

Success Story: Volunteer Reaches Out to those with Alzheimer's

The Friendly Visitor program at Sts. Peter & Paul Catholic Church in Reading, Ohio has been a significant part of its health ministry for years. Through the ministry, volunteers visit parishioners who are homebound and those in long-term care facilities. Recently the program was blessed when its Network of Care Coordinator, Rose Lindeman, received a call from Karen, a parishioner from nearby Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Church. After reading in the bulletin about Rose's plea for additional friendly visitor volunteers, Karen knew this was a calling for her. She had been devoting a large part of her daily time to caring and visiting her mother, who she recently lost to Alzheimer's disease. She understood how this debilitating illness affects an individual and the family.



At the time of her mother's illness, Karen's parish did not have a Friendly Visitor program, and yet Karen thought the time to "give back" was *now*. She told Rose, "I'm the person you want and need." Rose knew what a challenge it was to find experienced individuals who are not afraid and are willing to visit those with dementia so she was thrilled to have Karen as a volunteer.

While caring for her mother, Karen discovered one of the challenges in caring for someone with Alzheimer's is to remember that when the individual is having a bad day, it is likely because they have no control and cannot help their behavior. Now she wanted to take the knowledge she gained in caring for her mom and alleviate for another some of the loneliness that comes with a dementia diagnosis.

Rose matched Karen with a parishioner with Alzheimer's disease. After her first visit, Karen knew that the greatest blessing in this new relationship would be the strong connection she felt to her mom. Even though her client sometimes does not remember her visit, Karen feels blessed to be able to offer kindness and comfort to another on this journey with dementia. As Karen expressed, "I do this to honor God."

The goal of Parish Health Ministry's Friendly Visitor Program is to enhance the quality of life of homebound persons and those with special needs by showing concern and giving support as appropriate. Visits may be in person and/or on the telephone. The Friendly Visitor provides companionship, friendship, and support by listening and talking to individuals. The only qualification required is a desire to establish a one-on-one relationship with a homebound person or someone with special needs. For more information about the Friendly Visitor Program, contact Jeanne Palcic, Director for ERH Parish Health Ministry, at jpalcic@erhinc.com or 513-272-5555 ext. 4223.