

Somebody cares when parishioners are hospitalized

The Caring Ministry at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Crofton, just celebrated its fifth anniversary, and five is the magic number for the group of volunteers.

That's how many days a week they visit patients at Anne Arundel Medical Center.

"We have coverage five days a week, which is wonderful," said Kay Whelan, coordinator, adding that when the group started it could only cover two days a week.

"But if we didn't start somewhere, we'd never do it," she said.

Last year, the group made more than 200 visits.

The group, which has 10 regular members and five more who help when they can, visits hospitalized parishioners and gives them prayer cards with a message from the parish. They also pray with them.

Because of recent health care privacy laws, they can only visit St. Elizabeth Ann Seton parishioners; when other patients ask them to pray with them, they have to refer them to one of the hospital's chaplains.

Having volunteers in the hospital "gives the pastor more eyes and ears," Ms. Whelan said, noting that parishioners often don't tell the parish when they're sick.

"We love visiting the new moms," Ms. Whelan said. Volunteers bring a bulletin with baptism information to the new moms, saving a sleep-deprived mom from having to find out how to make arrangements.

Children who are hospitalized get glow-in-the-dark rosaries. "They just love it," Ms. Whelan said.

The Caring Ministry also activates a prayer chain when needed, and more than 50 volunteers pray. The prayer chain has gone high-tech; it's done via e-mail.

“With e-mail, it’s so easy,” Ms. Whelan said, noting the group gets about 10 prayer requests a week. But she does ask that volunteers write the requests down in a notebook so that they can flip through the notebook and remember the intentions. Many requests are not for parishioners, but for their friends and relatives.

The Caring Ministry, which celebrated its anniversary with a Communion breakfast on Nov. 8, also prays the rosary once a month at church in the evening.

The Caring Ministry is a subcommittee of the church’s Christian Action committee.

“Our church does a huge, huge outreach,” Ms. Whelan said.

As just one example of what the church does, volunteers prepared 505 Thanksgiving dinners – 90 for Annapolis area residents and 415 for the community of St. Gregory the Great, Baltimore.

As for the Caring Ministry, Ms. Whelan said, “I really think of us as a tiny little ministry, but I’m happy with the way it’s working.”