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Senior Lifestyles

Priest: Alcoholism among elderly on the rise

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Alcoholism among the elderly is on the rise, a Catholic priest who founded and runs an alcoholism treatment center in Maryland recently told a congressional subcommittee.

It often goes untreated or is misdiagnosed, according to the priest and other witnesses at a hearing in February of the Subcommittee on Health and Long Term Care of the House Select Committee on Aging. The witnesses cited loneliness, failing health and changing family and social situations as factors that contribute to alcoholism late in life.

Sulpician Father Joseph C. Martin, whose treatment center is in Havre de Grace, Md., said alcoholism among the elderly is becoming a major problem at least partially because people are living longer and life's pressures that draw them into drinking are exacerbated as they age.

"Alcohol is hazardous for the young simply because they are living in very immature, undeveloped bodies, highly susceptible to addiction," Father Martin told the subcommittee. "The elderly

are living in bodies whose parts are wearing out, and they, too, become highly susceptible to addiction."

The witnesses said often family members and even doctors don't attempt to treat older alcoholics for their drinking using arguments like, "He's 79 years old and drinking is his only pleasure," or "He's just too old. He'd never quit drinking."

Maurine Baker, coordinator of Older Adult Services for Alcohol Services of Cleveland, Ohio, said treatment works for older people as well or better than for those who are younger.

Father Martin concurred. "What I see in an elderly person who responds to treatment and becomes involved in Alcoholics Anonymous is someone who has been given another reason to live," he said. "Enthusiasm is created. Being of use to others plays a role in their happiness that nothing else can."

In her testimony, Rep. Mary Rose Oaker, D-Ohio, said up to half of nursing home residents have alcohol-related problems. Dr. Anne Geller, of the American Society of Addiction Medicine, said the number of elderly people with alcohol problems will in-

crease, particularly as more women who have matured in an age when it was more acceptable for women to drink reach their senior years.

At the same hearing, Michael K. Deaver, once deputy chief of staff to President Ronald Reagan, said the federal government has all but ignored treatment and education about alcohol and drugs in favor of enforcement.

Deaver described how alcoholism affected his life in the government and as a lobbyist. In 1987 he was convicted of lying to a House subcommittee and to a grand jury investigating ethics violations. In his defense Deaver claimed alcoholism had clouded his memory. He was fined \$100,000 and ordered to perform 1,500 hours of public service.

Deaver said Father Martin's treatment program has helped him recover.

He condemned what he said was a government fixation on the criminal justice aspect of drug and alcohol abuse.

"The problem isn't demand. The problem is treating the disease," he said. "What we need to be doing is spending 70 percent teaching young people this is like cancer and tuberculosis."

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Sisters of Mercy president to speak at cathedral March 1

ROCHESTER — Sister Doris Gottmoeller, president of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, will be the featured speaker on Sunday, March 1, during the sisters' second public prayer service honoring the 150th anniversary of Catherine McAuley's death.



The service will take place at 2:30

p.m. in Sacred Heart Cathedral, 296 Flower City Park. All are welcome.

Sister Gottmoeller replaces Father Jan Sobrino of El Salvador, who was originally scheduled to speak. She will speak on "Preferential Love of and Solidarity with the Poor," a favorite theme of McAuley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy.

A native of Cleveland, Ohio, the Mercy sisters' current president was elected in July, 1991.

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- June 10-"Annie"; Art Park Theatre with dinner at Rib Cage
- June 23-Geritol Follies, Hamilton Ontario (Evening Show) Carmans Dinner buffet
- July 1-Ft. Erie Race Track includes dinner and transportation.

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