

Ministry Emphasis—May—LSC Senior Services month

A Call to Serve

It is a typical Sunday at a Lutheran Services Carolinas (LSC) senior living community. Lunch has been served, and residents are spending their day relaxing. Some play a game of cards in the common area, while others read the paper or visit with family members. Soon residents will make their way down the hall to the chapel where church is getting ready to start.

"For many residents this is the only opportunity they have to worship," says Rev. Tom Cogan, chaplain at Trinity Village and Trinity Ridge in Hickory. Pastor Cogan is one of seven chaplains on staff with LSC senior services. The chaplains lead the worship services that are very similar to what you would expect on a Sunday morning in church. There is a sermon, hymns, prayers, and even communion. Residents are also able to participate in the service by reading passages of scripture or lighting candles.

The hymns and scripture are especially important within the senior living communities because the familiar words and tunes positively affect people in a way that even the best medicine cannot. "You'll see an old hymn or passage that people connect with and they will start repeating it or humming it when normally they may not communicate at all," says Pastor Cogan. The Rev. Beth Woodard, chaplain at Trinity Glen in Winston-Salem, says that common passages like Psalm 23 and the Lord's Prayer are "bred in the bones" of these older adults.

Beyond the Chapel

The work of the LSC chaplains, however, is not confined just to the chapel. In fact, the largest part of their work is being out and about in the senior living communities and available to the older adults who call LSC home.

"The office of the chaplain offers weekly opportunities for formal worship and bible study," says the Rev. Steve Ridenhour, chaplain at Trinity View in Arden. "But around the meal table, the coffee table, and the library



Birthdays are celebrated at Trinity Glen, Winston-Salem, with the delivery of a prayer shawl by Chaplain Beth Woodard. The shawls were donated by the Women of the ELCA.

tables, in the lobbies and hallways, we find time for one-on-one conversations about matters of personal interest, life experiences, and matters of faith." By bringing communion to the room of a bedridden resident, playing music at a "Name that Tune" game night, or hosting a monthly breakfast for residents, chaplains find ways to walk with residents as they live their day-to-day lives. They also are there to help celebrate accomplishments and milestones, like birthdays.

At Trinity Glen, birthdays are celebrated with prayer shawls and a visit from Pastor Woodard. The shawls, donated by the Women of the ELCA, make a perfect present and have become a favorite part of chaplaincy for Pastor Woodard. "Folks cry and hold these shawls very dear," she says. "I tell them, 'Someone who doesn't even know you prayed for you when they were making this.'"

One resident battling cancer received a prayer shawl on her birthday and used it as an extra blanket. It was the first time she was able to sleep through the night since beginning her chemotherapy treatments.

Supporting Residents and Staff

Whether dealing with a cancer diagnosis, the side effects of a new medication, or the death of a dear friend, the needs of residents change every day. Chaplains are there to respond to these needs with encouragement, comfort, and counseling. A priority of the LSC chaplains is to help the people who are grieving after the death of a fellow resident. Most residents are unable to attend the funerals, so chaplains work to find ways to bring closure within the walls of each LSC ministry.

After a resident dies, a "code angel" is called at the LSC senior living communities. This prompts residents, families, and staff to line the hallways as the body is taken from the room. The Rev. Brenda Bynum, chaplain for the Trinity Oaks campus, prays as she walks behind the body. In this moment, people are able to say their goodbyes and pay final respects to the person that was a part of their LSC family. Similarly, at Trinity Grove in Wilmington, the Rev. Rachel Connelly developed the idea of a "promise pall," which is used to cover the body as it leaves the building. The pall is white with the logo of Trinity Grove embroidered on the top. Before the final exit, Rev. Connelly shares a prayer of commendation.



At Trinity Oaks, Salisbury, Chaplain Brenda Bynum feels it's important to wear her robes during the Sunday afternoon worship services. She uses the robes as a way to teach residents the special meanings behind the different colors and symbols.

Memorial services are held every six months in most LSC ministries. Residents are able to gather together to celebrate the lives of the friends they have lost. In the chapel, they join together in prayer, sing hymns, and share fond memories and stories. Family members are also invited to attend to light a candle for their loved one. "I've seen people go from the apartments to assisted living to the nursing home and then on to Jesus," says Pastor Bynum. "I think each person here is important to the entire community."

LSC staff members are included in that community. Employees spend their days caring for residents, which creates a close bond between the people who live in and work at LSC. Chaplains are able to extend their care to the staff as they grieve after the loss of a resident. "Some days, it seems to be more time spent with staff members, especially after a well-loved resident dies," says the Rev. Ray Sipe, chaplain at

Trinity Place in Albemarle. "The staff grieves as much as anyone, but they do not always have an outlet for their grief." Chaplains frequently check in with staff to see how they are coping and to offer encouragement.

Pastor Bynum uses National Nurses Week in May as an opportunity to intentionally connect with the staff. She takes time each day during this week to bless the hands that care for so many seniors. "I pray that their hands are blessed and that God blesses the residents through them."

Responding to God's Call

The chaplains are essential to providing the LSC level of care to the older adults living in senior living communities. In addition to the medical care, safe living spaces, and activities that the homes provide, the chaplains bring a deeper, spiritual level of care as they work with these older adults. The chaplains, however, do not see this role as a job, but as a direct call from God to be in ministry and to serve the residents. "In moving to facility living, in saying goodbye to home ownership, employment, and some level of autonomy, residents have lost a sense of identity, purpose, and worth," says Pastor Woodard. "We are helping them live out John 10:10. Their lives might feel smaller by age or illness, but we help them live abundantly."

Residents appreciate having a connection to their faith and a person who can walk with them during this stage of their life. "Residents tell me, 'I'm so glad you're here,'" says Pastor Bynum. "And I say, 'Well, I'm glad I'm here, too!'"

LSC Chaplains:

Pastor Brenda Bynum – Trinity Oaks campus

Pastor Tom Cogan – Trinity Ridge and Trinity Village

Pastor Rachel Connelly – Trinity Grove

Pastor Steve Ridenhour – Trinity View

Pastor Ray Sipe – Trinity Place

Pastor Beth Woodard – Trinity Glen

The Trinity Elms campus in Clemmons is currently in the process of hiring a chaplain.

May is designated as the LSC senior services month of emphasis by the North Carolina Synod. This is a time to honor those who live and those who serve in LSC's ministries as well as the perfect time to pay tribute to the older adults in your congregations. For more information about the senior ministries of LSC, visit www.LSCarolinas.net.

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