

Traci Houts Wins National Award

Presbytery of Milwaukee

31 October 2017

Houts wins Ascension National Spiritual Care Award

The Rev. Traci Houts is a Teaching Elder in the Presbytery of Milwaukee. Traci is a Board Certified Chaplain and is the Manager of Spiritual Care for the South Region of Ascension, Wisconsin. She leads a team of 25 chaplains across eight hospitals in the Milwaukee and Racine areas. Traci recently won a prestigious national award for innovation in spiritual care, specifically for her innovative development and implementation of a Shared Governance structure within the Spiritual Care department at Ascension. Traci was nominated for the award by her leader, Sarah Reddin, who is the Director of Mission Integration for Ascension, Wisconsin. Ascension Health is the largest Catholic healthcare provider in the United States with hospitals in 24 states.

The award application needed to fit these parameters: Chaplain/s or spiritual care leader/s within the Ascension organization whose cutting-edge work is appropriately adaptable/replicable by other spiritual care colleagues across Ascension and significantly expands the impact of spiritual care; and/or creatively explores new methods within spiritual care; and/or points us in a new and promising direction for fulfilling our mission.

Traci's leader had this summary for the application: "[Traci] is being nominated for her innovative development and implementation of a Shared Governance structure within the Spiritual Care department. Modeled after a nursing best practice, Shared Governance provides the structure through which the Mission and ministry of the Spiritual Care Department are continually developed. It is a joint partnership of the chaplains and leadership team as we seek to provide a program of meaningful spiritual care to our patients, families, and associates. It not only expands the impact of Spiritual Care by engaging and leveraging the chaplain voice, but it is a creative new method for leading a Spiritual Care team in a matrix environment."

A summary of this award, from the application, is as follows: "in 2015, Traci [and her boss] met with chaplains to review recent associate engagement survey results. Chaplains expressed a desire for more involvement in department process changes and to develop their organizational understanding. Traci proposed the concept of Shared Governance with four Advisory Teams: Education, Development, and Innovation; Administration and Operations; Catholic Identity and Services; and Special Services and Events. Traci has engaged the Teams on projects like Pastoral Care Week, volunteer training, interdepartmental education, and process/policy/practice review. For example, she worked with the Administration and Operations Team to establish a chaplain back-up on-call rotation. What could have been a controversial conversation gained buy-in from the chaplains as they experienced collaboration between their colleagues and leaders. The new process has been in place for two years. In 2016, as Ascension Wisconsin integrated operationally, the Education, Development, and Innovation Team hosted a session for chaplains to familiarize them with all eight regional acute patient care sites. Chaplains presented facts, maps, pictures, and stories that helped their colleagues better serve patients on each campus.

"Shared Governance has improved department operations and processes, job satisfaction,

organizational understanding, and trust. [The] department's Model Community results quantify the advancement: 89% of chaplains feel they have the decision-making authority needed to meet the needs of patients; 89% feel they are encouraged to suggest better ways for getting work done; 94% feel they understand how their work contributes to the overall success and mission of the ministry. Shared Governance in Spiritual Care is an innovative, impactful, tested matrix design that could be replicated with chaplain teams elsewhere in Ascension."

Congratulations, Traci!