

Your Bishop's Invitation to join the Bone Marrow Registry

In November 2005 Pastor Jeff Giles was diagnosed with leukemia. Pastor Jeff and Jennae, their family and the people of Zion Lutheran in Ashley are on a long journey. Please hold Pastor Jeff Giles in your prayers as he and his wife, Jennae, continue the challenging journey toward health.

As an expression of mutual support with and for them, I invite all ELCA congregations in Western North Dakota to participate in a bone marrow tissue donor drive. Chaplain Gary Heaton at Medcenter One Hospital, and other area clergy are working in cooperation with the National Marrow Donor Program, to host a bone marrow tissue-screening drive to be held in Bismarck. Plans are to have the donor screening drive in early February 2009. Bulletin inserts promoting the drive will be emailed to congregations in January.

The cost to process the tissue sample (provided via a swab from one's cheek) and to register that information on the National Bone Marrow Registry is \$52 per person. The NMDP will offset part of the cost, reducing the amount to \$25. You may visit the website (www.marrow.org) to learn what is involved in this simple procedure of tissue typing

I am inviting ELCA congregations in Western North Dakota to prayerfully consider providing donations of money for tissue-typing kits. The goal is to raise \$5,000 by January 31st 2009, which would allow 200 new donors to be added to the national registry. If each congregation in our Western North Dakota Synod donated \$26 it would cover the cost of the 200 kits. That means more people like Pastor Jeff and so many others with life-threatening illnesses would have encouragement and perhaps a "match" to strike toward life.

Will you help? Monetary donations may be directed to our synod office, specified for the Bone Marrow Registry.

More personally, will you participate in the tissue typing so as to make yourself available on the Bone Marrow Registry? At any time, a person may choose to remove him/herself from this registry or decline to serve as a bone marrow donor. Will you please open yourself to this life-giving possibility?

Please know that your prayers are coveted as you also give prayerful consideration to how your congregation can help with this project through a cash donation and by encouraging members to be screened as potential donors.

For more information, contact Chaplain Gary Heaton, gheaton@mohs.org or Pastor Rebecca Aardahl, revreba@bis.midco.net

In Christ,

***Bishop Mark Narum
Western North Dakota Synod, ELCA***

Hi, my name is Jeff Giles, a pastor serving in Ashley, ND. I was diagnosed in November 2005 with Myelodysplastic Syndrome (MDS) which was changing over to Acute Myelogenous Leukemia (AML). I immediately began chemotherapy to begin fighting this cancer. I was hospitalized in Bismarck for this treatment for nearly a month. After spending a few weeks at home to gain strength, I returned to the hospital in Bismarck for more chemotherapy. This time I was hospitalized for just over a month. The plan was to repeat this process two more times to complete my treatments. Due to complications, a pesky virus that had invaded my system, I became transfusion dependent for six months. By this time it was too late to continue my treatments.

Holding our breath, I had frequent checkups for the next two years, because the relapse rate is very high within that time. It was long work building back up to somewhat close to the old normal, and those first two years came and went. We were just beginning to relax, feeling like we had beat the odds, when at the 2 ½ year mark, I began to feel those old symptoms once again. When my doctor in Bismarck confirmed that my MDS / AML had relapsed, I was referred to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN.

We came to Rochester in July 2008, the first priority was to get this cancer back under control, and begin to search for a stem cell / bone marrow transplant match. We learned that while chemotherapy, especially if we could do the full treatment schedule, would perhaps give a long term remission, odds are that it would not. Once MDS / AML relapses, odds are it will relapse again in less time than before, quickly becoming unmanageable. My only real chance for the long term lies in an unrelated transplant.

Since being in Rochester, I have completed the induction phase of chemotherapy, and am currently recovering from my first round of consolidation chemotherapy.

We are still looking for a good match for an unrelated transplant donor. While there are millions of people in the database at the National Marrow Donor Program, we need more. While the chances of anyone registered through this drive would be a match for me are infinitesimally small, hopefully you will be a match for someone in need, and you can save a life!

***Blessings and peace,
Pastor Jeff
(605)929-4883 cell***