

The Ripple Effect of the Prayer Shawl Ministry

On July 17th, my Mom (88) and Dad (89) were both diagnosed with Covid-19. Mom was asymptomatic but Dad ended up at St Johns for 18 days and was released August 3rd to his home on 24-hour daily home hospice care until September 2nd when he graduated from hospice. Early on I called the church for prayers for Dad and then Jinny asked if they might want a prayer shawl. Jinny suggested one for Dad for healing and one for Mom for comfort. It was hard to take two because one seemed so generous, but I am thankful I did.

For those parishioners who do not know about this ministry, it consists of wonderful people who pray as they make the shawls. Prayers for healing, wisdom, comfort, joy, peace and basically anything the recipient needs including acceptance if God's will is not what they were hoping for. It is like a constant prayer hug for the person who will receive it. When it is completed it gets blessed by father or a deacon. The prayer shawl is then available to anyone who is hurting, ill or lonely to let them know they are loved and prayed for because they are a child of God.

On my way to deliver the prayer shawls to my parents I also prayed for them. Mom has used hers every day since receiving them and then she started putting Dads on his shoulders from the first day he returned home, near death, until now when he can put it on himself during their prayer time. The prayer shawls often gave me and others in my family comfort and joy that strangers would care enough to make it with such reverence and caring. During times when I thought my spirit might break it was a visible sign of the prayers protecting me during this trial.

The important part of this story is it did not stop there, there was a ripple effect. Unfortunately, during our Covid-19 trial I had a sister and brother in law who were diagnosed with cancer. When I called Jinny to ask who to send the thank you card to for Mom and Dad's prayer shawls, I mentioned my sister and brother in law to her and I ended up picking up three more shawls.

This time before delivering the shawls I asked my Mom, Dad, sister, and Dad's home care giver to pray over them. It was so touching, and I noticed our care giver was crying so I tried to lighten the moment by asking how her five-year-old daughter was doing. She had not shared before this moment, but her daughter was struggling with an illness and her Mom had Covid-19 during a recent pregnancy and was still exhausted from COVID-19 and trying to raise her now three-month-old child. Knowing our churches generosity, I asked our care giver if she would like a prayer shawl for herself, daughter, and Mom. Once again, she was in tears, but they were tears of joy and hope because of the kind people who make these wonderful shawls out of the love for strangers.

I called Jinny, told her this new story and proceeded to pick up three more shawls. On the way to church my daughter called and asked what I was up to and I told her where I was going and the story of the prayer shawl ministry. She was touched because her future Grandmother in law had a new cancer diagnosis and there had also been a death in that family. I told her I would call Jinny and ask her to add two more to the list. When Jinny answered the phone she said she had been in the back trying to pick out the perfect ones and I said "Jinny I don't think God cares which colors you pick out because it's the prayers and reverence that is making people ask for these beautiful shawls sight unseen". Each time I went back to Jinny I apologized to her for asking for more and she said, "Rick, this is exactly what they are here for".

In closing this ministry is a wonderful example of the Pillars of prayer in action. During these trying times Covid-19 not only has brought illness but fear, isolation, and loneliness. Saint Mother Teresa once said, "The most terrible poverty is loneliness, and the feeling of being unloved". It is clear to me that God is working through this ministry.