

Companions IN PRAYER



Sisters of St. Clare
Saginaw, MI

Walking each other home

As some of you might know, we are a small community of four Poor Clare sisters. This past year two of our sisters, Bernie and Laurene, had to move to an assisted living facility because their physical needs were more than we could provide. Dianne and I are nearing retirement. This is a difficult time for the four of us. We realized that our lives together have reached a different stage. We are now in the day-to-day experience of “walking each other home” to meet the God we have chosen to serve and to whom we have dedicated our lives.

When we recognized this new phase of our lives, we saw that there were practical considerations to cover. We felt responsible for making sure that the final arrangements for our deaths were complete. This took longer than we had expected. We met with our attorney to update our medical declarations. Next we made plans with a funeral director, the parish administrator, and a musician to help plan our memorial services. We met with cemetery officials to buy vaults and stone markers. We then carefully documented all our plans and filed them for use when they would be needed. When we finished, we had a pleasant sense of completion and thought the hard part of our work was over.

However, as I prepared my sisters’ obituaries, I had a sharp emotional jolt when I saw their names. The same shock came when I saw the cemetery markers in place. I realized how dear these women were to me and how much I would miss them. Over the past 45 years together in ministry, we have seen each other’s successes and failures. We have worked hard to integrate our individual experiences of life with the demands of our lives in community. We have actually shaped each other’s lives. When we had conflicts or when we found each other irritating, we somehow worked through these problems and over the years achieved a kind of harmony.

I am reminded of the way oysters take irritating grains of sand and transform them into beautiful pearls. Somehow, our idiosyncrasies and irritating habits have been

transformed over time. We have rubbed and bumped against each other until our edges have smoothed out and been polished. With time and maturity it is as if these irritating habits have been converted into jewels, like pearls — beautiful transformations of character. Seeing my sisters and I change and grow has been one of the most rewarding experiences of community.



But there was one more task to complete for our final arrangements. We bought simple pine caskets, and over the last several months I have been staining and sanding them. There is no real need to stain and sand the wood as many times as I have, but the task does help me deal with my thoughts and questions. I found myself angry. I would think, “Why do we have to die?” and “Why do we have to die this way?”

However, over time I have come to see the caskets as boxes that will care for our remains that are simply like the “after birth” of a new-born. For I do believe that we will be reborn into the life of Jesus as he showed his disciples at Easter.

While Dianne and I consider ourselves the care-takers and leaders as we “walk each other home,” we realize that our older sisters are often the trailblazers. We brought them home for a visit on Valentine’s Day. Sister Laurene has found new peace and I can see that her heart and eyes are looking ahead. Sister Bernie, 99, says she is ready, and I see in her eyes a peace and longing. I envy her joy.

During her recent visit home, she asked us, “Do you worry?” We admitted that we sometimes were uneasy about what was to come.

“Oh,” she said quietly, “don’t worry, it will be a surprise.” She also added with conviction, “and it will be fun.”

Sr. Laura and Sisters

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