

By the Light of Faith

The dying bring many gifts of life into hospices

By Lynn and Brian McNulty
Guest contributors

"Adestes Fidelis ..." "O Come All You Faithful ..."

So sing the choirs and carolers of this season. The faithful should come to the stable to witness the birth of the Savior. In the humble station of a wanderer the Lord of Life came to share our life.

What else do we remember of this event? The shepherds and the kings.

The shepherds came with the simplicity of wonder, the kings came with gifts of precious treasures. A newborn king is here in our midst and the people bring gifts to share with the family. The people from the lowly shepherds to the mighty kings bring what they have to share with the wanderer among us.

Mary, too, is a gift-bearer. She patiently awaits the fulfillment of her time to bring a gift to the world unlike any other. Mary, the Theokotos, the Christ Bearer, delivering to us the gift of life. The patient Joseph awaits the outcome and lives the life of service needed to bring the voice of the kingdom to the people.

This is the theme of Elisha House, "Gifts Given and Gifts Received." Our namesake, the prophet Elisha, was twice given the faith of Elijah, who he followed. That was his gift for following the prophet. What he gave to the people was twice the witness of the promise of God, repeating much of what Elijah had done.

All of the fancy rhetoric of theology and service can be boiled down to the idea of "gifts given and gifts received." At Elisha House, we see this in many ways. The people who come there to die — for that is their work at this time in life — bring the gift of their rich treasure of life and experience.

We encounter those who have no one else in their life to care for them. Yet they bring the gift of thankfulness for care given that may shame many people.

Some who come to die are faithful followers of Christ. They bring gifts of trust and faithfulness in the face of death, reinforcing the faith of the volunteers who sit with them, hold them, clean them, pray with them, watch with them, and — in many ways — die with them. We know in our faith in the risen Christ that when these people die — whether they are swindlers or saints — they live in the grace of the humble baby born in the stable.



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The Christian community has taken care of the sick throughout its history. We found it necessary early on to live out the message of Christ by caring for the people in the community who did not have all the gifts that allowed for fullness of comfort in this life. The community gave of itself to help others in need.

Take, for example, the Christians who helped those who were persecuted in the arena. Remember the church in Europe in the Middle Ages that helped the leper and the victims of the Black Death. At that time, people began making their houses available for travelers on their way. These were dangerous times in Europe. A traveler's life might be in danger at any time from thieves and murderers.

The hospice was a safe place for the traveler. In addition to finding shelter and rest from their travels, they could get help and direction to reach their destination.

The modern hospice follows this example. In these places, the dying are given a safe haven on the journey. Here also, the dying may receive guidance and companionship on the last leg of their road home. They bring to these houses many gifts of their life: their joys, suffering, fears, hopes, gifts and needs.

We inherit those gifts, and we are called to pass that gift and example on to the next generation of Christians as they grow. In the catechism of the Episcopal Church, the question and response are listed: "Q.) What, then, is

our assurance as Christians? A.) Our assurance as Christians is that nothing, not even death, shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In their letter, *The Church in the Modern World*, the U.S. Catholic bishops stated a similar view: "Faith ... with its solidly based teaching, provides every thoughtful (person) with an answer to his (her) anxious queries about his (her) future lot. At the same time it makes him (her) able to be united in Christ with his loved ones who have already died, and gives hope that they have found true life in God." (n.18)

In this common understanding of the mission of Christians is found the place of Elisha House.

The residents and volunteers at Elisha House are from ecumenical and interfaith backgrounds. Yet, there is a dignity in life and in death that transcends the divisions of the denominations. We recognize that we are called to "one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all." This includes the volunteers and residents who do not accept everything in that statement.

We are all like Mary, the gift bearer, in this place. We wait together for that change, from life to death to life. We are like Joseph waiting to be of service, providing as we can. The waiting and providing may call for clean-ups, tears, laughs, and fears: all are gifts given and received.

