

Our Elders

Lest We Forget

Last in a 2-Part Series
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Help. For some it's just another word. But for the elderly it can mean a social event, transportation or a visit from someone who cares.

Besides the numerous county, city and community groups which assist them, their own parishes often offer these and other services.

Elderly of all denominations are discovering that the church they've always been close to spiritually is also serving temporal needs by forming social clubs and helping them participate in church related and community activities.

Along with this has come a spirit of ecumenism and cooperation among all faiths and existing elderly programs in the community.

Many churches, including Catholic, no longer plan their activities just for members. Instead, invitations are extended to everyone of that age within the neighborhood, regardless of religion or beliefs.

"We're an ecumenical Christian group working to help the area elderly and others in the community who need it," said Mrs. Kathleen McLaen, a member of the Charlotte Human Development Committee and Holy Cross parish.

"I guess you could say that we started out as basically a Catholic group (the Charlotte Human Development Committee grew out of the Holy Cross committee) but always with the aim of including everyone," she added. "We're fortunate to have five different religions in the area."

In addition to Holy Cross representation, other area churches with committee members are Lakeside Presbyterian, St. George's Episcopal, Church Of The Master (Baptist) and Lake United Church (Methodist).

The 40-member committee has helped form the Charlotte Senior Citizens Group. Besides elderly now residing in the area, another of their concerns are two new elderly high rises, Riverview and Lakeview (which also has low and moderate income housing for families).

They plan to conduct an orientation program for new residents when both buildings are completely finished, and help find furniture for those who do not have any because of previous occupancy in a furnished apartment.

Concern for the elderly has always existed in parishes with or without substantial elderly populations, but the advent of human development committees on parish councils in the diocese have made it a growing concern.

In name, they're often the result of a seven-session training program offered by the diocesan Office of Human Development (OHD). But committees with the same or similar concerns have existed for years in some parishes.

Holy Cross was the first to request and host the training session which is geared to provide foundation and direction for individual human development committees on the parish level.

After training sessions, the OHD does not run the committees but is always available as a resource.

Those within a parish who volunteer to attend sessions are assigned areas of concern and asked to research them. Results are discussed as a group and members are asked to define what they feel are the top two priorities in the parish.

St. Ambrose hosted the training program last Spring and found their two priorities were youth and the elderly. After their sessions the Social Concerns Committee became the Human Development Committee, and a subcommittee on the elderly was begun.



Smiling faces reflect the feelings of Holy Family senior citizens as they board a bus for a trip to Letchworth State Park.

It has planned such events for the elderly as a special Mass, and a Christmas party.

But the parish has no senior citizen club as such because "we get the feeling that those in our parish aren't too enthusiastic about a club as such," said Sister Mary Louise Heffernan, SSJ, pastoral assistant, "but they do want separate activities planned."

Pastoral assistants at many parishes, such as Sister Mary Louise, also include in their duties visiting the elderly and bringing them Holy Communion.

Home visitation enabled St. Ambrose volunteers to find out who the elderly were and what problems they face. The parish has roughly 600 elderly out of 4,500 families or 9,000 people.

A filing card system has been set up in the rectory as a result of their visits so the elderly can be reached easily.

Among other parishes which have utilized this system have been St. Monica's, St. Peter and Paul and St. Charles Borromeo.

The first two parishes have carried it one step further, and in addition to listing their elderly on cards, one person per block, or small area, has been asked to act as liaison between the parish and area people.

Problems concerning the elderly or others are relayed by block persons and those at the parish attempt to solve them or find someone who can.

According to Sister Barbara Moore, SSJ, pastoral assistant at St. Monica's, block leaders helped include the elderly in parish life by passing out ballots for a recent parish council election to those unable to get out to vote.

Large print bibles also are being distributed by the parish to those who need them, and parish facilities are used for meetings of the Southwest Golden Age Group, which St. Monica's and retired area residents helped form.

Besides Sister Barbara, one other Sister and two priests conduct an extensive program to reach housebound and the elderly with the sacraments.

