Living with purpose for 125 years

Marianne Kosel, Volunteer, Episcopal Homes escorts Helen McGrath, Gardens’ resident to Catholic Mass.
Living
WITH PURPOSE FOR
125 YEARS

We begin 2019 – our 125th year – with a newsletter issue dedicated to Spiritual Life at Episcopal Homes, honoring the roots that have defined our organization, its way of serving and its impact on elders and families in our community since our founding.

As the Twin Cities entered the final decade of the nineteenth century, streetcars whisked passengers between Minneapolis and St. Paul in just 45 minutes. Beneath the vibrant emergence of our nation’s cities, serious social challenges of the poor, homeless, orphaned and elderly hid. Caring for the vulnerable fell to churches, individuals, and volunteers. Sister Annette Reif, a nurse and first consecrated Episcopal deaconess of Minnesota, was one of the Twin Cities’ most entrepreneurial and tireless servant leaders of the times. She devoted her life to serving disadvantaged infants, orphans and elderly as a nurse at St. Barnabas Hospital; founder of Sheltering Arms; and founder of Episcopal Church Home, which began in 1894 as a home for babies and aged women before being incorporated in 1897 as a diocesan organization to care for aged women.

The seeds of engaged volunteerism that Sister Annette planted within the region’s Episcopal faith community led to growth of Spiritual Life services for older adults that continue to define our organization today. In 2001, with a full-time priest, deacon and chapel in place, plans were set to add a second chapel. An architect’s rendering placing the chapel at the corner of Feronia and Fairview Avenues. Volunteers insisted the chapel sit at the center of our community. Their voices ensured Spiritual Life remained literally at our center.

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Sister Annette’s vision of caring for elders in St. Paul has survived two world wars, the Great Depression, near doubling of life expectancy, origination of Social Security, and the transition from horse to light rail within our St. Paul Midway neighborhood. Her statement, “It is God’s work and he will provide the means.” said nearly 100 years ago, remains vital.

While much has changed, our founding values remain. Episcopal Homes’ culture has been rooted in the Baptismal Covenant of the Episcopal Church: “Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself? Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?”

Today, these founding values are manifested in simple interactions and relationships among employees, volunteers, resident elders and families. Guided by an abiding respect for the diversity of faith and spiritual traditions present in our diverse community, people that likely never would have met, much less become neighbors, caregivers, colleagues, deepen their connections in the daily rhythms of life together. Building these diverse relationships grows directly out of the missional aspect of the Episcopal faith and is a beautiful manifestation of Beloved Community.

Spirituality
REMAINS VITAL TO OUR
FUTURE

Because of the work of our founders and continued work of Episcopal Homes Foundation, we are blessed to have Spiritual Life services available to our communities. Spirituality remains a central value of our culture and is vital to our future.

www.episcopalhomes.org/spiritual-life

Historic accounts and artifacts needed
We are currently collecting artifacts and stories related to our history. If you have something to contribute to our history archives or are interested in volunteering on our History Team, please contact Susie O’Konek at sokonek@episcopalhomes.org.
Beloved Community

BY: PHIL ROSE, Director of Spiritual Life

This year the Episcopal Church in Minnesota is consciously engaged in God’s mission of becoming Beloved Community. Beloved Community values have been part of Episcopal Homes culture since its founding by Sister Annette Relf in 1894. As the leader of Episcopal Homes of Minnesota’s Spiritual Life team, it has been a great honor to contribute to and help uphold Sister Annette’s early work. From the beginning, she lived out gospel values of care for the least among us, seeking and serving Christ in all, and above all, loving your neighbor as yourself. That ethos of love and care continues today.

Because of the work of our founders and continued work of Episcopal Homes Foundation, we are blessed to have three, clinically-trained chaplains on staff including myself, Rev. Jennifer Allred and Leah Welch.

With more than 1,100 residents served annually, it takes more than three of us to meet the vast array of spiritual needs across our communities. More than 60 volunteers, including clergy and lay ministers, come to us through longstanding relationships with Twin Cities’ faith communities to help fulfill our Spiritual Life mission.

Our primary way of carrying out our mission is through a ministry of presence. A ministry of presence is rooted in the idea of being present for one another, loving and serving in simple ways, just as Christ loved us. As chaplains, we often practice a ministry of presence in pastoral settings, including tending to the sick and dying. Last year, 103 of Episcopal Homes’ residents passed away. There is no greater privilege than to walk with an individual and their family as they approach death.

Our team also helps build relationships through engaging events and gatherings. This past year, we hosted an Advent-themed film series, conducted a book study and made two trips to The House of Prayer at St. John’s University for a presentation of the St. John’s Bible and a retreat on living fully within the midst of loss. A ministry of presence can also take place while hanging out in the pub, singing, laughing, crying and praying with one another.

