



## History of Ministry to Sick and Aged

From its inception on July 12, 1974, this Ministry of Care was commissioned to "minister to the sick and aged of the Diocese" (taken from the letter of appointment from Bishop Albert R. Zuroweste to Fr. Gene Neff). Included in the letter of appointment was also a specific reference to providing Catholic chaplaincy to the patients of Belleville's Memorial Hospital and the residents of Four Fountains Nursing Center, Memorial Convalescent Center, St. Paul Home, Castlehaven Care Center, and Calvin Johnson Nursing Center. Chaplaincy at these facilities began immediately. By July 1975, Fr. Gene Neff, Director, and Chaplain, had included Swansea Care Center, Royal Heights Nursing and Rehab. Center and Willowcreek Nursing Home to the list of those facilities being served. Rosewood Care Center was added years later. All of these facilities were in the Belleville, IL, metro area.

Within one year the framework of a ministry to and with our Elders, and at Memorial Hospital, Belleville, had begun to take shape. Ministry was interpreted to mean more than just "administering" the sacraments. The Ministry to Sick & Aged (MSA) moved in the direction of a ministry of holistic wellness. From the beginning the focus of the MSA strove to be sacramental, pastoral, educational, and spiritual. Where appropriate it responds to spiritual, material, and psycho-social needs of the residents of long-term care facilities. Within this four-pronged focus, the MSA made an effort to respond to the needs of the sick and dying, and our Elders throughout the Diocese. While it was not humanly possible for Fr. Neff to celebrate the sacraments at each nursing home throughout Southern Illinois on a regular basis, the MSA has come to provide service to the sick, the aging, the bereaved, and persons with disabilities by also serving as a source of information and referral.

### **The Sacramental Ministry of the MSA:**

From the beginning Fr. Gene Neff has celebrated Mass and the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick on a regular basis at the long-term care facilities listed above. Over the years, following his additional appointments as Pastor of St. Luke parish, Belleville, St. John the Baptist, Red Bud, Sacramental Minister at St. Joseph, Lebanon, and St. George Parish, New Baden, Fr. Neff has been joined by Frs. Fred Jones, Edward Balestreri, Raymond Kownacki, James Orumpakkatt, Jose Ancheril, James Blazine, and Robert Gore in the celebration of the liturgy in the long-term care facilities.

A great need that was clearly expressed in the very beginning was the need to be available to Memorial Hospital and all facilities in the case of emergencies. That need was immediately addressed by the use of a pager. Initially this service was funded by the MSA budget. While each facility is now requested to first try to contact the clergy of the patient's choice in an emergency, a cell phone enables Fr. Neff to respond when that is not possible. The MSA continues to make every effort to respond to emergency and special requests at any time when the requested pastoral minister of a person is not available, or when the person is not affiliated with any particular parish.

The Sacramental Ministry of the MSA is the central focus of a response to the spiritual needs of patients and residents. In November 1974, the sacramental ministry took a big step forward with the establishment of a Volunteer Program. The first three volunteers were Mrs. Cleota Paoli, Mrs. Marie Timmer, and Mrs. Evelyn Casperson. Over the years nearly 400 people have been a volunteer for the MSA. A primary role of the volunteer has been to share Christ in the Eucharist with the patients at Memorial Hospital and the long-term care facilities. Many others provide music for the celebration of Mass and are involved in a variety of other programs.

Today, under the director of Assistant MSA Director Mrs. Connie Barre, 60+/- volunteers distribute Eucharist daily at Belleville, IL, Memorial Hospital and Memorial Hospital East, Shiloh, IL, and on a regular basis at most area long-term care facilities, provide musical accompaniment at Mass, raise funds, etc.

### **The Pastoral Ministry of the MSA:**

The one-on-one visit by lay volunteers and clergy is the cornerstone of the pastoral focus of the MSA. It is in the interpersonal encounter that needs surface, and the spirit is healed. Some needs that the MSA encountered repeatedly have led to programs to address them.

In response to the desire by long-term care residents to leave the environment of their facility for occasional trips, a 12-passenger van equipped with a handicapped accessible ramp was purchased and made available to long-term care

facilities in 1976. Refreshed from a shopping trip, dining out, etc., residents would speak for days about their "day out." One of the annual events that has been anticipated is the Annual Summer Outing. Begun in 1976, and average of 200+ residents with an additional 100 staff and volunteers spend a day at the Diocesan Pastoral Center enjoying fellowship, entertainment, and good food.

The MSA has also responded to needs of Elders living in private homes. During the late 1970s and early 1980s the "Roadrunners" 10 individuals using their own vehicles, provided a transportation service for the homebound. With the advent of DARTS (Sr. Transportation Service) by Southwestern Illinois College's Programs and Services for Older Persons, this service was discontinued. The MSA has received frequent gifts of medical supplies, e.g., wheelchairs, walkers, commodes, etc. For many years, and still an ongoing service, individuals living in private homes have borrowed this medical equipment, enabling them to remain at home during recovery from illness or until death.

