



Sisters' legacy of caring for those most vulnerable thrives at St. Michael's Health Centre

Just as the great depression arrived in Lethbridge, creating economic challenges for many, so did a group of Sisters to lighten the community's burden by caring for those in need—the Sisters of St. Martha of Antigonish, Nova Scotia. Known for their spirit of hospitality, simplicity and humanness, and prepared to minister to the sick, the Sisters opened their very first hospital, St. Michael's General Hospital, on June 1, 1929.

In 1995, the facility transferred to a new role of continuing care, and its name was changed to St. Michael's Health Centre. Today, caregivers at St. Michael's carry forward the Sisters' legacy of hospitality by providing care, dignity and respect to their patients and residents through programs such as the Adult Day program.

In December of 2015, Alberta Health Services contacted administration at St. Michael's about taking on a program providing care for seniors with dementia in Lethbridge. The previous operator was unable to continue the programming and it was going to close down. St. Michael's was their last hope.

The Adult Day program welcomes seniors with very progressed dementia, one to two times each week, and provides activities for them based on their needs and interests. This allows loved ones that usually provide care for these seniors (generally their spouses who are also seniors) some rest and respite.

James Ostoya, Manager, Post Acute Rehabilitation Program, St. Michael's Health Centre, and Jim Riedlhuber, Site Administrator, St. Michael's Health Centre, visited the program prior to it closing.

According to James, at this meeting they saw how special the program was. A client's wife was late to pick him up, and he was waiting for her when their meeting began. The client had worked in administration, and when he saw there was a meeting, he came over to join as if he was still at his job. Staff welcomed him to sit, gave him paper and a pen, and allowed him to interject comments, which they received with respect and gratitude.

"It was such a dignified experience that was provided for him—instead of redirecting him, we included him.

This is a wonderful example of how this program works—it upholds a person's dignity, especially at their most vulnerable stage in life," says James.

St. Michael's brought over the Adult Day program within a week, meaning the clients and their families would not miss a single day. They also hired every single staff member from the old program, meaning no one would lose their jobs at Christmas time, and familiar people would care for the clients. According to Jim, this program and the circumstances surrounding it clearly showcase the Sister's legacy of care living on at the facility.

"The hospitality of the program and these circumstances embody the warm and generous care at St. Michael's Health Centre," says Jim.

"The hospitality of the program and these circumstances embody the warm and generous care at St. Michael's Health Centre."

– Jim Riedlhuber



Sisters of St. Martha
of Antigonish