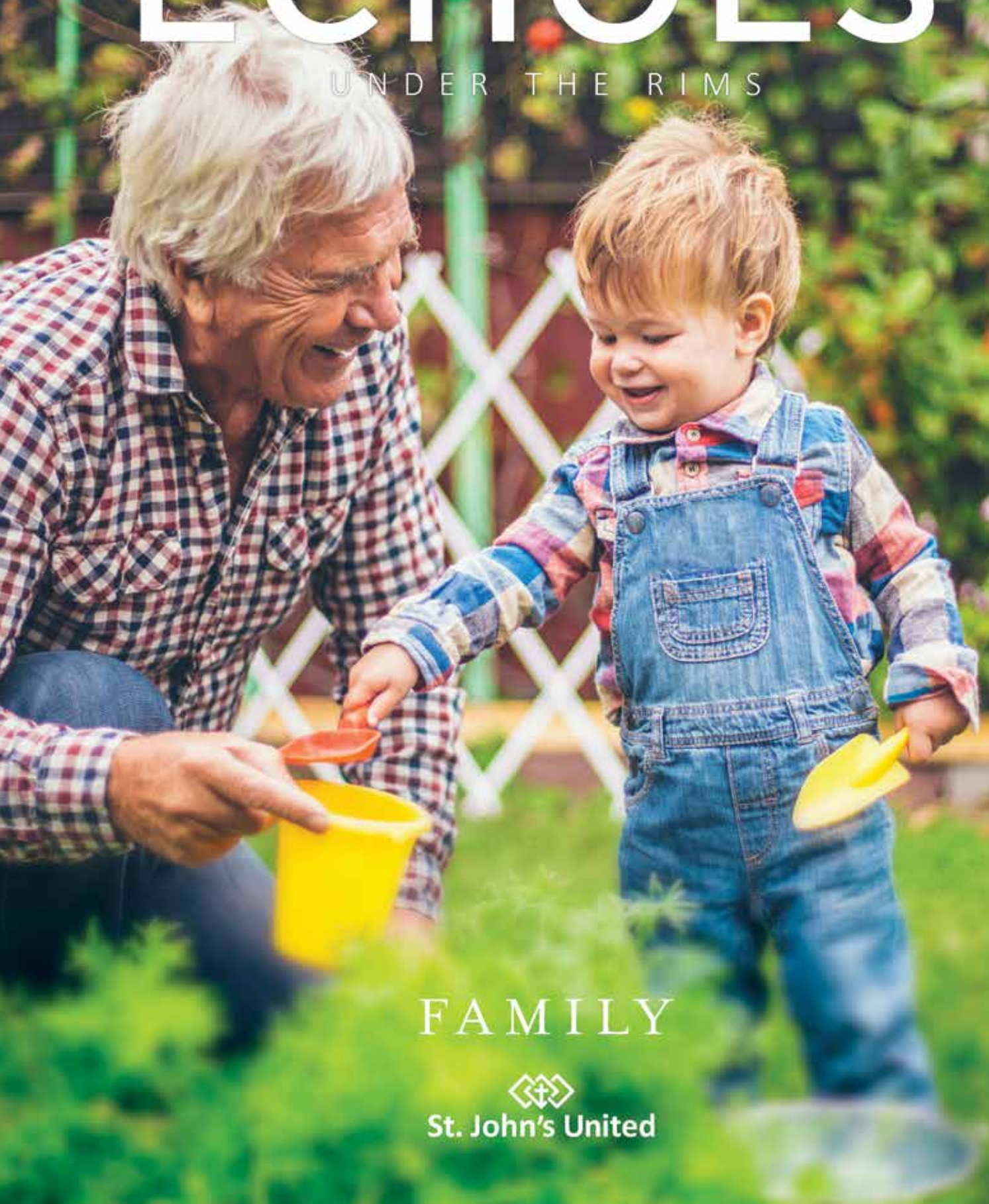


spring 2020

ECHOES

UNDER THE RIMS



FAMILY



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ABIDING & ADAPTING

St. John's United as Family



FAMILY IS A SINGLE WORD WITH many meanings. The meanings are as diverse as families themselves and the contexts they are found.

Some sociologists categorize family definitions in two general ways: (1) structural definitions that specify who is in the family and who is not, according to certain characteristics of family members, and (2) functional definitions that specify the functions that family members have in relation to one another.

Structural definitions of family refer to the characteristics of family members, such as those who share a place of residence, those who are related through blood ties and genetics, or those who are related by legal contracts.