Ministry to persons with disabilities and bereavement ministry has almost always been a part of the MSA. In 1976 Fr. Neff was asked by former Chancellor of the Belleville Diocese, Msgr. Bernard Sullivan, to serve as Diocesan contact to the National Conference of Bishops' National Office of Ministry to Persons with Disabilities. It was during that same year that the MSA rehabilitated and remodeled a group home at SAVE (St. Clair County Associated Vocational Enterprises). Located at Turkey Hill, outside the city of Belleville and a former US Air Force radar station, SAVE provides group home living for the developmentally disabled. Today, ministry with the persons with disabilities is primarily limited to information and referral when requests for assistance are received.

Bereavement is ongoing. Most is provided during pastoral visits with residents of the long-term care facilities and in the hospital setting.

Whether a late-night emergency call to one of the Memorial Hospitals or a room visit following the celebration of Mass in a long-term care facility, lay volunteers and clergy bring the compassion of Christ in times of need. The MSA also stepped in to provide bereavement ministry for the youth of Southern Illinois when it was not being offered.

Assistant MSA Director, Mrs. Connie Barre, was trained as a director for the Rainbows for All God's Children bereavement program. For a period of time in the 1990s when the program would have been disbanded due to a lack of a trained director, Mrs. Barre guided this bereavement program for young people experiencing a significant loss from the death of a grandparent, parent, divorce, etc. "Rainbows" not only continued but was extended to include youth attending public schools as well parochial schools in Southern Illinois.

### **The Educational Ministry of the MSA:**

One of the goals of the MSA has centered around trying to advocate for the dignity of life for our Elders. A key to accomplishing this is education - education of staff, volunteers, and the community.

Periodically MSA volunteers are provided the opportunity for days of reflection. These days will sometimes focus on spiritual renewal, and others will challenge existing attitudes. MSA staff has been available to give presentations on a wide variety of topics pertaining to aging, death and dying, the sacrament of anointing, bereavement, retirement, and spiritual care for Elders. From Shawneetown to Lawrenceville, from Menard Prison to Olney, from Belleville to Marissa, from Waterloo to Alton, in long-term care facilities, schools and churches, even to Indianapolis and Philadelphia, MSA staff has tried to be available to share, when possible, insights gleaned from years of experience and formal education.

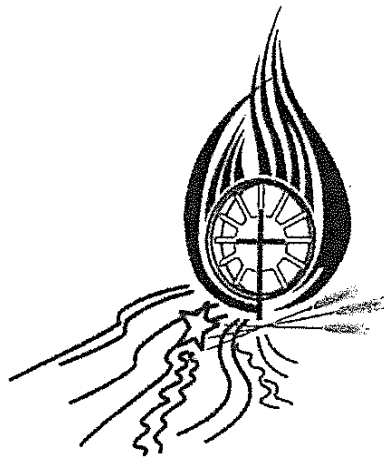
To advocate for the rights and dignity of Elders, the sick, persons with disabilities, and the bereaved, MSA staff have continued their own formal education. Her formal training in the "Rainbows" program, and a Master of Science degree from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, has enabled Mrs. Barre to train advocates for persons in parishes in the Belleville Diocese, facilitators to work with grieving children, MSA volunteers in long-term care facilities and the two Memorial Hospitals. MSA Director Fr. Neff earned a certificate in Gerontology from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, IL, in May 1994, and a Master of Arts degree in Gerontology from Lindenwood University in St. Charles, MO, in December 1998.

Fr. Neff also received training from the Association for Senior Adult Ministry in Wildwood, MO (St. Louis, MO) in November 1995 to assist Diocesan Clergy plan for a healthy retirement. This service is for retired clergy to enrich the Third Age of their life.

The history of the Ministry to Sick & Aged is one of service that strives to bring holistic wellness, dignity, and respect to those who are the most broken among us. And by the grace of God and the support of the Church of Southern Illinois we rededicate our efforts to: a) being a compassionate Christ to those to whom we minister; b) to being an advocate for the rights and dignity of aging brothers and sisters; c) to being a resource to parishes striving to be a ministry of wellness in the Church.

### **The Spiritual Ministry of the MSA:**

Spirituality is a holistic wellness concept that emphasizes health of body, mind, and spirit. Whether we are providing medical equipment, a ministry of Presence, the sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Anointing of the Sick, educational presentations, or advocating for a better quality of life for our Elders, in one way or another the MSA encourages holistic wellness for our Elders. Our collaboration with the Diocesan Offices of Human Resources, Catholic Charities Coalition of Christian Services, Youth Ministry, Respect Life Ministry, Catholic Urban Programs and Daystar Ministry extends our Ministry well beyond the Sacramental Ministry services we provide.



## Logo Explanation

Wagon Wheel - Aging/The Cycle of Life Cross - Christ is the "hub" of the wheel, the center of Life

Flame - Holy Spirit gives courage

Wheat - Eucharist nourishes us for the journey

Starfish - Draws life & wholeness from water. Every individual is important and draws life from the waters of Baptism.

## What's In A Name

Since July 12, 1974, this ministry has been known as the Ministry to Sick & Aged.

In an effort to be more inclusive in a name that speaks to who we minister with and to, the Ministry to Sick and Aged will keep this original name but has included a subtitle: A Ministry of Care!

We work to bring the care of a compassionate Christ to those suffering physical illness, our elders, persons with disabilities, and the bereaved.