

Independence for Seniors Is Office for Aging Goal

By MARTIN TOOMBS
Southern Tier Editor

Elmira— A common view is that the elderly are persons who live in nursing homes and need assistance to walk.

It comes as a surprise to many to find out that only four to five percent of those over the age of 65 live in an institution.

Sister Juliana O'Hara, SSJ, is the director of the Chemung County Office for Aging. She emphasized that the agency's goal is to "coordinate resources to help older adults maintain their independence." Even though it is easier "to do for than with someone," she said, "anything an older person can do, he or she should do."

Sister Juliana, who worked for several years in St. Joseph's School of Nursing had become known for her work with senior citizens following the 1972 Agnes Flood, when she organized the housing of many senior citizens in the former Mark Twain Hotel, and then helped them to relocate. When the Office for the Aging was formed in 1973, she was asked to become its director.

Sister Juliana listed many programs in which the agency is involved, most designed to aid senior citizens living at home. Nutrition centers offer seniors a hot meal and a chance to get out of the house, and meals-on-wheels are available for those unable to get out. Care in the home is possible on a short-term basis, and a telephone reassurance program is operated by the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, which works with the Office for Aging.

The agency has received more than 1,300 calls for information this year, she said, and noted that the staff tries to follow up questions with a home visit rather than just an answer on the telephone. Often the question doesn't indicate the real problem, Sister Juliana said, and a visit will give the staffperson a chance to see the situation, and for the senior citizen to get to know them. If trust can be established, she noted, it becomes easier for the agency to help.

Sometimes it is necessary for the agency to "run interference" for senior citizens, Sister Juliana

explained, because the system of assistance for the elderly is so complex. "The system doesn't mean to do the things it does," she commented, noting that it is set up to stop people from taking advantage of it, and is therefore more difficult for those the program is designed to help.

Volunteers also are important in the effort to keep senior citizens independent, she said. "We need to get society involved," she said, "we talk a lot about being our brother's keeper, but are we doing anything about it?" Senior citizens need people willing to do repairs, put up storm windows and assist with shopping, she explained.

Another problem, sister pointed out, is the housing situation in Elmira. She noted that more than 200 low-income persons applied for only 42 places reserved for low-income tenants in the newly-opened Southtown Towers for senior citizens. Many senior citizens in privately owned rental housing live in poor conditions, she pointed out. No major work has been done on many of the buildings since the flood rehabilitation, she said, but the rents continue to rise. As an example, she noted that one woman they recently helped move was being hurried out of an apartment that had not had a working bathroom sink in several years, so the landlord could "make repairs." On moving day, they found out that the owner had another tenant waiting to move in.

Transportation is a serious problem for the elderly, sister noted. The special 10-cent bus fare helps those who are able to use the bus, she noted, but many are unable to walk to the bus, or get on it. The agency now has two vans with lifts, she said, which were purchased after a four year fund raising effort. The agency also has a contract to provide taxis for such things as trips to a doctor, she said, for persons with no means of transportation. The vans are used primarily for social programs, and for outings for nursing home residents, she noted.

One program that reaches into the county's nursing homes is a shared "multi-disciplinary proprietary team," sister said. The team visits the homes and works with the operators, staff and residents to improve the life of the persons there. Programs are offered to enable residents to get out

of the home when possible, and recreational programs are available in the homes, she said. The team has been successful, Sister Juliana said, and "a model for New York State" in dealing with nursing homes.

Sister also has been involved in the establishment of an aging services program at Elmira College. Classes offered as part of the program have been well attended, she noted.

Sister Juliana expressed her satisfaction with the cooperation that exists among county agencies, commenting that "on the whole, we have a great deal of cooperation in Chemung County." She also cited the increasing agency budget as an indication of the county's commitment to its older citizen.

While the agency can't get involved in political issues, sister said, she noted that it is ridiculous for someone to be regarded as competent the day before their 65th birthday, and incompetent the day after. Sister noted that the agency previously was included in mandatory retirement legislation. The result was that the Office for Aging was prohibited from employing anyone over 65. Currently one-third of the 21 staff members are over 55, she said, and one is 75.

