



morning rounds at St. Mary's Hospital, Deacon Ona and Christopher Blicharski, M.D. in a chronic patient who is ventilator dependent.



St. Mary's physician is surrounded by patients during one of his frequent visits to St. Peter's Kitchen in Rochester July 16.

Photos  
by  
Kellie Mc Cann



Robert Keefe discusses his prognosis with Deacon Ona and Susan Lucchesi, R.N. after a gastroscopic procedure was performed.

moral teachings in the practice of their profession.

Thus, in addition to our annual spiritual retreats and symposia on medical ethics, we participate in serving the Easter dinner at St. Peter's Kitchen, 681 Brown St., and in our traditional annual health-awareness day with an outdoor summer picnic held at the grounds of Ss. Peter and Paul's Church, 720 West Main St. The health day usually draws about 500 or more guests who take advantage of our health-screening services — in addition to the picnic.

When time allows me to get out of my office for lunch, I try to spend this time at St. Peter's Kitchen. This allows me to meet the guests at the kitchen just by talking to them, and to answer some of their medical concerns while serving them juice, water or coffee, or at times helping the children to get their meals.

On one occasion, I had to attend to a medical emergency when one of our guests suddenly developed a seizure while eating. I had to use the spoon to keep his airway open and to remove the food particles from his mouth to prevent aspiration and asphyxiation. The person began turning blue from lack of air and lost consciousness, but by the time the ambulance arrived, he had recovered and regained consciousness. That was a rather scary experience.

How does one react when a person who is known to be HIV positive due to drug use hugs you? This happens to me at the soup kitchen. One of the patients at St. Mary's — whom I have seen in consultation — hugs me whenever I see him. I simply have to reciprocate and give him a bear hug.

Finally, in response to the rising poverty rate

in Rochester — an increase of 28 percent from 10 years ago, according to recent reports — the health-care volunteers at the kitchen were blessed when Ss. Peter and Paul's parish council approved the health center's opening next to the soup kitchen (see related story).

The goal is to provide guests with access to health-care screenings, medical/nursing concerns or health education and assistance to the appropriate health-care facilities that suit their needs. It is our prayer that we can enkindle hope by being available to the poor members of our community.

Our efforts are only effective with the help of volunteers — physicians, nurses, counselors, lay people and social workers, and through the financial support of our generous donors.

One may wonder how medical professionals who try to provide medical care for the poor in these conditions get the courage and strength to reach out to the seemingly hopeless situation. I believe that it is simply total dependence on God's grace.

The Eucharist is a central part of my life, as it provides the necessary sustenance for whatever I am called to do. Every morning, my wife and I start our day with the celebration of the Eucharist. I try to spend time in prayer and meditation from 5:45-6:30 a.m. and a half-hour at night before bedtime. I believe in Henri Nouwen's statement that ministry should be grounded in spirituality.

Thus, our Lord's call continues to invite us to be aware of His presence within us but more so in the poor. The challenge that faces us is how to respond to this call.

## Kitchen to 'serve' health care

ROCHESTER — Deacon Fernando Ona, M.D., has added a twist to the old saying, "If the mountain won't come to Mohammed, Mohammed will go to the mountain."

In this case, the poor residents around Ss. Peter and Paul Church, 720 W. Main St. signify the "mountain." And "Mohammed" would be health care, which Deacon Ona and his fellow volunteers provide on a regular basis.

The doctor and permanent deacon is opening a health clinic at St. Peter and Paul Parish in the basement where the parish's food ministry, St. Peter's Kitchen, 681 Brown St., is located.

"The idea is we will have access to the people who use the soup kitchen for their meals," Deacon Ona explained.

Named after the recently beatified priest who served lepers in Hawaii a century ago, Damien Clinic will provide health screening and education for people who eat at the kitchen, Deacon Ona said.

Deacon Ona said he chose the name because Father Damien was a member of the same congregation that serves the parish — the Sacred Heart Fathers — and because "of the metaphor of the leprosy of the inner city."

The clinic will initially operate on Saturdays while the kitchen is open. Eventually, Deacon Ona said, it will be open additional days as more doctors volunteer their time.

One of the reasons behind locating the clinic at the kitchen is to help neighborhood residents overcome their fears about the health-care system, Deacon Ona said.

"A lot of people do not come to (medical facilities) because they do not know what to do," the deacon added. "The paper work is too much for them."

"But this way," he concluded, "they will see us and get to know us and trust us."

— Lee Strong