

Philosophy of Chaplaincy

Spiritual Care. Healthcare chaplains are spiritual care specialists in the modern healthcare environment. They provide spiritual care to residents, families and staff in the licensed facilities at Shell Point Retirement Community. Spiritual care aims to assist individuals find meaning and purpose in life, access inner resources to hope for favorable outcomes while coping with present realities, and develop meaningful relationships with God and others. Chaplains perform spiritual screenings and assessments in order to identify spiritual distress and design group or individual interventions to restore spiritual well-being. They offer and provide spiritual counseling, guidance and other specific spiritual care services to residents, families and staff.

End of life spiritual care is an important part of a chaplain's ministry. They accompany residents and families through various phases of the death experience; they are bereavement and grief counselors for staff as well as residents and families.

To enhance the worship experience, chaplains plan and lead worship services such as vespers, holiday observances, memorial services, and prayer vigils. They administer the sacraments and other religious rites and observances when requested.

Active Listeners. Chaplains are skilled empathetic listeners. They understand that illness may generate spiritual distress precipitating a spiritual crisis. They are familiar with the continuum of loss faced by many residents of a retirement community and the consequent impact on sense of worth, purpose, inner strength and transcendent relationships. Chaplains hear the verbal and non-verbal expression of cares, worries, woes, anger, guilt, failures and respond therapeutically. In this way they help residents access and mobilize their spiritual resources in order to contribute to their own healing process. Chaplains maintain confidentiality in all matters.

Interfaith Respect. Chaplains do not displace local pastors and religious leaders, but fill the special requirements of a long-term care facility in Southwest Florida. Many people, even though they are active in their religious organizations choose not to notify clergy of their admission to a healthcare facility. Others do not have a religious or faith background and lack this support in the event of a health crisis. Some are far from home at the time of their health event and consequently removed from their spiritual counselor and support network.

Chaplains reach across various faith traditions providing interfaith, nondenominational spiritual care. They do not proselytize, but respect an individual's religious preference and listen respectfully to the spiritual concerns of those they serve. They attempt to understand the faith background, religious practices, beliefs and values of individuals and minister to them in the context they understand. Strengthening and affirming their relationship with God is the ultimate goal.

Ethos of Values. Throughout the healthcare facilities chaplains provide a consistent and constant reminder of the values Shell Point espouses. They are powerful testimonies to the presence of faith and the power of God to heal bodies, minds, and spirits. Chaplains reinforce the significant role that religion and spirituality play in how people cope with illness and recover health. They create an ethos of reconciliation, redemption and restoration through faith in Jesus Christ. The presence of chaplains assures that faith has a prominent place among the healing resources available to all individuals.

Chaplains take an active role in healthcare ethics and serve on the Healthcare Ethics Advisory Committee. They may be asked to educate and assist residents and families in completing advanced directives. They help identify and clarify ethical issues in the context of Shell Point's philosophy of ethics and other policy statements.

Interdisciplinary Team Member. Chaplains serve as members of the interdisciplinary resident care teams. They participate in care conferences offering perspectives on the spiritual health of residents and family members. On occasion they document spiritual care interventions in the record of the resident. Chaplains help staff understand the impact of spiritual health on physical and mental health. They offer insight and counsel about spiritual distress and management of spiritual care. They help staff grapple with the issues and stress of resident care and meaning and purpose for their own lives.

Qualifications. Professional chaplains at Shell Point are theologically and clinically educated to provide spiritual care to individuals from diverse faith traditions. They are licensed by The Christian and Missionary Alliance and recognized by a national chaplaincy certifying organization. Chaplains are familiar with community resources and serve as a liaison making connections with religious professionals who may offer additional services to residents, family and staff. Chaplains are professionally accountable to the Christian and Missionary Alliance, their certifying organization, The Village Church and Shell Point Retirement Community.

Chaplain Assistants follow a prescribed training program and collaborate with chaplains in carrying out the goal of providing spiritual care. They serve with and report to the board certified chaplain.

Chaplains use the tools traditionally associated with spiritual care such as prayer, scripture reading, religious rituals, physical presence, therapeutic listening, and comforting. The healthcare environment for older adults necessitates additional skills:

- Knowledge of many illnesses and disease processes and how these affect emotional, social, psychological and spiritual wellness in older adults.
- The ability to work on an interdisciplinary team, appreciate the contributions of other healthcare professionals and communicate one's spiritual assessment and interventions to this team.
- Understanding of the organization and structure of the healthcare environment particularly in long-term care and assisted living facilities.
- Familiarity with and sensitivity to the diversity of religious faiths and how each tradition responds differently to health, illness and death.
- Awareness of the cultural diversity in Southwest Florida and the impact of cultural beliefs on health, illness and death.
- Training in current bioethical issues and the skill to apply that training to a variety of clinical situations.
- Awareness of psychosocial and behavioral theories and how they apply to health, illness and loss in older adults.
- Comfort with one's self and the ability to move through one's own anxiety, preferences, and biases in order to meet residents where they are and bring them to wholeness, healing and peace with God.