

Seniors find ways to cope with challenges of pandemic restrictions

No visitors. No Mass. No trips to the mall – or to the homes of friends and family.

Seniors have restricted and readjusted their lives in many ways, while others may face much more of a challenge.

At [St. Michael's Long Term Care Centre](#) in north Edmonton, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought much uncertainty and isolation to the 153 residents, but faith and prayer are sustaining them.

“Prayer is always good, whether it’s morning, noon or night...it’s a comfort now more than ever,” said Nancy Kroshak, a 93-year-old resident at St. Michael’s. “It gives me strength to deal with things. With all that’s going on around the world, there’s not much else you can do but pray your heart out to it all.”



Nancy Kroshak

As of April 28, there were 458 cases of COVID-19 and 50 deaths at continuing care facilities, among the 4,986 confirmed cases in Alberta.

As a precaution, no outside visitors are allowed at St. Michael’s. Inside the long-term care centre, residents practise physical distancing. They must be at least six feet apart at all times. At mealtimes, only two people can sit at each table. Any mail or parcels must be sanitized, and care workers spend extra hours each day scrubbing and wiping down all surfaces.

“It can get a little depressing,” said 87-year-old Mona Kocon, who keeps in touch with her children by phone throughout the week, and passes the time with television, crossword puzzles and short walks around St. Michael’s.

“I used to love going to the mall with friends and now I can’t do that anymore. But they’re taking good care of us. I wish it was different, and I’m anxious for it to be over, but I’m not too lonesome. We are still kept busy and in touch with each other here.”

Faith is central to life at St. Michael’s. Its chapel is closed to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, instead residents gather for livestreamed church services. Ukrainian Catholic residents watch a livestreamed Mass from [St. Josaphat’s Cathedral](#) celebrated by Bishop David Motiuk.

It’s the highlight of Kroshak’s week.

“I enjoy it a lot. It’s rare I get the chance to go to St. Josaphat’s anyways so it’s a good feeling to see it and pray with Bishop David,” she said. “I’ve also got a videotaped Mass from my home parish, Exaltation of the Holy Cross, that I watch now from time to time. I put it on, pretend I’m in church, see old friends of mine and it’s so nice.”



Mona Koron

Mona Kocon agrees. “It’s nice having the Mass to watch. That’s as close as we can get to the church right now.”

For some seniors, the COVID-19 restrictions are difficult – and potentially dangerous.

“We’re reaching out to seniors we know may be at risk or in need of additional

support at this time,” said Samantha Yutzy, program manager with Catholic Social Services’ [Elder Abuse Resource and Supports](#) program.

Social workers with the EARS program help seniors facing abuse and neglect, whether its family members taking money without the senior’s consent or denying them medication, food or clothing. They expect new challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“If we know food security was an issue for someone and we set them up with a service five months ago, we have to ensure that the service is still available under current restrictions,” Yutzy said. “Right now we are doing a lot of cross-checking to make sure resources like that are still available.”



Gurjot Kaur

Team leader Gurjot Kaur worries that many seniors in abusive situations may now have no way out.

“We sometimes help seniors find new homes. But especially for those looking for housing, there are a lot of delays right now,” said Kaur. “Many lodges are not taking in people, and because of that, I worry many will feel unable to leave the abuse.”

Under current COVID-19 restrictions, social workers with EARS can only communicate with seniors by phone, but they have the resources to meet all challenges.

“Even if it’s tougher to access resources, our team is working to keep up to date with all the new community resources that are popping up,” Yutzy said. “There’s hamper drives. There’s restaurants doing free meal delivery for those who can’t leave their homes. We’re just trying to stay at the forefront of that

information, so when people do call we have the support ready.

“Our main work right now is letting seniors know we are not closed. We’re an essential service and we want them to keep calling us.”

In 2018, the program served 177 seniors in Edmonton.