Alzheimer’s specialist gives information, suggestions for providing care to those with the disease

By Laura Deavers
Editor

Forgetting a person’s name or where you put the television remote might raise the question of whether you have Alzheimer’s Disease or just getting forgetful.

Jo Huey, a consultant and trainer for Alzheimer’s Caregiver Institute in New Orleans, reassured those attending the workshop she gave in August at the Catholic Life Center that as people get older they forget things, but being forgetful is not the same thing as having Alzheimer’s Disease.

To explain the difference between Alzheimer’s and forgetfulness, Huey gave an example of a person looking for a set of car keys. When the keys are found, it is possible to recall where they were. But, if when you look for the keys you don’t remember why you were looking for them or what they are for, then it is time to call the doctor. Huey said another indicator of the disease could be the person does not remember what the doctor said after the visit.

Huey’s message was for those who are caring for family or friends. She emphasized the importance of caregivers caring for themselves as well and gave many suggestions of how to do this.

She was able to speak from her own experience of caring for her mother who had Alzheimer’s. “I thought I knew it all because I was a professional in that field,” said Huey. “She was always fine when she was with me. No one could do as good a job as me.”

Huey admitted her life changed when her mother was living with her all of the time and she had to make sure someone was there to care for her mother when she had to travel for business.

“Caregivers are doing the best they can but feel they have not done enough. I know you find it hard to ask for help, but you cannot do this alone.”

Huey told the caregivers to get rid of any guilty feelings they had, and, “Help is a wonderful word.”

She stated that the most important thing the caregiver can do is to be around for the person until the end of the person’s life because the person will not be able to make any decisions.

“Dementia is not a diagnosis, it is a symptom,” Huey repeated to insure her audience would not forget. “Forgetfulness can be caused by a person who is over stressed. It doesn’t mean the person has Alzheimer’s.”

There are many symptoms of Alzheimer’s and people will manifest the symptoms in many different ways. “It is important to remember the illness is not the same for any two people,” Huey said. Just as there are many symptoms for the flu and different people will have various indications that they have flu, it is the same with Alzheimer’s.

Each person needs a good medical workup, but it might be difficult to get the person to the doctor. “With Alzheimer’s it is a diagnosis of ruling out what it is not. The only real way of knowing if a person has Alzheimer’s is through an autopsy,” Huey explained. This progressive, degenerative brain disease, which is caused by plaque attacking brain cells, can be determined only by an autopsy. As the brain cells die, the disease gets worse.

To help the audience understand the process of the disease, Huey described the brain as a file cabinet and the patient trying to retrieve information from the files, some of which go back to early childhood and others that are only hours, days or weeks old. It is when the process for retrieving the information, which Huey called the “gizmo,” no longer functions as it should that the disease manifests itself.

“Sometimes the symptoms of the disease go fast,” Huey said. “The eraser is going fast.” For others the disease might progress slowly, over many years.

Through the knowledge she has gained over the years of being a caregiver and assisting caregivers, Huey gave suggestions, what she called the Ten Absolutes, of things caregivers can say to the person with dementia to keep situations calm.

Never argue, instead agree.

Never reason, instead divert.

Never say, “You can’t,” instead find out what they can do.

Never shame, instead distract.

Never lecture, instead reassure.

Never say, “I told you,” instead repeat and re-group.

Never say, “You can’t,” instead find out what they can do.

Never command or demand, instead ask and model.

Never condescend, instead ask and model.

Never force, instead reinforce.
Don’t go it alone: advice on financial planning for senior years

By Marylynn G. Hewitt
Catholic News Service

DETOUR – Although planning for a financially sound retirement can be an overwhelming process, it doesn’t have to be if people start making decisions about it before they retire and seek professional help to steer them in the right direction.

Jim Lampertius, an attorney in Farmington Hills, knows it usually takes a trigger point to prompt most people into getting their financial and legal documents prepared for their senior years. “There is an element of procrastination, and for a few years I was like the shoemaker without shoes,” said the managing attorney at Lampertius and Associates.

