

Announcer:

In this episode of Tim Talk, we continue discussing religious diversity in healthcare.

Tim Dentry:

Thank you for joining us for Tim Talk. I'm Tim Dentry, president and CEO of Northern Light Health. Through this podcast we hope to create a collective understanding of the vital role of diversity and tolerance in all of our lives. This includes religious diversity and tolerance, which we've discussed with members of the Jewish and Catholic faiths thus far on these podcasts. Joining me to continue the discussion today is Pastor Jerry Mick of Crosspoint Church in Bangor. Thank you for joining me here today Pastor Mick.

Jerry Mick:

Thank you so much Tim for inviting me and I'm looking forward to a great discussion.

Tim Dentry:

My pleasure. May I call you Jerry?

Jerry Mick:

Yes, you may.

Tim Dentry:

Thank you. For starters Jerry, could you share with me a little bit about Crosspoint Church?

Jerry Mick:

Absolutely. Crosspoint Church Tim was founded way back in 1967. That's when we were incorporated, and Crosspoint Church has multi ministries embedded in it. One obviously is the congregation. When we think of church as people coming to church or going to church, but what sets Crosspoint a little bit different from many churches in the area is that we have a lot going on that really meets the needs of the community, hurting and vulnerable people. And I think that's why it's really such a great opportunity to be on this program because that's what you're trying to do as well is to reach out and find out what people are doing to meet the needs of the hurting and vulnerable, which of course the hospital does. So for example, we have an inner city church that caters to the following five population groups, prostitutes, drug addicts, alcoholics, people coming out of jail.

Jerry Mick:

And these populations are what we would call the lower level of the rung in society. And we feed them, we have church services for them. We provide an opportunity to take a shower. And the fifth group of that are the homeless people. So we are working with people at what people might consider rock bottom. And right now Tim, you might find this fascinating as well, we're also helping the city and providing a warming center. And so we have the homeless come. We do bag checks, for example we had a bag check. Someone had 75 needles, dirty needles, used needles. We've taken weapons off people and they come at six in the evening. We feed them dinner and they stay there all night. We feed them breakfast at seven in the morning and then they leave, and then they come back that evening. So this is what we're doing downtown Bangor on Center street.

Jerry Mick:

So we are really concerned about helping the vulnerable. Really Tim one might consider the outcasts of our society that people don't really care about, but we do because we believe that every person is a special creation of God, every single person, no matter if they live in the penthouse or the outhouse, is important because the Bible says that we're created in the image of God. So that's just one aspect of our ministry. The other aspect is that we have two homes and I won't give you the street because we've tried to keep this a little bit confidential, but we have two large homes in Bangor that sit side by side, in which young girls and women who find themselves pregnant, they might be on the street. They might actually be from what might be considered an average home, but most of them grow up in environments that are atrocious and they find themselves pregnant and they want to have the child, but they have no support.

Jerry Mick:

And so we bring the girls in, we feed them, we house them, we clothe them and we allow them to have their child. And so we help them give birth and that's called the Shepherd Godparent Home. And then of course we have another part of our ministry too, which is Bangor Christian Schools, which is a K4 through grade 12 school, which is fully accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges that we have on our campus. And besides that we have a church. And so it's a very busy place and I'm a very busy person, but I'm really fortunate and glad that you asked me to come on this program because in the same way, we're trying to help those that are hurting, that need support. And I know people when they come to the hospital, they need support.

Tim Dentry:

Hurting and vulnerable people, absolutely. And the way that you use those words in many different contexts, I'm thankful to know you and to be on this podcast with you right now, and to give shelter to those that are in need is just a wonderful calling. So I thank you so much for that. There's been a little thing going on in our world called COVID these days. And I was talking with another organization that was asking me questions and they used the term malevolence. I hadn't seen that. We all know the destructive nature of the virus and not only from a medical point of view, but what it does to economies and people's lives and jobs and their shelteredness has become such a shelter away.

Tim Dentry:

The owner disconnected with people and things of that nature. So it's reeked havoc. It's reeked malevolence in so many different ways. But you have done so many things to show that there's still hope and show that there's still a connection. So I know that you have hundreds of people every week that you are engaging with and you are sharing your sermon with, and so many others, and all the activities that you talked about. How has COVID really impacted you and your voice and those in your flock, if I may use that term?

