

IHMs in action



Rose Ange (Robert Joseph) Leddy, IHM, knows that people with memory loss have spiritual needs that aren't met through "traditional" retreat experiences.

So last year, Sister Rose Ange and Franciscan Sister Alacoque Burger created *Praying from the Heart*, an innovative retreat ministry shaped to meet the spiritual needs of people living with memory loss.

Through the retreat, the two hope to provide meaningful experiences for participants in ways that respect their abilities, their dignity and their religious traditions.

Sister Rose Ange is a licensed social worker with experience facilitating support groups for people with memory loss. Sister Alacoque is a retreat director and pastoral minister working in community settings caring for older adults.

"Developing support groups led me to give presentations to religious communities about sensitizing others to what it's like living with memory loss," Sister Rose Ange explains.

"At the end of one presentation, a participant told me she could go to a whole retreat on the topic. The seed was planted to create a retreat for those with memory loss."

While the retreats are adjusted for each group according to the participants' needs, they follow a basic pattern. Participants are told ahead of time what the retreat is about and given a choice about attending. Caregivers also attend to provide assistance and familiarity.

"The first day of the retreat is one of pilgrimage," says Sister Rose Ange. "When we've offered the retreat to religious communities, the participants visit their archives, the Chapel and often the cemetery to help stimulate the memories associated with these sacred places.

"One of the participants remembered going to the Chapel when she was a young sister. She said she'd always loved going at night because she could dance and talk to God. Another said she could feel the 'yesterday sisters.' Witnessing their memories is profoundly moving," Sister Rose Ange reflects.

The second day engages the participants in contemplative experiences of the presence of God using music, art and creative movement.

"We stay very flexible to see what touches each participant," notes Sister Rose Ange. "We are committed to acknowledging and respecting the individual, giving them choices with regard to how they participate and giving them time to express themselves."

Comments have been consistently positive.

"I enjoyed this retreat," said one participant, who is in the early stages of Alzheimer's disease. "[It was] a private time to think and remember – my own way of touching God." Another said simply, "God is at the center."

"'God at the center' is what any retreat experience is about," Sister Rose Ange says. "Anyone can benefit from *Praying from the Heart*, but it's uniquely beneficial to those with memory loss because of the affective rather than the cognitive emphasis."

For more information about *Praying from the Heart*, contact Sister Rose Ange at raleddy@ihmsisters.org.

If you would like to partner with the IHM Sisters in support of their ministries, secure [online](#) giving is available.