Functional definitions of family lean away from blood relationships or legal definitions and lean toward functions that families perform. According to most functional definitions, a family is any unit of people in which there is found, among other things, the mutual

sharing of resources, supportive relationships, shared values and traditions, common experiences, compassion, dignity, and a commitment to or identification with other family members. Examples of functional families include, but are not limited to, a church family, a school family, or a workplace family.

As a matter of humor, English comedian Les Dawson once said, "Families are like fudge – mostly sweet with a few nuts." With a more serious tone, English novelist Jane Howard wrote, "Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family: Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one."

This issue of Echoes spotlights stories, themes, and expressions of family life within St. John's United.

You will read about the Center for Generations and learn how it engenders family support for St. John's employees and spawns rich relationships among residents and children. You will learn what our spiritual care team staff observes about family dynamics among residents, employees, and the organization as a whole. You will come upon a heartwarming story of an adopted child, her birth mother, and her adoptive family who were all served and supported by a social worker of St. John's United Family Services.

One article is replete with testimonies from St. John's employees who appreciatively tell how they have personally experienced St. John's to be an authentic and caring workplace family. Another article relays the voices of two Mission Ridge residents who describe the family guidance they received from a team of staff navigators. Also, the vital and valued relationship that our family of Lutheran ownership congregations shares with St. John's will be cited with affection.

Whatever you call it and whoever you are, we all need family.

Tom Schlotterback
VP of Mission Advancement

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HUGS & HIGH FIVES

WHAT'S A FAMILY GATHERING without the sounds of children: The laughter, the giggles, the chatter and yes, sometimes the tears. Small voices bring life to any occasion. Small voices bring joy – joy that is found in the halls and gathering spaces at St. John's United from the presence of children ranging in age from infant to middle school. In both intentional and subtle ways, the small voices provide life enrichment on a daily basis to residents and staff alike.

The Center for Generations (CFG) has been woven into the fabric of St. John's United since 1999. Licensed by the State of

Montana for up to 137 children, it is the largest private childcare center in Yellowstone County and has a continuous waiting list. In 2019, CFG achieved the STARS III quality rating from the Montana Department of Health and Human Services securing grant funding to support staffing and physical space needs.

Statistics aside, the sense of family is what makes CFG special according to Leatrice Spence, a seventeen-year veteran of CFG and now its coordinator. "We care for our children and their families," says Spence. "We worry about them when they aren't here, which comes with the territory when caring for

children. Their families become our family."

CFG was intentionally conceived to include St. John's United residents as part of the children's extended families. On any given day on the Billings campus, children are engaged with older adults in music, story time, and activities. On Monday mornings at Chapel Court, elders can be seen doing the "Hokey Pokey" right along with the under-2 toddler music class. Residents Alice Peterson and her son Danny love joining in. "The little ones are adorable. They don't really sing yet, but they like the actions. Danny and I get our exercise by playing along." As

a person with special needs, the engagement with the children gives Danny a particularly meaningful way for him to connect with others.

Chapel Court resident Bob Brekke muses, "these kids have inquisitive minds and if you understand baby talk, you know what they're thinking." When the music time ends, the children scatter to give the "grandmas and grandpas" hugs and high fives. Observing Bob, Alice, and Danny with the tots, it is clear that they love getting the high fives and hugs as much as they love giving them.

Campus chaplain Pastor Elisabeth Daniels spends a great deal of time engaging the preschool aged children with the elders at St. John's. She has

"hang out with us long enough and we'll suck you in whether you want to be family or not."

seen tender moments such as impromptu prayers for an elder appearing more frail. And she has experienced some hilarious episodes causing many a story time or worship experience to go off the rails. A recent Bible lesson about lost sheep veered into chicken butchering territory and the ensuing laughter from those within earshot made the lesson a lost cause.

It is not just residents at St. John's that build relationships with the daycare kids, it's staff too. Daniels says "when the kids are encouraged

to give the grandmas and grandpas hugs, the staff chime in with 'I'm a grandma, too!' The staff get just as much from the presence of children. No matter who you are, hang out with us long enough and we'll suck you in whether you want to be family or not."

For employees, a childcare center at St. John's means having their own children close by. "The daycare is an added bonus for people seeking employment and is an intentional part of our retention strategy," says HR Director Kelly Schallenberger. "Many of our employees have made their employment choice based on being here with their child, not necessarily for compensation purposes." She goes on to say that when her own children were enrolled in CFG, she felt a stronger connection to her co-workers. Just like in a small town, "other employees know your kid, you know theirs and we all watch them grow up together. Even today, my daughter – now 15 – has CFG buddies that she stays connected to even though they haven't gone on to the same elementary and middle schools."

