

Laughing, crying offer relief, aid healing

All it takes to make Maureen Cannon cry is a good country or love song, especially “if I couple it with another situation going on in my life,” said the St. Francis Xavier, Hunt Valley, parishioner. “I think it’s extremely therapeutic to cry. Once I’ve cried, I have a better perspective and outlook on a situation.”

Laughing is as therapeutic and equally as important, said the 33-year-old mother of three. “It should be as easy as crying. I laugh when I can. Being with friends and talking or reminiscing usually provides good laughs. Or my kids and the things they say can crack me up.”

Dr. Elias Shaya, chief of psychiatry at Good Samaritan Hospital, Baltimore, treats some patients who cry excessively or cannot cry. There are those, too, who can’t laugh or can’t stop laughing. Either condition is labeled emotional incontinence, sometimes brought on after a stroke.

“Laughing and crying are obviously important functions of life,” said Dr. Shaya, a parishioner of Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland, “and we should have it reserved. You don’t want too much or too little, just like other functions of the body.”

The psychiatrist thinks it is no coincidence that one of the first things a baby does at birth is cry. “In crying there is a survival indicator,” he said. “That’s what the doctor in the delivery room is looking for as the first sign of breathing.”

In his office, Dr. Shaya tries to instill the importance of laughter in his patients. “I advocate finding ways to laugh by watching comedy or engaging in looking up jokes and sharing them.”

Laughter is not only a good emotional exercise, said Dr. Shaya. “It is a very good physical exercise. It has a lot of value.”

There are 5,000 laughter clubs around the world, he reports, that invigorate laughing for no reason. “These clubs have exercises that teach how to move your

face, how to laugh more intensely to involve the shoulders, then the belly,” he said, “eventually the entire body and before you know it, it’s a complete aerobic workout.”

“I think both laughter and crying provide good outlets, like exercising,” said Loyola College in Maryland, Baltimore, sophomore Brittany Souder, “healthy ways to unwind. After I cry, I often feel a sense of relief, like a big weight has been lifted off my shoulders.”