



Parish Heartbeats: Stories of Faith In Action

Project Gabriel Sends in the Angels

Did you know that angels often work in pairs? Really, they do!

Through our parish's Project Gabriel, caring women are sent out in pairs to minister to women—pregnant women who find themselves in crisis situations resulting from economic hardship, domestic abuse, newly immigrated, or simply poor timing of the pregnancy.

Meet Regina Carlson, 'angel' on the core team of Project Gabriel at St. Margaret Mary. The consummate busy person, Regina raised six children in Wheaton, eventually moving into this parish 13 years ago.

"With my kids grown, I wanted to feel like I was doing something, and I needed to meet people," she explained. "I wanted to know what people in the parish were like."

So she explored and she found what she was well-qualified to do. Through her daughter, parishioner Joan McMillen, Regina discovered Project Gabriel, which originated in Texas, and is a ministry of Women's Choice Services of the Diocese of Joliet.

Together, in 2008, they formed the Project Gabriel ministry at St. Margaret Mary. Since then, 12 women from Naperville, Woodridge and Bolingbrook have received assistance through the program.

Once a pregnant woman in crisis is identified, WCS interviews her and ensures that she has medical attention. WCS then provides the parish with a profile sheet outlining the client's location, job status and needs. At St. Margaret Mary, an 'angel' from the core team is then assigned.

'Angels' work in pairs to provide help such as rides to doctor's appointments, or to parenting classes provided by WCS, where attendance can earn expectant mothers points towards purchases for their babies.

Relying on her belief that "you can't know who is out there to help unless you ask," Regina speaks highly of the core team. "I am thrilled that we have managed to pull this off! We don't have a lot of meetings, maybe three or four a year. I think there can be too many meetings with volunteer work."

And, when asked about a budget.... "We don't need a budget," she laughs. "This parish is so generous." A crib, set up in the hallway upstairs outside the church Narthex, is the receptacle

for baby-related donations. Although grateful for all generosity, Regina admits to no storage space and asks that drop-offs be made only when items are called for, usually as a notice in the church Sunday bulletin.

Within St. Margaret Mary's Project Gabriel ministry are: a prayer team; a resource team (housing, jobs, county and state programs); client 'angels' who relay a client's needs to Regina (who does the shopping) and who deliver items to houses or shops for client pick-up.

"Our 'angels' help with many practical needs," says Regina, "but we support the women spiritually as well. We are not a counseling service. Our relationship with the women is more about camaraderie and faith sharing. We work to give mothers the faith and confidence they need to survive."

When asked if volunteers need particular skills, Regina explained that WCS provides training, speakers, and classes. Regina and Joan, as coordinators, receive training and materials that they bring back to the group.



Regina sums up what makes this ministry work: "A little sleeper from Target is not a big deal, but when you put everything together, it makes a world of difference."

Please contact Regina Carlson: reg1215@aol.com or (630) 247-5216, or Joanie McMillen: joanie_mcmillen@yahoo.com or (630) 726-1244) if you would like more information or to help through Project Gabriel.

- written by Kathleen Macko

Parish Heartbeats is an occasional bulletin column that celebrates the ways St. Margaret Mary parishioners make a difference in the lives of others.