It is often said that St. John's feels like a family, but what does that really mean? St. John's Administrator Karna Rhodes recalls that nearly twenty years ago, as her father was preparing to drive the 700 lonely miles back to Minnesota after dropping her off in Billings for her first day of her St. John's internship, he said to her, "I think I can leave my baby here." For her, she says, "it has come full circle. Just a few years later after having my first child, I dropped him off for the first time at (St. John's) daycare. I remember thinking, I can leave my baby here." ♦

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BECAUSE SHE LOVED ME

WHO IS THAT BLONDE LADY WITH the two little boys who always comes to Nikky's games? That is a common question for seventeen-year-old Nikky Hereim and her parents, Sarah and Kent Hereim. The answer is shocking to some. The blonde lady is Nikky's birth mother, Carrie Hall, and this is their exceptional story of creating a family.

"We build our families in different ways," says Diana Tolstedt, St. John's United Social Worker and the caseworker involved with Nikky's adoption. Diana, an adoption caseworker since 1983, has observed the changing landscape around adoption and the trend from closed to open adoptions, where both parties know information about the other and develop ongoing relationships. A perceived stigma associated with adoption has historically caused families and agencies to be private. "I've seen it change from being so secretive and paranoid with all parties kept in the

dark" says Diana. "Now, it has moved to the birth parents and adoptive parents together deciding what the child needs."

Nikky's adoption story began in 2002 when at the age of seventeen, Carrie discovered she was pregnant. The pregnancy prompted Carrie and her then-boyfriend to leave their hometown and troubled family situations for a better life in Billings. They rented an apartment, got jobs, and Carrie enrolled as a senior in high school. Soon, the reality of impending parenthood without a support system sunk in. "We started thinking about: What would our child's life really look like?" Carrie remembers. "When we finally went in to Planned Parenthood, one of the nurses told us about open adoption and referred us to Lutheran Social Services [now St. John's United Family Services]. We thought she deserved better than we could provide."

The process of reading through the adoptive family profiles filled Carrie and Nikky's birth father with a lot of anxiety. Then Diana shared with Carrie a profile of a couple with two children ready to adopt after receiving a diagnosis of secondary infertility. When the expectant parents read the information from the Hereims, Carrie recalls, "It was like God speaking through me. We knew they were the family."

Carrie remembers first meeting Sarah, Kent, and their two young children, "It just kind of fell into place. The kids had brought schoolwork and pictures for them." Carrie gave Sarah and Kent a photo of her and the birth father. Following their initial meeting, Carrie asked Diana if she could visit the family on their ranch. An unusual request, Diana forwarded it on to Sarah and Kent who welcomed the couple with open arms. Visiting the ranch solidified for Carrie that this is where she wanted her child

to grow up. Sarah recalls, "I had no idea what this was supposed to look like and I just went with what felt right. I was so nervous about open adoption... but I went right across that into all-in, not even realizing that our relationship is not the norm."

Nikky was born nine months to the day from Sarah and Kent getting on the list to be available adoptive parents. There is a three-day waiting period following the birth of a child placed for adoption before the birth mother can sign the paperwork. Although this is a time typically spent apart, Carrie visited Sarah, Kent, and Nikky in their hotel room. She also joined the entire extended family for meals. This provided a unique bonding experience that set the tone for the rest of Nikky's childhood.

The Hereim's invited Carrie out to the ranch several times a year. Carrie was present for Nikky's first birthday and the Hereim's attended Carrie's high school graduation. When Nikky was eight years old, she was the flower girl in Carrie's wedding to husband Darren. "We never had a set plan but I think what's helped with that is always asking, What's going to be best for Nikky?" says Carrie. "There is no book on this and we paved our own way as we went," Sarah echoes.

As Nikky approached adolescence, she began to grapple with the emotional complexities of being adopted. Although she grew up knowing Carrie and knowing that she was adopted, Nikky recalls not really understanding what that meant. She says, "I really struggled in junior high, I didn't really know my place. I was having some mental problems that I couldn't really pinpoint. I wasn't close with my mom yet because as I child I pushed

my mom away; subconsciously I pushed her away because she wasn't my real mom."

