



## **Spiritual Care Services during COVID-19 – Bethania MPCH & Pembina Place MPCH**

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the way Spiritual and Religious Care is provided at Bethania MPCH and Pembina Place MPCH. Following the direction from MB Health and the WRHA all group programming was put on hold until further notice, including weekly Chapel services led by Vernelle Enns Penner at Pembina Place and Ferd Funk at Bethania. Volunteers were no longer able to assist with piano playing and assisting residents to attend Chapel services. Furthermore, Pastors and music groups from our supporting congregations were also restricted from entering the PCHs to provide vital religious and spiritual support to residents. At the same time, families were prevented from visiting their loved ones to provide companionship, emotional support, and an added degree of spiritual comfort.

The effect of the restrictions on spiritual support for residents became evident in an increase of boredom expressed by residents, coupled with a sense of confusion, feeling anxious, questioning their faith, loss of meaning and a feeling of abandonment. Someone said, *“COVID-19 leaves scars on the Spirit, too. This disease tests your spirit as much as your body, because it forces you to stay apart from others.”*

In Manitoba, Spiritual Care is recognized as an essential service and our Chaplains have been providing spiritual and emotional support throughout the stages of COVID-19. Still, the pandemic has added significant challenges on how we provide spiritual support to residents and family members. The restriction on visits from family, friends and the faith community has possibly been the greatest challenge for many residents as those visits provide an essential link to the outside world and everything that is familiar to them. For residents whose regular routine includes frequent visits from their support networks the disruption of their social routine has been particularly difficult. It has been refreshing to observe a number of residents offering friendship and community to one another.

With social distancing protocols in place a great deal of Spiritual support today consists of 1:1 visits with the chaplains indoors and also on the courtyards of our facilities as the weather permits, as well as spiritual conversations in smaller groups. After a prolonged time of not being able to offer any group programming, we are again beginning to have Chapel services and Devotional times while maintaining social distancing protocols. A favorite activity at Bethania is the Wednesday morning Hymn Sing with Ferd and accompanied by Dan on the piano. At Pembina Place, Vernelle offers Worship Services on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, which include a variety of spiritual songs and hymns which she accompanies on the auto harp.

Since Pastors from our supporting congregations are not able to provide weekly services for the residents we are grateful for Churches who make their Worship services available via YouTube or Livestream. The worship services from Bethel MC are broadcast live for resident at Pembina Place every Sunday.

Spiritual care during times of transition remains a very important part of the work of our chaplains. During Final Days of Care, our chaplains share time with the resident and family members who are granted visitation privileges on compassionate grounds, offering words of faith, hope and healing. Clergy visits are also facilitated during these critical times following COVID-19 protocols to provide additional religious rituals and spiritual support. Following the death of a resident, staff are invited to participate in a ritual of remembering the life of the resident and reflecting on the relationship they had with the resident and their family members.

Newly admitted residents often find it difficult to adapt to their new home, especially when family members and others in their pre-COVID-19 support network are not able to assist them in making the transition easier. This can be a confusing time for new residents. Our chaplains, alongside all staff extend and foster a heart of hospitality to facilitate an easier transition into their new home. They spend extra 1:1 time with new residents going for walks and getting to know their stories in order to make them feel more settled.

As part of the multi-disciplinary team our chaplains respond to referrals based on the observations and conversations that residents have with staff. They also offer their observations and support during staff huddles to identify ways to provide care for the spirit as well as the body and mind.

Since families are now able to visit their loved ones, clergy visits can also be accommodated, particularly during times of illness and where family supports are not readily available. Chaplains Ferd and Vernelle assist other staff with family visits and offer an opportunity to discuss any spiritual concern or questions families may have during those visits.

The annual care conferences for our residents provide an additional opportunity for our chaplains to give an update on the residents' Spiritual and Religious Care Plan and to attend to families' questions and concerns.

This pandemic has placed high demands on the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual resources of staff as well. Dealing with constant change and the unknown of what is yet to come has placed a lot of strain on staff. Assisting staff in times of uncertainty and offering encouragement and support is another way that our chaplains provide spiritual and emotional support to the organization.

As we continue to navigate through this pandemic, we strive to provide compassionate and loving resident-centered care, while also tending to the spirit of the wider network of support. Until we are able to open our arms wide in a welcoming embrace, we covet your prayers as we also pray for you.