By Tony DeGol
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Spiritual renewal knows no age limit.

Just ask the 100 and 103 year old ladies participating in ARISE Together in Christ.

The two are among roughly a dozen people joining in weekly small group faith sharing at Garvey Manor Nursing Home in Hollidaysburg during this first season of the diocesan renewal initiative.

ARISE is happening in most parishes throughout Altoona-Johnstown and in other venues such as nursing care facilities.

Ron and Darlene Harella are involved at their parish of Saint Catherine of Siena in Duncansville. The couple reached out to Patty LeFevre, activities assistant at Garvey Manor and offered to lead a small group there since Darlene’s mother is a resident.

“This is a faith sharing session, so everybody that wants to can share what we talked about in the readings and how it affects their life,” said Ron.

“They’re interested, and they like the discussion of the faith,” added Darlene. “It brings back many memories of childhood and when they worked. It just rehashes the memories.”

During a recent session, for example, there was much reminiscing about religious sisters and others who introduced them to the Catholic faith at home, at Catholic schools, or at religious education classes.

Any resident can join with the group at any time, Ron stressed, whether it is to engage in faith sharing or to just listen.

“And the goal is to bring us all closer to Jesus,” he noted.

Hilda Gordon belongs to Saint Mary Parish in Altoona and currently resides at Garvey Manor. After initially hearing about ARISE through her parish, she was thrilled to learn about the opportunity at Garvey.

“There are a lot of questions that you have and never get the answers, but you can get them here,” she said.

Carmelite Sister for the Aged and Infirm Ann McCartney, coordinator of Pastoral and Palliative Care at Garvey, stressed that the benefits of ARISE are critical at any age. She realizes that some of the residents participating in the opportunity may come from a generation that did not openly share their faith, but the response has been positive.

“Renewal and being a part of the church is important all the way through a person’s life,” Sister Ann said.

Daily Mass is celebrated at Garvey Manor, and the Rosary is prayed regularly. ARISE, however, offers yet another dimension of the Catholic faith to residents.

“Through our activities program, we’re able to host it here and get that out to all of our residents through our activities calendar and open it up to our whole facility,” said Activities Director Barb Hileman stated. “Depending on how the group would grow, we would look at different locations to host it in our facility.”

The theme for this first season of ARISE Together in Christ is “Encountering Christ Today.” Besides parishes and nursing facilities, ARISE is also happening in Catholic schools, religious education programs, Catholic ministry on college campuses, and in prison ministry.

Season one will conclude over the next few weeks, and season two will occur during Lent 2019.

*Sister Linda LaMagna, CCW, diocesan coordinator for ARISE Together in Christ, is offering weekly reflections for ARISE throughout the season on Proclaim! The show airs every Sunday at 10:30 a.m. on WATM ABC 23. The reflections are also on the diocesan website and Facebook page.*