“Our international travel was a spur-ring point for us,” said Lampertius, who adopted four Guatemalan children with his wife.

“Guardianship for minor children is a good example of a trigger point,” he said. “When we adopted our first child, we really knew we had to expand beyond a simple will and medical and financial powers of attorney.”

As an attorney who also holds a graduate certificate from Wayne State University’s Institute of Gerontology, he has seen the court system shatter families who did not plan ahead. That experience and his growing family “was our main impetus to do a living trust as a married couple.”

Living trusts are growing in popularity, he said, “and the true value of a trust is to protect beneficiaries.” That could include such instances as a child with a disability or a spouse who is ill.

Anticipating that help, and providing guidance on that help, ensures the best respect of the dignity for the person,” said Lampertius, a lifelong Catholic. “It also provides the most effective way to get the best proper care and administration.”

While many consider the financial retirement portion of their estate planning early on in their career, they often overlook medical directives, which vary by state.

Lampertius said it is important for a person at any stage of life to make sure their “financial and legal health is in order to properly respond to life as it evolves.” In the past 20 years, he said, retirement planning has emphasized retirement accounts that enable money to be inherited or managed at death without accelerating all the taxes.

Not all retirees are able to afford a trained professional to help them get their finances in order and may also have difficulty with organizing expenses which is where Catholic Charities agencies often come in.

Several Catholic Charities agencies provide programs to help seniors understand and manage their personal finances and often also provide bill-paying and budgeting assistance.

Catholic Charities Hawaii offers a Money Management Assistance to the Elderly Program that fills the growing need of many elderly who cannot manage their own finances because of their increasing frailty, forgetfulness and confusion. The service allows elders to continue to live independently in their own homes and communities and avoid premature moves into nursing homes.

For those who are not in financial straits and not quite ready to retire, the AARP recommends another key way to stretch earnings for the later years: Keep working.

More than 60 percent of workers say they expect to retire at age 65 or later, according to a survey by the Employee Benefit Research Institute, up from 45 percent in 1991.

The 2008 book “Working Longer: The Solution to the Retirement Income Challenge” advises prolonging retirement for at least two to four years to preserve one’s retirement savings and delay taking Social Security.
Living by the maxim, “To whom much is given, much is expected.”

Where in the world can you find Cheri McDaniel? Wherever there is a need.

Cheri has been a lifelong humanitarian. After building a business and raising a family, she moved to Mexico for four years to do volunteer work. In 2008, she returned to Baton Rouge and a new home at St. James Place.

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“St. James Place is set on 52 acres with just 12 acres of buildings. That's a lot of nature to enjoy.” She also enjoys the quality of services offered, choice of restaurants, travel and cultural opportunities, her fellow residents and the staff.

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Today, Cheri is as busy with her humanitarian work as ever. She's planning workshops to encourage Louisiana youth to stay in school. She's raising funds for a medical clinic and a job-training center in a remote area of Africa where she will be traveling this fall. She also leads assisted living and Alzheimer’s care residents at St. James Place in singing every week as a form of therapy.

As if she weren't busy enough, Cheri is also writing her memoirs. "I've got a lot more to do!" she says. "We're given talents to make the world a better place. We shouldn't lay those aside just because we reach a magic age."

Find out more about why Cheri McDaniel chose St. James Place.

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Alsen seniors eager to attend Catholic Charities weekly group

By Barbara Chenevert
Staff Writer

On Wednesday mornings Mary Johnson wakes up eager to get on the road. She will be heading to the Alsen Community Center where she gathers once a week with about 20 other seniors for a morning of friendship, education and prayer.

“I wake up thinking about it. I’m in a hurry to get here. I enjoy the people and it is good fellowship,” said the widow who lives by herself most of the time. Her son stays with her occasionally.

Johnson is part of the Alsen Senior Support Group, coordinated by Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Baton Rouge to provide education, spirituality and exercise to the elderly of the Alsen community of north Baton Rouge.

