

Elderly

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vices, for example, operates two outreach centers. It also offers several programs focusing on such needs as housing, counseling, case management, health and nutrition.

Those services assist approximately 10,000 people annually, Coveney estimated.

Also operating within the 12-county Rochester diocese are such institutions as Rochester's St. Ann's Home/The Heritage — which offers 354 acute-care nursing-home beds and approximately 230 apartments for individuals not needing acute care — and Auburn's Mercy Health and Rehabilitation Center, which offers 252 skilled-nursing beds.

Through the diocesan Division of Social Ministry and its regional offices — the Catholic Family Center, the Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry and the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry — programs address needs and concerns among the elderly, such as housing and health care.

In addition, parishes offer a number of programs. At the most basic level, many parishes commission individuals to bring the Eucharist to shut-ins. Some parishes also reach out to the elderly through such programs as Stephen Ministries and Dove, which include transportation for elderly people needing rides to appointments or for shopping, and home visiting.

Dove, for example, was begun in Geneva in 1988 by the social ministry committees of St. Francis de Sales and St. Stephen's parishes. Mary Bertino has worked with the program from its inception, coordinating 25 volunteers who provide transportation. "It's to help people who don't have anyone else," she said.

The program also schedules weekly visits to a nearby nursing home. Bertino

noted that she herself is homebound, and that she is able to contribute by serving as the coordinator. "It helps you forget about your ailments," she noted.

Although such services are effective, they do not address the broader concerns of the elderly, nor do they challenge the stereotypes of the elderly, Coveney acknowledged.

The elderly must contend with their changing roles in society and in their personal lives. Retirement means that couples spend more time together, and thus the possibility for conflict grows, noted Sister L'Esperance. Consequently, the elderly frequently need to find ways to re-examine and adjust their relationships.

Retirement can also pose problems, Sister L'Esperance observed, because in the United States, "so much of our identity is tied up with what you do, not who you are." And for many people, she added, social life is tied in with work, meaning that retirees often need to develop new social networks.

The elderly also face changing spiritual needs, acknowledged Sister Anne Maloy, RSM, director of the Mercy Center. "I think there's a sense of letting go," she said. "Things are not as important.

"There's a need for more scriptural development," she continued, "more time to reflect on their lives — 'What has my life meant?'"

In addition, Sister Maloy said, the elderly begin to confront death, perhaps for the first time in their lives. "It's something we don't deal with well in our society," she noted.

Sister L'Esperance said that beyond the many health, economic and housing concerns they face, the elderly must deal with loneliness.

"We tend to have a cluster of losses as we age — employment, health, family, friends," she said.

Thus, contact with the outside world is

vital to the elderly person. The church can play an important role in helping to encourage the elderly to be involved by providing opportunities to serve the church and others, Monsignor Fahey noted.

"We have to marshal (the elderly) as a resource rather than a problem," he said. Parishes, he observed, can serve as a focus for that ministry because of the sense of community.

Parish-level ministry to the elderly is, in fact, one of focuses of the Mercy Center's programs. Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Rochester was one of the pilot parishes at which the center conducted an education program in the mid-1980s.

As a result of that program, the parish created an Aging Committee to coordinate activities.

For individuals who are homebound, the parish features a Ministry of Praise program, which currently involves 62 people commissioned by their pastor to pray for specific needs and intentions.

In addition, the parish created a group called the "Fun People," which plans social activities for elderly parishioners. To help meet the spiritual needs of the elderly, the parish has reinstated First Friday services, created an annual remembrance Mass for deceased friends and relatives, and presented a day of reflection on grief. The parish also provides cassette recordings of weekend Masses to the homebound.

A number of other parishes have increased their outreach to the elderly and have sought to encourage elderly people to remain active and involved. But these activities need a central, coordinating force, Sister L'Esperance stated.

"In our diocese in particular, we don't have a systematic approach to the ministry, or a systematic approach to issues that affect the elderly," Sister L'Esperance said.

A diocesan committee met in 1986 to examine the needs of the elderly and sub-

mitted to Bishop Matthew H. Clark a report calling for such a coordinating body. That recommendation was also contained in the report the Commission on Aging developed for the state bishops' conference.

No diocesan body to coordinate ministry to the elderly as yet exists. But at the Jan. 13 meeting of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, Father John Mulligan, vicar general of the diocese, sought input on the issue of ministry to the elderly, and distributed a report summarizing efforts thus far and perceived needs for the future.

In an interview with the *Catholic Courier*, Father Mulligan reported that a diocesan task force was set up last fall to examine ministry to the elderly, to consider possible diocesan sponsorship of the Mercy Center with the Aging.

The task force, convened by Father Mulligan, has consulted with the 34 parishes for which the center has provided educational programs. "What interests us is that it (Mercy Center) is parish based, that it is an educational program, that it has proven to work, and it has some good ecumenical possibilities," he said.

The vicar general said he expected the task force to deliver its recommendation to Bishop Clark within a month.

Until a decision about the task force proposal is made, or until a coordinating body is created, the diocese will continue to reach out to the elderly through its parishes, chaplains at health-care facilities, and its offices of social ministry.

At the same time, the elderly also must be open to making use of what is now available to them and of the talents they have, Bedford observed.

"It doesn't help your mind and your disposition to just vegetate and wait for the Grim Reaper," Bedford said. "It's a beautiful world that God created. You've gotta dance. You've gotta rejoice."



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