Nikky was experiencing abandonment issues, an attachment disorder with mom, Sarah, and received a diagnosis of depression. "I always knew that Carrie did that because she loved me, but inside there was always this nagging voice of why did she give me up, why was I not good enough?" After successful therapy, which included regressive trauma work and treatment for the depression, Nikky was able to bond with Sarah and says, "I finally realized Carrie did this because she loved me so much and now she is in my life all the time... She is another light in my life to me and she just means so much to me and now I have two moms. It's cool to have that and more support."

Most of the feedback from Nikky's peers has been positive, but there are also a lot of questions. Having successfully overcome the challenges of her early teens, Nikky stresses the importance of being candid about the hard parts as well as educating others. "Not a lot of people really know about adoption, so I'm really open with it."

With Nikky's senior year on the horizon, she is grateful for added support of her unique family, "I have two moms and I'm close with both of them. No matter what stupid things

I do they are never going to give up on me," says Nikky. "[Carrie is] more support for me. She is a part of me and a part of my life. It would be weird without her. I couldn't imagine life without her." Nikky keeps a photo of Carrie and her birth father in her wallet, the same photo exchanged during the initial meeting so many years ago.

Although Nikky's birth father is no longer in her life, Carrie's husband, Darren, and their two young children have melded into the mix as the families spend time together at all of the children's events and exchange gifts during the holidays. Darren can even be found fixing things at the Hereim's ranch and Nikky describes their relationship as close.

Carrie and Sarah's friendship today is stronger than ever. Sarah says, "I feel so fortunate to have her in my life and to have the support. And I found a best friend for myself... We call ourselves soul sisters." Carrie echoes Sarah's feelings and is forever grateful that Nikky is safe and taken care of. She says, "Just to know that someone loves and cares for your child, I don't know even how to describe it." "At the end of the day," Sarah says, "we're all in it together, the good times and bad... This is our life. It's working for us, and we're happy." ♦



THE NAVIGATOR

PRIOR TO DEVELOPMENT OF THE Global Positioning System (GPS), a skilled navigator was an essential person to have aboard a sea vessel or aircraft for travel. A navigator's role is to guide a vessel or craft safely and accurately from one location to another. A navigator plans the journey, monitors weather, establishes communication, advises the captain or commander of timing to destinations while en route, and ensures that hazards be avoided.

Historically, the field of navigation has included four general categories: land, marine, aeronautic, and space. In a broader sense, navigation can refer to any skill or study that involves the determination of position and planned direction to proceed toward an appointed destination.

Even though no person serving within St. John's United has the professional title of Navigator on a name badge or organizational chart, there are many St. John's employees who daily engage in kind acts of navigation on behalf of those being served. These navigators do not apply their skills to sea vessels, aircraft, or spacecraft, although van and bus drivers do navigate land vehicles. Instead, they apply their skills to guide people safely and fittingly toward destinations of home, health, and family well-being.

One of our St. John's navigators is Andrea Bouchard, a registered

nurse who serves as Resident Liaison and Case Manager within Mission Ridge and The Vista. In fact, when Andrea was recently asked to describe her professional role, she replied, "I am a navigator. I help folks navigate through the continuum of care that St. John's provides."

Andrea has served in her current position at St. John's since January, 2016. "I see this as my life calling from God," she says. "I see the mission of St. John's truly at work within this community and with those whom I am fortunate to serve. I have a passion for people and gift of empathy. I love the day-to-day interactions with residents. I love to get to know the residents and their family members. I enjoy supporting residents to achieve their desires and aims toward best possible goals for living."

Residents within Mission Ridge express affection and appreciation for Andrea's capable and wise help with matters of family navigation. When Frank and Mary Mosdal moved from their farm near Broadview, Montana, into Mission Ridge in 2010, they did so because of the continuum of care St. John's provides. Mary affirms, "The continuum was an important feature we sought in a place to live. Our sons and their families, one in New Hampshire and one in Iowa, were very supportive of the decision. That took worry off of their minds about caring for us."

When Frank displayed increasing medical symptoms and changing health due to Parkinson's disease, Mary tells that their sons came to Billings for family conversations. "We consulted together with Andrea Bouchard and others to consider best options for Frank and for me." Mary observed, "I could see that Frank needed more help than I could provide. Out of those conversations and further assessments, we decided it would be best for Frank to move into Langemo Cottage."

Mary now makes the three-minute walk from her Mission Ridge apartment to connect with Frank at Langemo on a regular basis. "The staff is so good there for Frank," she says. "People probably think they will keep going along as they always have been and can take care of their own life needs forever,

but it doesn't always work that way. We are grateful for Andrea and Tennyson Gabel (Cottages Health Director) for helping us through all this."

