

Doing unto others includes a ride in a pinch

A father of three young children in southern Carroll County was hospitalized, and his wife was overwhelmed running to the hospital and caring for their children.

Enter the Helpers to the Homebound committee from St. Joseph Catholic Community, Sykesville, which fixed meals for the family.

Catholic parishes quietly respond to a basic need of parishioners – a little help when things get tough.

The Helping Hands Committee at St. Michael the Archangel, Overlea, will take an elderly or disabled person to the doctor, pick up a prescription or fix a meal.

It's not meant to be long-term care – just a bit of concrete support when it's most needed.

“The committee is for helping people out in a pinch,” said Jane Oakjones, coordinator of Helping Hands.

At St. Michael, years ago, a parishioner would call the parish for help, “and I think at first they would send the maintenance man to help out,” Ms. Oakjones recalled with a laugh. “They couldn't keep doing that.”

She was serving on another parish committee when the topic came up, and she offered to organize a team of volunteers to help.

Because Ms. Oakjones is a nurse, the first time a person calls for help, she responds so that she can assess the situation – evaluating things such as how well the person can move. Then, if they need help again, she'll call on one of the six or so volunteers who serve on the committee.

Kathy Reid, pastoral associate for service, justice and life at St. Joseph, said she depends on about eight volunteers.

“Mostly what we find is individuals who need a trip to the doctor,” Ms. Reid said.

One woman who contacted St. Joseph for help normally drove her car, but she was undergoing therapy for her back. Volunteers drove her to therapy three times a week for eight weeks. Another man needed rides for eight weeks for chemotherapy.

“It’s not a great commitment; it’s a temporary commitment,” Ms. Reid said. “It might be a one-time thing.”

But it’s not a small thing to those in need.

“I do it because there’s a need,” Ms. Oakjones said. “When people are really lost for someone to get them places, I just feel like there needs to be someone there to help out.”