Most of the ladies in the group are in their 70s or 80s, and one is 90, said Diane Pitts, who directs the program for Catholic Charities. “They love it. They look forward to coming. I look forward to it too. It’s work, but it’s fun. When you leave here, you feel so good because they are just so appreciative.”

Each meeting begins with a time of prayer and meditation. Then several activities are planned. There could be a speaker from the LSU Agricultural Center talking on nutrition, or an informational meeting about using debit cards. Some Wednesday meetings center on an exercise or yoga class, while others include bingo where prizes are practical items the women need. Lunch is always included.

On a recent Wednesday Pitts talked to the group about preventing falls. “You know you all live in those older houses that are not as accommodating for the elderly,” she told the group as she explained the importance of having a safe environment.

“It’s impressive that they are as positive and as healthy as they are,” said social worker Lynne Jordan, who attributes their condition to the spiritual and emotional support they receive from the group. They definitely turn to God for support and guidance, she said.

Jordon, who is on contract with the Behavioral Health Department of Catholic Charities to provide counseling at the center, said it helps the seniors to know there is someone they can talk to when they are facing issues connected to aging. “We help them with life’s ups and downs – dealing with their health, death and aging difficulties,” she said.

“So many older people are isolated. This gives them an opportunity for fellowship and a social system that they might not have,” Jordan added. Jordan plans activities that are proactive in preventive health care, such as gentle stretching, breathing exercises, walking, meditation or brain teasers to keep them alert.

Susie Wells is another Alsen resident who looks forward to the group’s gatherings. “God wakes me up on Wednesday morning and I get up and put my clothes on to come be with these beautiful people,” she said. “We all have age on us. They are so nice to us.”

The women have been meeting for four years and have bonded in a special way, Pitts said. If someone is not here, they know why. Occasionally one of the members will pass away or become ill and they always pass around a card for all to sign and send.

Just recently, Lucille Sensely, who works with the support group, had surgery, Pitts said. “Lucille called me in tears. She was so touched. The women in the group had sent her a card with $27.11 in it.”

Seniors in the Alsen community in the northern part of East Baton Rouge Civil Parish play bingo at one of the weekly gatherings hosted by Catholic Charities of the Diocese Baton Rouge. Photo By Barbara Chenevert | The Catholic Commentator

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Exercise essential for good health as people age

By Sara Angle  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Exercise might not be able to stop the aging process but it can certainly prevent or slow down some of its effects.

Exercise can improve the ability to do everyday tasks and manage diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and osteoporosis, and provide increased balance, strength and mood, according to the National Institute on Aging’s Go4Life outreach campaign, which promotes physical activity among older Americans.

A 2010 study from the American Geriatrics Society also found that exercise is especially effective in preventing cognitive disorders in women, aged 65 or over. “Women who remain sedentary have nearly twice the chance of cognitive impairment as do women who are active,” said lead study author Laura Middleton of the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Center in Canada.

The American Geriatrics Society also points out that exercise can lower one’s risk for falling, which can lead to injury.

The National Institute on Aging at the National Institutes of Health recommends that seniors choose activities that involve four types of exercise: endurance, strength, balance and flexibility. Combining types of exercise not only improves different areas of the body, but it also reduces boredom and prevents overuse of certain muscles.

Exercise such as swimming, walking and yoga are low-impact but engage the whole body, which makes them ideal for beginner exercisers or those in their golden years.

Whatever a seniors’ fitness level is, there are countless options for improving their quality of life through exercise and socialization.

“We have a common saying that if you don’t use it, you lose it,” said Justine Merlin, director of therapeutic services at Immaculate Mary Home in Philadelphia. Residents of Immaculate Mary Home are encouraged to participate to the extent they can. Residents are offered daily exercise to begin their morning, such as outdoor strolls, and special events that include physical activities, such as gardening, are worked into the schedule.

Another option for exercise is joining a local gym, YMCA or health club, which gives seniors an opportunity to meet and socialize with others like them who are trying to stay healthy and active. Many fitness centers have group exercise sessions that can make exercising seem more like fun than work, alleviating a common roadblock to exercise.

