

# The Vintage Voice

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■ May 2013

## A Call in the Night

*The Rev. Lewis W. Towler*

I am told, and have no reason to doubt it, that the President of the United States has a phone on his bedside table so that he can be called in the middle of the night in case of a national or international emergency. In a much humbler way, I also have a phone by my bed. It is a comfort to me to know that should I have what my doctors refer to as a “medical emergency,” I can punch in 911, and help will be on the way. In my downstairs study, I have another helpful object at the ready. It is a little sticker attached to the coffee table upon which my phone rests. The sticker invites me to call . . .

Any time.  
Any reason.  
Any question.  
MyNurseLine\*  
1-866-229-2919

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Late one night, around 11:30 or so, I needed to make that phone call. During the day, some pain had lodged in my left arm. Nothing to be alarmed about, I thought; perhaps due to my lifting weights early that morning. I became concerned when, stretched out, trying to sleep, the pain seemed to increase. Doing a bit of self-diagnosis (always risky, I know), I wondered if this might be the onset of a stroke. I remembered I had taped to my refrigerator door a list of conditions to watch for, and, checking off the items listed, I saw “pain in arm” as one of the warning signs. That’s when I made the phone call. In addition to my physical pain, I was feeling a kind of spiritual pain as well. I was making the call on Saturday night knowing I was scheduled to celebrate the Eucharist and preach the next morning. I had been thinking about my sermon all week long. It was based on the gospel for the day from the fourth gospel. I wanted to show how the Gospel of John, while not having the explicit words of institution, “This is My Body, This is

\*For more information, please see the special note at the end of this article.

my Blood,” found in the first three gospels, was, in meaning and theology, the most eucharistically centered of the four gospels. I really wanted to preach that sermon rather than spend Sunday morning in a hospital bed.

So there I was, in my Ann Arbor home, alone except for my snoozing Great Pyrenees dog, Bernadette, waiting to hear the nurse’s voice. I did not have long to wait, and, as I was sharing my concern with her, she was at the same time pulling my medical history up on her computer. In a very relaxed and peaceful manner, she asked me several questions and concluded with these recommendations:

1. I did not need to do anything except apply some heat right then, because what I was describing did not sound like a stroke;
2. I was free to call back, if needed, and;
3. I might want to check in on Monday with my primary care physician (whom she was able to mention by name).

It would be extremely difficult for me to put into words the relief I felt after having had that conversation. By the time I finished talking, it was early Sunday morning, and I knew I would be standing in the pulpit instead of occupying a hospital bed. Praise God.

Final entry in my mental journal: went to bed, slept well, my dog cooperated by not barking during the rest of the night. I arose refreshed, hummed a verse of “Get Me to the Church on Time,” and off I went. Coming home after the service, I did something I seldom do; I talked to myself: “You deserve a nap.” After browsing through the “Week in Review” Sunday section of *The New York Times*, I did just that, still marveling that healing help was just a phone call away.



Lew Towler, already twice retired, is now Assisting Priest at St. Andrew’s Church in Ann Arbor, a church he first entered while a freshman at the University of Michigan in 1946.

*MyNurseLine is now called Medicare Decision Support, and is a benefit of the Medical Trust’s Medicare Supplement plans, administered through UnitedHealthcare. Medicare Decision Support is staffed by registered nurses who can provide immediate answers to your medical questions and help you find community resources for medical and financial assistance. All Episcopal Church retirees with a minimum of five years credited service are eligible to join a Medicare Supplement plan. (In the event of a conflict between this document and the official Plan documents, the official Plan documents will govern.) For more information, contact Client Engagement at (800) 480-9967.*