Mission Ridge resident Helen Eastwood tells of a similar experience. When she and her husband, Mike, moved into Mission Ridge in 2015, all was relatively well. With time, Helen and family members noticed that memory challenge was increasing for Mike. He was medically diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.

Helen tells, "I consulted with Andrea Bouchard, Lisa Sorensen (Retirement Counselor at Mission Ridge), and Tennyson Gabel about Mike's needs and consideration of a move. I realized I could not take care of Mike anymore. I needed help." St. John's navigators

recommended that Mike be moved into Langemo Cottage also. For a time, Mike was able to spend day hours with Helen, family members, and friends at Mission Ridge. Later on, he needed to remain at the cottage. Helen reflects, "I can't speak highly enough about the staff who cared for Mike. He had really good care at Langemo. He was going through a lot of health changes. He had a really good life over there. I feel that was the place Mike needed to be. I was guided through everything so well. At the end Mike's life, the vigil care people were so good also. They stayed right with him."

Andrea voices that helping residents and their loved ones with family navigation is a team effort. "We have several folks on our Mission Ridge team and it's a great team. Our retirement counselors are

very astute with observations. Our life enrichment team, spiritual care team, nurses, therapists, and executive director are all supportive and responsive to resident needs. Carmen Cox, our health director, and Dr. Yee Chuan Ang, our medical director, are attentive to the safety measures of our residents and their related goals. These people really are person-centered in their work."

Helping residents and family members navigate through life transitions is not only a life calling for Andrea and her Mission Ridge colleagues. It is a calling shared by all employees and volunteers at St. John's United because the people being served have so much life to live. ♦



Mary Mosdal and Andrea Bouchard



Melissa Johansen

IT'S A
BEAUTIFUL THING

IN AUGUST, 2019, MELISSA Johansen packed belongings and departed from her hometown of Carol Stream, Illinois, to head westward for Billings, Montana. Upon arrival she began a year-long pastoral internship to be served within a dual ministry context. One context is Peace Lutheran Church in Billings and the other is St. John's United. Melissa is the twelfth pastoral intern to serve in this dual arrangement. In addition to Peace Lutheran, prior pastoral interns have also served at St. John's in dual context with Atonement Lutheran in Billings, King of Glory Lutheran in Billings, Messiah Lutheran in Billings, and Our Savior's Lutheran in Laurel.

When asked about the transition of moving from home and family in Illinois, and classmates and teachers at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, Melissa acknowledges missing both of these. She expressed, however, that her life in Billings has included a surprising gift of family support. With a gentle smile on her face Melissa tells, "Family definitely exists here at St. John's in ways I had not anticipated."

When asked to provide example of what she meant by family existing at St. John's, Melissa explained, "Being away from my own family for a year I have found care and love amidst the staff and residents. That has been especially valuable to me at a time when I could have felt very alone. At Christmas, residents reached out to me and shared honest experiences of what it was like for them to be away from family members during the holiday seasons. They really checked in to make sure I was doing alright. It feels like a family here. I did not anticipate that residents would reach out to me as family. It's been a beautiful thing. While it's not the

same as my own family, it has filled that hole."

Kristin LaVé, St. John's musical director and lay pastoral associate, grins while providing example of how she has experienced family life within St. John's communities. "Some of the elders are like grandparents to me. When I leave a building they check to make sure I am bundled up enough to go out into the winter air. They watch over me. So kind."

Pastor Karl Guhn, Director of Spiritual Care at St. John's, observes that "The definition of family these days is broad. It goes beyond genetic connections." He adds, "What I discover when I'm around St. John's is that it's all about family. Residents talk about staff as family. Family members of residents refer to staff as family. There is a loving circle that happens here. People just care. It's always interesting that some of the more curmudgeonly residents we serve are actually some of the most beloved by staff. Staff members seem to fall in love with residents who arrive. They also grieve deeply when residents die. The times around the bedside of residents who have died are very meaningful. Staff share memories

that family members cherish and they also share memories that family members may not have known."

Pastor Elisabeth Daniels at St. John's agrees with Pastor Karl and adds observation that "family members of the residents become family within St. John's also. When a resident dies, it can be hard for staff not to have the family members around anymore. Staff members truly grieve that loss. Staff members remember both residents who have died and their family members."

