



SHILOH SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN SMYRNA INSTALLS MEMORIAL GARDEN

*Submitted By Nancy Howard
Special to The Bright Side*

We heard the story hundreds of times during the painful months that COVID-19 raged over the world. The tragedy of the pandemic was compounded because so many were not able to physically be with or even say goodbye to their loved ones who passed away during the height of the worldwide lock down.

"It seemed like we just kept losing more and more members and family of members as time went on," said one church member at Shiloh Seventh-day Adventist Church in Smyrna, "Of course, we knew we were not the only ones suffering this way, but when you're separated from the people you love in the midst of trauma like this, it feels even more isolating."

In response, the Shiloh Cares Community Outreach and Grief Ministry team of Shiloh SDA Church came together to establish a memorial garden on the church grounds as a lasting tribute in memory of the loved ones who were lost during the pandemic, and as a support to the families who remain.

Sabbath May 29 of Memorial Day weekend was chosen as most fitting for the installation as it was already established for the purpose of remembering those lost in past wars. COVID can certainly be considered a world war on humankind.

Shiloh's member Nancy Howard was the lead on establishing the memorial. "COVID was a huge disruptor- not only to the way we worshipped," said Sis. Howard, "but also to the way we grieved. We

adjusted to it- we had to. But not being able to assemble as a church community made it even harder to get through the grief. Moving on was difficult. So, choosing to celebrate our loved ones in this way was very encouraging."

As an avid gardener and plant lover, Shiloh church member Cynthia Miller stepped up to design and plant the garden. "Rose bushes were selected as the focal point of the garden because they are a popular plant to honor those we want to remember," said Sis. Howard. "And they bring beauty and hope for a better tomorrow."

Shiloh's pastor, Dr. Harold Thomas III, shared his thoughts on the memorial garden – both as pastor and a griever. "My heart was touched with gratitude as Shiloh acknowledged my mother during the dedication of the memorial garden," said Pastor Thomas. "As I look at the flowers, when I drive onto the church property, I smile as something is there in memory of my loved one. I am also proud to be a part of a congregation that put the time and effort to plant and provide a space to remember lost Church members and members' loved ones who passed during the 2020-2021 pandemic. The memorial garden is a small caring act that will have a lasting impact."

God believes in memorials. The Bible includes several accounts of memorials that God set up because of specific times or situations. Elder Glenn Wallace officiated the installation service and shared the story of Joshua and how God instructed him to have

one man from each of the tribes of Israel to take a stone from the Jordan River. The stones were set up at Gilgal as a memorial that would last forever as a reminder to future generations

of the time when the Lord stopped the flowing of the Jordan River – just like He parted the Red Sea – so the Israelites could pass.

Likewise, the Shiloh Memorial Garden was established as a reminder to our Shiloh congregation and our Smyrna community, to let them know we care, and we are here for you. And when future generations ask "What is this? Who is it for? Why is it here?" We can tell them -there was a time when we couldn't come together, we couldn't see or touch or hold our loved ones. And we couldn't even come to funerals. And some of the ones we loved are gone now. But we know that this is a memorial not only for here, but also for eternity. They left when we couldn't touch or talk with them. Whenever we pass and see these rose blossoms, we will remember that this is not the end of our collective journey. Because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and the wonderful plan of salvation, we know the time is coming when we won't need any more memorials because we'll be with our loved ones upon Christ's return.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Matt 5:4, NKJV

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