

Our History: A Journey of Vocation

For more than 40 years, Vesper Society has served those in need, providing tools, resources and expertise to meet social, health, educational, and spiritual needs of people around the world. The organization's co-founders dreamed of recruiting lay people, like themselves, to live out their faith by doing good works for the benefit of mankind.

That sense of call led two Lutheran businessmen to launch Vesper Society in 1965. Eugene Heckathorn and Robert Cummings were cooling their heels at a Philadelphia restaurant after a day of work on behalf of the national Lutheran body. At the church's invitation, the two leaders were sharing their management expertise with the denomination's nonprofit agencies. And it dawned on Heckathorn and Cummings that others like them would be thrilled to have the church affirm their gifts and send them out to serve the church's ministries.

It was the proverbial "napkin moment." On the back of a placemat, the two leaders sketched out their idea of a network of lay people who could be called upon by faith-based nonprofit organizations to provide expertise. But what to call this network? Well, the restaurant's name was handy and religious sounding. It seemed to fit: "Vesper." And they had in mind a society of lay people. And so the enterprise was born: Vesper Society.

Consulting work led to a management contract and then ownership of a Lutheran-affiliated hospital in San Leandro, Calif. Later, the organization acquired a Hayward hospital, and by the early 1970s, Vesper Society was providing faith-based community healthcare in the Bay Area and outside the U.S. The vision was to use the hospitals as centers of practice and reflection, and as springboards for broader societal engagement.

In 1984, Vesper Society sold the two hospitals to Republic Health Corporation for about \$40 million. Debt was retired, and the remaining

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believing in individuals, creating opportunities

“OUR HISTORY” CONTINUED

funds – more than \$23 million – established a foundation. Now no longer bound by the responsibility of maintaining two institutions, we were free to devote our full energies to creative engagement in the work of the church throughout the world.

Since 1985, Vesper Society has invested in local and overseas healthcare improvement projects, including hospice and home health operations, dental clinics for low-income individuals, and outreach in South and Central America. We brought combatants in Guatemala’s long civil war to a common table to explore peace. And we convened faith leaders in Hayward to work on the health and healing of their community.

Today, Vesper Society’s work progresses in California and around the globe. Through various incarnations, our call to serve continues. As our Board Chairman Rodric A. Lorimer puts it: “No matter its permutation, Vesper Society’s mission to provide care and improve the lives of those most in need has never wavered.”

VESPER SOCIETY

115 Sansome St., #1250 • San Francisco, CA 94104 USA

1.415.291.0901 • info@vesper.org

www.vesper.org