

Lee Ventrella, Parish Minister for Homebound and Hospital Visitation at St. Charles Borromeo

I began volunteering in the Church during my early teens when I helped one of our nuns clean the Sacristy and I washed and ironed purificators for her. I always knew that I would volunteer at church. I really did not think about working in the Church. As my children grew up, I taught in the Religious Ed. program, and as a family we helped with the coffee hour after Sunday Mass. Later I was part of “Martha’s Ministry” in the parish we belonged to. My career took me to Ohio in a position where I traveled a great deal. I still wanted to do something for our parish and joined a team of ladies who washed and ironed purificators, corporals and hand towels. It was a large parish and when it was my turn I would have to wash and iron about 100 purificators and corporals from that week’s Masses. I always said that when I retired that I would do more for the Church.

On a business trip I became very ill and almost died. While spending one month in a hospital and several more weeks in rehab in Houston, TX volunteers from local parishes would come to bring me Holy Communion, and a local priest anointed me. I can’t explain how overwhelmed with love and the presence of Our Lord that I felt when receiving the Eucharist at this time. When I recovered, my desire to volunteer brought me to the ministry that I am in now. I thought that I could bring Jesus to those in the hospital just as He was brought to me. It was my way to “give back”.

I met with, and was interviewed by, Peggy Malvaso, who led this Ministry at the time. I was interested in bringing Holy Communion to St. Charles parishioners in Unity Hospital. She walked me through what was involved and explained the Hospital Visitation Ministry to me. She introduced me to Lynn Clifford who trained me at Unity Hospital on how to conduct a hospital visit. Both Peggy and Lynn were very helpful as I began. Pre-Covid, I did visits at Unity Hospital and the Cottages at Unity one day per week. At that time several of us were visiting Unity Hospital every week, which all ended with Covid.

Post-Covid Peggy Malvaso decided to retire. One Sunday after Mass Father John Firpo approached me about an opportunity that he had for me to lead the Homebound/ Visitation Ministry at St. Charles. I told Father that I had to think about it. I prayed about taking on this role. I was retired and this was a “job,” much more than volunteering, and did I really want to make this commitment. I know that the Holy Spirit took over and gave me the nudge that I needed to tell Father John that I would lead this Ministry for him. My official title is “Parish Minister for Homebound and Hospital Visitation”. Maureen Beattie got me set up in the office and through all the new hire details and we were off and running. Joanie Bigham, parish secretary, has been tremendously helpful with her knowledge of everyone in the Parish and giving me background information about parishioners when I need help. And, of course, Father John is always there for guidance and direction.

We have a team of almost 20 volunteers who do a combination of home visits, phone calls and hospital visits at Unity Hospital and, when able, Rochester General Hospital also. We have over 100 parishioners that I currently track. This includes those who are homebound and their caregiver spouses, and those living in independent and assisted living facilities. Our volunteers and I visit 35% of those on our list. Our Card Ministry sends quarterly “thinking of you” cards and notes, and the Knights of Columbus bring lily plants for Easter to everyone on the list. In addition, we do weekly Communion Services at the Village at Maiden Park, and twice monthly Communion Services at GrandeVille Senior Living Center.

Under this ministry we also have a Prayer Chain which has a group of 10 parishioners who pray for special intentions of parishioners when they are called into the parish office or to me.

When I said that I wanted to do more for the Church when I retired, I had no idea what Our Lord had in mind for me. I continue to volunteer as a Sacristan on weekends and for Funerals, and at the Garage Sale and Ladies Luncheon. I'm always willing to help.

My advice to anyone who would like to volunteer in the Homebound and Visitation Ministry or volunteer in any capacity in the parish, is to simply pray about it and your answer or a little nudge will come. The work is more fulfilling than you can ever imagine, and you bring so much joy to those you serve. May God bless you and bring you to the role you were meant to have in His service.