Enriching Spirituality through a Ministry of Presence

For more than 125 years, Episcopal Homes has fostered meaning, purpose and connectedness among the elders who call us home. For our residents, who are Catholic, Presbyterian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, as well as Episcopalian, our ministry of presence:

- honors contributions, past and present;
- encourages exploration of peace and joy, pain and sorrow, life and death; and
- guides the search for meaning and purpose through a myriad of late-life transitions.

For the 1,400 elders we serve, ministry of presence doesn’t just happen. It is rooted in our tradition, culture, governance and budget. It flourishes through the time, expertise and love of gifted staff, including three full-time, interfaith professional chaplains, as well as volunteer clergy and leaders from area faith communities, trained lay ministers and community volunteers.

Strengthening our Beloved Community

Episcopal Homes is one of nine affiliated organizations of the Episcopal Church of Minnesota. Spiritual Life Services are an extension of area faith communities, not a replacement. Many residents come with church relationships that are a lifetime in the making. Many are also retired clergy who remain engaged in ministry while living at Episcopal Homes.

Our large network of resident and community volunteers of all denominations work together with our employed chaplains to foster vibrant communities of faith in our own and broader faith communities. This work is strengthened by Communities of Hope and other partnerships to train volunteer leaders to expand our collective capacity for elder ministry.

“When we have the experience of being understood, when someone gives us the gift of attention and simply listens, nonjudgmentally, acceptingly, a shift occurs. This understanding from another seems to allow an opening into ourselves, where the wish to understand and be free is stronger than the wish to hide in isolation and remain contracted.”

— Kathleen Dowling Singh, Author, The Grace in Aging
Fostering Spiritual Growth
As our physical capabilities diminish, our inner lives often grow and flourish. Spiritual Life chaplains, volunteers and visiting lecturers help residents explore and grow spiritually through:

- liturgy and worship services
- one-to-one spiritual listening
- rites of transition
- healing touch
- retreats
- music ministry
- prayer, book, Bible studies and discussion groups

Celebrating Lives, Honoring Souls
We work with elders and their families to help express late-life care and end-of-life wishes. We offer palliative care and hospice services that enhance peace and pain management. We also help plan memorial services that honor elders’ lives and legacies.

When residents pass, community members and staff gather with elders’ family and friends to memorialize their lives through song, prayer, shared stories and a Procession of Honor. We hold these Celebration of Life services in our sacred spaces, like our two chapels, reflective spaces, community rooms and meditation garden. Our chaplains lead memorial and funeral services or actively partner with other organizations to conduct them. In the process, we foster a ministry of presence and a beloved community where elders are truly known and honored.

"In Spiritual Life, we focus on presence and connection. When we are present—honoring souls and celebrating lives—we shepherd the search for meaning and purpose and strengthen our beloved community."

—Phil Rose
Episcopal Priest and Director of Spiritual Life, Episcopal Homes

Episcopal Homes' wellbeing programming is funded through your contributions to the Episcopal Homes Foundation.
Beautiful friendship blossoms through lay ministry partnership

When Gwen was looking for ways to serve Christ at her new church, St. John the Evangelist in St. Paul, her associate rector suggested she participate in the Community of Hope lay ministry program in which St. John’s partners with Episcopal Homes. She had no idea then that this experience would lead her to finding such a life-impacting new friendship.

During the initial Community of Hope training, Gwen was paired with Ginny Parrish, a longtime, active parishioner at St. John’s who resides at Episcopal Homes’ Garden’s nursing home. Gwen and Ginny hit it off right away. Together they share a love for music, family ties to the state of Iowa and a deep love for their faith. They began meeting for coffee and enjoyed discussing current happenings at their shared parish.

Gwen quickly connected with Ginny, and it didn’t take long for Gwen to find herself feeling like she was more of a friend than the volunteer companion that was so simply described in her lay ministry training. She felt a special connection to Ginny and knew she wanted to continue to be there for her. Gwen now takes Gwen to doctor’s appointments and to activities on Episcopal Homes’ campus. Gwen knows Ginny gets homesick for Sacramento and for family members who live further away so she feels compelled to continue finding ways to stay busy.

“We have many activities we enjoy together. One of my favorite moments came during this last Holy week. We sat together listening to hymns in her room. It was beautiful and we didn’t even need to say much to each other. It was like being in church together, forming a very special connection,” says Gwen. “We’re fortunate to have each other. I do not consider myself a volunteer. I am her friend,” she adds.

Ginny is thankful to have a friend like Gwen. When they can’t get together, they text each other often. “Gwen is the type of person that once you get to know her, you feel like you’ve known her your whole life. She’s a giving person. She’s a good person and she means the world to me. I am so thankful for her.”

“When I talk about Beloved Community, I use Episcopal Homes as an example. I support the Living Fully endowment campaign because it strengthens Episcopal Homes’ capacity to serve at the epicenter of elderhood and aging support within ECMN,”

—Bishop Brian Prior
Episcopal Church of Minnesota (ECMN)