Making the most of every day

Staying active in retirement

Resting easy in retirement is not on the hearts and minds of many seniors across the archdiocese – and the Catholic Voice found five representative couples who continue to give to their families, parishes and communities.

These stories and photos take a look at seniors preparing the altar for Mass, moving and maintaining the parish cemetery, volunteering in family ministry, greeting at church and leading the rosary before daily Mass, among other activities.

As one of the seniors said: “If I feel someone at this age, you should be doing things like that. It’s a good feeling. It’s what the good Lord wants you to do.”

JOHN AND MARILYN PLESKAC
St. Joseph Parish, Ponca
Lifelong member of the parish.
Phil, 88, has served parish for many years as an extraordinary minister of holy Communion and maintained the grounds at the parish’s South Czech Catholic Cemetery outside Ponca by mowing, trimming and weeding. Still doing some of the physical work, most of his time now is spent supervising other volunteers. And to provide for future maintenance, Phil, and his wife, Patricia, in 2013 organized a successful campaign to establish a cemetery endowment fund, surpassing the $100,000 goal two years later. Married for 65 years, Phil said he and his wife hope to be remembered, “always looked for ways that I can serve the church.”

LEONILA AND GREGORIO HERRERA
Assumption-Grundy Parish, Omaha
Parishioners for 20 years.
Originally from Mexico, Leonila, 66, and Gregorio, 71, raised their five children in Omaha, supporting them by working in the meatpacking and hotel cleaning in Omaha, supporting them by working in the meatpacking and hotel cleaning industries. Now retired, they stay busy in the church as lectors, extraordinary ministers of holy Communion and organists for recital scholarship at the Christmas first Saturday of each month at Our Lady of Grundy Church. They also have accompanied Davenport Martin Fema and the Assumption-Grundy Parish to St. Leonard Parish in Sidney and St. James Parish in Cote, Neb., to start recreational adult groups. And the Herrera’s help coordinate the Christian Prayer environment (CPE) at Grundy Parish, a seven-year commitment that unites their relationship with each other and with God through communication, prayer, and a greater understanding of the faith. Involved in CPE, Leonila said that learning to pray is vitally important in any age when many marriages fail.

“We didn’t know all of this before learning it.” Leonila said. “It is a way to promote it and pass the knowledge of the faith on to this ministry so that others can learn it too.”

PHIL KNERL
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MARY LOU NIENABER
Holy Family Parish, Lindsay
Parishioner for 56 years.
Mary Lou, 70, worked for 32 years as school lunch manager at Holy Family School in Lindsay and now works when needed as a substitute teacher’s aide. She serves as a leader at Holy Mass, leads the rosary on Monday morning and is an extraordinary minister of holy Communion. Mary Lou also is active in the parish Altar Society, helping set up for Masses and handling the altar linens. She was a long-time member of The Sewing Ladies, a club that quilts, sews and crochets various items to sell as a fundraiser for the parish. She and her husband, Deacon Harry Nienaber, parents of 19 children, eight of whom are airline, also participated for many years in the Plant Project at Lindsay Parishioners for 20 years.

“Deacon Harry loves to do things for the church,” Mary Lou said. “As a deacon’s wife, I just do those things because it’s the right thing to do. I don’t want any recognition. I just do things that need to be done.”

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NORMAN ‘TED’ AND DONNA MAE HAVENKAMP
St. Wenceslaus Parish, Verdigre
Members of the parish since 1956.
Ted and Donna Mae are growers and share at Maun and extraordinary ministers of holy Communion (EMHC). They also work at parish fish fries and are charter members of their local Knights of Columbus and Catholic Daughters organizations. The parents of six children, five of whom are living, they love 12 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. Donna Mae, 82, is an EMHC at the local retirement home, serves on the parish funeral committee and helps with the altar cloths and linens. Ted, 85, is a facilitator in “That Man Is You!” sessions at the parish, serves on the cemetery board, has served several times on the pastoral council and helps with chores around the parish, such as cleaning snow.

“I feel someone at this age, you should be doing things like that,” Ted said. “It’s a good feeling, it’s what the good Lord wants you to do. And it is serves as an example for people who are younger. Hey, when you get some time, this is what is expected of you.”