

Service for the Unclaimed Dead of Los Angeles County

December 6, 2017 we gathered around the fresh grave in the lawn behind the county crematorium, blinking in the bright Los Angeles sunlight - county workers, elected officials, community members, and family members. Chaplains and clergy from many faith traditions sang and offered blessings, including Rev. Elizabeth Gibbs Zehnder, the Presbyterian Staff Chaplain at LAC+USC Medical Center. The Street Symphony Chamber Singers filled the cemetery with song as mourners laid flowers and burned incense and sage. We came together opening our hearts to honor the lives and legacies of the 1,461 unclaimed people who were at last laid to rest.



A simple gravestone engraved with “2014” now marks the place where they are buried. How can it be that so many bodies go unclaimed in Los Angeles County? There are many reasons - Some people die alone in nursing homes and hospitals. Some were homeless. Others were babies who died at birth. Some people die and their families



can't afford to “claim” them. In the days before the service, the undertaker placed their ashes in a single mass grave. “2014” — the year they were cremated — now marks the plot.

– Rev. Elizabeth Gibbs Zehnder serves as Presbyterian staff chaplain at LAC+USC Medical Center. The Presbyterian Chaplaincy is made possible through the Consortium funded by the Synod of Southern California and Hawaii, the Presbyteries of the Los Ranchos, Pacific, San Fernando and San Gabriel. To find out more about this ministry and how you can be involved, please contact her at Elizabeth.GibbsZehnder@gmail.com.

Chaplain's Corner – Acts of Kindness, December, 2017

Blessing Formula: 4 large skeins of yarn or 3 yards of fabric + 40 hours of hand work + 40 hours of prayer = 1 hand crafted blanket x 631 = Every patient at LAC+USC Medical Center BLESSED on December 19, 2017!

All through the year, people in churches across Southern California knit, stitch and quilt blankets for the patients at LAC+USC. Many of the blankets are created as a prayer for healing and blessing. The chaplains give these beautiful hand-made blankets to patients in need throughout the year. However, once a year, in the week before Christmas, a team of volunteers come to the hospital and give a blanket to every patient who is in the hospital over the holidays. December 19, 2017 over 30 of us teamed up to go to each of the 600+ patients to offer them the gift of a prayerfully made blanket.



One of the volunteers described a patient who kept her eyes lowered and barely greeted him when he walked in the room, but once he explained that someone had made a blanket just for her, her face lit up with gratitude and a smile. I have continued to visit patients after the holidays, and in the middle of their drab space, I find the colorful hand made blankets carefully laid across their bed.

This outpouring of compassion was made possible by the many skilled hands who knit, crocheted and quilted their prayers into blankets and the dedicated volunteers who came to help distribute the blankets. Thanks to everyone who gave of their time, talents and treasure to bear witness to God's love for those who are suffering.

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