

May 1, 2001

## Mass for Shut-ins

### HISTORY

In Hamilton during the 1950's residents of nursing homes and hospitals seldom left their rooms. The vast majority received few, if any visitors and no activities were planned to brighten their days. If you were fortunate enough to have someone add your name to the parish sick list you could look forward to only an occasional visit from a priest.

In the late 1950's a few members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society discussed the possibility of holding a mass as an annual event, for those confined to hospitals and nursing homes.

The first mass for "Shut-ins" was held at St. Patrick's church in Hamilton in 1960. At that time a number private ambulance companies loaned out vehicles and drivers for those who were too ill to sit or stand. The Amity owned a bus named the Bluebird. It held about a dozen wheel chairs. For many years it played a major role in ensuring that the "Shut-ins" would get to the church. We also borrowed two small W.C. vans from the MS. Society and we had to supply the drivers. Hamilton Street Railway busses carried the remaining two hundred or so people. A few wheel chairs were placed on each bus and they were secured with rope. During the sixties and seventies senior students from Bishop Ryan high school volunteered for the event. For several years we were fortunate to have most of that school's senior football team. We needed them to carry people seated on wooden chairs, up and down two or three flights of stairs. Students watched over those on the busses. They also handed out holy cards, pinned on holy medals and nametags.

Nametags were very important and we are pleased to say we have never placed anyone on the wrong return bus and no one wandered away from the church.

It was a very impressive, emotional experience to witness the "Shut-ins" Mass. The church was filled to overflowing, stretchers at the front beneath the altar and wheel chairs along the front and up the sides of the building. Every second pew was left empty in order to allow the Bishop and priests easy access as they move through the church handing out communion and anointing with holy oils.

DOFASCO has been very generous throughout our forty-two years, loaning us ambulances, drivers and walkie-talkie equipment.

The St. Elizabeth Visiting Nurses Association sends volunteer nurses to the church to ensure comfort for those with special needs. They have never missed a mass for-Shut-ins.

The St. John Ambulance Association has also sent volunteers and when available has often included their ambulance.

During the early years, members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society would visit every nursing home and hospital. Taking down the names of those interested in attending. To-day, we send letters to the Activities Director or Pastoral Services in each home/hospital advising them of the date and time of the mass and requesting they contact us to advise how many would like to attend. We then confirm the numbers attending and give them the approximate time our vehicles would be arriving for the residents. Letters also are sent to the Pastors of each church in the Hamilton/Burlington area.

In the late 1970's ambulance services and wheel chair vehicles became a part of the government health care system. Government also regulated nursing homes and hospitals closely and legal issues became a major concern.

At that time life changed for the residents of hospitals and nursing homes. Chapels were added to their buildings and activity directors were employed. Priests and extra-ordinary ministers started to make regular visits to the "Shut-ins".

Today, numbers attending are approximately one hundred; the Society pays for transportation for both wheel chair vans and mini-busses. Activity Directors state, as they have chapels, receive regular visits from priests/extra-ordinary ministers, and as staff is limited (to dress residents, re-schedule meals etc.) they view the mass for "Shut-ins" as both unnecessary and extra work.

We are aware the word "Shut-in" is not politically correct and upon occasion we have been criticized for employing this term. However, we define "Shut-in" to mean anyone, anywhere who cannot get outside of a private home, apartment, hospital etc. without assistance. We are always open to suggestion.

At this time the Society spends several thousand dollars annually for transportation, insurance, medals and holy cards. We will not attempt to calculate the countless gifts of time and effort expended by our many volunteers.

Mass schedule:

- 1) President contacts Bishop Tonnos to arrange date for mass.
- 2) President makes arrangements with host church. (A different church each year)
- 3) Approximately 2 months prior to the mass letters are mailed to volunteers, conference presidents and interested parties. Two meeting dates are selected. Letters are prepared and mailed to hospitals, nursing homes, St. Elizabeth Visiting Nurses, St. John Ambulance Assoc., Wheel Chair transportation Co.,

and Pastors of all Hamilton/Burlington churches. When necessary police are notified for traffic control. Sometimes, newspapers and local radio stations are advised.

4) On several occasions, throughout the years, we have sent Information to radio stations, and newspapers as public service items.

5) Arrangements are made with the host church for choir, organist, and ushers to work with our head usher. Seeking out additional priests if required and additional nurses/volunteers from the host parish. Committee members visit the church and review washroom locations, parking and traffic. We address any other Items that may conflict with the Mass, e.g. a wedding lust prior to or immediately following.

Holy cards, medals, ribbons and safety pins are purchased. Each medal is attached to a ribbon and secured with a safety pin. "Bus kits", a box with pens, nametags, medals on ribbons, extra pins and Instructions for new volunteers are enclosed.

6) Nursing homes and hospitals are contacted two days prior to mass with a close approximation of time that vehicles are scheduled to arrive.

7) Signs are prepared for pews with name of Hospital/Home. (In order to keep residents together amid familiar faces)

8) The Society's wheel chairs are delivered to the church; they are used to help people who have difficulty walking from the bus into the church.

9) Our volunteers arrive at the church approximately two hours before the mass. They prepare name tags and medals for each attendee. A white ribbon Identifies those wishing to receive communion.

10) Boxes with pens, nametags and medals are ready for the volunteers. As each bus and private car arrives two volunteers greet each Individual, and pin and tag.

11) Nurses and volunteers carry trays with small cups of water to hand to anyone that experiences difficulty swallowing.

12) Following mass, students in school uniforms hand out holy card or some other religious Item and the attendees are then assisted to their vehicles and returned to their homes.

13) Volunteers clean up the area.