Some facilities even offer specially designed classes for older generations. Zumba, a Latin and hip-hop inspired dance class and one of the latest fitness crazes being offered at many gyms, also has a Zumba Gold program, tailored for older individuals who want to work at a slower pace with people their own age.

St. Andrew’s Catholic Church in Roanoke, Va., hosts its own senior fitness class, taught by 83-year-old parishioner Gene Jones. Jones, who holds several regional, national and world titles in bench pressing, didn’t begin exercising until he was 68 years old, but is now certified as a senior fitness adviser.

He works with parishioners in wheelchair and walkers, using exercise bands to provide resistance to their motions. Although he described his exercises as “nothing major,” he said they are important to health and longevity.

Jones, who suffered from colon cancer, only took off two weeks of exercise during a year of chemotherapy treatments and believes his fitness regimen helped him to overcome the obstacle.

“I’ve got a long time to live yet,” said Jones, who does all the

See Exercise on Page 7B
Eating well is key to aging with grace

By Sara Angle
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Retirees, whose schedules are less busy, can use this extra time to prepare foods with anti-aging properties.

More than ever before, nutrient-rich but low-calorie foods are vital, says “Eating Well” magazine, which notes that as the body and mind age, certain nutrients become particularly important for nourishing the body and fighting signs of aging while caloric needs drop and the metabolism decreases.

Everyone’s personal needs vary, so those beginning to see and feel the signs of aging should focus on the biggest challenges of their own body.

For starters, there are many power foods for bettering complexion and reducing fine lines and wrinkles.

A 2007 study from the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition said that vitamin C-rich foods – such as kale, bell peppers, papaya or peaches – have the ability to fight free radicals produced by ultraviolet rays. Vitamin C also helps produce collagen, which keeps skin firm.

Omega-3 fatty acids, found in salmon, olive oil, flax seeds and walnuts, have a double benefit for skin and brain health. The acids improve the skin’s natural defense against damage from the sun’s ultraviolet rays, according to “Eating Well” magazine, and the University of Maryland Medical Center notes these foods also play a crucial role in brain function. They are thought to be a key component in brain memory and performance.

Power foods can help ward off problems with blood pressure as well. Although blood pressure can be lowered with medication, most people find that is not needed if they adjust their diet. “Prevention” magazine reports that potassium-rich foods such as bananas, sweet potatoes, kidney beans, melons, tomatoes and orange juice, can lower blood pressure when 2,000 to 4,000 milligrams a day are consumed. Decreasing sodium intake can also help even out blood pressure levels.

If cholesterol is a concern, Harvard Medical School recommends adding foods that lower low-density lipoprotein, known as LDL or the “bad” cholesterol, which is a cholesterol-carrying particle that contributes to artery-clogging and hardening.

Oats, barley, whole grains, beans and nuts get the gold star for lowering cholesterol.

Don’t forget the liquids; coffee and red wine have proved to have multiple health benefits and are tasty indulgences.

Coffee was found to be the No. 1 source of antioxidants for Americans in a 2003 study from the University of Scranton. Antioxidants are a source of disease prevention and possibly a method of disease treatment in some cases. Several Harvard Medical School studies discovered regular coffee drinkers are 50 percent less likely to suffer from breast, colon and prostate cancer.

Red wine is also packed with antioxidants, namely a type called flavonoids. Researchers from the University of California at Davis say Cabernet Sauvignon contains the most flavonoids, which reduce the risk of coronary heart disease.

But all these tips won’t make a difference if retirees don’t actually have the energy to prepare nutritious meals or snacks.

An online resource – helpguide.org – with tips on health issues, parenting and senior living recommends that a key step in healthy eating for seniors is making the effort whenever possible to eat with others — making dinner dates with family members, or attending programs that combine food and companionship or signing up for senior meal programs.

“Eating with company can be as important as vitamins,” the site points out, noting that a social atmosphere stimulates the mind and helps people enjoy meals, and those who enjoy meals are likely to eat better.

