



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Heritage Christian Home residents Sue St. John and Anthony Cervasio contribute to the offering during a March 14 Mass at St. Joseph's Church in Penfield. St. John, Cervasio and fellow resident Kathleen Sanfilippo regularly attend Sunday Mass at the parish, which is located a few hundred yards from Heritage Christian Home.

Heritage residents enjoy the Mass

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

PENFIELD — If Anthony Cervasio asks you the name of your father, be careful how you answer. According to the resident of a home operated by Heritage Christian Services, there's only one correct response.

"Howard" is the name of your father, Cervasio will tell you — as in "Howard Father, who art in heaven."

Dan Farrell, the residential home's former manager, shared a laugh with Cervasio as he talked about how Cervasio likes to kid people by making the pun on the Lord's Prayer. But his Catholic faith is something Cervasio takes seriously, Farrell noted, as he and Cervasio discussed attending Mass every Sunday at St. Joseph's Church, which is within walking distance of the home.

"Do you like church?" Farrell shouted to Cervasio, who has some hearing difficulty. "Yes," Cervasio replied. "Why do you like church?" Farrell asked. "Pray to God," Cervasio said.

Cervasio is one of nine residents at the home. It is one of several op-

erated by Heritage Christian Services, which serves people with developmental disabilities. Three of the residents — including Cervasio — attend 10:30 a.m. Mass every Sunday at St. Joseph's, according to Maisha Ajavon, the home's assistant manager.

Cervasio and fellow resident Sue St. John both use wheelchairs, but the church is accessible to people with handicaps, according to Father Kevin P. Murphy, pastor. He noted the church has a wide area where a pew was taken out to make room for people in wheelchairs, and the church's eucharistic ministers go to Cervasio and St. John to distribute Communion. In addition to Cervasio and St. John, another resident, Kathleen Sanfilippo, also attends Mass at St. Joseph's.

The church is not only physically accessible, but emotionally accessible as well, according to Ajavon and Farrell, who spoke highly of how parishioners have related to their residents.

"They're very accepting," Ajavon said of St. Joseph's parishioners. Farrell agreed, noting that people with developmental disabilities are sometimes greeted with stares



Daniel Kennison, a resident counselor at Heritage Christian Home, helps Cervasio off the bus that takes him to Mass.

when they're out in public, but not at St. Joseph's.

"It's like family," Farrell said. "It doesn't matter if you're in a wheelchair."

Father Murphy noted that the residents are familiar to the parish,

having attended Mass for years now.

"I think they're just part of the community," he said of the group-home residents. "I think they're warmly welcomed, and (parishioners are) glad to have them here. They extend the sign of peace to them."

Cervasio particularly likes the sign of peace, Farrell said, as well as the prayers of the faithful. St. John said she likes seeing babies at the church, and making the sign of the cross. She added that she likes to "shake" whenever music is played during Mass.

On a more serious note, St. John faced a life-threatening health problem from December to January that has since abated, according to Ajavon. The assistant manager noted that St. John said she made her way through her ordeal by praying and going to church.

Farrell said the group home's staff tries to support all the residents' spirituality as much as possible.

"We say grace before meals ... and do the little things that encourage their spiritual growth," he said. "You can care for their physical and their emotional needs, but there's a spiritual need that all people have."