

Friends offer help to historic Calvary Cemetery

written by Aprille Hanson Spivey |



How to help

- For more information about Friends of Calvary Cemetery, email Diane Allen at mdiane.allen@gmail.com.
- Donations to Calvary can be mailed to Diocese of Little Rock, Attn. Calvary Cemetery, P.O. Box 7565, Little Rock, AR 72217-7565.

Calvary Cemetery projects

Read more about projects, activities at Calvary Cemetery:

Knights help form a perfect circle at diocesan cemetery (May 21, 2018)

Knights embrace project to buy headstones for baby graves (Aug. 3, 2017)

Annual All Souls Day Mass held at Calvary Cemetery (Nov. 3, 2017)

For nearly 200 years Calvary Cemetery has been a place for families throughout the Diocese of Little Rock to mourn and remember loved ones. The Friends of Calvary Cemetery association is

working to ensure that its legacy is preserved.

“The main thing this small group of six, at this point, is wanting to do is form a strong association to raise awareness of the cemetery, to educate people about it and to increase support whether that be monetary or emotional or however,” said Diane Allen, founder of the association. “The cemetery is very old and very beautiful. So we’re just wanting to raise awareness and do all we can to preserve and improve it.”

Allen, a retired lawyer who attends Our Lady of Good Counsel Church in Little Rock with husband Dr. Rene Bressinck, has generations of relatives buried at the official diocesan cemetery, including her uncle Msgr. Francis A. Allen.

“My daddy Charles Allen grew up going to the cemetery with his mother every Sunday,” to visit his father, who died when Charles was just 10 years old, she said. “Going to the cemetery is just something you did to pay respects. That continued as I was growing up. Daddy was the one who still felt a responsibility to go to the cemetery and maintain the family plots.”

In January, Bishop Anthony B. Taylor approved forming the association, which has six members with differing backgrounds and skills, everything from a historian/scientist to someone who has worked in communications.

Member Patty Larrison Wingfield, a master gardener and parishioner at Christ the King Church in Little Rock, hopes to preserve the natural beauty of Calvary for future generations.

“It’s the place where almost everyone I love is buried. It’s sacred to me,” Wingfield said.

Lucinda Akel, office manager of Calvary Cemetery, is an ex-officio member and diocesan liaison for the association. Each member, Allen said, has had a long history of volunteering.

“I honestly feel like trying to do this was a call from the Holy Spirit. It’s been rambling around in my head for quite a while. It just wouldn’t go away,” Allen said. “... I just felt like it was an organization or project just waiting to happen, that needed attention because it’s such a magnificent place.”

The cemetery, which covers more than 30 acres, has had various groups contribute throughout the years, including the 2018 project by Knights of Columbus Council 10208 in Hot Springs Village to beautify Priests’ Circle, where many deceased diocesan priests have been buried since 1933. In 2017, Knights of Columbus Council 5725 in Clarksville purchased headstones for 169 known unmarked graves of babies, dating back to the 1940s.

The annual diocesan All Souls Day Mass is celebrated at the cemetery with an outdoor Mass and rosary procession. This year’s Mass Nov. 2 will be held at 9:30 a.m. with Msgr. Francis I. Malone as the celebrant.

“We feel like particularly because of the Priests’ Circle, we feel that Calvary is a cemetery that every Catholic in the state could have an interest in,” Allen said. “As long as we remember, it’s not ended. Nothing is ended until it’s forgotten. We just feel real commitment to doing what we can to help make the cemetery as good a memorial place as it can be.”

Allen said the association has three top priorities they are pursuing:

- Record an oral history of the cemetery with cemetery superintendent Mike Cagle, who has worked 43 years at Calvary.
- Research whether Calvary Cemetery qualifies for the National Register of Historic Places.
- Verify the archived cemetery records with the physical evidence at the cemetery.

Dennis Lee, chancellor for administrative affairs, said of the association, “We are excited that Mrs. Allen and the other volunteers have formed the Friends of Calvary Cemetery to help our diocese maintain the cemetery and preserve its history. They are off to a good start with their focus on the cemetery’s legacy, and we look forward to their help with improving the beauty of the grounds. A future project we hope to work with them to accomplish is repaving the majority of the roads that run throughout the cemetery. This will be a significant expense and it will take a collaborative effort with the Friends of Calvary Cemetery and a lot of generous donors to make it happen.”

While there are no specific fundraising efforts at the moment, Allen said she’d like to hear from those interested in getting involved.

For more information about the association, email Allen at mdiane.allen@gmail.com.