

Quality of Life Retreats

At each Quality of Life Retreat, our participants — all people living with HIV — are asked what they valued about the experience. After 28 years, the answers have become familiar, but our all-volunteer staff never tire of the affirmation this life-changing ministry receives from the people it serves.

“The team and the returning retreatants made sure I...was welcomed and showed me the way,” wrote one a first-time participant at the December 2016 retreat. Wrote another, “I enjoyed the small (discussion/support) groups, meeting new people and reconnecting with old friends.” Yet another lauded “the love” she experienced, along with “the spiritual nourishment, and making friends without judgments.”

Love is essentially what Quality of Life Retreats are all about — love expressed through many acts of grace: the hospitality and guidance; the non-judgmental sharing of life’s struggles and tough lessons; the wisdom and encouragement offered about handling personal challenges.

Then there are presentations about HIV disease management, latest medicines and self-care strategies, as well as demonstrations of healing and stress-relief therapies. And there is always worship with prayer, reflection and testimony; a communal, spiritual healing exercise; artistic crafts and fun games; a festive meal served by the staff; and finally, high-spirited entertainment and daily gift exchanges among secret “prayer buddies.”

Quality of Life Retreats (QLR) are transformative experiences especially for first-timers but also for returnees who discover new depths of love and grace in the human spirit each time they come back. This HIV/AIDS ministry of the Baltimore-Washington Conference offers respite, renewal and relational support to people living with HIV and AIDS in our region. Participants gather for inspiration and education while forming close bonds with one another in a place of honesty, where the truth can set them free.

The loss of significant funding due to UMCOR’s program changes forced us to reduce our usual four retreats to three in 2016. But we pressed on and nonetheless served 70 retreatants. As usual, about half were in their 50s, leading us to offer presentations on aging with HIV; and just over half were women. Retreatants, including 22 first-timers, came mostly from Washington D.C. and Baltimore, but also from several Maryland counties and other states.

In 2017, we plan to offer three retreats again, including a first-time women’s retreat. Camp Manidokan will again serve as one location, preferred for its natural beauty and amenities. Where decades ago we annually mourned the deaths of participants from AIDS, now we are helping HIV survivors learn to live faithful, fruitful lives. Indeed, our motto and the name of our newsletter is Celebrate Life! (For a copy, contact us at qualityofliferetreatshiv@yahoo.com).

We depend heavily on generous help from the Baltimore-Washington Conference and some supportive churches and individuals. They have aided us with funds, transportation, meeting and event space, volunteers and other needs. We share the good news of our ministry on the conference website, at Annual Conference, Mission U and other conference and district events. And we covet more opportunities to be better known, as we seek to raise funds and friends for our mission to enhance the lives of our sisters and brothers living with HIV. Thank you!