

‘Grandma’ Dixon serving others at age 91

Although the entire room calls Dorothy Dixon “Grandma,” she has no grandchildren. The 91-year-old soup kitchen coordinator answers to the pet name from some 100 community members who visit St. Cecilia, Baltimore, on Thursdays to eat a hot supper.

The lively Ms. Dixon walks three blocks daily from her home that she shares with her 86-year-old sister, Lucille Talley, to serve her parish of 53 years. Her first self-appointed duty is to feed the birds.

“They’re Father Sy’s birds,” she said, dressed from neck to foot in red including blazer, sweater, skirt and slouch boots, about St. Cecilia’s pastor, Father Sylvester Peterka, C.M. “He’s a country boy. I’ve been feeding birds since I was 5 years old.”

Her second duty at the parish depends on the day. On Wednesdays, she efficiently packs lunch bags, including slathering peanut butter and jelly on bread, for those who request one. Thursdays she cuts pie, readies desserts, unwraps bread and muffins, and ensures that details are in place for the evening soup kitchen meal.

On any day, she might prepare the parish hall for a funeral or wedding, gather altar cloths to wash at home, lead the social life ministry, or sew items, such as priest vestments and altar cloths, for the parish.

“If I’m alive next year,” the senior teased about the pace she keeps, “I’m going to ask the Lord to take March off the calendar!”

Several times, Father Sy has offered Ms. Dixon a key to the rectory. “I don’t want no key to the rectory,” she said as she laughed. “That’s more work!”

Parish secretary Michelle Martin Daniels sees the resident grandmother come and go daily and said she is the “go-to lady” for everything. “She says if she ever stops moving, that’s it for her.”

“For anybody!” added Ms. Dixon, her white hair tied up in a bun. “Anybody can stay home.”

Ms. Dixon is often on the move. She may be leading bi-monthly meetings as president of the Walbrook Neighborhood Community Council. She may be out of town visiting her 72-year-old daughter in the Bronx of New York. Or she may be entertaining bus seatmates with her comical personality during senior day trips.

“Every senior citizen bus that leaves here,” said the spunky Baltimorean, “I’m on it!”