

Sister brings cheer to the elderly year 'round

By Richard A. Kiley

Throughout the year — especially during holidays — her time is spent trying to provide cheer and special needs to the elderly.

Affectionately known as "The Rev. Dolan" to many, Sister Louise Dolan, SSJ, has become a bright light and a special friend to the 31 patients at the Skilled Nursing Facility of St. Joseph's Hospital in Elmira.

"She is the most dedicated, compassionate and caring person I have ever met," said Rose MacFeiggan, director of volunteer services at St. Joseph's. "She just loves her work, and I can't say enough about her."

Sister Dolan arrived at St. Joseph's in July, 1971, when she was asked to head a new education program for employees at the hospital. She remained in that capacity until the spring of 1986. Since then, Sister Dolan has contributed more than 6,800 hours to her patients, providing what the staff cannot because of a busy workload.

"I just stop in every morning and say, 'Hi' to everybody. I can't stay for a long time because I have to see everybody," said Sister Louise, who formerly taught in the diocesan school system. "I stay just long enough to see how they're doing."

Or to exchange a good joke or two. MacFeig-



Her dedication to patients at St. Joseph's Hospital recently won Sister Louise Dolan the Sister Ann Loretta Memorial Award.

gan said that Sister Dolan "has a terrific sense of humor, which highlights her personable personality."

"I do like to hear a good joke now and then," Sister Dolan said. "There is one little old fella who tells 'knock-knock' jokes all the time. He really makes me laugh; he tells some wild jokes."

The holidays, however, can bring on depression for patients, many of whom have outlived their family and friends. During the Christmas season, Sister Dolan likes to keep patients busy creating crafts. In addition to making Christmas bells for children in the hospital's day-care center this year, Sister Dolan had her patients make Santa Claus decorations for the facility's windows.

"Some of their motor skills are pretty bad because many have arthritis," Sister Dolan said. "I keep things pretty simple for them because they have trouble handling materials."

Children at the day-care center recently visited patients to express their appreciation for the crafts. Sister Dolan also scheduled visits from a local widows and widowers group to provide patients with some holiday cheer.

"They love the attention. We ask the children to come visit us during the holidays," Sister Dolan said. "They enjoy the patients very

much."

The double transition from working with children in the classroom to employees in the developmental program to caring for elderly patients was relatively easy for Sister Dolan. But it did take a while before patients warmed up to her.

"It takes a long time for them to accept you," Sister Dolan said. "Some people are much more friendly than others, but everybody is nice in their own way. It's kind of nice to be able to say you've taught the three ages of man."

Sister Dolan said she can often see the effects of her work when she returns from a long retreat. "Being there every day without fail is what counts," she said. "When I've been away, I notice that some of them become noticeably less able. One day while there was a Mass going on, I was walking across the room and one of the women I usually visit said, 'Aren't you going to talk to me today.'"

Perhaps Sister Dolan's dedication to her work was never more evident than earlier this month, when she lost her niece in a tragic car accident. She returned to her volunteer work just a few days after attending her niece's funeral in Rochester.

"I was glad to get back, but they're in a very tough situation," Sister Dolan said.

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Linda Dow Hayes, Courier-Journal

Members of the GeVa Theatre production of Charles Dickens "A Christmas Carol" celebrate the transformation of Scrooge (K.C. Wilson) from a selfish miser into a giving, caring soul. Christian Zwahlen (aloft), a student at St. Ambrose School, portrays Tiny Tim in the production, which runs through Dec. 24.

Ambulance service gives free holiday ride service

National Ambulance and Oxygen Service Inc. has announced that it will dedicate one vehicle during the Christmas holidays to provide free, confidential transportation for Monroe County residents who recognize they should not drive. The program will operate from 9 p.m. to 2:30 a.m. every night from now until 4 a.m. New Year's Day.

Individuals wishing to take advantage of the drinkers' transit service during the Christmas holidays should call 716/546-2525. The free service will operate throughout Monroe County.

Station to broadcast Mass

WXXI's annual Christmas eve service will be broadcast live on Saturday, Dec. 24, at 11 p.m. on WXXI-TV 21 from the Memorial AME Zion Church in Rochester.

The service, led by the Revs. Andrew Gibson, William Gipson and his wife, the Rev. Willette Gipson, will consist of a Christmas program, a play and carols sung by the Memorial AME Zion Choir.

Local church to offer services in Vietnamese

Father Joseph Hien will celebrate Christmas Mass and hear confessions in Vietnamese at Corpus Christi Church, 864 E. Main St., Rochester. Father Hien will be available for confessions after 2:30 p.m. on Christmas day. Mass will begin later that afternoon. All are welcome to attend.



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