Honoring Charlie . . .

by Josh Andrzejewski, Faculty Chaplain, Pediatrics & Women’s Health

At the Perinatal Memorial Service in April, the Pastoral Care Department dedicated a newly finished Memorial Candle Display in the hospital chapel. This was the culmination of months of planning and was a truly healing experience for one bereaved family in particular. Liza’s son, Charlie, died before he was born due to a genetic anomaly. Liza works at VCU Health as a speech pathologist and shared with a nursing colleague, Sonyia, that she wished there was a place she could go to spend a few moments to honor Charlie during the course of her day. As these conversations continued, Sonyia reached out to members of the Pastoral Care Department, who recognized that there was ample space on one of the walls of the chapel to create a built-in display case for battery-operated candles. Liza and her husband, Trey, helped raise money to cover the cost of construction and supplies (candles, batteries, chargers).

At the Perinatal service, Liza and Trey lit the first candle and placed it in the display in honor of Charlie. Now the display is used regularly for a variety of situations: a chaplain may lead families in a brief ritual after a death; a team member may stop by to honor a relative who has died; families may wish to perform a ritual prior to surgery, or to celebrate the end of chemo, or to mark other significant milestones in their lives. The display is accessible 24 hours a day and anyone who wishes may come by to light a candle. The Pastoral Care Department continues to find new ways to use this symbol of light to bring hope and encouragement to patients, families, and team members in the hospital setting.