Jerry Mick:

Well, what we've had to do, of course, as you know, the state mandate through Governor Mills's office is only 15 people, 50 people rather can gather together in a building. So that's created a challenge. We see 800, we can put 800 in. And so you can imagine a seven to eight hundred seat auditorium with 50 people. We are extremely social distanced. So there's no problem there. But the challenge with that is that we have hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people who aren't able to come to church. So they're watching us online, we've always streamed our services, our three morning services, we've done

that for years, but what we're doing right now is we started with five services. So I was speaking five times on Sunday, and we just felt that was a little too much, not so much for me, but for our volunteers, you just can't ask volunteers to be there at 6:00 AM until three or four in the afternoon, it has created an extreme challenge.

Jerry Mick:

We've had even our own congregation. We've had two people commit suicide because according to their family, the virus, they couldn't get the mental health that they needed. We've had numerous people fall back into drug addiction because we have a big program in house, along with the inner city church. We have a couple of programs on Wednesday evenings and during the week at our church where people come, support groups. And just because that was lax for a while, no meeting, or only 10, unfortunately some of them fell back into drugs and one of them actually overdosed, another one committed suicide. So Tim, this has had a major effect, not only on the people in the families where people have passed away due to COVID, but it's actually spilled over into other areas with people losing their businesses.

Jerry Mick:

And we have two LCPC's on our staff and the amount of people that they're seeing, just because of anxiousness, because of depression has really skyrocketed. And I think it's going to be a couple of years before we see the total fallout and carnage of COVID, which is horrific to all of us, which I'm sure you're seeing here at the hospital level as well.

Tim Dentry:

Yeah. Thank you for painting that picture and those that are in the communities that we serve, we all are servants and we carry out our mission no matter what. And so that's what I hear you say. I really admire that. And I thank you for that.

Jerry Mick:

We're in the trenches.

Tim Dentry:

We really are. And it's also that people need hope from any sources that they can get and we, I believe are giving them hope those in both of our missions. Thank you for that. So, Jerry, that was terrific. I want take the opportunity now to hear what you would like to know from me?

Jerry Mick:

All right. Well, as you might know, I'm part of the clergy advisory committee under Dr. Bernard Richardson, who by the way, is a fabulous guy. He's a wonderful guy. And I just want to say, thank you so much for allowing the hospital once again to have clergy come and be invested and have a chaplain. That's wonderful, but I'm just wondering, maybe you could share with myself and the listeners, the commitment and where you stand on far as your support for chaplaincy and not just chaplaincy Tim, but it's more than that. It's the spiritual component of patience. I mean, obviously there's the physical component, which we all agree with and there's that emotional part, but as a clergy person and many people in the community, clergy and non clergy, we believe there's also so a spiritual component. And

we also believe that that's part of health and recovery. And so maybe you could just speak to that as in detail or not as a detail as you feel led to?

Tim Dentry:

Yeah. Thank you. That's a great question. First I see it as more than allowing that kind of service it's essential. It's absolutely essential of the body, mind, spirit, the care of the whole person. I mean, this is what healthcare workers are trained to do. Acknowledging that most healthcare workers are trained more on the body, some on the body and mind, and some of the real enlightened ones are getting the message out. And we're so glad that Bernard is with us, as you said, so many of our physicians really get the body, mind, spirit connection. And so we want that to be part of our culture of caring for one another in Northern Light. So it's really, really important, care of the whole person and inclusion of the family. You already cited many examples where it's not just the patient in the bed if you will, it's their family around them.

Tim Dentry:

And that is such a critical part for healing, such a critical part for people's definition of their own quality of life. And what's going to keep them happy and healthy. So, that's really important. The other thing, I just have to say though Jerry, it's the emotional and therefore spiritual. I see very little distinction between body, mind and spirit myself personally. I see them as integrated. So I have a hard time segregating the three in the way I live my life, but the emotional health of our staff is so, so important, it's always important year around no matter what the conditions are, but in this COVID crisis where they're expected to go on in there and handle what faces them and what the family and the patients are dealing with. So that emotional health of our staff is very important.

Tim Dentry:

And so the services you're talking about that Bernard and others that we have across our organization, we dedicate a lot to make sure we're right there more than as witness, but as witness for our staff, but also to give them the support and give them tools in which they can deal with this situation and just let them know we care, and we embrace everything that they're doing. It really goes back to one of the first things that my mom, who was a nurse and my granddad, who was a country doc taught me. And that is, and this very early in life, hospitals are a sacred place. And so in that sacred... And now hospitals have broadened to, we are in so many, we are in hundreds of physician practices, our home care and hospice nurses go into homes, hundreds of homes every day. And so we're out and about we're in so many different places, their places of.... They're sacred places.