“Eating with company will take some strategizing,” it said, “but the effort will pay off.”

Researchers from the University of California at Davis say red wines contain flavonoids, which reduce the risk of coronary heart disease. CNS photo

Potassium-rich foods, which includes kidney beans, can lower blood pressure when 2,000 to 4,000 milligrams a day are consumed. Oats, barley, whole grains, nuts as well as beans can get the gold star for lowering cholesterol. CNS photo

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EXERCISE: For all

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exercises with his students.

He said he likes working with seniors, because people can relate to his age and see that he is trying to take care of himself.

He advises the group to try everything at their own pace, even sitting down if necessary.

“No matter what your age is you can still do it; you can do something! You can do it, and it’s not going to hurt you,” he tells them.
Seniors find great satisfaction in volunteering to help peers, others

By Liz O’Connor
Catholic News Service

LEVITTOWN, Penn. – Retirees form the core of volunteer programs across the United States, offering important services especially to the elderly – some of whom are younger than the volunteers.

In the Diocese of Syracuse, N.Y., for example, where Donna Nash coordinates Catholic Charities services for the aging, the majority of volunteers are themselves seniors.

They deliver Meals on Wheels, visit the homebound to provide companionship and outreach, offer a reassuring daily phone call to elderly individuals who live alone, offer counseling on tax preparation and dealing with insurance companies, function as nursing home ombudsmen, give a friendly check to elderly people discharged from hospitals to make sure they’re doing all right and provide other services.

Stacey Lazurek, who coordinates a visitor program through Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Charleston, S.C., said the majority of her volunteers are seniors. She trains and matches about 100 volunteers to help older adults who are essentially homebound.

Mike Kronn, who is 74, has been a regular visitor to a few people during the past two years and is also on call if someone needs a driver in a pinch.

Visiting those who are very ill “isn’t always pleasant,” Kronn said, but there’s great satisfaction in knowing he’s brought pleasure into someone’s life.

Kronn noted that volunteers are screened and informed about not getting involved in dispensing medications and not lifting a disabled patient because that might endanger the elderly volunteer’s own health.

Sue Jepson, 70, is legally blind and has some difficulty walking, but that doesn’t stop her from being active in several organizations and volunteering three or four days a week at the “Loaves and Fishes” program of her local senior center.

She sets the table, helps serve lunch and gets coffee for people who range in age from 62 to 90. “I like helping others, it keeps me busy,” she said in an interview from her home at Catholic Charities-affiliated Caritas Villa in Portland, Ore.

She enjoys “seeing people have a better day” because of a program in which she’s involved. She said those who come to the senior center also play bingo, listen to music and “do a lot of chatting.”

Being a senior citizen herself, she said, “I kind of can understand where they’re coming from.” Legally blind from birth, she said she cared for her own parents for 12 years and before that “worked lots of places – usually with people.” She said she has lots of memories and is “still making them.”

Cindy Hamberg, 64, recently started running an osteoporosis prevention program called “Bone Builders” at Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Winona, Minn.

The group is for people as young as 55 and in their 90s and uses carefully graduated weight-bearing exercise to strengthen muscles, build bone density and improve balance.

“Word is getting out that people need to watch themselves,” she said, and she said she now has about 40 who come regularly. Hamberg is energetic and enthusiastic, saying, “I love it, I really love it,” and she loves the fact that she can help people who couldn’t afford to go to a gym.

Passing on family stories create legacy

By Liz O’Connor
Catholic News Service

LEVITTOWN, Penn. – Considering how rapidly the world has changed in just the past 10 years, the senior members of families and parish communities have a wealth of memories which, if shared and preserved, can provide a fascinating and lasting legacy.

The American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress describes “folk life” as the “everyday and intimate creativity that all of us share and pass on to the next generation” from songs, dances, games and communication of beliefs.

Diaries, photo albums, letters, home movies, business records and artifacts all form part of the legacy elders can pass on, but audio and video recordings of elders’ memories of their own lives – and of the lives of their parents and grandparents – are relatively simple and immediate ways to gather and organize a legacy for future generations.

