

A CLEARING IN THE WOODS

Retreat House Aids Mission Integration At Indianapolis Hospital

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In March 1997 the leaders of St. Vincent Hospitals and Health Services, Indianapolis, announced plans to construct a \$1.9 million spirituality center to be named Seton Cove, after Elizabeth Ann Seton, the first American-born saint and the founder of the Sisters of Charity in the United States. Like other Catholic healthcare organizations, St. Vincent provides patients with care for the spirit as well as for the mind and the body. Seton Cove was intended to provide spiritual formation and education to St. Vincent's physicians, employees, volunteers, and business partners—the caregivers themselves. St. Vincent believes this will reinforce the spiritual support its staff gives patients and help build an environment conducive to healing.

RETREAT IN THE WOODS

Seton Cove's origins can be traced to 1989, when St. Vincent's sponsoring congregation, the Daughters of Charity—Evansville Province, and the Daughters of Charity National Health System—East Central Region* undertook a year-long study of spirituality and spiritual formation (see Sharon Richardt and Jude Magers, "Spirituality for Lay Leaders," *Health Progress*, November-December 1997, pp. 18-19, 34). From the study came definitions of spirituality (as distinct from religion) and key elements of a spiritual formation process that, the system decided, should be integrated into each of its healthcare organizations. The system, first, published a booklet containing these definitions and key elements and, second, established a method of accounting for their use. Then it asked its hospitals to report on the success of their efforts to integrate spirituality in the workplace.

*Now Ascension Health, St. Louis

Between 1993 and 1997, St. Vincent added the definitions and key elements to an existing leadership development program called Mission and Mentoring (see Mary Elizabeth Cullen, Sharon Richardt, and Rosemary Hume, "Mentoring Mission Leaders of the Future," *Health Progress*, September-October 1997, pp. 36-38, 43). St. Vincent also instituted monthly retreat days and a series of after-hours seminars on spiritual maturity for staff members, as well as retreats for physicians and their spouses. In 1996 St. Vincent, in conjunction with the Epiphany Lay Formation Association, Pittsburgh, launched a two-year certification program in spiritual formation.

An enthusiastic response to these programs led St. Vincent's leaders to see the need for a spirituality center. For their model, they chose Seton Cove, a retreat house near Seton Medical Center in Austin, TX. Construction of Indianapolis's Seton Cove began in the fall of 1997.

The completed building, a 14,000-square foot, two-story structure, sits beside a pond in a wooded section of St. Vincent's campus. Great care was taken to preserve trees during the building process, and the area remains full of wildlife. The setting, conducive to reflection and contemplation, aids the work done in it. The center has a number of meeting rooms, a kitchen, offices, meditation areas, a chapel, and overnight rooms for 20.

SETON COVE'S VISITORS

The spirituality center opened in September 1998 under the direction of a Seton Cove Council made up of St. Vincent's vice president for mission services, the Seton Cove staff, and graduates of the certification program. The council meets monthly to develop policy guidelines, approve programs, and plan and evaluate events. Since its



Seton Cove, St. Vincent Hospitals and Health Services's spirituality center, Indianapolis.

inception, Seton Cove has hosted more than 5,000 visitors; it currently averages more than 500 a month.

Among these are the physicians on St. Vincent's staff. For some time the hospital has had a mandatory orientation program for new physicians, introducing them to its mission, vision, values, ethics, and spirituality. Since Seton Cove's opening, this program has been held there. More than 40 physicians and spouses have attended spiritual retreats at the center. Many have later expressed their appreciation for both the existence of Seton Cove and St. Vincent's dedication to the spiritual dimension of health-care.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Has Seton Cove been effective in its efforts to foster spirituality among caregivers at St. Vincent? To answer that question, the Seton Cove Council has developed survey questionnaires for both the hospital's patients and its employees. The patient satisfaction survey, conducted four times a year, asks two questions of people who have received treatment at the hospital:

- Were you treated with respect?
- Were your emotional and spiritual needs taken into consideration?

The survey for employees, which will be conducted every two years, asks these questions:

- Are you aware of Seton Cove? Are you aware that its services are available to all staff members?
- In your opinion, does the work done at St.

Vincent possess a spiritual dimension?

Although Seton Cove has been in operation only a year and a half, survey responses seem to indicate that it is effective. In the patient satisfaction survey, the scores concerning respect, on one hand, and emotional and spiritual needs, on the other, were the highest registered in the hospital's history. In an initial survey of employee attitudes, 65 percent of staff members said they were aware of Seton Cove and its availability; 59 percent said they recognized the spiritual dimension of the work they performed. Since the center opened, every hospital department, including satellite facilities, has been represented at a Seton Cove spiritual opportunity. □

 For more information about Seton Cove, call Sr. Sharon Richardt, DC, 317-338-7061.

SETON COVE'S FIVE OBJECTIVES

As envisioned by St. Vincent Hospitals and Health Services's leaders, Seton Cove would:

- Promote spirituality and spiritual formation
- Serve as a satellite center for the Epiphany Lay Formation Association
- Serve as an interfaith center for staff members interested in mission integration
- Provide consultation, limited research, program development, and facilitation of spirituality
- Serve as a retreat center and provide paraliturgical and liturgical opportunities