

Benedictine & Mercy Sisters Unite at Hesychia House of Prayer

Hesychia House of Prayer's long-standing leader and foundress, Sister Louise Sharum, has stepped down as the ministry's director as of July 1, 2021. Filling her position is Sister Lisa Atkins, a nurse practitioner originally from New Jersey who embraces the Hesychia ministry with all the action of a Religious Sister of Mercy, all the reflection of a Benedictine, and all the grit of a true southern native.

Accompanying Sister Lisa to New Blaine, Arkansas is Sister Anita DeSalvo, RSM, who assumed the position of assistant director, also on July 1. Though Hesychia's foundress is no longer the acting director of the ministry, her spiritual leadership is still a guiding marker to the ministry's future.

Before being named director and assistant director, Sisters Lisa and Anita were regular retreatants to Hesychia

"Sister Louise has helped to reawaken my deep desire to live a life of contemplation-action; in my thinking, in my actions, in what I do and who I am, and who I profess to be as a woman who has given my life to God." ~ Sister Lisa Atkins

dating back to 2004. They would frequent the 200 acres of Arkansas wilderness when not working with Mercy Hospital NWA, where they were both employed. It proved a reflective break for the Mercy Sisters, one that would eventually have a huge impact on their evolving and continuing call to be the hands of Christ.

In 2016 Sister Lisa was asked by the hospital administration to help lead the community health and benefit program.

"We started a new department for Northwest Arkansas that was primarily focused on homelessness and affordable housing. As part of the ministry team, I spent my time educating the population

about who the Religious Sisters of Mercy are as a Catholic healthcare organization. Then shortly after we started the ministry, the Children's Advocacy Center and Restoration Village in Rogers asked us to visit a hotel because of the high rate of violence taking place. That's how I came to serve the community," Sister Lisa recalls.

Meeting people outside a clinic setting was quite a transition for Sister Lisa. Addressing physical ailments was not the same as helping people toward reconciliation. She grew to walk with people on their spiritual journey as they dealt with grief, distress, and painful situations. If they wanted help, then it was up to Sister Lisa and her team to provide it. "I see now that God was opening up my path to be at Hesychia," shares Sister Lisa.

In walking with people, God opened up Sister Lisa's heart to listen and extend healing in a different way than in a clinic. The ministry became about being with people in their own way, at the heart and soul level. Sister Lisa was molded into the ability to listen to God on a deeper level, and to listen to people deeper as well.

"The Benedictine charism of prayer and work is very similar to that of the Foundress of the Religious Sisters of Mercy. Her focus in 1827 was about contemplative action. It is one synergy. That is very similar to what Saint Benedict was about," she explains.

According to Sister Lisa and the team of women at Hesychia, the hermitages are a diamond in the rough in a world starved for solitude with God. Sister Lisa explains how vital the ministry is to people of all faiths and backgrounds, "What Hesychia offers is what people need more than ever. This ministry is a ministry that the church calls us to provide for people. The focus is for people to slow down and experience God's love for them. Spiritual companionship is our focus, to walk with people and help them be with God in whatever way they are called to."

Her vision for Hesychia House of Prayer is vast, and marketing has extended into Texas, Oklahoma, and Missouri. Fliers and advertising materials have been sent to several dioceses, including parishes, other retreat centers, and deacons.

Hesychia House of Prayer is ready to help you on your journey to enjoy solitude alone with God. Whatever your path, Hesychia is the place to help you find it.



Sister Louise Sharum, OSB, Foundress of Hesychia House of Prayer



Sister Anita DeSalvo, RSM, mows the lawn at Hesychia



Sister Lisa Atkins, RSM, enjoys feeding her favorite large cat.



Sisters Lisa, Louise, and Anita enjoy an evening on their porch swing.