

SHEPHERD WELLNESS COMMUNITY

Report to Diocesan Convention 2023

In 1987 Fr. Lynn C. Edwards (then serving Church of the Good Shepherd, Hazelwood), Social Worker Cyndee Klemanski, and Dr. Bill Brandon, met with a group of men dying of AIDS, who needed a safe and welcoming community and gathering place for support and care. Shepherd Wellness Community (SWC) held its first dinner that October. In the beginning, SWC's mission was helping people die with dignity. Today, SWC remains the only HIV/AIDS community in Western Pennsylvania. Our mission is helping people living with HIV/AIDS improve their wellness. SWC is a ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh.

In January 2023, Bishop Solak appointed William Stevens (Calvary, East Liberty) to our board of directors as a representative of the Episcopal Diocese.

Since Fr. Lynn's death in June 2017, Shepherd Wellness Community had no formal pastoral presence for spiritual care. Mindful that our beloved co-founder could never be replaced, but desiring to provide our members, staff, and board with spiritual support, the SWC board was pleased to appoint Fr. Chuck Esposito (St. Stephen, Wilkinsburg) as our new SWC Spiritual Advisor in October 2022.

Also in October 2022, Shepherd Wellness Community celebrated 35 years of Positive Wellness with a community open house featuring a history display, 35th Anniversary program and speakers, and a delicious hors d'oeuvres buffet. The Anniversary cake featured a picture of the SWC quilt panel on the Names Project National AIDS Memorial Quilt, with over 350 names of deceased SWC members. The National AIDS Memorial Quilt was first displayed on the Mall in Washington, DC, in October 1987, the same month as the first Shepherd Wellness Community dinner.



As part of our celebration, we commissioned our art therapist to create a 2 part (indoor – outdoor) 35th Anniversary Art ensemble using components from the former AIDS Memorial Rose Garden in Schenley Park (which the City of Pittsburgh removed a number of years ago). SWC has the last remaining rose bush from this garden, which grows at the corner of our Bloomfield center. The outside art pieces are a series of symbolic metal flowers, along with a post containing the name plaques from the Memorial Garden.

The indoor art pieces are a set of 3 interior lit boxes (made from the wooden name posts from the Memorial Garden) with translucent sides decorated with rose motifs. The art ensemble has been dedicated in memory of a Board member who died in 2021, Mike Stone, and one of our co-founders currently serving as Board President, Cyndee Klemanski.



In November 2022 Shepherd Wellness Community had a table at the Diocesan Convention, and hope to be present in 2023 as well.

In December, 2022, SWC was honored to host for the first time the World AIDS Day (December 1) Annual Observance/Service by the Pitt Men's Study, which pre-pandemic had been held in Heinz Chapel. We will be hosting this special and moving event again in 2023.



For a number of years, SWC has been the grateful recipient of the SJO Garden Grants. We have a series of raised beds in which we grow vegetables and herbs, which our Chef Jim uses in our wellness dinners during harvest season. This year's crop has been very plentiful, and our members are thrilled to have their meals enriched by the home-grown produce.



Our ministry to the HIV positive community has also been supported by generous grants from the Women of Calvary.

As this is our first report since the pandemic, a brief recap of 2020-2021:

I began as Executive Director in September 2020. After training and orienting me, my predecessor, Scott Peterman, retired after 21 years of faithful service. Delayed by the pandemic, we honored him with an open house and retirement recognition in June 2022.

During the pandemic, we transitioned to providing freshly cooked, flash frozen wellness meals by contactless pick up for our members, many of whom are food insecure. We distributed a record number of meals during the pandemic, made possible by the generous support of many, including parishes and individuals in the Diocese. We provided support groups and health education programs via Zoom, and held socially distanced outdoor gatherings and outings.

In closing, we are grateful for the support of our work provided by the Episcopal Diocese, Bishop Solak, individual parishes, the Episcopal Church Women and the Women of Calvary, which enables us to continue our ministry.

Our 2022-23 HIV/AIDS wellness programs include:

- Wellness Dinners (Monday, Wednesday, Friday) to improve nutrition, reduce isolation, and provide social support.
- Peer Counseling phone calls to connect members with HIV/AIDS services and offer a lifeline of help, support and hope.
- Support Groups which boost mental and physical health. Groups guide members through the challenges of living with HIV/AIDS and help participants to deal with anxiety, depression and other relevant issues.
- Health Education Programs to provide information about HIV/AIDS treatment, HIV medications and the latest medical advances.
- Complementary Therapy Classes to teach members how to improve health and wellness and strengthen their immune systems.
- Treatment Adherence and Risk Reduction Programs to advise members on how to effectively maintain their HIV medical regimen and ways to decrease the risk of HIV transmission and reinfection.
- Spiritual Life Programs presented in an interfaith format which offer insight, encouragement, inspiration, direction and guidance.
- Social and Recreational Outings to combat isolation and loneliness and provide supportive community and respite for families.
- Wellness Classes to help improve quality of life by addressing the Six Dimensions of Wellness (social, occupational, spiritual, physical, intellectual and emotional).
- Transportation Assistance, in the form of bus tickets or mileage reimbursement, which helps our members attend programs and access services.

The board of directors, staff and members of Shepherd Wellness Community express our gratitude to the Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh for thirty-six years of ministry to people living with HIV/AIDS.

With thanks for our partnership in the Gospel,
Richard W. Krug
Executive Director, Shepherd Wellness Community