



Rebecca Gosselin/Catholic Courier

Lois Rixner (center), who volunteers at Bethany House in Rochester through the Ignatian Lay Volunteer Corps, talks March 14 with fellow volunteer Mary Starks, a student at Carroll College in Montana.

Service and reflection combined in program

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Lois Rixner, a retired college computer science instructor, can't imagine a life without volunteering.

"It's almost like a necessity now," she said as she sat in the living room of Rochester's Bethany House, a Catholic Worker facility for homeless women and their children. "I couldn't just sit home and play and do social things."

Rixner came to Bethany House through the Ignatian Lay Volunteer Corps, which recruits people 50 and older with the slogan: "Your most important work may not begin until after you retire."

The Baltimore-based ILVC was founded in 1995 as way of enabling retired lay men and women to minister to the poor and reflect on that ministry. The corps now includes volunteers in 12 regions throughout the country and maintains a Web site at www.ilvc.org. According to the corps' national office, an ILVC volunteer is called to devote the equivalent of two days per week to a ministry or ministries matched with his or her skills and talents; meet regularly with a spiritual "reflector" or adviser to discuss service experiences and spiritual growth; attend retreats during the year; meet monthly with other volunteers in the same area; and pray, read spiritual material and keep a journal.

Michelle Cooley serves as ILVC regional director for the area encompassing Syracuse, Elmira and Amherst as well as Rochester.

"It's really not like a job because you're meeting and working with people doing things they want to do,"

said Cooley, who maintains an office at McQuaid Jesuit High School in Brighton.

Rixner learned of the corps last year in the bulletin of her parish, Fairport's St. John of Rochester, and was attracted to its combination of spiritual reflection and service. Her ILVC work includes helping out on Wednesdays at Rochester's Problem Pregnancy Help Center, and volunteering on Fridays at Bethany House, where she does everything from helping to prepare meals to putting together bags of donated food for the needy.

"Your other job is just to listen," she said, noting that she often lends a sympathetic ear to the Bethany guests. "I listen to these women's stories, and they have learned how to take one day at a time and put it all in God's hands."

Jesuit Father Francis J. McNamara, alumni director at McQuaid, serves as a "reflector" for the regional ILVC. He noted that volunteers such as Rixner are often motivated by gratitude.

"I think a lot of the volunteers feel like, 'What should I give to the Lord after all he has given me?'" Father McNamara said.

Rixner added that she's learned through the corps what it's like to volunteer at places such as Bethany House in one's retirement.

"As a young person coming here, I wouldn't have had the homemaking skills, the listening skills and the acceptance-of-other-people skills," she said.

For information about ILVC, contact Cooley at 585/473-1130, ext. 229.

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