When asked if she has noticed a sense of family arising among St. John's residents, Intern Melissa nods in agreement. "I definitely see residents looking out for each other physically and emotionally. They are companions to one another. They really do life together. They share in the celebrations of life and in the challenges of life like family members do. They also occasionally bicker with one another like siblings do. When you live in close proximity with one another there can definitely be squabbles. It's real."

Pastor Elisabeth confirms, "The residents count on each other. They are very bonded. It's true that

they do squabble with each other some days and as a pastor I feel sort of like a middle school principal, but it's real family and neighbor life here. Residents do watch over one another and are there for each other when needed."

When asked what she sees among employees who serve within St. John's, Melissa reports, "I definitely see employees looking out for each other. They check on each other and make sure everyone is doing well. They pray for each other. They try to know what's going on in people's lives and what they may need." Pastor Elisabeth concurs and states, "When people go through losses or circumstances, staff love and support one another. Last week I sat with the Pharmacy Department. One of their employees was in the hospital. We all joined hands and prayed. We hold hands here when we pray. Even with our bosses we hold hands."

What Pastor Karl stated above is true. "The definition of family these days is broad. It goes beyond genetic connections. There is a loving circle that happens here." St. John's is a family that our pastoral intern, Melissa, had not anticipated. ✦

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A STEADFAST PARTNER

THE ENLARGED HOMESTEAD ACT of 1909 brought people westward to Montana – mostly young – seeking new lives and adventures. They worked the land, they built the cities and towns, and they raised their families. As the decades passed, those intrepid pioneers grew older. In the late-1950's, a small group of Lutheran leaders in Billings recognized the need to care for an aging population and came together to form Lutheran Retirement Home, Inc. Nearly seventy years later, St. John's United now offers a full array of human services spanning the arc of life, from childcare and adoptions to skilled nursing and end-of-life care.

Twenty-five Lutheran congregations constitute the corporation of St. John's United and in functionality, provide governance support and guidance to the organization in the form of voting rights. While often referred to as ownership churches, these congregations are in no way obligated to provide financial or human capital support to St. John's, though many do.

All of the corporate churches offer support in countless ways to St. John's, however two stand out: one for enduring financial support and the other for inspiring volunteer support.

"A steadfast partner" is how Pastor Jen Quanbeck of King of Glory Lutheran Church describes the relationship with St. John's United. Many of the congregation's members have had family members or friends cared for at St. Johns; some have had children enrolled in St. John's Center for Generations childcare program; and a number have served in leadership capacities on St. John's Board of Directors and St. John's Foundation Board. In these ways, King of Glory members have become passionate advocates for St. John's mission.

Quanbeck describes King of Glory's deep affection for St. John's as "rooted in members' hunger to make a difference locally and desire to make a deep impact with our benevolence dollars. We seek to give at least 10% from our revenues to

our ministry partners every year. We practice first fruits giving with our monthly support because we know that our ministry partners are counting on that support year-round." St. John's Foundation publicly recognizes King of Glory as a donor in the \$10,000+ tier.

WE HAVE A STAKE IN ST. JOHN'S

Volunteer experiences are another expression of congregational support. Members of American Lutheran Church in Harlowton are no strangers to the St. John's campus. Traversing miles of lonely highway, they arrive as a group to be the featured St. John's Summer Concert Series volunteers for an evening. Decked out in shirts emblazoned with their church logo, they come to work, but they also come to have fun, according to ALC-Harlowton member Alicia Moe. "It's the highlight of the summer for many of us and we get as much as we give."

Moe has also served as a delegate to the St. John's corporate

THE IMPACT OF \$10,000

- 5 Months of Medicaid gap closure for a resident whose resources have been exhausted
- 6 Scholarships (one-semester) for staff pursuing degrees in healthcare
- 6 Birth parent journeys: pregnancy counseling, birth support, post-birth/placement counseling
- 30 Search services for adoptees seeking to connect with birth families

organization for a number of years and explained that it is a source of pride to "serve a first-class organization and watch it grow. Because many of us (at ALC) have expressed desire to live at St. John's Mission Ridge when we retire, we feel we have a stake in what goes on there."

