

A group of Sylacauga women learn that cancer is not to fear, but confront with faith

Cancer. To many, it's scary word. But, thanks to a former Sylacauga resident, there's a stronger word in play. Faith.

To be more specific, confronting cancer with faith, isn't just an ordinary phrase. It's the title of a book and a series of life lessons offered by Karen (O'Kelley) Allen each Monday evening at Yoder Family Traditions. We spoke with a number of the participants to find out what that means to them.

"She gets down to the nitty gritty of battling cancer, telling us what exactly she went through, step by step. It was both scary and enlightening," said the first attendee of the weekly seminar. It seems that a significant number of friends and family have battled cancer throughout her life.

Referring to her sister's battle with the dreaded disease and her role in that process, she said, "I wish I had the knowledge of Karen's experience before I faced that. I walked in faith everyday, but we have learned of some valuable tools that guide one through, physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

Another, who had a large number of friends, and later her husband face a cancer diagnosis, said, "Some conquered the disease. Some did not. I'm

here to store up useful knowledge, to learn how to help someone else along the way. But the most important lesson was to learn to live in the moment rather than dread and fear."

The next respondent said, "I learned to be more open and honest about cancer. Don't tiptoe around the issue, don't be afraid of cancer and its treatment. Being open to discussion is a very freeing process for the soul."

Pointing out the need to maintain a positive outlook, she said, "This week's lesson emphasizes 'living' rather than 'I'm dying' and that's so important. Having a positive attitude is a struggle, but it rubs off on everyone, including yourself when you learn to be positive." She added that she is also looking at the course as personal preparation for the possibility of being diagnosed with cancer herself, "You never know."

The next class member is literally taking a professional approach to the course. As a retired pediatric nurse, she has become involved in a parish nurse program, "That's where nurses become health advocates and information sources within their home and neighboring churches. That is, afterall, where confronting cancer with faith needs to reside, in a pa-



Karen Allen, author and teacher of "Confronting Cancer With Faith." See her website: www.confrontingcancerwithfaith.com

tient's church that is a source of strength and faith in all matters of life."

She will join other parish nurses in another seminar from Karen Allen at the Heritage Trail Conference Center in Fayetteville. "We'll literally have several dozen nurses learning to spread Karen's message - a study in encouragement, comfort, and hope through the trials of cancer.