

THE CHAPEL AT LACLEDE GROVES

PAST

In 1763 the French Catholic fur trader, Pierre Laclede, headed up the Mississippi River and founded Laclede's Landing. He named the village forming around it "St. Louis" in honor of King Louis IX of France. Now, 263 years later, our retirement community bears his name, "Laclede Groves," and at its center is a chapel on a hill with a steeple and a cross welcoming people to the community.

The chapel was built in 1919 as part of a convent for the Sisters of Mercy, a Roman Catholic sisterhood devoted to contemplation, education, and caring for the sick, older adults, and young children. The chapel was the center for the formation of these "saints," and it was "holy ground" defined by a high altar with mosaics blessing them from above and stained-glass saints embracing them along the side aisles. The interior art proved to be the prototype for what blesses the interior of the Cathedral Basilica in St. Louis today.

PRESENT

Eventually, Lutheran Social Services bought the 64-acre site and expanded the housing to accommodate senior citizens and called it "Laclede Groves," keeping the chapel at the heart of the community and thereby honoring its Roman Catholic heritage. With the adoption of a new name, "Evertrue," the call is to people of all religious and ethnic backgrounds to consider this community to be a place where they can "live life to the fullest."

Today the chapel is open 24 hours a day throughout the week, with a variety of worship services, some special events, and a setting in which to sit quietly and think and pray. There are residents at Laclede Groves today who say that the presence of the chapel at the heart of the community is the reason why they chose to live here.

There is an emerging conversation among the residents and the management about what must be done to preserve and protect the chapel. The list of needs includes replacing the original roof of 1919, which is leaking, protecting the interior décor and the saintly stained-glass windows, and upgrading the heating and cooling systems.

This also includes a discussion of the greater use of the chapel for an organ recital series, choral concerts, guest speakers, and architectural tours within the chapel focusing on the windows, the statuary, the altar imagery, and the vaulted ceiling. The chapel will be even more central to the community's life once it is preserved for decades to come.

FUTURE

Bearing the name of the Roman Catholic founder of St. Louis, thriving under the care of a Lutheran-inspired organization devoted to making it possible for people to live life to the fullest as they grow older, and now presenting itself as "Evertrue," a vision that invites people of all backgrounds to call Laclede Groves "home," the future opens even more graciously to all. And there on the hill is the steeple and the cross anchoring the community to a chapel open to everyone all the time.