



Reflections on Caring

In this hour of sadness and reflection, the volunteers and staff of The Hospice of the Florida Suncoast are humbled that we have had the privilege of caring for Terri Schiavo and ministering – to the best of our ability – to everyone involved. We extend our sympathy to her entire family and honor the courage of conviction demonstrated by so many.

We could never have imagined such an unprecedented experience. Clearly, it has raised questions that transcend Terri – or any individual person. This is about each and every one of us. It's about how we live now that we have been forced to confront the reality of our own mortality. Our profound spiritual reflection has led us to grapple with some of life's most difficult issues and reflect on our own values and beliefs about life and death, about marriage and family, about our democracy itself.

The Hospice of the Florida Suncoast is honored to have been entrusted with the responsibility to provide such excellent, quality and compassionate care; to minister to all those involved, offering comfort and support throughout a most difficult situation; to serve as a resource to the media and our community on such complex issues; to preserve a sanctuary of caring as emotions and tensions increased; and to honor human dignity and autonomy even as a most private and uniquely personal issue came to be so publicly debated.

We have witnessed the dichotomy between legal and political proceedings and the devotion to care and compassion shown each day by our Hospice House Woodside care team. This has renewed our sense of mission to walk with individuals and families as they face difficult, highly emotional situations and to be there for them when answers don't come easily – not just when decisions and solutions are clear. We are ever mindful of the responsibility that is ours to shepherd our community through life's most difficult journeys and to honor their decisions, even when it would be much easier to walk away, for this is what defines us and our values as a hospice.

Our thanks to the thousands of individuals across the nation who have expressed their support and our community ethicists, legal advisors, spiritual advisors and care partners who have shared our five-year journey. May Terri's legacy for us all indeed be one of dignity and compassion, rather than strife and division. Our hope and prayer is that the family, the caregivers, all those faced with similar challenges – and our nation – might find peace and healing in the days ahead.

— *The Board, staff and volunteers of The Hospice of the Florida Suncoast*