



## **Understanding Hospice Spiritual Care**

*By Chaplain Karen Lewis, MTS, MDiv, VNA of Somerset Hills Hospice Chaplain*

Beyond a patient's physical needs, a comfortable end of life experience includes time to make peace with their personal beliefs and own existence. Unlike pastors representing or promoting a specific church or denomination, hospice chaplains are specially trained members of the hospice care team who support this need through non-judgmental, spiritual care to individuals regardless of their background, religion or culture. We are sensitive to the many forms of worship and culture components of faith, and know that spiritual expression may or may not involve religion or religious practice.

Often, patients share stories to help explain themselves and their values. These stories also help derive meaning and purpose from past experiences. I listen closely, providing a presence to accompany them on their personal journey. They begin to ask questions such as, "Is there anything I need to accomplish before I die?", "Is there anyone I need to make peace with?" or "Is there really a heaven?" As I discover what is important and meaningful to our patients, I assist them in finding comfort in, and through, their personal spirituality.

Despite life-limiting illness, opportunities to live one's final days in new and meaningful ways are still present. Receiving spiritual care during this special time provides important emotional support, and enables patients and their families to feel more at ease and reassured. It is my role and privilege to help honor the lives of our hospice patients, and let them know they are loved, accepted and valued as individuals.