A Case Study
Shoulder to Shoulder
A Ministry at Holy Rosary Church in Seattle, Washington

Our Purpose
We are parishioners helping parishioners at Holy Rosary Church in Seattle, Washington.
We know that life, at times, has its difficulties and we believe it’s important to rely on one another. This is the gift of community. St. Paul commended us to “bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2). When one of us is ill, grieving, homebound, facing an unexpected crisis, or just struggling to get by – we help bear the burden. We stand together, Shoulder to Shoulder.

What We Do
Much of the help needed is simple - a ride to a doctor appointment, help with a chore, a computer, paperwork, moving something, replacing lightbulbs, a small repair, a home or yard project, help finding someone to hire, meals or prayer. Sometimes, we are asked to take on a larger project. For example, a 92-year-old parishioner needed to move into a retirement community, out of the home she’d lived in for over 50 years, and she did not have family to turn to. Volunteers organized her move, estate sale, and all of the details. Other times special skills are required. For example, our Carmelite Sisters needed a security camera, but didn’t know how to choose one, install, or use it, so volunteers handled it all. We simply take requests from parishioners or the parish staff, ask volunteers if anyone is willing to help and proceed from there.

Who Does It
People from all walks of life are willing to share their time and talents. Some lend a hand once per year, others once per week, working with people in need or behind the scenes. They are teachers, cooks, painters, project managers, organizers, mechanics, engineers, architects, lawyers, marketers, business owners, realtors, nurses, and so on. We started with 20 volunteers, grew to over 2000, and are now we are ready for every person in our church to join in. Together, our skills, expertise, strengths and time, make an impact. Every contribution is important and meaningful.

Lessons Learned
We’ve learned three important lessons. First, it is hard for people to ask for help even when it is desperately needed. So, we’ve made it every person’s responsibility to proactively look for opportunities to help – the parishioners, parish staff, and priest all keep an eye out for help needed, then we ask for it on their behalf. Second, supporting our parishioners over age 80 is particularly important. We make an extra effort to connect with seniors and once per year we honor them by delivering a homemade meal or plant and we remind them to ask for help when they need it. Third, it is important to keep asking for help simple. Any parishioner can email or call the church office, tell the what’s going on, then they pass it along to our ministry and we (post) take it from there.
Community
The most important lessons might be found in community. Although we help many people, it is our volunteers who receive the true blessing - hearts are touched, challenged, and reminded of what matters most. People, especially those who may not be willing to be a Eucharistic Minister, sing in the choir, teach Sunday school, or serve on a board, have a place to serve through Shoulder to Shoulder and they are truly needed. People forge new connections through the work, connections that break through social circles, and generations. Our sense of community continues to grow and what we can accomplish together knows no bounds.

Getting Started
We’d like to suggest four steps to get started.

1. **Form a small team**, to 1) enlist or recruit volunteers, 2) evaluate and approve projects, 3) organize projects and volunteers.

2. **Set up a private Groop for volunteers.** This is how we build community, mobilize volunteers and count their actions. Volunteers sign-in using their mobile phone or pc, and we prompt them to take three actions: 1) tell us as things get done, 2) share that smile, and 3) ask for help when it’s needed. We use Groopit. https://www.letsgroopit.com/php

3. **Tell everyone about it.** Announce it at church, in the bulletin, distribute handouts (like the one shown on the right), include it on your website and Facebook page. It’s important to build awareness, let every parishioner know about the ministry and provide specific examples of how or when they can call on Shoulder to Shoulder. Have one specific call to action for every person you talk with - sign up as a volunteer.

4. **Help parishioners who need assistance.**

Frequently Asked Questions

*Are there limitations to the help you provide?*
Yes. We are not equipped to provide long-term assistance, financial assistance, social work, or occupational expertise. When requests of that nature are received, we respond clearly and quickly. We let people know that, “We are not equipped to provide help that is long-term, financial, or requires occupational expertise. We are most effective to provide short-term help with simple problems. But, there are others who are equipped to help.” Then, we connect them to appropriate resources like Catholic Community Services, the local food bank, and our pastor.

*Do you assist people who are not parishioners?*
Members of Shoulder to Shoulder can sponsor help for non-parishioners. For example, a local woman (who was not a parishioner) just had her leg amputated, was living in disarray, was about to be evicted and become homeless. The woman was unable to clean out and haul away trash in order to keep her apartment. Mary, a Shoulder to Shoulder volunteer knew about this situation, knew there was no one
for the woman in need to turn to, agreed to manage the project, asked Shoulder to Shoulder for help and people volunteered to take it on.

**What is the biggest ongoing challenge?**
Most of the requests we receive are for “regular” help, but we've found some situations are more complicated and require intervention by an organization or person that’s trained in social work. The faster we can connect the person(s) in need with the “right” organizations, and remove ourselves from the process, the better it is for everyone involved. We’ve gotten smarter about how to identify those cases early and connect them appropriately.

**How do you explain it?**
We are parishioners helping parishioners at Holy Rosary Church and want to make sure you know that you can call on us if ever help is needed. There are times in life when we need to rely on one another. This is the gift of community. St. Paul commended us to “bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2). If a parishioner is ill, grieving, homebound, facing an unexpected crisis, or just struggling to get by – we want to help bear the burden. We stand together, Shoulder to Shoulder.

If you need a ride, help with a chore, a computer, paperwork, moving something, a small repair, replacing lightbulbs, a home or yard project – call the church office to see if a volunteer can help.

We, the volunteers, receive the true blessing – our hearts are touched, we are challenged, and we are reminded of what matters most. Now, we want you to join in. We will let you know when parishioners need help and you can decide to volunteer- once a year or once a week, whatever works for you. Go to [link] to sign-up.

**Can we ask you questions?**
If you have questions about starting a Shoulder to Shoulder program at your church, just call or send email to shoulder@holyrosaryseattle.org