

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER



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Can children benefit from funerals?

Children are sensitive and emotional when a death in the family occurs. Children can benefit from a chance to attend the funeral and say their good byes. Like adults, children need some time to adjust and understand what has taken place. Seeing the deceased and understanding that death is different than life helps children avoid myths that suggest the deceased has only gone away or gone to sleep. Children who loved the deceased will gain from the chance to be a part of a meaningful ceremony. They should be told that the ceremony and viewing are special ways to remember the deceased. Naturally, children should only participate if they wish.

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Senior just keeps 'going and going'

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

ROCHESTER — Mattie Smith is walking a little slower these days because of a plastic knee she received last June to relieve pain from arthritis.

But even though the operation has forced Smith to cut back on some of her activities, the 85-year-old parishioner of the Community of Hope — consisting of Holy Redeemer, St. Michael's, St. Francis of Assisi and Our Lady of Mount Carmel parishes — is not about to let anything slow her down.

Twice each week, she helps out during lunch time at the Regional Council of the Aging's Garson Myers Senior Center, 79 N. Clinton Ave.

Smith is also waiting to start a new ministry through her parish in which she will call home-bound people or those people who simply need to hear a friendly voice.

That she wants to keep active is typical of Smith. Since coming to Rochester in the late 1930s, she regularly maintained a schedule that often included a full-time job, side work, and volunteer activities — ranging from teaching a young woman to read and write as a library volunteer to being a charter member of the diocesan Office of Black Ministries.

And she hasn't stopped since "retiring" in 1974.

"Anything she was asked to do, she would do," recalled Father Raymond H.



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer
Mattie Smith pauses for a photograph at Rochester's Garson Myers Senior Center where she volunteers twice a week.

Booth, the current pastor of St. Paul's Parish in Webster who was co-pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel from 1970-75. "The things she did, she never did for self aggrandizement. It came from her heart and her love for people."

"I don't know how I got mixed up in all those things," Smith laughed. Then she added, "Every time anybody called me to go, I would go."

Smith was born in Hillsborough, Ala. on June 15, 1909. She and her family moved to Nashville, then to Detroit, and back to Nashville before arriving in Rochester in 1938. Along the way, she had two children, Frances and Burley.

During her teenage years she followed in her father's footsteps by converting to Catholicism. Once in Rochester, she attended Our Lady of Lourdes Parish before later joining Holy Redeemer Parish.

She became involved with the Mother Cabrini Circle at the time of its founding in 1946. An interracial group, the Circle raised money to help send African-American children to Catholic schools. Smith later served as the organization's president for two years.

In addition to the Mother Cabrini Circle, she became involved with the Council of Inner City Catholic Parishes. That organization was created to deal with problems faced by inner-city parishes, and, in particular, with issues concerning Catholic schools, Father Booth explained.

In subsequent years, she became one of the charter members of the diocesan

Office of Black Ministry. She also served on the Catholic Family Center's board of directors from 1978-84

But Smith's activities extend beyond interracial efforts.

She was involved with the Model City's program for a number of years, traveling around the country "to get ideas about how to do things for the city," she explained. Smith later became involved with Senior Citizens of Model City, Inc., a group aiming for ways to improve services to senior citizens.

She also began visiting people she knew in area hospitals over the years. One day, she recalled, "a guy told me some of the people didn't have anyone to visit them." She added some of these people to her list of people to visit.

"I used to spend every Sunday afternoon after I left Mass visiting people," she said. "I'd go to the hospital, and not get home until late in the afternoon."

Although she has been forced somewhat to curtail her visits because of her knee problems, she said she's not about to give up on reaching out to others. She said she is looking forward to beginning "visits" by telephone once her parish supplies her with names and numbers.

Asked why she was still going strong at an age when most people begin taking it easy, Smith simply replied, "I don't know. I like to help people."

A moment later, she added, "I just keep going and going. If I've got something to do, I just do it."



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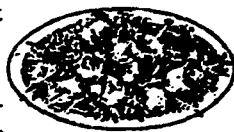
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