

# The Lord's Ladies: Holy Family parishioners meet for conversation, camaraderie

**By Elizabeth Lowe**

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RANDALLSTOWN - Nearly as often as the sun rises, a vibrant group of female retirees attend daily Mass at Holy Family Parish before heading to a nearby fast-food restaurant for coffee and fellowship.

The group - women have come and gone over the years - has been meeting for decades, usually at the same corner table at McDonald's. Someone orders hot beverages, usually coffee, for the group and they stay for about an hour.

Five women met April 5, but the group of Holy Family parishioners can swell to nine. They call themselves "The Lord's Ladies."

Dolores Gertz, 85, led a prayer before the women sipped their coffee and the conversation turned to Carol DeNardis' birthday celebration the day before.

The women dialogue about politics, faith, recipes, medications, the day's activities, husbands, children and surgeries, among other topics.

"It's sort of like seeing a psychiatrist," DeNardis said of the sharing. "It's the camaraderie of our faith. It's nice to have people of like minds of the faith. It's uplifting."

"You need to have other people to bounce things off," said DeNardis, 63, who has been married for nearly 41 years. "I look forward to the opportunity to talk about stuff that may be bothering me. You go away feeling really good."

Suzanne Bray cherishes the relationships she has formed through the group.

"This I enjoy very much," said Bray, 81, who never married.

Mary Lou Darrell, 82, a widow, said "we take care of each other."

Beyond those anecdotal testimonies, health care professionals cite the benefits of developing friendships - particularly for seniors ages 65 and over - such as reducing depression, anxiety and blood pressure.

Dr. Ernestine Wright, a geriatrician and medical director at Stella Maris and Mercy Ridge Retirement Community, both in Timonium, said "I always tell my patients that social interaction and having close relationships help to maintain your cognition."

“Even from the beginning of time, the Lord never meant for man to be alone,” Wright continued. “I always say that two are better than one. It’s important for every senior to have at least one close friendship. It helps with getting through the challenges of life and it certainly increases and enhances the overall quality of life.” The women are active at Holy Family – some arrange flowers on the altar while others are involved in the sodality and visit patients in nursing homes or hospitals. They travel locally together and once a month, they go to IHOP to celebrate birthdays. Along the way, they never miss an opportunity to evangelize.

“People see us and ask ‘what are you doing?’ and we tell them,” said Mary Ann Bechtel, 70, who has been married for 49 years.

DeNardis and Gertz agreed.

“It behooves us to try to reach out,” DeNardis said. “We are PR (public relations) for Him (God). It’s all about our love of the faith.”

Gertz, who has been married for nearly seven decades, said “it’s not what you say, it’s what you do.”

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