

ENGAGING THE SPIRIT



LaPorte parishes consider faith-based caregiver support

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When a group met in August at Sacred Heart church in LaPorte to hear about a new caregiver support program that could be coming to the area, Judy Harenza had something in the back of her mind.

“I imagine when I go home, I’ll have about eight hang-ups,” Harenza said.

She anticipated her 93-year-old mother, who lives in assisted living, would have called at least that many times during the hour Harenza was at the meeting.

Repeated phone calls, medical needs, shopping and financial oversight are among the countless demands on caregivers.

In response to the diocesan synod, the LaPorte Catholic Peace and Justice

Commission recently invited Kelly Johnson and Deb Kelsey-Davis to give a presentation on Nourish, a faith-based caregiver support program they created.

Kelsey-Davis referred to caregivers as an “invisible army” that serves as the backbone of the healthcare system. But their emotional and spiritual needs are often overlooked, she added.

“We know they’re in our pews,” she said. “We know they’re in our churches and our communities. Why don’t we hear about the family caregivers as much as you would think?”

The women collaborated to create the program after realizing, through their own caregiving experience, that although there are support groups, there was nothing they could



Nourish for Caregivers co-founder Deb Kelsey-Davis, right, answers a question as Kelly Johnson (Nourish co-founder) listens. The two were explaining the Nourish for Caregivers program to a group at Sacred Heart in LaPorte on Aug 23. (Bob Wellinski photo)

find that incorporated the tenets of the Catholic faith.

Harenza, a Sacred Heart parishioner, was among 30 people gathered at the Aug. 23 meeting to learn about the Nourish program.

Nourish is a turnkey program that requires little advance preparation by group leaders. Each meeting focuses on a specific topic and is supported by materials. It is not set up as a support group in which people go around the room and share whatever is on their mind,

Johnson explained.

Gayle Finney, a parishioner at Queen of All Saints in Michigan City, is the sole caregiver for her elderly mother. Not only would she and others benefit from the program, but she sees it as evangelizing and bringing people into the parish.

“It does fit into the synod,” she said. “Evangelization. It’s one of the tenets of the synod.”

Kelsey-Davis said the cornerstone of the Nourish program is monthly meetings, face-to-face in

church. When she started the program, she was surprised to see so many faces she didn’t recognize.

“Not only is this pastoral in nature, it also has an evangelization aspect to it as well because we’re showing people we care about you and the things that are happening in your life, and we’re going to be here to provide support,” she said. “We’re bringing people back into the Church at a time when they will really need someone who will care for them.”

Harenza said emotional

support for caregivers is much needed.

“You’d better believe it,” she said.

Deacon Frank Zolvinski agreed there is a definite need for such a support system in the area. He said the committee would discuss the program and talk with the pastor about taking the next steps to implement Nourish.

To tell us how your parish is following the Holy Spirit’s lead in this synod process, contact Vanessa Negrete at vnegrete@dcdgary.org or (219) 769-9292, ext. 246.

“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”
- Leo Buscaglia

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