It is interesting that one of the gifts given to the child Jesus is Myrrh because this is the spice of burial. It is the same spice brought by the women as a gift to the tomb of the dead Jesus. For all of us involved in hospice work — whether it be at Elisha or Isaiah or Sunset or Mt. Carmel or Advent House — this shows forth the cycle of gift given and gifts received.

Our guests come and bring us their gifts. We receive those gifts and give our gifts of hope, care and love. The cycle is complete as the person dies and brings those gifts given and received back to the Creator.

In this cycle is the continuing new life that seeds the community to grow through the experience of death to life. Each death in the house is an experience of Christmas, the humble birth of a new person into a new life.

Lynn is an Episcopal deacon at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Rochester. Brian serves as a deacon at Rochester's St. Augustine's Church.

JANUARY BINGO CALENDAR

SPECIAL PAID ADVERTISEMENT

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY
Holy Family St. Ambrose St. Boniface St. Rita's St. Stanislaus St. Theodore	Holy Apostles St. Charles Borromeo St. Mary	Holy Apostles St. Francis Xavier St. Stanislaus
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WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Bishop Kearney	St. Anne Holy Cross St. James St. Mary Our Mother St. Philip Neri St. Stanislaus	Holy Ghost Most Precious Blood St. Cecilia's St. Mark's	Good Shepherd St. Ambrose St. Casimir's St. Thomas the Apostle
Bishop Kearney Guardian Angels Holy Family Home School Assoc. Our Lady of Perpetual Help	St. Anne Holy Cross St. James St. Mary Our Mother St. Philip Neri St. Stanislaus	Holy Ghost Most Precious Blood St. Cecilia's St. Mark's	Good Shepherd St. Ambrose St. Casimir's St. Thomas the Apostle
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BINGO TIMES & LOCATIONS

Bishop Kearney 125 Kings Hwy S 671-1085 Wed 8p m	St. Boniface 15 Whalin St 271-1468 Sun 7:45p m
Good Shepherd 3288 E. Henrietta Rd 334-3518	St. Casimir's 1004 Davis St Elmira 607-734-1622 Sat 8p m
Guardian Angels Church 2061 E. Henrietta Rd 334-1412	St. Cecilia's 2732 Culver Rd 467-4286 Fri 8p m
Wed 7:30p m Holy Apostles 6 Austin St 254-7170 Mon, Tues 7:30p m	St. Charles Borromeo 64 Maiden Lane 663-3230 Mon 8p m
Holy Cross 4488 Lake Ave 663-2244	St. Francis Xavier 316 Bay St 482-3211 Tue 8p m
Thur 8p m Holy Family Church 899 Jay Street 328-3110 Sun 7:30p m	St. James 119 Brockley Rd 482-9796 Thur 7:30p m
Holy Family Home School Assoc. 899 Jay St 328-4800	St. Mark's 54 Kuhn Rd 225-3710 Fri 8p m
Wed 7:30p m Holy Ghost 220 Coldwater Rd 247-3535 Fri 8p m	St. Mary Lyceum Hall, Auburn 315-252-9545 Mon 7:30p m
Most Precious Blood 179 Stenson St 458-6079	St. Mary Our Mother 811 Westlake St Horseheads
Fri 7:30p m Our Lady of Perpetual Help 923 Portland Ave 467-2725	St. Philip Neri 1772 Clifford Ave 482-2400 Thur 7:30p m
Wed 7:30p m St. Ambrose 25 Empire Blvd 288-5000 Sun 2p m & Sat 8p m	St. Rita's 1008 Maple Dr 671-1100 Sun 7:30p m
St. Anne 1600 Mt Hope Ave 271-3260	St. Stanislaus 1150 Hudson Ave 467-1472 Sun 6p m
Thur 7:30p m	St. Theodore 170 Spencerport Rd 429-6811
	St. Thomas the Apostle 41 Colebrook Dr 342-2323 Sat 8p m

CLIP & SAVE