



Sister Alice Cooney
Chaplain at Monroe Community Hospital

Connecting Neighbor with Neighbor and Neighbor with God

Moving through the very busy intersection of East Henrietta and Westfall Roads, passersby see a large and sprawling building. The architecture is strikingly beautiful and the well groomed lawns and landscaped gardens create a park-like setting.

The building, Monroe Community Hospital, in origin dating back to 1826, has been magnificently restored and renovated and stands proud, a symbol of part of the unique story of Rochester health care and its multiple transitions. MCH is primarily a long term care facility for residents with chronic conditions and disabilities, unable to live independently in the community.

Coming from years of parish work and pastoral care, I joined the staff in 2009, as one of three Chaplains. I relate to all 560+ residents; about 50% are Catholic. My day consists of welcoming new residents and making them aware of the religious and spiritual opportunities available. I visit residents in their rooms and the many common areas. For the most part, people are more than happy to share their story. Rooms decorated with family photos and keep sakes readily provide an easy starting point for conversation.

New Catholic residents are delighted to know that Mass is celebrated every Sunday and several days during the week in the Main Floor Auditorium. On an average Sunday, depending on the number of volunteer transporters available, about 90 residents attend Mass, many accompanied by family members.

Unlike other hospitals, where patients come and go, the staff and residents at MCH form strong bonds of friendship. As chaplain, I often bring Communion, especially to residents unable to attend Mass. At some point in almost every conversation, I invite a resident to join me in a brief prayer. It's amazing how poignant those moments are – when concerns or doubts or fears or relief surface and we are simply two people “gathered together in the name of Jesus, with Christ in our midst.”

Often the residents and staff help create the agenda for my day.

“Sister, stop in to see Dan. He's a little down today.”

“Katie's time is short and the family is coming. Can you be there with them?”

“Tom's going for a difficult surgery. I know he wants to see you before he goes.”

“Would you pray with me for my daughter? She's going through a rough time.”

Pretty much every moment of every day seems to be connecting “neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God.”

Listening, caring, reassuring and safeguarding confidences... all simple ways of loving. Often when we feel vulnerable and in need, as at a time of illness, a brief prayer or blessing leads right to the core of our awareness of our dependence on God – for the resident and for me!

MCH is a wonderfully diverse community, ages eight months to 102. Residents come from varied backgrounds of family circumstances, education and careers. All have amazing and precious life stories to share and carry unique hopes and dreams in their hearts. The great blessing is that each resident is surrounded by a supportive and caring community of health and wellness providers, as well as resident friends. It's a privilege to be “serving the neighbor without distinction” in this time and place.