

COVENANT OF CHURCHES

SAINT BARNABAS HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE CENTER

Newark, New Jersey

Life in the inner city can be tough. Discrimination and suffering can batter the spirit, creating mistrust and cynicism. These attitudes often surface when medical care is needed, which may explain why many inner-city residents do not avail themselves of hospice services. Saint Barnabas Hospice and Palliative Care Center (SBHPCC) wanted to change that. With a grant from The Healthcare Foundation of New Jersey, the Covenant of Churches project was launched.

Recognizing that churches are often the hubs of support in the inner city, SBHPCC management met with key religious leaders in the greater Newark area and surrounding communities to discuss how best to conduct education on end-of-life issues. At individual planning meetings held in the spring and summer of 2003 for church leadership and members, volunteer recruitment and the specifics of hospice services were discussed. The Covenant of Churches met twice to share member perceptions of hospice and to guide future educational sessions. A six-hour training session was held in October of 2003; two participants from each of the six member churches attended. Ongoing presentations during Sunday services and a volunteer support group held monthly at Bethany Baptist Church help reinforce the concept of end-of-life care.

Loss is a way of life in the inner city, and bereavement needs are complex. A per diem social worker was hired to address these needs, offering Saturday hours that are more convenient for working families. A support group for parents and children was held in



November and outreach to schools is planned for this year. Forty-five families and SBHPCC staff attended a memorial service of songs, music, and readings held at Bethany Baptist Church in October of 2003.

The opening of SBHPCC's hospice inpatient unit at Newark Beth Israel Medical Center in February of 2003 helped to extend care to the inner city by providing an oasis of comfort and compassion when patients were unable to be cared for at home.

Referrals from targeted communities increased from 112 in 2002 to 157 in 2003; the percentage of African-American patients also increased significantly. To date, 150 volunteers have been trained at Bethany Baptist Church and are available to assist families from Covenant member churches.

The strength and integrity of the residents of the inner city has been demonstrated in their commitment to this project. Member churches have made financial donations and hosted fundraising events to benefit the project.

The Covenant of Churches makes it possible for young mothers to say goodbye to their children, for elderly

couples to stay together in the comfort of their own homes. Children with multiple losses learn to talk about their feelings. Terminally ill patients without a safe place to stay are being cared for in the inpatient unit.

The Covenant of Churches is a model that can be replicated in any community where the church is a center of community life. Future plans include expansion into the Hispanic community, the fastest-growing part of the population in the country. Lorraine Sciara, SBHPCC executive director, offers these helpful guidelines for creating a successful faith-based partnership:

- *Maintain a presence* — The partnership should be visible in community workplaces, cultural centers, and places of worship.
- *Recognize your church partners* — SBHPCC honors each participating church partner annually.
- *Stay committed* — Despite a period of financial difficulty in the organization, Sciara and her management team chose to maintain the Bethany Baptist Church office.



INNOVATION HIGHLIGHTS

JOINT CLERGY-HOSPICE LEADERSHIP

USE OF CHURCH STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

BROAD BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT