Msgr. Russell Bleich: ‘This is all about laying down your life for one another’

By Dan Russo
Witness Editor

DUBUQUE — Msgr. Russell Bleich has given the majority of his 84 years on the earth in service to the church as a teacher, pastor and administrator. Although he may be officially retired, his work as a priest continues under the banner of an unofficial credo: “I do what I can as long as I can.”

“The care for our retired priests is a moral responsibility, in return for their many years of sacrificial services in priestly ministry.”
—Archbishop Michael O. Jackels

Msgr. Bleich currently lives with about a dozen other retired clergy at the Villa Raphael in Dubuque. Since retirement in 2012, the native of Miller, Iowa, has been a part-time chaplain for the Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary and spiritual director for a group of secular Carmelites in Cedar Rapids. He regularly assists at parishes. He is also on a roster of retired priests that routinely visits Anamosa State Penitentiary to provide Mass and confession to Catholic prisoners each week, and he gets involved in retreats and parish missions, among other activities. His ability to stay positive and remain active in his golden years, he says, comes from the joy and hope he finds through faith.

“It’s a Gospel of joy,” he said. “Jesus came that we might have life and have it to the full. It’s all connected with friendship with Jesus.”

The roots of this friendship were planted decades ago in the small town of Miller he called home, where he began his education in a one-room schoolhouse. Growing

Msgr. Bleich baptizes an infant. Since retiring in 2012, he continues to assist in parishes and at retreats and serves in other ways. (Contributed photo)

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