

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

96-year-old's active schedule includes daily round of visits

By Dave Hrbacek
Catholic News Service

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Senior citizens visit other seniors in hospitals and nursing homes every day. But it is unusual when the visitor is older than most of the people she sees.

At 96, Mary Hamilton of St. Peter Claver Parish in St. Paul might be described as well beyond her golden years.

Try telling that to her. As often as she can, Hamilton hops city buses to hospitals and nursing homes. Though she walks with two canes and has some sight and hearing problems, she carries her bright eyes and cheerful smile wherever she goes, not to mention plenty of stories and homemade gifts.

"I started during World War II. My son was in the service and I'd visit hospitals," said Hamilton, who lives in a high rise several blocks from St. Peter Claver and has been a member of the church since 1915.

"The poor soldiers. Some of them didn't have anyone to visit them. And, some of them didn't even know the war was over," she told *The Catholic Spirit*, newspaper of the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis.

She enjoyed the visits so much, she has kept them up through the years. The number of sick and elderly who have been graced by her charm and infectious chuckle probably number in the hundreds, if not thousands.

Yet, Hamilton could keep just as busy visiting her own family members — they number about 80, from her great-great-grandchildren to the three of her five children who are still living. "I know all of



CNS/Dave Hrbacek

At 96, Mary Hamilton travels around St. Paul, Minn., visiting hospitals and nursing homes.

their birthdays. I give them gifts for Christmas and birthdays. I remember them all," she noted.

Her gift-giving extends to people she visits at hospitals and nursing homes. Among the more popular items are bedroom slippers she knits.

"At Christmas, I make little stockings — 500 of them — and put candy canes in them," said Hamilton, who wants to keep active. "I just like doing it. I like visiting people who are ill and doing favors for them."

Pope: Value older people's role

CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy (CNS) — Society should re-examine its values concerning the elderly and adjust its compartment toward them accordingly, Pope John Paul II said.

"In industrially and technologically developed societies, the condition of the elderly is ambivalent," the pontiff said, explaining that old people are becoming less integrated into family and social life while "their role becomes ever more important, above all in the care and education of grandchildren."

The 79-year-old pope made his observations on aging during his July 25 Sunday noon prayer with visitors outside the papal summer villa in Castel Gandolfo.

He noted that the next day's liturgy was to commemorate Ss. Joachim and Anne, traditionally considered to have been Mary's parents.

This occasion "induces me to say a word or two about old age and its value,"

Pope John Paul said.

He pointed out that in the countries where the elderly are moved out of mainstream life, "young couples, in fact, find grandparents an indispensable help."

"On the one hand," he said, "the elderly person is marginalized, while being sought after on the other."

The situation highlights "the characteristic imbalance of a social model dominated by the economy and by profit, which tends to penalize 'nonproductive' groups, assigning value to people ... for their utility."

A long life has intrinsic value, the pope said, because life itself is a gift of God. Beyond that, he added, life experience is accompanied by "understanding (and) lessons of which the elderly person is the custodian."

"For this reason," the pope noted, "in all cultures, old age is synonymous with wisdom and equilibrium."

Unity Health housing complex accepting applications

Unity Health System has announced that applications are available for income-eligible seniors for R.L. Edwards Manor, Rochester's newest senior housing complex, 615 Clarissa St.

The complex, made up of 50 one-bedroom apartments, is expected to open in November. The manor is sponsored by the Frederick Douglass Housing Devel-

opment Community, managed by Unity, and is an equal housing opportunity community.

More information is available by calling 716/426-5005, or writing R.L. Edwards Manor c/o Housing Administration, Unity Health System, 2300 Buffalo Road, Building 800, Rochester, NY 14624.

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