The collective impact of all of St. John's ownership congregations cannot be overstated. Tom Schlotterback, St. John's Vice President of Mission Advancement

shares these thoughts:

Whenever St. John's United receives philanthropic support in the form of volunteers or financial gifts from its ownership congregations and stakeholders, the support is both heartwarming and impactful. The work of seven hundred employees and fees for services are not enough to sustain all that St. John's provides. Philanthropy is also needed. Philanthropy is vital

to St. John's good health and sustainability. The original notion of St. John's arose from a rooted theological understanding that God cares about the well-being of all people, and that God calls people to love and care for one another as neighbors. When human needs surface, God's people are called to respond by providing. The response to human needs may be an individual's expression of generosity, but real impact especially happens when the response to needs is a corporate expression of generosity – that is, when people join together and invest resources to fulfill a common mission. Every day of the year St. John's experiences the loving accompaniment and supportive impact of our family of twenty-five congregations. We say thanks to God for each and every one of them! ✦

FIRST INTERSTATE BANK GRANT AWARDED



St. John's United is pleased to announce that it was recently awarded a grant of \$150,000 by First Interstate BancSystem Foundation and Bank for construction funding related to the Chapel Court Apartments – affordable housing project.

St. John's United leadership expressed sincere appreciation to First Interstate BancSystem Foundation and Bank for this generous gift and for the valued business partnership these two organizations have shared for the past three decades.

Tom Schlotterback, Brian Brown (Marketing President for First Interstate Bank), and David Trost

A STEP OUT OF THE DARK

FOR MANY WHO ARE EMPLOYED AT St. John's, the community becomes more than just a place to work. "Once you are a part of the family, this group, you are important," says Music Director, Kristin LaVé.

St. John's manages several formal employee-driven programs that support those suffering hardship. One option is for staff to make contributions to the Employee Crisis Fund, administered by the Pastoral Care team, open to any employee suffering a financial hardship. A second way employees can help is through Earned Time Hours (ETH) donation. Kelly Schallenberger, Human Resources (HR) Director, explains, "Oftentimes, departments take care of their own. If someone is in need, staff will pool their time off for their coworker. In one instance, a department covered an entire 12-week span." Other times, HR sends out a request. "Some people may donate a large chunk of hours while others an hour or two. It all adds up," says Kelly. But the formal programs couldn't stand up without participation from the employees, and often the care extends well beyond. "We are not perfect, but everyone has everyone's back. People look out for one another," says Grounds Specialist Cena Anderson.

The spirit of giving came as a shock to Director of Volunteer Services Carissa Welsh. Carissa recalls, "I moved to Montana from

Florida two years ago not knowing a single soul in the state. On my ninth day of work at St. John's, my mother passed away unexpectedly at the age of 59." Immediately Carissa boarded a plane back to Florida. "As a brand new employee I had no vacation time and didn't know how long I was going to be gone. I really didn't know if I was even going to have a job when I came back," she remembers. The day of the service, a bouquet of flowers from St. John's arrived and upon her return, Carissa learned that several employees had donated their ETH to cover her absence. "The care and concern shown to me during that time and in the months following got me through the toughest period in my life. The people of St. John's really stepped in and became my surrogate family."

Michelle, a nurse who asked her last name not be shared, also recalls her experience as a new employee with St. John's over 10 years ago and how it has inspired her to continue to pay it forward. Moving from out of state to Billings, there was an unanticipated lapse in her insurance. The medication her son needed cost more than her paycheck and it was going to be months before the insurance kicked in. "I was a single parent and I didn't know what to do. One day, they just told me to go to the pharmacy (at St. John's) and to pick up the medication. I was

shocked." Michelle's coworkers had elevated the need to the Employee Crisis Fund which covered the medication until her new insurance kicked in. "It saved my life," Michelle says.

A second time of hardship for Michelle's family followed and they utilized the Share the Joy program so her children could open gifts on Christmas morning. As the years passed and as Michelle's financial situation stabilized she says, "I've always kept in mind that giving back is a blessing for me. It's my job now to bless others. 1 Corinthians 13:13 is very important to me, And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest is charity." (KJV)