She also noted that the current discussion concerning Social Security running out of funds "is a fear of older people," although she commented, it will probably be more of a problem for those now working.

"On the whole I think it's an advantage" to be a sister holding a directorship in a county office, Sister Juliana said. "It enhances my relations with older people," she explained, "I stand for something they can trust."

Finding time to pray with the activities of the job has been difficult, she said, and requires extra effort. She also noted that her commitment to the community she lives in is important to her, and she tries to participate in community activities whenever possible.

Although downplaying its importance, Sister Juliana draws a salary commensurate with the position of agency director, which is paid to the Sisters of St. Joseph, meaning an extra income for the order.



Parish Convention

A unique parish convention, bringing all parish committees, clubs and organizations together, was held recently at St. Mary's, Waterloo. The celebration began with Mass and was followed by an open house where the organizations set up display and information booths. The displays included a pictorial history of the parish. Sister Mary Bridget, pastoral assistant, described the event as a gathering of all parish members to "celebrate themselves as parish." Shown above are Bishop Hogan and Father Michael Conboy listening to the St. Mary's First Communion Class sing "Simple Gifts" during the Offertory. Members of the Catholic Daughters of America are shown in the foreground.

DCG HOSTING
FR. O'NEILL

Elmira— Father Robert F. O'Neill, officialis of the diocesan tribunal, will speak to the Elmira Divorced Catholic Group Sunday, Nov. 20 at 7:30 p.m. at St. Patrick's School. All area divorced and separated Catholics are invited; Father O'Neill will explain the annulment process.

SOUTHERN TIER
AUBURN-GENEVA



Photos by Martin Toombs

Bishop Joseph L. Hogan accepts the gifts during the offertory at the St. Patrick's celebration Mass.

Bishop Hogan: Parish Should Be 'Caring Community'

Elmira— Bishop Joseph L. Hogan stressed the need for community during his homily at Masses at St. Patrick's Church Nov. 5 and 6.

Bishop Hogan visited St. Patrick's over the weekend, celebrating Mass on Saturday evening and Sunday morning, and participated in receptions in his honor. Concelebrating with him were Father Kevin Murphy and Father David Callan, St. Patrick's co-pastors, and Father Michael Conboy.

Parishioners should work to establish a caring community, Bishop Hogan told those attending the Sunday celebration, so that when others view them, they will say "these people are different," they care about one another, as the early Christian community did.

"The early Christian community was a very affectionate, loving community," Bishop Hogan pointed out, and

establishing that type of community should be the goal of parishes today.

A possible source of division, he said, is the feeling of self-importance that some have. Noting that everyone has some unique gift, Bishop Hogan pointed to Paul's admonition that "you have nothing that is not given to you." No one gift is more valuable than another, Paul told the Corinthians, Bishop Hogan said, and if "you don't have love," everything is "sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Another problem is that "we don't have enough

listeners... Everyone is on a soap box." Someone said, Bishop Hogan related, that "God gave us two ears and one mouth, but we've never really taken the hint."

He called on St. Patrick's parishioners to follow the life of Christ, and to show by their caring that they love one another.

Receptions after the Masses gave the parishioners an opportunity to speak with the bishop; more than 200 persons attended the Sunday reception.



Photo by Martin Toombs

Craft Fair

The Girl Scouts on Elmira's Southside are sponsoring a Craft Fair Saturday, Nov. 19 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Centenary Methodist Church on Pennsylvania Ave. Above, Brownie Troop 701, which meets at St. Mary's, works on crafts to be played. Working with popsicle sticks are from left, Barbara Beras, Eileen Callahan and Amy Reed.

M. L. ALLEN & SON
Corning, N.Y.
Quality Furniture
62 Bridge St.
Phone 936-8431

Gerould's Pharmacies
S. Main St. and
Church & Hoffman
Elmira
Delivery Service
733-6696