

Yesterday we celebrated All Saints Day, a service in which we name and remember those who have died in the last year and gone to be with God. In preparing for the service one year, I ran across accounts from people in hospice about how God was present in their final days, preparing them for the new life that waited for them. These accounts were collected by a hospice chaplain and published in her book *Dreaming Beyond Death*.

Charles Rasmussen was a retired sea captain who was dying of cancer. He was filled with fears about his dying until, one night, he dreamed of sailing on the high seas. He felt the same thrill he had often known as a merchant-marine captain: sailing his ship at night through a black and empty sea, knowing he was on course. "Strangely enough," Captain Rasmussen told the hospice chaplain, "I'm not afraid to die anymore."

A woman patient told of how she dreamed of a candle, burning on the windowsill of her hospital room. Suddenly, the candle was snuffed out, engulfing her in darkness. For a moment she was filled with terror -- until, in her dream, she saw the candle spontaneously re-light, but this time outside her window.

Another female patient, a cancer victim, was struggling with doubts about the existence of God. For three nights in a row, an image appeared in her dreams: a collection of huge boulders that pulsed with an eerie blue light. Reflecting on the meaning of this strange image, she knew intuitively that the boulders were symbols of a divine being, who was very real. "I don't need to know anything more than that," she told the chaplain. "God is God." Then, the night before she died, the woman had a final dream. It began the same way as the others had begun, but then the boulders morphed into steppingstones. In the distance, she could see a golden light. "It's calling me now, and I want to go," she told the chaplain. She died the next day.

The image of the stepping stones speaks to me. Life is a journey. Death is not the end of the journey and God will show us the way with stepping stones into the future prepared for us in our eternal home.