Voices of Sisters
Spirituality

(Dreamstime/Teerapong Younglek)

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More than 20 years ago, I was part of a pilot project to bring medical aid to schools.

There was a time when all schools in the United States had a nurse assigned. S/He was usually not there on a daily basis, but was there often enough to do some basic health monitoring. School nurses have long since disappeared.

A colleague convinced our school administration that we should have some trained staff to handle basic first aid as well as potentially life-threatening events. He handpicked a small team based on two qualifications: You could think on your feet, and you were good under pressure.

I was trained, and the group of us practiced all kinds of scenarios: fainting, dislocated or broken bones, shock, bleeding, and the most scary — cardiac events. We learned cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and how to use an automated external defibrillator (AED).

I've assisted with many minor medical situations and have ridden in paramedic vehicles with staff and students (no one ever goes to the hospital alone), and I'm happy to say I've never needed to use CPR or an AED.

After years of annual training and practice, I've now become a trainer for other individuals/groups wanting knowledge around basic first aid, CPR and AEDs.

Whenever I'm in a public place for any period of time, I find myself scanning the area looking for an AED. Most public places in the United States have them now. Just this week, the grocery store I frequent had one installed.

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After a recent province gathering, when a sister friend noticed me looking around for the AED, she asked about my experience. I shared that while I am trained and can train others, I've never had to use an AED.

She was fascinated and encouraged me to look at ways to "heal the heart."

My paternal grandfather had two massive heart attacks and extensive cardiac rehabilitation after each. My dad had a heart valve replacement, so I've got a little personal experience with medical heart healing.

Healing the heart in nonmedical ways, as the sister suggested, took some time to "figure out." Knowing how to heal the heart has been on my mind ever since and is very much a work in process.

Hearts need healing, not just after physical cardiac events. We've all been there, feeling not quite right on an emotional, psychological, mental, physical or spiritual level. And the causes are many: misunderstandings, loss, disappointment, chronic conditions, etc. Maybe it's the sale of the family homestead, or ministry changes, or loss of independence and the need for more assistance, or the ever-changing reality of religious life as we know it.

Stardust and Snowdrop are new members of my household; they are rescue kitten siblings and are as different as night and day. Stardust is a tortoise shell complete with "tort-itude," very feisty. Snowdrop is a calico who literally climbs walls.

Rescue kitten siblings Snowdrop and Stardust (Jane Marie Bradish)

The two of them definitely heal my heart. Much like our community dog Oreo Cookie Monster before them, they know when I need extra attention, also known as healing.

Snowdrop insists on a cuddle when I get home. She's on my lap, belly up and purring for a good five minutes every single day. At bedtime, she will curl up at the foot of

my bed, leaning into me. If I am especially restless, she'll move up and lean "harder."

Stardust has similar routines; she crawls up close to my shoulder and purrs while I'm watching the evening news. Her bed routine involves curling up near my head and purring until I am awake, usually a good 15 minutes before the alarm clock goes off.

Sister's simple inquiry about heart healing seems to pop up at random times. As I paid attention, I found other ways to heal the heart, aside from the "usual things" we all do: spiritual direction/therapy, prayer, retreat, etc.

Turning off the phone and email for a while goes a long way toward healing. Disconnecting from our 24/7/365 world for even an hour can go a long way toward healing.

A good cry can also heal. I've learned that tears are my "automatic reaction" when I'm overextended and overtired. Not too long ago, I found myself crying while making dinner. It had been a long and stressful day. Those tears were healing in a way difficult to explain, but I'm sure others have had a similar experience.

Sometimes, heart healing is catching a glimpse of a new baby or getting a note or card for no particular reason. Maybe it's a memory, remembered or shared.

But one thing is for sure, just like physical heart healing, nonphysical heart healing takes work. Misunderstandings don't just work themselves out. Left unexplored, they often become sources of anger. Loss can quickly slide into depression. Disappointments become resentments. Chronic conditions ignored can steal the life from us.

My question, for me and for everyone, is: "What heals your heart?"