

Bread baker shares gifts at age 96

ROCHESTER — In the miracle of the loaves and fishes, Jesus created enough food to feed thousands of people.

In her own way, Silvestra Ferrara has also fed thousands.

And at age 96, she shows no signs of letting up.

Ferrara, a member of St. Francis Xavier/Holy Redeemer Parish, has earned a well-deserved reputation for the quality and quantity of bread, cookies, and bread crumbs she produces.

When Ferrara bakes cookies, for example, she doesn't just make a single batch. She makes three, four or five batches at once. When she makes bread crumbs for the parish's spaghetti dinner, she turns out 35 pounds of them.

Ferrara, who was born in Sicily, shares that abundance with fellow parishioners, neighbors and even people who stop by to visit her home on the city's northeast side.

In addition to her baking, Ferrara is deeply involved in the worship life of her parish. She makes altar linens, and each morning before 8 a.m. Mass she goes to the church to clean, prepare the vessels, and ready the altar. Ferrara is also a eucharistic minister at Saturday evening Masses.

During her own quiet time, she recites the rosary daily, and reads an Italian prayer book — after learning to read at age 66.

"She's a remarkable woman," said Father William Leone, who served as Ferrara's pastor for three years. "She was there every day and (for) every parish activity."

The priest added, "She's a great example of living faith. She was always just so constant."

Ferrara — who came to the United States in 1910 at the age of 16 — has a habit of constancy. She married her late husband, Frank, on June 24, 1915, and the two remained together until his death in 1971. In addition to living in the same house for the past 42 years, Ferrara worked as a finisher at a clothing factory for 46 years.

Still active in the kitchen and the parish, Ferrara counters the notion that the elderly are somehow frail or helpless.

Asked what keeps her going, Ferrara shrugged and answered, "God don't want me yet."

And referring to all that she does, Ferrara said simply, "This belong for God."

— Lee Strong



Silvestra Ferrara prepares cookies in the kitchen of her daughter's home.



Ferrara gestures while her daughter, Sarah Marino, and her friend, Doris Ratforth, join in the fun.



Ferrara lights a votive candle at St. Francis Xavier/Holy Redeemer Church before morning Mass.



Ferrara walks her dog, Queenie, through her grape arbor to the garden.

Photographs by
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