Families, organizations and church parishes are among those now collecting such oral histories.

The Library of Congress website – loc.gov/ folklife/familyfolk life/index.html – offers tips for setting up a formal oral history project, from determining the scope of the project, considering who will organize it, what equipment will be needed, to deciding on the ultimate destination of the project’s results. It emphasizes the importance of obtaining releases from those interviewed and also provides examples.

It also offers tips for interviewees, advising them to do the following:

SEE LEGACY PAGE 9B
Parish programs aim to narrow the generation gap

By Marylynn G. Hewitt
Catholic News Service

DETROIT – Although so much of today’s education takes place in segregated age groups, some churches are bucking that trend by offering intergenerational faith formation – teaching everyone, of all ages, at the same time.

Currently, more than 650 churches across the country are using this model, called Generations of Faith. They offer separate religious education for sacramental preparation, but for everything else they provide one-on-one or group sessions which engage all members of the church in hands-on learning about central parts of their faith.

Mary Beth Nygaard said people have told her that the only time their family ever eats together is at the church’s Generations of Faith evenings. “That’s just incredible,” said the pastoral care director of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Mankato, Minn. “But it’s the way society is now and we do anything we can to bring people together.”

The intergenerational program draws parishioners of all ages together for an evening including an introduction, a shared meal, age-designated learning breakout sessions and a closing activity. Each meeting is based on a foundational teaching of the church and includes take-home activities.

“It’s a very big change from dropping off your kids and going to the grocery store,” said Nygaard, who has been involved in the 1,200-member church for 20 years. The Generations of Faith program was added at the church 12 years ago.

Nygaard said, “We’d had a lot of conversations with people wanting something different and they wanted parental involvement.”

In the years since, she has seen less discipline problems, more family participation and parishioners growing in their faith. The older members of the church “are among those who like it the best,” she said.

Generations sharing experiences in faith is also the basis of a program called Invitation to Live in Love to be offered in the Diocese of Rockford, Ill.

“It’s really a teenage catechesis on the sacrament of matrimony,” said Don Gramer, who with his wife, Lorrie, are diocesan family life directors. Married couples will meet with teens to explore such topics as marriage as a vocation, masculinity and femininity, the power of affirmation in marriage and portions of Blessed John Paul II’s theology of the body.

Gramer said he hopes the intergenerational meetings will help teens look at marriage in positive ways.

In Middletown, Conn., Susan Ferraiolo is just starting Generations of Faith at St. Francis of Assisi Church, after seeing its success at neighboring St. Mary Church. She serves as the director of religious education at both churches.

With St. Mary Church now in its sixth year of the program, she has seen “Mass participation improved and an increase in fellowship. People are more involved and they feel like they know others because of the shared meal,” which, she said, is always prepared by her husband, Richard. “He’s become very good at cooking for 300, and he has a lot of help.”

Ferraiolo said it was difficult at first for some older youths to share and talk in front of others. “Now, they have taken on these amazing leadership roles.”

The monthly gatherings are designed with hands-on activities, Ferraiolo said. For the recent social justice topic, local and national organizations were invited to set up stations. Families made sandwiches for a soup kitchen, donated supplies for a pro-life women’s center and learned about national service organizations.

In the United States, some 650 churches are using Generations of Faith – a program which provides a once-a-month group session for all age groups to participate in hands-on learning about central parts of their faith.

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LEGACY: Keeping memories alive

FROM PAGE 88

- Ask open-ended questions.
- Use follow-up questions
- Allow the interview subject to go off in another direction if a question reminds him or her of another topic.
- Limit the interview to about one hour.

Recordings need to be stored in a way they can easily be retrieved; for example, digitally recorded interviews should be moved for longer-term storage to a hard drive.

For about two decades, parishioners at Christ the King Church in Oklahoma City, Okla., have been taking an active role in obtaining senior stories.

