

The Gathering Place at St. Cecilia's

The Gathering Place is a fun and dynamic ministry of St. Cecilia's that meets monthly to offer activities, entertainment, lunch and bingo for those who are affected by mild to moderate memory loss. At the same time, it provides a few hours of respite for their caregivers, who sometimes have no other time they can call their own. Many of our volunteers have experienced the effects of having a family member with Alzheimer's and understand the need for brief respite away from the challenging demands of caring for a loved one with memory loss. This is a ministry that unfortunately many families will need at some point. In partnership with CarePartners since 2005, St. Cecilia's is one of 54 area congregations sponsoring a Gathering Place ministry free of charge to its participants. Caregivers are welcome to participate in as many locations as needed. The beauty of the Gathering is two-fold: caregivers receive a break when they need it and care partners can enjoy a stimulating and fun morning of socialization and activities. The backbone of the St. Cecilia Gathering Place is a dedicated team of compassionate and caring volunteers who offer snacks and lunch, decorate the tables, plan activities and programs, and, most importantly, provide one-on-one loving attention to all those participating. If a care partner needs to walk around a bit or go to the restroom, there is always a volunteer who can accompany that person and be sure that nobody gets lost or confused. Some family or paid caregivers remain with their care partners should they require additional assistance, while others are left with us so they may run errands, take a nap, or simply enjoy some time alone.

So what happens during a typical day at the Gathering? When our care partners arrive, they are greeted by name with a smile and a handshake or hug. Volunteers help them out of their cars and can assist with wheelchairs or walkers if needed. It usually takes about 20 minutes for most of our care partners to arrive, get their nametags, and get settled inside. We often have a therapy dog that drops by and greets our guests.



A cup of coffee, snacks and conversation start the morning.



Many guests clearly remember the early years of their lives and enjoy talking about work, their children, college, and favorite family outings. The volunteers love to see their faces light up as they talk about "old times."

There is a different theme each time (luau, weddings, Valentines, Mardi Gras, Easter, circus, sports, travel, etc.) and we meet in a circle and share memories, discussions, or a word game related to the theme.



Other days, we may have musical entertainment, arts and crafts, music and movement, or balloon volleyball for exercises.



A light lunch is prepared and served by our kitchen volunteers and is shared by all.



We typically end the day with games or bingo.



Everyone involved with the Gathering Place is part of a wonderful, caring, and loving team that works very well together. Each volunteer seems to know just what needs to be done, ensuring everything runs smoothly and everyone is well cared for. Those efforts are recognized and appreciated, not just by family caregivers, but also by the care partners. St. Cecilia's members can be proud that their church supports such a worthwhile, compassionate ministry. For information about volunteering for the Gathering Place (either during the day or to help with cooking or food), contact Lorrie Dawlearn at 713-783-7903 or via email ldawlearn@comcast.net To register a loved one to attend this free program, please contact Tom Breaux, CarePartners, 713-682-5995 ext. 210.