



News
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Signs of Health in a Recovering Body

A recurring pesky condition cropped up again recently in my physical person. While not generally overwhelming, this condition is difficult to ignore and disrupts focus on "regular" life. Not that illness, irritations, "dis-ease," etc are not a regular part of life. They are for the vast majority of us, and quite common for many. In fact, to an immunologist, a healthy body is not one absolutely free of disease or foreign cells, but one with a healthy immune system and a healthy daily living practice.

I am blessed to have a strong immune system. My system neither collapses when faced with bacteria, falling into some more serious illness, nor goes into allergic reaction, threatening to "kill the patient" along with the invader. My system responds patiently, persistently and with measured reactions. I know when I have turned the corner toward acceptable "containment of the disease" toward health. My body starts to give the illness less notice. My attention becomes more easily focused on regular life patterns. I jump in and start doing those things which I can control in my health, such as choosing sleep over caffeine to address tiredness. When such signs appear, I know I am on the mend.

The spiritual body, being a living organism in an at times hostile environment, also experiences incursions of ill health. Many, I surmise, are systemic — not so much about "foreign elements," but about imbalance, reactivity, and frankly, really bad habits in the body. Again, focus on "regular" spiritual life is disrupted. And yet, being a living organism, comprised of a complexity of organs with intertwined functions, "dis-ease" is to be expected. And again, the health of the immune system is seen in the responses. From life-threatening allergic reactions to "impending doom" panic attacks and every thing in between, the spiritual body of Christ can display any number of less-helpful responses.

When the spiritual body is "turning the corner" toward renewed health and vitality, I think certain signs begin to emerge. Good questions replace suspicions, strategies replace accusations, and a return to healthy practices of spiritual life and endeavor replace a compulsive focus on the source of discomfort.

I have recently found it easy for me to speak of encouraging signs within Ohio Conference. Congregations are beginning to address more maturely the various issues which concern them. They are enlisting aid from others, not seeking some quick super-drug cure, but guidance in how to be the body together in the conversation. Churches are thinking of partnerships in seeking clarification from the denomination and conference to help with decisions still in front of them.

Is all the discomfort over? Of course not. But the patterns of response are more measured, more disciplined, and oriented to putting things of greater importance back in focus as well.

I really like a translation by William Lane of Hebrews 12: 11-13 from Word Biblical Commentary:

"All discipline at the actual time seems not to be pleasant but painful, but later yields the fruit which consists of peace and of righteousness for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your drooping hands and weakened knees, and move in a straight direction with your feet, so that what is lame might not be dislocated, but rather healed."

Consider if you will that these episodes of perceived "disease" may simply be the regular disciplining function of life in a complex, interactive organism not yet fully matured or aware. I believe we may be ready to embrace some new learnings and indeed some new health in days and months ahead. May the living Spirit guide us in discovering the joys of discipline which has fulfilled its purpose!

