

Once upon a time, **Clark Dingman** fancied a future as a teacher. In a sense, that's what he has become.

Dingman, a Southampton resident, now teaches the gospel of the Hospice Association of America and the National Association for Home Care in general and the precepts of Samaritan Hospice in Moorestown in particular.

Dingman, 39, was hired 10 years ago to launch what was then known as the Hospice of Burlington County, and became its first, and only, executive director. The hospice cares for terminally ill patients who have exhausted most other types of treatment.

"I had gone to Cornell University [biology degree]," he said. "I came to New Jersey looking for a teaching job. Most of my friends were going where the jobs took them. I didn't do that. I wanted to live here." He taught 10th-grade biology and then junior high for two years in Middlesex County.

"I got my master's in education at Rutgers thinking it would make me a better teacher, but it didn't," he said. "I found I didn't fit well as teacher. It just wasn't working."

He studied pastoral counseling at Princeton Theological Seminary, earning a master's in divinity degree, served as director of the community ministry for the Nassau Presbyterian Church in Princeton and, still searching, took a job in private industry in Philadelphia, his last stop before he made what has become a career move for the Albany, N.Y., native.

The hospice idea seeks to provide home care for those with an expectancy of a year or less to live and who are no longer pursuing aggressive treatment toward cure. "We aggressively treat patients' symptoms but recognize that the disease is not going to be cured," Dingman said. "They will live as long and as well as they can."



Clark Dingman runs Samaritan Hospice in Moorestown.

Dingman is one of many who have worked for recognition of hospice as an alternative form of care for the terminally ill. He is a member of the Advisory Board of Directors for the Hospice Association of America and lobbies on state and national legislative issues for hospice.

For his active role in the movement, Dingman received a special award from the Hospice Association of America and the National Association for Home Care in October.

Because hospice is now a Medicare entitlement, "it saves the government millions by keeping the Medicare beneficiary at home rather than in an institution," Dingman said. "Effective July 1, New Jersey will begin to pay for Medicaid recipients to be on hospice."

"This year, we are launching pre-hospice, Hand-in-Hand. It's for people who are not ready for hospice but may be in the future," for those still not accepting the finality of their condition.

Samaritan, one of 43 hospices in the state, averaged 10 patients per day in 1982. Last year, it was 150. There are more than 100 staff members.

"It has been much more successful than I ever anticipated. I really love it," said Dingman, despite the fact he also has to do fund-raising.

"That's part of what I do. I don't mind it because I'm asking for something I believe in myself, something I give to myself."