



HER SPIRIT
+ compassion

The Compassionate Way

**BRINGING SPIRITUAL
SUPPORT WHERE
IT'S NEEDED MOST**

BY KATHLEEN KRUEGER
PHOTOS BY JOEY HALVORSON

"I've always had a heart for those who've been outside the pews."

That's a statement from the Rev. Candace Adams, who leads a newly formed outreach ministry sponsored by Lakes Area Presbyterian Church called The Compassionate Way.

The congregation at Lakes Area Presbyterian Church is small, but they have a big heart for the surrounding community. For some time, they've been exploring ways to make a lasting impact in the Brainerd lakes area. When the Rev. Mark Ford, their pastor, reached out to the Rev. Adams for input, she suggested an outreach focused on underserved populations in the area. The congregation enthusiastically supported the idea. In April of 2023, they launched The Compassionate Way with the Rev. Adams spearheading the new endeavor.

"We didn't know what this was going to look like," shares the Rev. Adams. "There wasn't a script. We just started experimenting and reaching out."

"I really had to start wrestling with some deep questions. I've learned that I need to be willing to be present in that pain, instead of trying to "whitewash" it away. Sometimes, it's okay not to have all the answers."

Rev. Candace Adams

Even though this new ministry was uncharted territory for the Rev. Adams, she had years of personal and professional experience to guide her. The Rev. Adams, certified through the International Coaching Federation, served as a parish pastor for several congregations. She also served as the chaplain for the University of Jamestown, where she enjoyed close interaction with a very diverse student population. On a personal front, the Rev. Adams and her husband have six children, all adopted through the foster care system. Some were as old as 16 when they first came into their home.

The Rev. Adams and her husband, Doug, took in their first foster kids when they were a young married couple in their mid-20s, sisters aged 16 and 11. When family reconciliation was no longer an option and adoption became available, there was no question, the girls became permanent

members of the Adams family. Over time, three more daughters and one son joined this forever family through the foster care system.

Their kids taught them a lot about the struggles of navigating life in a minefield of trauma and instability.

"I really had to start wrestling with some deep questions. I've learned that I need to be willing to be present in that pain, instead of trying to "whitewash" it away. Sometimes, it's okay not to have all the answers," Adams said.

There are many private and governmental agencies available and offering tangible support to marginalized populations in our area. The Compassionate Way seeks to come alongside these agencies and help to fill a less visible, but extremely vital need — someone available to listen, show empathy, and offer spiritual and emotional support and guidance.

But that doesn't mean they ignore the practical needs presented to them. If compassion means "love in action," then, when appropriate, they do their best to assist. That may mean helping someone find a safe place to stay or donating necessities to other organizations. It's all about filling the gaps.

The Rev. Adams has been welcomed and established a regular presence in many areas of our community. Currently, the Rev. Adams ministers in several locations on a weekly basis. They include the Crow Wing County Jail, Open Arms drop-in center, Artesian Homes, several recovery homes for those dealing with substance abuse and youth-centered settings. With the ministry still in its first year, she continues to seek additional opportunities and ways to collaborate with like-minded organizations and individuals.

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The Rev. Candace Adams works on the computer at her Lakes Area Presbyterian Church office.

An example of what The Compassionate Way offers is the Compassion Connection Circle that the Rev. Adams facilitates at the jail each week.

The gathering starts with a statement establishing a supportive, “no judgment” zone for the meeting: “We are here, recognizing that each of us are whole, resourceful, and capable. We’re not here to fix each other. We are here to recognize we are on our own journey,” said Adams.

The Rev. Adams then shares a short story or thought to consider for the day. The individuals are asked to share honestly about how they are coming into the meeting that day — tired, hopeful, frustrated, etc. They are also asked to share about ways they have received or expressed compassion during the last week. After that, there is a short teaching and discussion time, and a final closing where each

individual expresses how they are feeling as they leave the gathering.

The Compassionate Way also has a big focus on providing friendship and encouragement to individuals one-on-one. This can be simply sitting and listening to someone who needs to share what’s going on in their life or delivering “Blessing Baskets” to individuals working to start their life on a new path.

Since the ministry reaches out to people in an area that spans from Little Falls to as far north as Backus, opportunities to connect and develop community in a safe space online is also being developed. Private weekly Zoom meetings are already being

offered to those interested in that option. New this year is a website being developed to help facilitate a better understanding of what The Compassionate Way has to offer and how to connect with their services.

“One of my mottos is ‘To listen is to love,’” says the Rev. Adams. “We need places where we can be authentic and not have to put on a mask, and not say what people want to hear. That is really difficult in our culture.”

For more information about The Compassionate Way, contact the Rev. Candace Adams by emailing revadams@hotmail.com or calling 320-905-5453.



Kathleen Krueger has been a full-time freelance writer since 2011. Her book, “Hey Freelancer Go Clone Yourself” shares advice based on the experiences of her successful freelance career and that of her co-author.

Learn more about Kathleen on her website: KathleenKrueger.com.

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