

**35th Anniversary Celebration**

On June 5, 1981, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta reported five cases of a rare pneumonia among previously healthy young men in Los Angeles, California. That June 5 report represented the first official publication of something that not only would radically change public health in the United States, but also would come to be recognized as the beginning of a modern worldwide pandemic. Within four years, the causative virus (HIV) had been found, and the new infectious disease, which initially had been called “the Gay Plague,” was officially named AIDS when scientists recognized the infection could be acquired by anyone.

A test for HIV became available in 1985, and by 1987, the first promising medication was released at $10,000 per year as the most expensive prescription in the country. By 1987, statistics revealed the immensity of death and loss to AIDS in America: 50,378 people had been diagnosed with AIDS and 40,849 had died. Those numbers require a moment of reflection: by 1987 we had lost nearly 80 percent of the people diagnosed with AIDS since 1981. Four out of five were gone.

The anguish associated with such loss was overwhelming, not only for those who lived with the incurable infection, but also those who loved and cared for and about them. In the absence of effective treatment or cure, love and care were essential to life and well-being. Many turned to family, friends, church and community for support; however, all were not met with love and care because stigma, judgment and fear attached to the diagnosis and detached human relationships.

In this 1988 setting of grief, loss and pain, United Methodist minister, the Rev. Terri Rae Chattin, became aware of a small group of men who were living with AIDS and feeling outside the love and care of families and church. In Rev. Chattin’s words: “During the early years, many people still looked upon HIV/AIDS as ‘God’s punishment’; ignorance about the virus brought out fears in many people, even among those in the church. People left the church or felt driven away.” In response, Rev. Chattin imagined a retreat where this group of 12 gay men could “come together to share the impact of HIV/AIDS in their lives and to experience healing grace together,” She secured space at West River Camp, engaged clergy colleagues to join in program development, and found volunteers to prepare meals and serve participants as needed. The first gathering was so meaningful to participants and staff that another one was requested. Rev. Chattin persisted, securing donations from local congregations and individuals, getting word out to HIV/AIDS organizations, expanding locations throughout the Conference, and “going forward always on faith.” By the end of the first year, four retreats had been held, and Quality of Life Retreats (QLR) was born as a voluntary ministry of the BWC.

For a notable 35 years, QLR has proceeded unfailingly to provide three or four retreats each year for 40-60 participants at each retreat, as it strived to live into its Statement of Faith and Purpose:

* In affirmation of the love of God, this program is offered to all HIV-infected persons, regardless of religious faith, nationality, race, gender or sexual identification.
* The QLR Board views the church as a healing instrument, which can extend a caring, supportive ministry of prayer, education, advocacy and direct service. The goal of our effort is to uphold and enhance the quality of individual life by nurturing hope, unconditional love, independence and self-determination.

How heartening it is to know that even as treatment and living with HIV infection have dramatically improved, and the faces and stories of QLR participants have changed to reflect the wide impact of AIDS in America, QLR has remained steadfast, serving and striving, as Rev. Chattin reports, to “show that there is a place for retreatants to belong in the church. We’ve given the church back to them. That is our gift.”

In March, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. This pandemic caused us to change our life style in very drastic ways. This change brought Quality of Life Retreats to devise ways to continue our retreats and adhere to the strict regulations of the CDC. The decision by the Board of Directors for QLR was to experiment with virtual retreats. In 2020-2022 we held a number of virtual retreats ( to mention a few): “When COVID-19 Crosses Paths with HIV; Lockdown Yoga; Unmasking COVID-19 and HIV; Finding Balance-Mental Wellness/Health; The New Era of HIV Treatment. We held our first Hispanic Retreat on October 16, 2021, Living with Pride and HIV. We have returned to in-person retreats and will continue QLR (both regular and Hispanic).

As one may imagine, many devoted volunteers, supporters and leaders have served to build and sustain QLR over three decades. We always welcome others to join our work.

**We Need Your Help**

Quality of Life Retreats needs your support to continue this vital ministry. Participants, who typically have limited funds, pay only $30.00 registration fee. But we need donations to subsidize the actual cost of retreats ($350.00 per person). We also seek volunteers to teach arts and crafts, demonstrate healing arts and provide health information and services.

We would like to come speak to your church or organization about this important ministry. And we solicit your prayers and encouragement for our efforts and for the lives of all people living with HIV/AIDS.

10/27/22

**WHEN:** Our goal is to sponsor retreats 3 to 4 times a year, seasonally in the winter, spring and summer.

**WHERE:** Our retreat sites have typically included: The Washington (DC) Retreat House, Manidokan Camp & Retreat Center in Knoxville, MD.

**QUALITY OF LIFE RETREATS PROVIDE:**

* Health and disease management insights
* Small-group dialogues and exercises
* Activities to build community and morale
* Optional worship and spiritual nurture
* Ideal settings where participants can meet and mentor, engage and encourage one another through personal sharing

**For more information please contact:**

**Raymond Shattuck, Board Chairman**

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**For retreat applications or more information visit our Web site at** [**bwcumc.org/ministries/quality-of-life/**](http://www.http:/bwcumc.org/ministries/quality-of-life/)

**Also visit us on Facebook at** [**facebook.com/qualityoflife**](https://www.facebook.com/qualityoflife)**retreatshiv.org**

**Donations: All contributions are welcome and needed. Checks should be payable to: Baltimore/Washington Conference Treasurer and earmarked “Quality of Life Retreats” and sent to: Terri Rae Chattin, 37 Cedar Hill Road, Randallstown, MD 21133-1510.**



**Education and Support for People Living with HIV and AIDS**

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**A ministry of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church**

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