Pam Cullen, director of senior adult ministry for the church parish, said the Life Story Project began with a parish staff member’s project for his master’s degree in adult education. The project was so successful that now the church publishes a book each year with photographs and biographies of its older parishioners.

The church parish connects its senior parishioners willing to take part in the project with pairs of seventh graders from the parish school. The 12-year-olds interview the seniors and write up their stories. The seniors then interviewed and wrote up what the children remembered.

The church also provides other learning opportunities that provide a service to the community.

Stories include games the seniors played when they were 12 as well as how they met and courted their spouses, what kinds of work they did as children and adults, and information about how their families came to live in the United States and in Oklahoma.

One older parishioner hesitated to get involved in the project because she thought her life was “too ordinary,” but she said that when she began talking with her interviewers, she realized that in “82 years there’s a lot of change in the world.”
One third of those living in nursing homes, assisted living facilities and retirement centers in East Baton Rouge Civil Parish are Catholic. Since most of these 1,500 people are not able to get to Mass weekly, some 250 men and women make sure the residents receive Communion regularly. This group of lay volunteers belongs to the long-term care ministry of the Baton Rouge Diocese.

Ten years ago, Bishop Robert W. Muench asked Deacon Gene Brady if he would take the lead in making sure those in long-term care facilities in East Baton Rouge Civil Parish would have Mass and the Eucharist. One of the first tasks Deacon Brady undertook was to set up an advisory board that would assist in establishing procedures and policies so the work of the clergy and volunteers ministering to those in the long-term care facilities would go smoothly.

With so many long-term care facilities in the civil parish and many church parishes, confusion often occurred as to which priests were responsible for providing pastoral services to a particular facility. “Within the geographic area of St. George Church, there are 11 facilities. There is no way the two priests assigned to that church can take care of that many places,” Deacon Brady explained.

Deacon Brady and his board of 16 people coordinate the dates and times Mass will be celebrated, or Communion services will be held, in all of the 50 sites. This includes scheduling the priests and deacons who will serve.

Diocesan priests who have retired from active ministry willingly make time to celebrate Mass, Deacon Brady acknowledged. “They are receptive and open. We have to make sure that they don’t overcommit because we want them to stay healthy.”

The newly ordained priests who are assigned as parochial vicars are also a great help, said Paul Geissler, a board member.

The lay volunteers, who are important to the success of this ministry, enjoy ministering to the residents, said both Geissler and Deacon Brady. Consequently, they stay very committed to it. The volunteers who bring the Eucharist to the residents are trained in their church parish on the proper way to carry the Body of Christ to those who wish to receive. The volunteers also understand about giving blessings to those attending Mass or prayer services who are non-Catholic.

The advisory board has chosen St. Frances of Rome as their patron. This saint was chosen because of her work among the sick, explained Deacon Brady.

In addition to bringing Communion to Catholics in long-term care facilities in East Baton Rouge Civil Parish, lay volunteers plan events such as this May Crowning in 2011 at Landmark of Baton Rouge. Paul Carpenter, left, a member of St. Theresa Church in Gonzales, Teri Watson, a member of the St. George nursing home ministry, and Lark Morales, a member of St. George Church, get ready for the service which was followed by a Communion service led by Deacon Tommy St. Pierre, background. File photo by Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator

Clergy, lay volunteers provide service

By Laura Deavers
Editor

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In addition to bringing Communion to Catholics in long-term care facilities in East Baton Rouge Civil Parish, lay volunteers plan events such as this May Crowning in 2011 at Landmark of Baton Rouge. Paul Carpenter, left, a member of St. Theresa Church in Gonzales, Teri Watson, a member of the St. George nursing home ministry, and Lark Morales, a member of St. George Church, get ready for the service which was followed by a Communion service led by Deacon Tommy St. Pierre, background. File photo by Debbie Shelley | The Catholic Commentator

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Today’s grandparents often have parenting role too

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The expression “over the river and through the woods to grandmother’s house we go” is becoming less true for many American children because often their grandparents are right there in their home and increasingly, they are even taking on the role of parents.

