



# The Gathering Place

*Nurturing Katy's Seniors while Supporting Katy's Caregivers*

Written by Gabrielle Browne   Photography by Marisa Hugonnett



Annie Beard playing bingo

**C**aregivers of the elderly share much in common with parents of young children. Both seldom ask for care for themselves. They are so busy providing for the needs of others, that they frequently fail to realize their own needs. For a parent, taking care of a child means watching and encouraging amazing growth. But now imagine the life of a caregiver of an elderly person. The elderly share many of the same needs of children but the caregiver, usually an adult son or daughter, knows that such exciting growth is just not possible. It is difficult for these children to watch their parent slowly decline with age. The Gathering Place is seeking to relieve some of the strain Katy caregivers may experience, while also providing support to the elderly community it serves.

Fran Borders and Norma Jean



## Supporting Katy Caregivers

The Gathering Place began in the Houston area through Interfaith Care Partners, which shares the mission of the program on its website: “We help congregations recognize and compassionately respond to opportunities to enjoy supportive relationships with community-dwelling individuals and families whose independence and self-esteem are challenged by a chronic illness or disabling condition.” Katy caregivers benefit from a welcoming community of volunteers and four host churches that offer a free morning of respite from the daily concerns and irritations caregivers often share. The Gathering Place also acknowledges the elderly person’s feelings of frustration that may come with being less independent.

## A Place for Many Needs

A participant of The Gathering Place program, Epiphany Catholic Church serves seniors with many different needs, focusing on helping those suffering from Alzheimer’s or dementia, says Alice Stewart, who coordinates the program for the church. “We try to add to their quality of life by interacting and entertaining them, giving their caregivers a break,” she says. The Gathering Place is not just for those suffering from such a disease, though, Stewart explains. “At Epiphany, we also include anyone who is lonely or just in need of companionship,” she says. St. Peter’s United Methodist Church also reaches out to those with many different needs when it hosts The Gathering Place once a month.

Peggy Woodward, who coordinates the volunteers at St. Peter’s, has been involved in the program since its inception 10 years ago. “We always encourage people to bring their mother or father. We began this for the homebound. We have served guests who have MS or are just in a situation where they’ve been bound to a wheelchair. It’s not just for Alzheimer’s patients,” she says.

## Gathering Times & Places

The Gathering Place meets every month at four Katy churches. Call each church for meeting times and to register.

- ▶ First United Methodist Church  
5601 5th St.  
281-391-2121  
First Tuesday of the month
- ▶ Epiphany Catholic Church  
1530 Norwalk Dr.  
281-578-0707  
Second Thursday of the month
- ▶ Living Word Lutheran  
3700 S. Mason Rd.  
281-392-2300  
Third Thursday of the month
- ▶ St. Peter’s United Methodist  
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Talking and enjoying their apple pie



Caregivers, parents, and volunteers  
enjoying lunch and conversation



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## Fun with a Purpose

A usual morning at the Gathering Place begins with volunteers greeting guests and their caregivers. Once the participants are signed in, the caregivers are free to run errands, meet up with friends, or just attend to their own needs. The guests are given a nutritious meal, but there is so much more that is given emotionally. "We sing songs, do exercises, play games, always do a craft, and play bingo," Stewart says. "We partner every guest with someone, so many volunteers are needed. Epiphany is fortunate to have classes from our preschool, Child's Play, come and perform for us each month. We also have an awesome piano player, who can play most any song from memory."

Katy resident Anthony Baginskie brings his 97-year-old mother, Theresa, to several Gathering Places each month. He welcomes each meeting since he sees her enjoying her visits. "She always enjoys eating lunch with everyone. The volunteers make her feel very welcome and important - they care for their guests," he says. "I enjoy having some time to myself to run errands or just kick back and relax at home without having to worry about my mom. She is always happy and more outgoing when she comes home from one of the Gathering Places."

## Volunteers Needed

The Gathering Place relies on volunteers to provide its vital services, and is always seeking additional help. "It's such a good thing," Woodward says. "It gives a caregiver a day off each week since there are four locations right here in the Katy area. We always need people who might want to be a substitute. We want volunteers to come a couple of times to see if they prefer a specific area of service: arts and crafts, kitchen, exercise, doing the games." For Stewart, who gradually began volunteering with the program more and more, the rewards are great. "When I began, I felt that I needed to be involved more," she says. "I started out organizing craft projects. It has been so rewarding for me. The smiles on our guests and their caregivers make it all worthwhile." **KM**

*GABRIELLE BROWNE lives with her husband and toddler in Katy. Her grandmother and family benefit from The Gathering Place.*



Peggy Woodward

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**Cinco Ranch Pediatrics**  
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