

SENIOR
FEATURE

Couple brings Communion to aged residents

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

WEBSTER — Leo Schwenger makes no bones about it.

He has sold his soul.

But Schwenger did not barter with that legendary trickster, the devil. "I make a deal with God," Schwenger acknowledged. "As long as you keep me in good health, I'll keep working for you."

Apparently, God has kept his end of the bargain. At 83, Schwenger walks sprightly as he and his wife distribute the Eucharist to Catholic residents of Maplewood Nursing Home, 100 Daniel Drive.

Schwenger's wife of almost 60 years, Evelyn, explained that she would not be so bold as to cut deals with the Divine Lord like her husband did.

Nonetheless, she shares his good health as well as his age. The couple, parishioners of Holy Trinity Church, 1460 Ridge Road, seem to thoroughly enjoy ministering to their fellow Catholics at the nursing home.

"You come because you know they're so grateful that you're here, and, as God tells us, treat these people as you'd treat me," Evelyn commented.

Back in the mid-1970s, as a Legion of Mary volunteer, Evelyn assisted at a Mass for residents regularly celebrated by the late Father Paul J. Cuddy, a *Catholic Courier* columnist and cleric well known for his devotion to the elderly and the sick.

Leo and other volunteers also helped out, performing other services for the residents such as shopping, the couple noted. Since November, 1992, the Schwengers have celebrated a short prayer service each Sunday for the residents. They also assist at a full-fledged Mass two Tuesdays out of each month.

"All I can say is that they're just wonderful people, very devoted," said Annette Bobec, Maplewood's director of nurses. "I know that the residents do appreciate the fact that they're so faithful."

Leo, a Webster native, has known Evelyn since 1916 when her family moved to this community from Rochester. As children, they attended Holy Trinity School



Lauren McFalls/Photo intern

(Above, top right) Leo and Evelyn Schwenger lead residents at Webster's Maplewood Nursing Home in a Feb. 13 prayer service. (Below) Leo Schwenger distributes Communion to Helen Hays. The Schwengers, parishioners at Holy Trinity in Webster, lead a short prayer service each Sunday and also help with a semimonthly celebration on Tuesdays.

together.

"I knew him, but I didn't pay much attention to him," Evelyn said with a smile about the former parish altar boy.

She did notice Leo when they performed together in Holy Trinity's drama club, and the two were married in 1934. They have continued to remain active in the parish, with Leo becoming a eucharistic minister and Evelyn teaching religious education classes.

Along the way, the couple had five children, three of whom — Robert, Dick and Jeanne, are married.

A daughter, Kay, a Sister of Mercy, is pastoral associate at St. Michael's Parish, Rochester, part of the Community of Hope cluster along with Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier.

And a son, Ronald, is a Basilian priest and principal of St. Pius the Tenth High School in Albuquerque, N.M. Father Schwenger was ordained in 1968.

"My vocation to religious life and the priesthood was really very much fostered by my family," he recalled in a phone interview. "Back then, every night, we had the family rosary after dinner."

Hence, the fact that Kay and Ronald took up the religious life came as no surprise to Evelyn. "I prayed that one of them would take up a vocation," she said.



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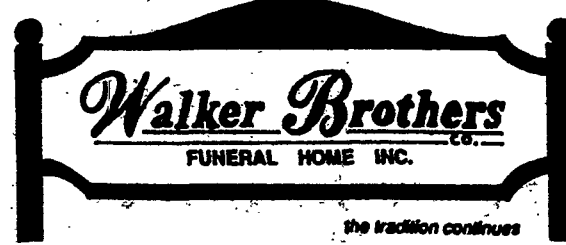
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