and Death is a wonderful treasure, truly something to savor. In this multipurpose and multiuse book, Sharon Lund acknowledges that “death is a chapter in life few people are comfortable talking about.” (p. 98)

In the introduction, the reader is greeted with the rollercoaster ride that is Lund’s life: her childhood experience of violent sexual abuse from a close relative; the loss of most of the people she has loved; giving birth to the joy of her life; being diagnosed with AIDS; her spiritual awakening in the midst of marriage, divorce and domestic abuse.

She concludes, “I have danced with life and death throughout my life, and each challenge seeded the gifts and wisdom I share with you. By facing all of my challenges and releasing them, they have become sacred—sacred because they have healed me, brought me to self-discovery, to wholeness and to living my life purpose.” (p. xxi) With this profound statement, she sets the tone for the rest of the book.

In chapter 1, titled “Legacy of Love,” Lund provides a series of topics and questions. This is more than a workbook for recording one’s life; it is a self-help book focused on learning to accept and celebrate one’s life experiences. She includes suggestions on how to begin a dialogue journal. Rather than merely being an end product, this journaling becomes a holy and spiritual journey. Lund encourages the reader to find a safe, quiet environment and to set aside a certain amount of time to write. She includes detailed instructions for “oral journaling” via audio or video recording, a means of life review that will provide a lasting legacy.

Chapter 2 is filled with information and resources for celebrating life through a memorial or funeral service. Readers are encouraged to “step out of the box” and to fashion an event truly reflective of their individual life journeys.

Chapters 3 and 4 review in great detail the decisions one must make in preparation for death. Having this information neatly compiled serves to relieve the anxiety of family and friends in making decisions during a final illness and after death has occurred. Lund cautions that each state has its own regulations and laws and that one should investigate their particular state’s regulations prior to making plans.

Finally in chapter 5, Lund returns to her own life as she invites the reader to travel with her as she recreates her near-death experience, a very powerful and emotional journey through life and death and finally life again. What might have been the end was really the beginning. As she embraced the negative events, the hurts and frustrations, the losses—all were

transformed into a passion for life. It is from this passion the *Sacred Living, Sacred Dying* springs. As Lund observes, "*Sacred Living, Sacred Dying* is a gift of tools which will allow you to 'practice dying.'" (p. 107) As one practices dying, one is able to live more fully in the present moment.

Lund's Web site describes *Sacred Living, Sacred Dying* as a book that "embraces all people, regardless of race, religion, or spiritual beliefs. It is truly a universal document with enormous potential." Does it live up to that statement? Certainly some aspects, such as the suggestion in the section on cremation that the remains be scattered or mixed with pottery clay and made into items for distribution (p. 78), are not acceptable within some faith traditions. That being said, this book provides a plethora of ideas and information that does make it universal in many respects.

One further observation is that in developing what she terms a legacy of love, Lund focuses on the positive. As one intention in creating this document is that it become public—at least within one's family—this is understandable. However, for those who wish to go deeper, as Lund did in her autobiographical introduction, questions such as the following that evoke negative experiences may prove helpful. What was the most terrifying event you've experienced? How did you feel? What did you do? How do you regard that experience now?

In reviewing Lund's life journey, it becomes evident that she has found positive aspects in many of her negative experiences. Inclusion of the negative in preparing one's legacy of love may result in a transformative experience for others as well.

For those who find Lund's autobiography in this book much too short, she currently is working on *Sacred Ashes*, a fuller account of her journey toward self-discovery and wholeness. Additional information on her books and lectures is available on her Web site (www.sharonlund.com).

I consider *Sacred Living, Sacred Dying* to be a valuable resource for anyone who is involved with caring for others. First of all, one may use it to write one's own story and to encourage others to tell their stories. It provides a manual to assist elderly patients in completing a life review. It also includes ample resources to assist patients, families and staff in creating a meaningful memorial service and dealing with the details that are the responsibility of those who survive.

Finally, this exceptional book demonstrates the personal impact each of us has on the lives of those we touch whether they are personal friends, patients or casual acquaintances. The many creative suggestions are a valuable resource and assist us in thinking outside the box of our day-to-day chaplaincy.

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