Jerry Mick:

Yeah, absolutely. And the church where you are a place for physically sick, we're a place for the spiritually sick. And I share with people often in sermons. I say what I've learned in my life is some people are broken, some people are cracked and some are shattered, but the reality of it is there are no perfect people.

Tim Dentry:

Right, here, here.

Jerry Mick:

All righty. Let me ask you another question. How would that be?

Tim Dentry:

That'd be great.

Jerry Mick:

All right. Let me ask you a question that in regard to outreach and let me phrase it this way. I'm part of the clergy advisory committee and working with Bernard. And one of the things that I have been doing is I'm the community outreach coordinator for the hospital, from a spiritual perspective of connecting the hospital that you oversee with the faith community. And recently before COVID we had a wonderful time where we met and we had someone come and talk about Alzheimer's. And so we're looking to continue that, and it's difficult right now because of COVID because we're not able to meet. So we're thinking about doing something in regard to Zoom, but I would just like to hear your thought on the importance of the hospital and connecting with the faith community.

Tim Dentry:

Yeah. Again, I would use the word essential first of all. It's not just one of those things we like to check off a checklist or something like that. It needs to be part of exactly who we are. Healthcare is local and healthcare is only as good as the difference it is making in people's lives and in what is happening in our communities. And the COVID crisis has brought that even more to bear. Northern Light is unique in that we serve in many disparate communities across Maine, as you know, and our vision is to always demonstrate that we are community treasures. And so we don't want to just be that place wherever it is in those communities. We want everyone in the community to have trust in us, to have thankfulness for all the services and the accessibility and the care that is there when they need it.

Tim Dentry:

In fact, to help them keep care in the forefront of their lives, of their lifestyles, community treasures really, really important. And we only do that by being a good partner. We can't be a good community treasure, unless we're really, really good partners. So what you just described, I thank you, because you're part of our outreach, our way of life as an organization of being a good partner and connecting with people in the community, really important. So, so much of what ails healthcare in the United States right now is that the lions share of resources are spent on the extremes of poor health. So a lot of the services you talked about, and as I've talked with other individuals on other podcasts, be it the police department, or what have you, Rabbi Garner, for example, some of the things that they do in outreach.

Tim Dentry:

So much of that, I'm almost envious, but in a healthy, positive way, not in a negative way, that when people's lives aren't tended to the way that you all are tending to it, as best as you can, then the people get into more extreme ill health. And that's when, historically in our country, in many hospitals, in many countries, but that's when they come to us. And how many times have you heard, if only we would've done some things earlier and sooner. So that's our motivation. That's our vision for the future is, be a great partner on that front end, so that we aren't dealing with as many of the real travesties on the backend, it's really, really important. And I absolutely believe that our health system is great and even getting better.

Tim Dentry:

We care about people. We have a great, highly trained individuals. We're coordinating care. Quality is first and foremost, making ourselves more and more accessible to people because healthcare can be a complicated thing to get into. To show that we're there as part of their lives is really important. Great people, as I said, across Northern Light, and to do things together again on the front end of life, before it becomes a critical situation on the back end. That's what I hope to be able to influence on my time as CEO of Northern Light is to make us even more of that front end partner.

Jerry Mick:

Well, it's always better to be proactive than reactive.

Tim Dentry:

Very true.

Jerry Mick:

And so what we're trying to do on our end is working with people. Unfortunately, the proactive wasn't as good as it maybe could have been, or maybe they did not make necessarily the best decisions, but the reality of it is we try to take people where they are and help them get to where they need to be. And I think that's all we can do.

Tim Dentry:

That is true. And we'll keep at it day in and day out.

Jerry Mick:

That's right. Never give up.

Tim Dentry:

Thank you, Jerry. I really, really appreciate your time and your thoughts and your mission.

Jerry Mick:

Well, thank you for allowing me and I wish you the best in your new position, and I trust you and everybody here associated with the hospital has a great holiday and a Merry Christmas.

Tim Dentry:

Thank you, terrific. Happy holidays and Merry Christmas to you as well. And that will wrap up this episode of Tim Talk. Thank you to you, our podcast listeners as well. Until next time, I'm Tim Dentry, encouraging you to listen and act to promote our culture of caring, diversity and inclusion.

Announcer:

Thank you for listening to this episode of Tim Talk. If you enjoyed this podcast and would like to hear more, please go to northernlighthealth.org/podcast. We welcome you to join us in the new year on January 7th, when Tim will speak with Omar Conte about religious diversity and tolerance as it relates to Islam.