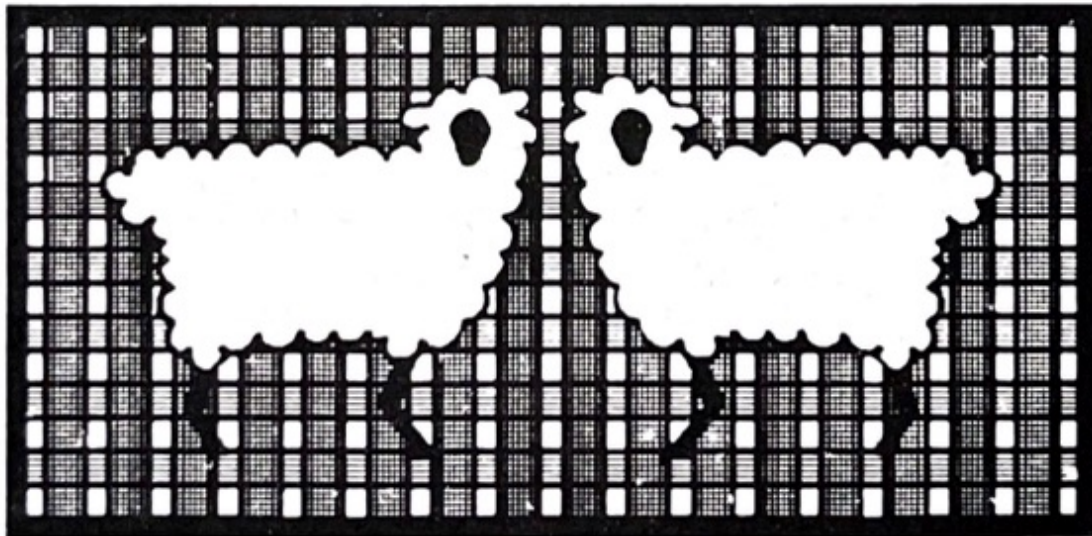


A Short History
of
The Good Shepherd
Program

Since 1984



Saint Michael and All Angels
Episcopal Church

Saint Michael and All Angel's Good Shepherd Program began with a need. In 1984, the Rev. Robert Ratelle, then Rector of the parish, gathered several capable women to discuss ways in which a large parish could be more "pastorally sensitive." The answer seemed to lie in creating a ministry, shared by clergy and lay people, that would link parish members to church resources in times of need.

Determined to avoid reinventing the wheel, Litty Turner, who attended that first gathering, investigated a neighborhood shepherding program she had heard about from a vestry member at St. David's Episcopal Church in Austin. Litty agreed to head such a program for Saint Michael, with Sue Patton as her assistant. The two women traveled to Austin to study the model at St. David's. They returned to modify the program, with Fr. Ratelle's assistance, to fit the needs and size of our parish.

Adhering to the guideline, "Keep it Simple," the fledgling program was structured to address three clearly articulated needs. First, each shepherd was

asked to be in touch with each household at least once a year with a card, a phone call, or a visit. Second, shepherds would respond to special needs (such as the arrival of a newcomer, a death in the family, the birth of a baby, or a hospital illness or surgery) with a meal prepared by other neighborhood parishioners. Finally, each shepherd would plan and execute one neighborhood get-together a year. Once again, "keep it simple" was emphasized. The purpose of these gatherings was to acquaint parishioners with neighboring church families, to make them aware that a mutual support network exists, and to remind parishioners that we are all called to "Feed my sheep."



"Our vision was to divide the parish geographically into neighborhoods with a limited number of households, giving each area its own shepherd," Litty recalls. "We did this at first on a limited basis for a year with five or six trial areas." It took almost a year and a half, working with the church office staff and a Mapsco, to get the parish

geographically divided into 66 neighborhoods of 20 to 25 families each. Then followed the publicizing of the program and the recruiting of shepherds and assistants for each neighborhood. Printed materials for the program employed the artistic talents of Gwynne Juett and Sharon Brown. The Rev. Andy McCarthy was the first chaplain, and Ann Cruikshank and Mary Chesmore helped with training of the shepherds. The program was officially launched on Good Shepherd Sunday in 1984 (and new shepherds and their assistants continue to be commissioned for this lay ministry on Good Shepherd Sunday annually).

The program continued to be refined. At first Good Shepherd chairs did all of their own clerical work, working closely with Maxine Jones, the church receptionist. Maxine relayed needs to Litty and Sue, who in turn contacted the neighborhood shepherds. Training sessions and opportunities to share concerns among shepherds were added. Posters went up in the halls of the church to better acquaint parishioners with their shepherds.



In the flurry of preparing lists, organizing meetings, sending cards, and telephoning, the "keep it simple" origins of the program might have been lost, had it not been for the creativity of the individual shepherds and the touching responses that such caregiving sometimes elicited. Jean Baty, the third chair of the program, remembers mailing a form letter to parishioners to ask for help in neighborhoods that had no shepherds. One afternoon her phone rang. The caller was an 89-year-old member of the parish who mistakenly thought that the form letter was a personal letter to her. She cheerfully said, "It was so thoughtful of you to ask me to help with the Good Shepherd program. Because of my age, I will not be able to visit or cook and deliver food, but I most certainly can check on my neighbors by phone. It was so precious of you to think of me." The Rev. Mike Wallens, who succeeded Fr. McCarthy as chaplain to the program, was so touched by this woman's response that he began to visit her as often


as he could. "They shared small snacks of cheese and crackers and grapes," Jean recalls, "and it was never clear just who was ministering to whom."



All who have participated in the Good Shepherd program are grateful for the opportunity they have had to listen and to stand with another in times of great joy or great sorrow, demonstrating the love of God. It is indeed a mutual ministry.

Jeanne Snead, Good Shepherd chair in 1990, had herself been served by the program in 1987. She recalls her first encounter with the program: "Imagine a family with three children, ages five, nine, and eleven, a dad who works ten to twelve hours a day, and a mom who is home for her family and does volunteer work. Then imagine a large remodeling of their tiny home to double the space. The family continues to live in the house, even though the roof is off and major construction has begun. Now imagine a phone call saying, 'You have cancer and need to have major surgery, followed by five to six weeks of radiation therapy.' I had no

immediate family in the area, but my extended Saint Michael family filled the void through the Good Shepherd program. Fellow parishioners delivered dinner Monday through Friday for six weeks while I was undergoing radiation. Caring friends called to check on me and my family. This is truly the ministry of Jesus Christ."


The program bears the imprint of all who have served. Beginning with Litty Turner and Sue Patton, these dedicated, caring individuals have headed the program. In addition to Litty and Sue, Amy Engleman, Jean Baty, Virginia Falconer, Jeanne Snead, Sylvia Rundell, Ellen Logan, Debbie Ryan, Sharon Brown, Sally Magee, Carol Price, Anne Leary, Co-Chairs Carol Price and Margaret Mebus (served 2 years); Co-Chairs Sherry Wilson and Maria Ward have given leadership to this essential ministry of loving neighbors as ourselves within our large parish.

During the past twelve years, the program has nearly doubled. Today, chaired by Carol Price and with the Rev. Sharon Turner as chaplain, the program serves 101 geographical areas, with 150 shepherds caring for over 6,200 parishioners.

"Jesus said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' . . . And he said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.'"

— John 21:15-16

The Good Shepherd Program
A Program of
Angels Among Us



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