

Encore on the Lake Membership Community: Pastor Gary helps members ‘refill their lives’

Some people describe Pastor Gary Gibson as a “personality magnet.” Others say he is a “saint” (technically correct in Presbyterian theology). Both are fitting descriptors as Pastor Gary serves as chaplain and director of spiritual life for Presbyterian SeniorCare Network’s Washington Campus and at the Network’s newest community, Encore on the Lake (EOL).

Bobbi Jo Haden, vice president of retirement services for Presbyterian SeniorCare Network, says Pastor Gary plays a critical role in helping seniors reinvest in their lives.

“At a time in life when many seniors feel their world is getting smaller—their children have moved away or are busy with their own lives ... they are physically unable to do what they did in earlier years ... they feel more isolated ... or they have fewer connections with friends—Pastor Gary helps them refill their lives with purpose and meaning.”

“Encore on the Lake is not only a new place to live,” states Pastor Gary, “but a place to thrive and find new friends, gain a new sense of spirit, concentrate on life and wellness, and just truly appreciate life.”

This is precisely the spark needed to help some members reengage with others and with life itself.

“Pastor Gary is certainly that spark at Encore on the Lake,” states Bobbi Jo.

One example is “Pancakes with Gary,” a monthly breakfast at Encore that includes preaching and teaching, but also listening, learning and laughing. This gives members the opportunity to see Pastor Gary—and perhaps themselves—in a different light.

“What better way to start the day than with pancakes, prayer, praise and lots of spiritual support with newfound friends,” he muses. He also started a bi-weekly vesper service and continues to build upon the strong spiritual life foundation at Encore and is working on other exciting ways to engage members.

Pastor Gary has served as a chaplain with Presbyterian SeniorCare Network for 18 years, and he was pastor of North Buffalo Presbyterian Church for 25 years before retiring in December of 2019. He has served as chaplain and hospice spiritual counselor of Washington Health System for more than 30 years.

“I’ve always had a comfort level working with older folks,” Pastor Gary chuckles. “More than 35 years ago I volunteered to lead Sunday vespers at Presbyterian SeniorCare Network’s Washington Campus, and that was enough for me to decide to pursue a career in Clinical Pastoral Education and Chaplaincy.”

“My life and ministry have been blessed by those seniors who have lovingly and graciously shared with me their spiritual journey and their love for God,” he says.

“We tend to believe that seniors have reached the maturity of their faith, but I don’t think that’s accurate,” Pastor Gary observes. “The spirit is still capable of additional growth, renewal, or even new birth late in life.”

“Many years can and do provide one with outstanding tools to explore and expand their spiritual journey regardless of age,” he notes. “This is an important means through which seniors can experience happiness and purpose, even in the midst of aging.”

Pastor Gary believes social connection for seniors is critical, playing an essential role in their mental, emotional, spiritual and physical health. Seniors with a strong social network have a better quality of life and experience overall better health and wellness.

“One of the most important things in a community like Encore on the Lake is having people around to support, engage and encourage you,” Pastor Gary asserts. “Taking care of each other keeps you alive and healthy.”

“Encore on the Lake is a community where people find that their last chapter can be their best,” Bobbi Jo concludes.

Encore on the Lake is a service-enriched membership community and is located at 243 McDowell Lane in Canonsburg. The membership community appeals to adults who want to be part of an active, meaningful community focused on successful aging. To learn more, visit: <https://encoreonthelake.org>. ■



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 **Encore on the Lake**[™]

A Presbyterian SeniorCare Network Community

A Membership Community