

LINDA BARBEE

How Faith Enriches an Elder Care Nurse

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Editor's Note: When originally published in *The Director* (Vol. 28, No. 4), the Presidential Profiles were inadvertently not attributed to an author. We regret the error and would like to note that Katherine O'Brien authored those profiles.

A few years ago, Linda Barbee, 58, was searching for a church, trying to rekindle a faith, that would fill her with a sense of peace and well-being. She tried out various places of worship—some traditional, some contemporary—until she finally found a church that filled her spiritually... a feeling she can't quite put in words. "I felt like I was home and it was important to me," says Barbee, who as a youth had been active in her church but lost touch with her spirituality when she moved from Georgia to Norwood, NC in 1983. "It fills something in me that I had been missing for a long time."

This reawakening of faith gave Barbee, who is president of the NADONA NC chapter, the strength to work on herself and her relationships. After realizing she had distanced herself from family and friends, she was able to mend many relationships. At the same time, she was given the strength to disconnect from people who were coming between her and God. "God showed me that I was his child and was worth more than what I had been made to believe by people in my life," she says.

"For me, a big part of faith is giving back, whether it is to your family, your church family or complete strangers," she says. One way she gives to others is by making prayer shawls for those with physical or mental health issues. After coming up with various patterns and colors, Barbee sets to work crocheting, praying while she works. These shawls, which are later prayed over by a minister, are like "loving arms wrapped around you," she says.

She also brings comfort to people is by injecting a little humor into situations. "Sometimes things just come to me ... but I really didn't plan on them coming out of my mouth and people just roll [with laughter]." As well, her faith helps her be more tolerant of others and to care for people in a non-judgmental way, no matter the circumstances. "Yes, I know you drank all your life and I know you pickled your liver, but I'm still going to take care of you and I'm going to make you as comfortable as I can make you," she says.

Barbee's faith also plays a role when she is looking after for a patient who is dying. It allows her to be present, to put her grief to the side and to show compassion and care. "Sometimes you're all they have and you do not want them to die alone," she says, adding that "some [nurses] assist with bringing people into the world, and I choose to help them at the end of their lives."

Showing Love Through Food

Barbee, who is an avid cook, also sees her cooking as a way to give to others. "Sometimes I fix food for people just because I felt led to do it," she says. In fact,



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Barbee's mother instilled in her the belief that you show love by cooking for people. "It did not matter to her what your background was or where you came from, when you came into her house she welcomed you, and she loved you by cooking for you."

Just as her faith helped change her relationships with people, it has also changed her relationship with food. After realizing she needed to take better care of the body God gave her, she started eating "cleaner." This lifestyle change has helped her better manage her health issues—in fact, she no longer needs to take medication for diabetes, high cholesterol and hypertension.

Luckily, Barbee, who enjoys experimenting with recipes, has decreased the calories and fat in many dishes without sacrificing taste. For instance, she has lowered the fat in her Southern cornbread recipe and she uses applesauce and/or bananas instead of oil in cakes. She has also converted chili, fajitas and tacos to low-fat versions and her "fried" chicken is now baked in an oven. Her latest challenge is adapting macaroni and cheese to a low-fat, low-calorie version.

Barbee started helping her mother cook meals when she was old enough to reach the table – and, with 11 kids in the family, there was a lot of food to prepare. (Her mother made full suppers as well as substantial breakfasts: eggs, homemade biscuits and meat, plus grits and oatmeal on the weekend.) The two of them would often try out new recipes found in newspapers or magazines, adapting them as necessary. Not surprisingly, Barbee, who describes herself as a "cooking show junkie," especially enjoys shows that encourage cooks to put their own spin on recipes.

Shifting Course

About two years ago, Barbee left her Director of Nursing position after 16 years. "Staff was being cut and we were asked to do more with less, and I could no longer provide the care that I wanted to provide," she says. Leaving was painful. "I love it [long-term care] it's where my heart is. It's like having 50 sets of grandparents.... In acute care, when you see people you might see them for two days and they're gone – these people become your family [and] you become their family."

Barbee, who was encouraged to go into nursing by her mother, has been known for a long time that she wanted to work with older people. When she was eight or nine, she enjoyed helping her grandmother and other older ladies in the neighborhood, then, at 14, worked one summer job in a senior center. After high school, she found a job as a nursing assistant in a skilled nursing facility, eventually becoming an LPN and then an RN. She also worked as an ADON, RN staff nurse, RN supervisor and staff development coordinator.

Now, Barbee works as a homecare RN/RN care manager in the Transitions program for PACE (Programs of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly), helping complete safety assessments and following participants who are out of their home setting. This role allows her much more direct patient contact, which she loves. "I've kept my feet in the long-term care world, but it's a lot less stress," she says. 🍷