

Parents, adult children must communicate needs



By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

VICTOR — Picture the following scenario:

An elderly widow chastises her dutiful, adult daughter for allegedly lacking respect because she asks questions that highlight her mother's increasingly dependent state.

Mother: "You just don't know what it's like without your father. Nothing's the same any more. He used to take care of things like the faucets, and now they're dripping again."

Daughter: "I give up!"
Many adult offspring may feel tempted from time to time to "give up" on their elderly parents, who face the lifestyle constrictions sometimes imposed by old age.

Yet, by using the proper communication and organizational skills, senior citizens and their children can work out arrangements in which parents retain a sense of independence and their children lovingly fulfill their duty to care for them.

Such was the message conveyed by Sisters Anne Malloy and Gratia L'Esperance of Rochester's Mercy Center With the Aging to participants during Session II of a six-part "Family Education Series on Aging." The program was held last Thursday night, March 19.

About 40 people attended the program at St. Patrick's School of Religion, 200 High St. The session's theme was: "The development and the needs of older people and their adult children; family conflict, responsibilities and guilt."

The Mercy sisters used such devices as the mother/daughter role-playing sequence to help participants clarify for themselves the needs of both the aging person and the care provider.

Sister Malloy, director of the Mercy Center, said the mother and daughter in the role-play "are like two ships that passed in the night." Rather than listening to each other, the two women simply expressed their own frustrations with each other's inability to adjust to the lifestyle changes that aging can bring.

Sister Malloy offered some guidelines for adults who find themselves caring for their aging parents. Some of the tips she gave were also adapted from materials provided by St. John's Home and the Jewish Home, both in Rochester.

• "The worst fear of older adults is

to be seen as childish," Sister Malloy said. "A parent's right to respect should never diminish."

To that end, adult children should always give their aging parents the the most independence as possible. Even parents who suffer some mental incapacitation should always be consulted on any decision that affects their lives, she emphasized.

• Adult children should be careful not to take on a condescending "parenting" role in their relationship with their aging parents. The grown child's role is to *care* for their parents, not *raise* them, Sister Malloy said.

• Care-givers should seek the help of their siblings. As many family members as possible should be consulted on any decisions regarding an aging parent.

• Care-givers need to take time for themselves, rejuvenating their own marriages and personal relationships. Spouses have broken up when one feels the other is spending too much time with an aging parent, Sister Malloy warned.

• Use as many available resources as possible. Extensive support services and groups exist for both the elderly and their offspring, Sister Malloy noted.

Sister L'Esperance, the Mercy Center's assistant director, noted that many adult children are hungry for information on how to relate to and take care of their aging parents.

"(The series) is striking a nerve in the sense that people are concerned with elder-care as well as child-care as an issue," she said.

Sponsored by St. Patrick's Church, the education series is one of several education programs the Mercy Center has offered since its inception in 1983. The center has provided information on elderly issues to more than 3,000 people at about 80 churches, according to Sister L'Esperance.

Upcoming topics for the St. Patrick's series are: *March 26* — "Chronic care and conditions; home care agencies and services; Better communication skills between parents/adult children;" *April 2* — "Legal planning; health-care decision making with a proxy;" *April 9* — "Acute hospital care, nursing home care: What to expect."

The sixth session, entitled "Where do we go from here? Our call to service," is yet to be scheduled.

For information, call the Mercy Center at 716/235-8731.

RCOA offering free help with spring yardwork

ROCHESTER — The Regional Council of Aging is offering free help with spring yardwork, window washing, garage and basement clean-out and other spring cleaning chores. Individual volunteers and volunteer groups perform the work.

This "Home Help for Seniors" program is available to low- and middle-income residents in Brighton, Chili, East Rochester, Gates, Henrietta, Penfield, Pittsford, Webster and Perinton.

Volunteers are needed for the program, which is geared to home-bound and handicapped residents. Projects

may be used as fundraisers for qualified groups.

For information on receiving the service or becoming a volunteer, call 716/586-8921.

Volunteer drivers needed for senior service group

ROCHESTER — Winton Senior Services needs volunteer drivers to provide rides for senior citizens going to doctor's appointments and other activities.

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