According to figures from the AARP, more than 5.8 million children live in their grandparents’ homes and more than 2.5 million grandparents have taken on the responsibility for raising these children without the children’s parents living with them.

Grandparents or other relatives as the primary caregivers are often called “kinship caregivers” raising children whose parents cannot, or will not, care for them because of substance abuse, death, abuse or neglect, economic hardship, incarceration, divorce, domestic violence or other family and community crises.

Although the number of grandparent caregivers has increased significantly in the past decade, the task has not necessarily become any easier. And just because grandparents have already raised children doesn’t mean they are naturally equipped to do this again in today’s world when they are likely to have less energy and more personal health concerns than they did decades ago.

One way for these grandparents who are parenting again to make their job easier is to connect with other grandparents in the same situation. AARP provides a grandparent support locator – giclocalsupport.org/pages/search_form.cfm. Many local Catholic Charities agencies also provide support for grandparents in this role and can connect them to available resources.

The website of the Northwest Senior Services of Catholic Charities of Chicago notes that “many grandparents or relative caregivers are overwhelmed with the situation they face. You are not alone. It’s important to ask for help.”

According to AARP, more than 5.8 million children live in their grandparents’ homes and some 2.5 million grandparents have taken on the responsibility for raising these children without the children’s parents. 

The federal government and AARP have outlined many of the available resources for parenting grandparents at these sites: usaa.gov/Topics/Grandparents.shtml and aarp.org/relationships/friends-family-info-08-2011/grandfamilies-guide-getting-started.html.

The AARP guide notes that it can be overwhelming for seniors to be “unexpectedly thrust into the role of being the primary caregiver.” It urges grandparents to first focus on basic needs, such as finding a place for the child to sleep; providing food, clothing, and any medication; getting the right kind of equipment, such as a stroller, car seat and crib for young children; and getting as much information about school and other activities for older children.

The site also advises grandparents in this new role to talk with the key people in their grandchild’s lives, such as teachers, pediatricians, school social workers, and lawyers or child welfare professionals who have been involved with the grandchild to find out about schedule details, possible resource materials or available services.

The federal government site provides a detailed listing of available resources and publications and it also links readers to a site offering general tips for grandparent caregivers such as:

- Read to younger children daily.
- Keep immunizations up-to-date.
- Provide nutritious foods.
- Set a good example by calmly working out disputes, especially with the grandchild’s parents.

- Monitor television, music and computer use by grandchildren.
- If a grandchild has special needs, seek out services as soon as possible.

And last, but certainly not least, the site advises grandparents to make their grandchild feel loved and important.

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This section can be read online at thecatholiccommentator.org; select SPECIAL SECTIONS across the top bar.
Getting homes ready for senior living

By Carol Zimmermann
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON – When people plan for retirement, they usually make sure their finances are in order and make plans for their upcoming spare time.

Making their homes safer and easier to navigate isn’t often on the top of their to-do list but experts say it should be.

According to a recent AARP study about 80 percent of Americans age 45 and older prefer to “age in place” or remain in their current homes and communities. Manufacturers and contractors are responding to this trend by developing new products and technologies and talking a lot about universal-design homes that are accessible to people with or without disabilities.

For more than 70 million baby boomers who are on the edge of retirement, now is the time to remodel or modify potentially dangerous areas in the home – such as the kitchen and bathroom – to avoid future safety hazards. It’s just not in our nature to settle for good enough. We feel exactly the same way about healthcare. Whether we’re developing a world class Heart and Vascular Tower, offering breakthrough cancer treatments and clinical trials or opening the state’s first free-standing ER. Or whether we’re getting the region’s sickest kids to our door with our new pediatric transport team and then coordinating that care with the most advanced clinical information and electronic medical record system in the country. It’s just not in our nature to settle for good enough.

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SENIOR LIVING

Experts say making homes safer and easier to navigate should be on the top of the to-do list before retiring. Remodel or modify potentially dangerous areas in the home – such as the kitchen and bathroom – to avoid future safety hazards as you age. CNS photo

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