**“God is our refuge and our strength…” (Psalm 46:2)**

The work of the Retirement Home Committee began in August of 2020 in response to the pandemic COVID-19. The elderly population is extremely vulnerable to the virus. Statics have shown that residents in care facilities, who often have pre-existing health conditions, may have the greatest risk of any segment of the population of becoming infected and dying from the virus. At the outset of the pandemic, as government regulations were established, these care facilities were closed to visitors. People in care facilities who tested positive for the virus were quarantined from one another. Many residents were sick, dying, and alone. All the residents found themselves in a situation of extreme isolation. The efforts of the committee focused on discovering, generating, and disseminating creative and innovative ways of expressing God’s love to residents and helping them to stay connected to their families, friends, Church communities, and others in the world outside the care center. There has been an effort, through regional Deacon meetings, to disseminate best practices in attending to residents in care facilities. Many parishes, in this outreach effort, used electronic means of communication, such as internet-based connections to Mass, programs and presentations, and meetings with groups or individuals. A special effort was made to encourage the Archdiocese Catholic Schools, grades K-12, and parish religious education programs to participate in projects, from class to school-wide efforts, in reaching out to residents through various means, such as artwork, cards, letters, and video production of messages, skits, or songs.



The committee, in regular meetings, has kept up-to-date on the current situation in care facilities, noting changes in regulations and access to facilities. One of the major committee efforts, as visitation was allowed under strict guidelines, was to compile a list of care facilities within each Archdiocese parish boundary. This list, now at over 700 facilities, includes assisted living centers, nursing homes and rehabilitation centers, memory care facilities, hospices, and hospitals. This list will continue to be updated on a regular, periodic basis.

Recognizing a need among some deacons and lay ministers in some parishes, the committee has developed a training manual, “Ministry to the Elderly, Sick, and Dying.” This manual can be found at the [www.DeaconDen.org](http://www.DeaconDen.org) website, from the *Resources* link, then under *Liturgical Resources* (or directly at <https://deaconden.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Diaconate_Training-3.pdf> ). In the same website location there is a presentation, “Ministry to the Elderly PowerPoint,” created by Deacon John Volk. The training manual contains a brief history of the Communion Ministry, information on conducting a Communion Service, a Resources List, Frequently Asked Questions, and pastoral responses to specific scenarios & situations. The manual brings forth an effort of Evangelization, reaching out to the families of residents, especially those who may be farther away from the Church. There is a modifiable template of a pamphlet intended for a resident’s family. On the pamphlet there is a prayer and space for listing parish Masses, confessions, and contact information. In the manual, the Communion Service and the pamphlet for the family of a resident are in English and Spanish. This manual is intended to be updated and revised with further questions, suggestions, and information provided by those practicing this ministry.

**“Go and announce the Gospel…” (see Mark 16:15)**

