

Be their guest

By Grace Griffie on March 14, 2017

1

Parma Baptist Community Church to offer monthly respite care

Parma Baptist Community Church, 4997 West Ridge Road, will soon provide caregivers of family members with memory loss the break they so deserve. The “Be Our Guest” Respite Care program will be offered free of charge the first Saturday of each month from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the church.

The pilot program is the first in Monroe County and is made possible by a grant through New York State Caregiving & Respite Coalition (NYSCRC), which is providing training for volunteers along with Lifespan, Respite Education & Support Tools (REST) and the Alzheimer’s Association.

“There are no services of this kind currently on the west side,” said Reverend Denise Bell, who is not only pastor of Parma Baptist Community Church, but program assistant for Finger Lakes Caregiver Institute at Lifespan of Greater Rochester Inc. “A lot of people are apprehensive about having someone come into their home and don’t want to drive into the city. The need is great.”

To participate in the program, individuals must be ambulatory, attend to their own bathroom needs, participate in social activities and feed themselves. The program is designed for those with early stage dementia, Alzheimer’s, a loss of memory or cognitive ability; however a diagnosis is not necessary. Cynthia Haslip, program coordinator and church member, conducts an interview with the caregiver to determine if his/her loved one is a good fit for the program.

“The program is a social model, not a medical model,” explained Bell. “Our goal is to have our guests be comfortable and have fun.” During the four-hour program, participants would have the opportunity to participate in arts and crafts, puzzles, games, conversation, singing, music and dancing, exercise, and lunch – all at no cost.

The facility, which is in the lower level of the church, offers plenty of space, four bathrooms and two kitchens. Exterior doors will be kept locked when the program is in session, much like a memory care unit in an assisted living facility.

Volunteers work with the clients one-on-one and the program is all interactive. Haslip also serves as the volunteer coordinator and currently has 15 volunteers – including church members, a chaplain, a former caregiver, a nursing director and two young people – all of whom are trained in respite and CPR.

Bell, who has been pastor at Parma Baptist for nearly two years, said she hopes to eventually expand the program to be offered more than one Saturday per month and would also like to provide a program for caregivers. “We could possibly offer things like

yoga, massage, caregiver training and support at the same time their loved ones are in the respite program,” she said.

Bell was born in Harlem and raised in the Bronx before she came to Rochester when her mother moved here. “I worked at Kodak and when my department closed, I had a choice – either go to school or get a minimum wage job,” she said. A mother of three, she was accepted and hired at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) in the same month. During that time she received her call to the ministry.

Bell went on to earn her master’s at RIT and served in the U.S. Air Force before beginning her doctoral studies at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School where she is still a student. At Parma Baptist, established during the time of slavery, she is the first African American woman leader.

“I’m honored to be here to revive the church into a community resource,” said Bell. “I want us to not only preach the word of God, but to be able to provide the community with what it needs.”