



- [Home](#)
- [Local News](#)
- [World News](#)
- [Classified Ads](#)
- [Bulletin Notes](#)
- [Photo Slideshows](#)
- [Purchase Photos](#)
- [Business Directory](#)
- [Archbishop Gregory](#)
- [Archdiocesan Master Planning](#)
- [Book Reviews](#)
- [Catholic Charities Atlanta](#)
- [Catholic Living](#)
- [Chancery News](#)
- [Clergy, Consecrated Life & Vocations](#)
- [Commentary & Reflection](#)
- [En Español](#)
- [Letters to the Editor](#)
- [Ministries News](#)
- [Movie Reviews](#)
- [Parish News](#)
- [People](#)
- [School News](#)
- [Special Events](#)
- [Sports](#)

LOCAL NEWS



Family Finds Hospice A Comfort In Time Of Need

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Published: November 26, 2009



Clinging to the hand of his wife under the sheets, Dr. Anton Reel Jr., 90, sits beside his wife of 64 years, Louise, 87. After a month of care at the inpatient facility of Hospice Atlanta, Louise is currently receiving home hospice care. A Hospice Atlanta nurse comes twice a week to their Alpharetta home. (Photos by Michael Alexander)

ATLANTA—Every night Dr. Anton Reel Jr. pushes a second hospital bed next to his wife's and holds her hand as she falls asleep. It is a tradition to which he has held true throughout 64 years of marriage.

He continues to speak encouragingly to his wife, who is now under home hospice care from Hospice Atlanta, telling her that her mind is still sharp and reminding her that they are together and always will be.

Louise Reel recently spent almost five weeks at Hospice Atlanta, after being treated for several days in the intensive care unit at Saint Joseph Hospital, Atlanta, at the end of September. Louise has been suffering from pneumonia and several other ailments throughout the year and had been in and out of hospitals since May.

The family has been told time and time again that their mother and grandmother only had a few months, sometimes even a few days, to live, but time and time again Louise has proved she is a fighter and will remain with her family as long as she can.

"She has a tremendous will to live," her son, Anton Reel III, said.

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ENGLISH
**What I Have
Seen And Heard**

SPANISH
**Lo Que He
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by † Archbishop
Wilton D. Gregory



When she was admitted to hospice, they were again told she did not have much time to live, so the family contacted Msgr. Daniel O'Connor to come and administer the sacraments to her. They prepared for the worst.

Now nearly two months later, the family is able to help care for Louise at home, since she was released from on-site hospice care due to her recent stabilization.

But her son and husband were with Louise every minute during her stay at Hospice Atlanta and witnessed something special about the kind of care and support found at a hospice.

"Most people have a negative connotation when they hear 'hospice,'" said Anton III. The family was no exception.



Louise and Anton Reel Jr. were married Sept. 29, 1945. Anton is a retired dentist and Louise was a registered dietitian. (Photo provided by Reel family)

Anton III recalled not being too happy when he was informed his mother would be moving to hospice because to him, as with many other people, hospice simply meant, "a place someone goes to die."

His father agreed. "I was against going to a hospice because I knew what that meant," Anton II said. He was worried about not being able to stay with his wife during her illness, but was surprised to learn he could sleep with her in her room.

Dr. Reel would sit next to his wife's bed every night and hold her hand as they fell asleep together, continuing their tradition.

"They are inseparable," said their son with a smile.

However, the support and care given to Louise and her family during this trying time was like having family with them all the time, a pleasant surprise for the family.

"Everybody treated mom like she was their own mother," said Anton III. "Not just the nurses, but everybody. ... The people there, everybody, was just as sweet as can be, and very respectful."

Hospice Atlanta, part of the Visiting Nurse Health System, is a nonprofit community-based hospice emphasizing compassionate, innovative and cost-effective home health and end-of-life care.

With nearly 500 employees, including over 275 nurses and assistants, 75 medical social workers and 75 therapists, Hospice Atlanta serves patients in 26 North Georgia counties.

In addition to home hospice care, like the kind Louise Reel is currently receiving, Hospice Atlanta also provides inpatient care and bereavement and

spiritual counseling services to an average total daily census of 130 adult and pediatric patients.

The physical and spiritual care provided by the employees and volunteers with Hospice Atlanta is also manifested in the physical attributes of the grounds.

Located in Buckhead, it seems the facility should be infiltrated with the sounds of the city. However, the peace and quiet found when walking around Hospice Atlanta or its several outdoor gardens is surprising, yet calming.

The quality of care does not diminish when a patient leaves the grounds. Staff are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, a component to the Hospice Atlanta experience for which the Reel family is especially grateful.

"They put us at ease," Anton III said, saying they have only had to call after hours a couple of times, but each time they have been helped promptly and without difficulty.

The Reels' experience with Hospice Atlanta magnifies the strong link they have with each other. Both Anton II and Anton III had wonderful things to say about Louise and the sacrifices she made for her family.

"I was an atheist and an outlaw and she was a saint," said Anton II about the early years of their marriage. "She always has been a saint and always will be."

"They raised us right," said Anton III. "They sacrificed everything to make sure we had an education."

Mary Stack, a social worker at Hospice Atlanta, said educating families and patients about hospice care and the dying process is very important.

"There is an acceptance here" about the dying process, said Stack. "We help people transition to the next world . . . and help families understand."



Sitting beside a stuffed Louisiana State University tiger, Anton Reel III of Washington, D.C., talks about the positive experience his family has had with Hospice Atlanta regarding his mother's care. His mother is a graduate of LSU.

While only an estimated 6 percent of Hospice Atlanta's patients are Catholic, Stack, the sister of Father Dan Stack, believes that hospice care is a very Catholic idea.

"It is universal and it allows for the presence of God," Stack said. "Death is normalized, and we are very open about it here."

The Reel family said it was difficult to leave the hospice because of all the wonderful connections they made over the five weeks Louise was there. However, they also feel relieved to be home and feel it is good for Louise to be in her own home with her own things.

"Mom is the cornerstone of the family," said Anton III. "She has always been our guiding light."

That statement rings true for the entire family, even Dr. Reel who himself now

believes in the afterlife.

"I was always searching for what she had," he said, adding that now he has finally found it.



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[Greek Orthodox, Catholic Churches To Celebrate Advent](#)

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ISSUES IN NOVEMBER

[Thu, November 12, 2009](#)

[Thu, November 26, 2009](#)

IN 2009

[January](#), [February](#), [March](#), [April](#), [May](#), [June](#), [July](#), [August](#), [September](#), [October](#), **[November](#)**, [December](#)

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[1963](#), [1964](#), [1965](#), [1966](#), [1967](#), [1968](#), [1969](#), [1970](#), [1971](#), [1972](#), [1973](#), [1974](#), [1975](#), [1976](#), [1977](#), [1978](#), [1979](#), [1980](#), [1981](#), [1982](#), [1983](#), [1984](#), [1985](#), [1986](#), [1987](#), [1988](#), [1989](#), [1990](#), [1991](#), [1992](#), [1993](#), [1994](#), [1995](#), [1996](#), [1997](#), [1998](#), [1999](#), [2000](#), [2001](#), [2002](#), [2003](#), [2004](#), [2005](#), [2006](#), [2007](#), [2008](#), **[2009](#)**

