

Ministry brings parish even closer to neighbors

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Less than half a block separates the 125 St. Paul St. Plaza Apartments from Our Lady of Victory Church on Pleasant Street.

Yet that short span includes four lanes of downtown traffic, making elderly residents of the apartments skittish about attending functions at the church.

"It's hard for us to get across the street for church," resident Dolores Nobes said.

So instead, the parish staff brings its ministry to those who live in the 520-unit Plaza Apartments high-rise complex.

The Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph Parish staff launched an extensive outreach effort in January 1997 to better serve the Plaza Apartments tenants' spiritual needs. The list of activities includes First Friday Mass; Bible study; special holiday worship services; open forum discussions; and ministry to the sick and infirmed.

"Three-quarters of the people who come to the worship services do not come across the street (to the church)," noted Gene Zulauf, pastoral minister at Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph. Zulauf conducts most of ministry's programs.

Some seniors — fearful of becoming crime victims — even balked at leaving their rooms when the ministry began, said Father Winfried Kellner, Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph pastor.

"They'd lock their door and not come



Greg Franca/Staff photographer

Front, from left, Genevieve Ricciardo, Clarice Dewind and Rose Hennelly join in a candlelight service preceding a Bible study in the Community Room of 125 St. Paul St. Plaza Apartments, Rochester, Dec. 15. Gene Zulauf, pastoral minister for Our Lady of Victory/ St. Joseph Parish, officiated.

out," Father Kellner said. "But Gene (Zulauf) has been able to alleviate that."

Zulauf said that he encourages people by being upbeat and outgoing.

"I'm the hugging guy around here," Zulauf said with a smile.

Nobes applauded Zulauf's efforts, saying, "He gives off a lot of warmth. It's very contagious. He certainly has been a great asset; he's such a warm and caring person."

Most of the ministry's events are held in the complex's Community Room. Father Kellner noted that Plaza Apartment administration has been "very good about

giving us time and space." The apartments were funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

One of the ministry's most popular programs is a pair of discussion groups held on Mondays and Tuesdays. These open forum gatherings touch on religious and social issues as well as self-help topics, such as how to make friends.

"Basically, the forum is about all subjects. It's not just about religion," resident Marie D'Aiutolo said. "It's a learning and growing experience."

"It's very interesting. It gives us an out-

let," Nobes added.

Despite the wide range of topics, D'Aiutolo said, one important rule is observed by the discussion groups at all times.

"No gossip!" she emphasized.

Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph also coordinates a monthly First Friday Mass in the Community Room, as well as a new ministry known as "The Sunshine Club."

"If somebody is going to the hospital or is ill, we send a sunshine card," resident Helen Rudman explained.

During Advent and Lent, Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph offers weekly Bible study and special religious services for the Plaza Apartments community. In addition, the Monday and Tuesday discussion groups enhanced their holiday season by holding a joint Thanksgiving dinner.

Although many participants are Catholic, Father Kellner said that the ministry is "ecumenical" in nature.

"Everybody is welcome, no matter what," said resident Celia Donahue.

Many positive results have already emerged from the ministry, resident Sue Secore said.

"It really took a lot of courage on some people's parts to come down here. Now we have that bond," Secore remarked.

Another resident, Anna Willis, agreed that the sense of community has swelled due to the new ministry provided by Our Lady of Victory/St. Joseph.

"I find that I talk to people more than I used to," Willis commented.



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