

Spiritual Care

Fourth on the list of Extendicare's 19-point *Commitment to Residents* is a statement that says we will make sure our residents have access to programs that meet their physical, spiritual, social, emotional and recreational needs.

Nothing about the human condition is simple, and so fulfilling these needs for ourselves and for others takes great skill, understanding and communication. That's as true for people who live in nursing homes as for those who live outside of them. But perhaps the biggest challenge is to meet the complex human need for spiritual nourishment.

Extendicare homes across Canada provide "pastoral care services" which try to do just that. Pastoral care services is a term used to represent a wide variety of spiritual support programs. In shaping its programs, each home is guided by the availability of volunteers and clergy of different denominations, and residents' preferences.

Programs may include worship services, memorial services, visits from volunteers with religious training, pastoral counselling by clergy and trained lay-persons, hymn singing, bible study and seminars.

Also, in keeping with Extendicare's commitments to residents, each person's participation in our pastoral care services is strictly voluntary. While research tells us that people's spiritual needs increase with age, many residents choose to meet their needs independently, and in private. Staff respect this decision, and residents are never subjected to unwanted spiritual guidance.

Most homes use multi-purpose rooms — such as activity centres or dining rooms — for worship services and other programs. A lot depends on the design of the building. Unfortunately, few homes are able to offer permanent chapels. However, when residents are admitted, staff inform them which areas of the home are available for pastoral activities requiring privacy, such as counselling.

Providing pastoral care services demands a great deal of planning and coordination. That's why each facility assigns one staff member to be the pastoral care *coordinator*. Often, that person is the activity supervisor. The coordinator ensures that each resident's spiritual needs are clearly identified at the time of admission, and that there are regular opportunities for residents to make changes. It then becomes the coordinator's responsibility to arrange for the best way of meeting each resident's spiritual needs given the resources that the nursing home is able to offer.

Many homes also have a pastoral care *committee* whose members include the facilities' pastoral care coordinator, local clergy who represent different denominations, residents, family members, volunteers and other staff. The committee offers an invaluable consulting service to nursing homes, and creative solutions to residents' concerns are often the result.

Families are encouraged to join residents for pastoral care activities at the home, and are also encouraged to accompany their family members to their community place of worship, if possible.

If you have questions or concerns, or if you wish to become a pastoral care volunteer, please contact the administrator or activity supervisor of the nursing home.