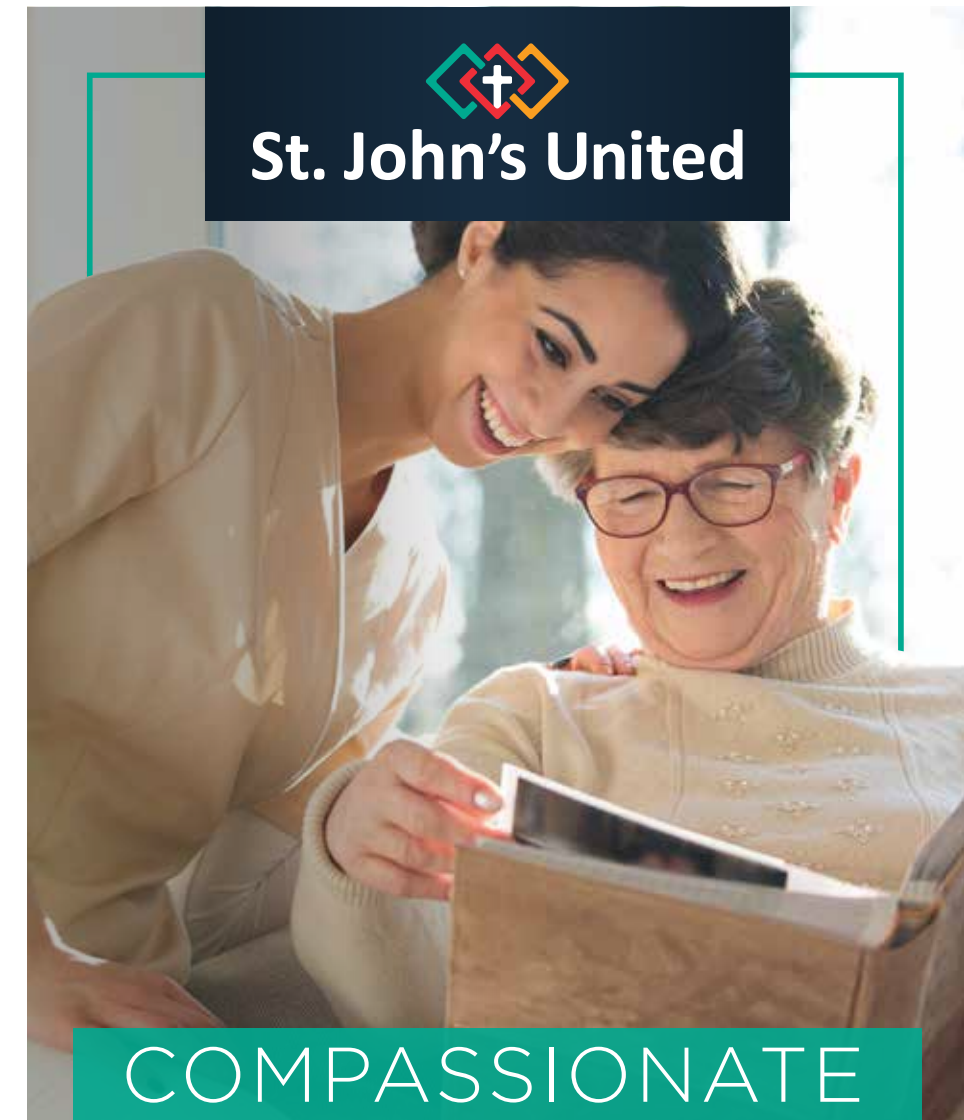
For Kristin LaVé, the St. John's community facilitated the discovery of her vocation. Prompted to find employment as the family business was failing and they were struggling to make ends meet, Kristin joined St. John's in 2012. A music teacher by trade, turned stay-at-home mom, turned bookkeeper, Kristin began as St. John's music director just two days per week. During the transition to working outside the home, Kristin remembers apologizing to her children for being gone so much. Their reply was, "We don't care because you're happy. You finally have a job you love."

Three years ago Kristin earned her Lay Pastoral Associate certification and her position grew to full time

as both the Music Director and designated pastoral care leader for the WyndStone community. Noticing Kristin's dedication, her colleagues recommended her for ELCA seminary consideration. Now in her second semester working towards ordination as ELCA clergy, Kristin says, "I didn't realize how blessed I would be... I'm more than the girl who plays the piano now. Working at St. John's was a step out of the dark for our family."

Cena Anderson remembers her mother, a member of the founding congregation First English Lutheran, coming home from a planning meeting in the early 1960's declaring, "I found the place I'm going to live when I'm old." Much time passed before she finally became a resident of Chapel Court in 2004 at the age of 92.

Cena joined the grounds crew at St. John's in 2009, shortly after her mother passed away in St. John's nursing home wing, Unity Place. Cena recalls pushing her mom around campus, sharing daily meals together, and the relationships they built with both residents and staff, "Everyone was always so happy to see me. Not that I was special, but the attitude was happy." Staff and residents came together at Martha's memorial service held on campus to share stories about Martha. For Cena, it was a natural transition from family member to staff member. Cena tells, "St. John's had the same morals I had growing up, a strong work ethic and a focus on caring for people. Yes, you work for someone, but you are part of the family here." ✦




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