Our 125th year marks a renewed commitment to spiritual life services throughout our organization. Our strategic plan aims to keep Spiritual Life at the center of our culture. Our organization serves individuals ranging in age from 65 to 100. This plan recognizes there is a tendency for young adults to identify as spiritual but not religious. Spiritual Life must also continue to evolve to meet the increasingly diverse spiritual and religious needs and traditions of our community without compromising our commitment to being unapologetically Episcopalian. For us, this means that all are welcome and our focus is on the human spirit, enhancing and facilitating the search for meaning and purpose. We recognize the worth of every person regardless of faith or religious background and believe in serving and building beloved community through authentic relationships. What better place to be intentional about the Beloved Community than a diverse, dynamic, intergenerational community where people have the gift of time to explore deep spiritual questions and, in turn, commit to meaningful spiritual practices. It is my hope that residents, families, friends, volunteers and employees feel loved and cared for and know we are here to support them.

Our 25th year marks a renewed commitment to spiritual life services throughout our organization. Our strategic plan aims to keep Spiritual Life at the center of our culture. Our organization serves individuals ranging in age from 65 to 100. This plan recognizes there is a tendency for younger elders (boomers vs. greatest generation) to more often identify as spiritual but not religious. Spiritual Life must also continue to evolve to meet the increasingly diverse spiritual and religious needs and traditions of our community without compromising our commitment to being unapologetically Episcopalian. For us, this means that all are welcome and our focus is on the human spirit, enhancing and facilitating the search for meaning and purpose. We recognize the worth of every person regardless of faith or religious background and believe in serving and building beloved community through authentic relationships. What better place to be intentional about the Beloved Community than a diverse, dynamic, intergenerational community where people have the gift of time to explore deep spiritual questions and, in turn, commit to meaningful spiritual practices. It is my hope that residents, families, friends, volunteers and employees feel loved and cared for and know we are here to support them.

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Community members at Carty Heights, an Episcopal Homes' community located at Lexington and University Avenues in St. Paul, experienced significant loss last year. Several active community members passed away during the summer and their absence left residents feeling deep sadness. “It was beginning to feel pretty somber around here,” says Carrie Kane, Manager, Carty Heights. “We started talking about ways to come together and pick each other up. We decided to make a call to Phil on our Spiritual Life team to help bring meaningful joy to Carty residents’ lives.”

Phil Rose, Director of Spiritual Life at Episcopal Homes, responded by making regular visits with Carty residents. The diverse group, which includes people who grew up in Frogtown and Hamline-Midway neighborhoods of St. Paul, as well as people coming from across the United States, Vietnam and Cambodia, enjoy ongoing discussions with Phil and feed off mutual experiences, finding comfort as they help each other cope with emotional struggles. “Phil has brought a wonderful perspective and helped us through some hard times,” says Doris Douglas, Carty Heights’ community member. “He’s real. He understands. He talks to me like my second family,” Betty shares. She quickly worked her way into hearts and is known for picking up spirits. “I love the people that live here,” says Betty. “Living in this community of people makes me take my eyes off myself. There are many that are going through harder times than I am. If I don’t see someone for a while or I think they’re having difficulty, I like to check on them,” she adds.

“This is the best community I have ever lived in. I never imagined I would be in this place with all these different nationalities of people who care so deeply about each other,” says Doris. “If I need to talk to someone, I can go down the hall. We’re all about lifting each other up and helping each other out because you never know what someone else is going through.”

Episcopal Homes’ mission is to enrich life and build community with older adults. Carty Heights opened as a 50-apartment affordable, senior housing community in 2007. Community formation continues among its members. Building community takes far more than bricks and mortar.
Episcopal Church Home (ECH) and The Gardens were recently named among US News and World Report’s Best Nursing Homes, receiving a ‘high performing’ quality rating for overall care. The ratings evaluate care for a wide range of residents, including long-term residents with chronic needs and short-term patients with rehabilitation needs following a hospital stay.

In 2018, The Gardens received the highest possible five-star overall quality rating from the Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services and ECH received a rating of four stars overall. Both received five out of five stars for high staff to resident ratios. This rating system was key to these care centers being recognized by US News as top performing.

In 2018, The Gardens also achieved a top rank in the State’s Quality Improvement Incentive Program with its second deficiency-free survey based on the hundreds of rules and requirements evaluated related to quality of care and compliance.

ECH had its own set of accomplishments in 2018. With a newly renovated Transitional Care Unit, short stay quality measures thrived. It was ranked among the best care centers in the state at preventing patient re-hospitalizations. Both the number of re-hospitalizations and patient emergency department visits for ECH patients are significantly below state and national averages.

Long term care residents also experience better than national and state averages for reduced levels of pain, depression, and use of unnecessary medications.

“All of these accomplishments are a team effort among leadership, staff, outside medical professionals, suppliers and consultants. We are proud to know that few places deliver our level of exceptional care and service,” says Steve Mork, Chief Operations Officer, Episcopal Homes.

www.episcopalhomes.org/nursing-home