What Is ElderCARE and How Was It Started?

ElderCARE began at Victory Memorial Hospital (now Vista Medical Center) in Waukegan in July, 1998. After receiving an anonymous $1.2 million donation, the hospital did a needs-assessment in Lake County. They determined that there were a number of elders in Lake County who needed just a little bit of help in order to live independently, but could not afford to pay for services. Thus ElderCARE was born. We recruited volunteers from area congregations; sought elders who needed help, and matched the two. St. Joseph Catholic Church was one of these faith communities and the volunteers from St. Joseph's have been wonderful—willing to help in any way they can.

ElderCARE provides friendly visits (to reduce isolation), grocery shopping (elders have nutritious food of their own choosing) and, our most used service, transportation to medical appointments (elders remain connected to their healthcare providers) for elders who are 65 years old or older and who live in Northern Lake County (Rt. 60 is our southern border). Since 1998 volunteers have served over 2,400 elders and provided over 116,000 hours of service and they have provided over 16,000 round trips to medical appointments. In 2010, our volunteers served 454 elders and provided 5,255 hours of service including 1,115 round trips to medical appointments.

Our elders are extremely grateful for these services. During our yearly evaluation of our program we have received the following comments:

• Friendly visits: "Lifts my spirit, get strength to have outside contact. Being sociable. Keeps depression at bay (for Mom) that might lead to more health issues. Does so much more. Inspiration to me."

• Grocery shopping: "Don't know how you find such wonderful people…So happy with it…Lovely couple, really pleased…Not wealthy, couldn't pay someone to do it…Don't have relatives around…Otherwise wouldn't get groceries!"

• Transportation: "This service is so great - gives you freedom to go to the doctors and facilities that you want to go to. You are not limited to where you can get a ride to. People in my building sometimes put up with less than the best care or the care they'd like to have because they believe they have to go where they can get rides. I tell them about you and I think several people are using you now."

99% of the elders we surveyed reported that our services contributed to their being able to live independently. This is ElderCARE's mission; to help elders remain healthy, independent and in their own homes (where they want to remain) for as long as possible.

How Can I Become Involved and Support ElderCARE? What Is the Contact Information?

St. Joseph parishioners can become involved with ElderCARE with a simple phone call to the ElderCARE office at 847-406-4683. All of our volunteers must attend two-hours of training. It consists of a video "Communicating with Compassion," discussion of Issues of Aging and the particulars (timesheets, grocery receipts, job descriptions, etc.) of ElderCARE. Please go to our website at www.eldercarelakecounty.org for more information.