Ss. Peter and Paul, a member of the Council of Inner City Parishes (CICP), used the Office of Human Development's CICP survey, which surveyed attitudes and concerns of those living in inner city parish neighborhoods by using city census tracts as guides.

Legion of Mary volunteers using the survey in census tract 74, the first one completed in the parish area, found that while helping them discover neighborhood concerns, it also pointed out who the elderly were.

Sister Carol Marie Datz, SSND, pastoral assistant, said that although the parish has not yet had the OHD training session, the survey was the starting point of a Human Development Committee.

Members helped form the St. Peter and Paul Senior Association which has been meeting monthly since September with about 30 elderly in attendance, not all of whom belong to the parish.

Area elderly also attend activities at Charles Settlement House.

Sister Carol Marie believes getting seniors involved in solving their own problems is important because "the whole thing in ministry today is to listen, not only with your ears but with your eyes as well, to see what exists and to help people help themselves."

Many who work closely with the elderly agree they need to plan things for themselves as a group, instead of always relying on others.



Making Christmas decorations at a Ss. Peter and Paul Senior Association monthly meeting are Mrs. Helen Curtis [left], Mrs. Vicky Ververs and Mrs. Marion Mews.



Mrs. Mildred Pilot fingers her rosary as she attends a special Mass for senior citizens at St. Charles Borromeo.

Sister Eileen Conheady, SSJ, who works for the Northeast Property Upgrading Association (NEPUA) and has her office in the old St. Francis Xavier school, agrees.

The Senior Citizens Action Cell was formed in 1971 through the combined efforts of the parish and NEPUA, and serves elderly in the area.

She said they get much of their recreational activities from the Genesee Settlement House, so "their concerns here are things like Social Security, medicare and neighborhood safety."

St. Francis Xavier's Human Development Committee was formed this year and is slated to receive the CICP survey in late November.

"The committee will study it, utilize it and act from it, and hopefully we'll be able to serve the seniors better afterwards," said Sister Eileen.

St. Charles Borromeo also has had the training session from the Office of Human Development, and their Concern for Senior Citizens Committee tries to "educate members to the availability of services for the old, their needs, and sources of information which will help them," according to Sister Patricia Norton, RSM, pastoral assistant.

There are about 450 people in the parish who are 65 or above.

Although the concept of human development in the parish is about five years old, she said nothing was being centered directly on the elderly except Legion of Mary visitation until 1972 when Holy Cross Brother Charles Varnak, from Cardinal Mooney, received his order's permission to spend the summer helping senior citizens at St. Charles.

Since then, he and Brothers Tadeus Las and Etienne Cooper have helped Sister Patricia and others with elderly visitation and arts and crafts at meetings of the St. Charles Senior Citizens Club.

All are interested in helping seniors in addition to their teaching duties at Mooney.

Many elderly residents around the inner city parish of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel have lived there for much of their lives.

Last summer, senior citizens group representatives met and discussed some of their problems and formed a 16th Ward coalition with representation from Mt. Carmel, St. Francis Xavier, ABC #3 (Action for a Better Community), Genesee Settlement House, RSVP, (Retired Senior Volunteer Program) and the Red Cross.

One of the biggest elderly needs in the area, they discovered, was transportation.

Wheels, a group of volunteers from the northeast section of the city and Monroe County, will seek to eliminate this need by providing transportation to the doctor, the store, etc., for elderly in the 16th Ward.

It's a project Sister Carol Fox, RSM, pastoral assistant at Mt. Carmel, is actively trying to get started, along with the others in the coalition.

"We need more volunteers," she emphasized.

In addition, the parish's Sick and Aged Committee plans social events, special church services and other functions.

And the Spanish and English Legions of Mary, along with Sister Carol, take care of home visitation.

Not all the churches working on programs to help the elderly have been mentioned, but those who have are representative of everyone's concern for a group that's often forgotten but shouldn't be.

"I think it's important that we go to them since many can't come to us," said Sister Carol, echoing the others who hold similar sentiments.

"They've served us well in the past and given generously of their time, talent and money," she added.