

# Companions IN PRAYER



Sisters of St. Clare  
Saginaw, MI

## *The protection of the Good Shepherd*

I have only once seen a real shepherd herding sheep, and that was when I was in Northern Africa with the Peace Corps in the 1970s. It was not a heavenly Christmas card scene. The shepherd that I saw was as unkempt as his sheep. Long days wandering the hillsides while the sheep graze is a rough life.

In the fields, sheep are not soft and cuddly. Their wool is clotted with mud, manure, burrs, and knots. Often the sheep seem confused and unaware of their surroundings. They frighten easily and wander off from the herd. They are not known to be particularly intelligent animals.

The shepherd protects and manages the sheep with a special staff. It has a hook on the end to capture a wandering sheep and bring it back to the herd. The rod of the staff is used to encourage the sheep to stay together.

The shepherd needs these sheep for his livelihood. He sells the wool and provides food for his family.

This interdependency of shepherd and sheep is used in early Christian images of Jesus the Good Shepherd. We are the sheep who need to be protected from dangerous attacks. Jesus cares enough about our safety to stay with us in the fields. I find this Christian image still comforting in a world far removed from the hillsides of biblical times. Fear and vulnerability live within us even today.

Pope Francis understands this interdependency between Jesus as Good Shepherd and our lives today.

I like the pope's image of being a shepherd among us so much, that I have a copy of his pectoral cross in my own collection of crosses. It reminds me of my own responsibility to reach out to others as a protector and caregiver whenever I am able — even though, as the pope warns, the sheep may smell.



*Pope Francis pectoral cross*

I sometimes remember the dog we had when I was growing up. She was a shepherd to us. She went with us everywhere. We had a paper route in the family. My two older brothers delivered papers morning and evening. I was initiated into the delivery operations by being given the Sunday morning paper route.

The feeling of companionship stays with me when I remember those early mornings delivering papers.

Since my dog was with me, I didn't feel frightened. I was reminded of that safe feeling when I visited my aunt in a nursing home. She had a stuffed cat on a chair. I picked it up and it made a cat sound and a stretching movement. I looked up at her and asked if she petted this animal. She said, "Yeah, especially at night when it reminds me of my cat." I knew what she meant. Holding an animal can be very comforting. Holding and petting even a

stuffed animal can be very comforting. There is a warmth and peacefulness that lessens the feeling of loneliness.

As I grow older and attend more wakes and funerals, I'm aware of how often Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd," is chosen as a Scripture for these services. As I hear the psalm read or sung, it does comfort me.

Asking the Good Shepherd to come to us, hold us, be with us, is one of the ways I know who God is. I

## *Saint Clare Day*

This year on August 11 we remember our founder, St. Clare of Assisi. I have been thinking about how sad she must have felt after St. Francis died. She lived and continued his work 12 years after his death.

St. Clare, more than anyone else, understood him. They were friends. They lived in the same town and were baptized in the same church. Their lives coincided in many ways. St. Clare heard St. Francis preaching in the streets of Assisi. She was inspired by his message and chose to join with him as he followed his vision. He led the men, and she would lead the women.

I think that the reason I have been thinking about St. Clare's sadness is that two close friends of mine have died very recently, and I'm also walking another friend home as she faces her imminent death from cancer.

I have felt great pain in losing these friends. The pain is especially sad for me because as I lose them, I am aware that in many ways, I am losing our shared history. Our love and respect for each other developed over many decades of our lives. Together we endured many challenging situations. We found comfort with each other as we shared our stories and memories.

can only long for the experience of a Good Shepherd to guide me through the dark night of death to the new dawn. It helps me to know that I will not be alone as I make this last journey.

(We are interested in your thoughts. Let us know at: <http://srsclare.com/about-us/companions-in-prayer-newsletter>)

### *Sr. Laura and Sisters*

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Of course, I still have the memories of my friends, but I so miss their presence and comfort that we gave each other when we were together. I'm sure that we have all experienced this kind of grief. As I remember St. Clare, I can feel her heart ache after the death of St. Francis. Remembering her pain draws me closer to her, and gives me a special peace as we celebrate her feast day.



*Pope Francis names Bishop Gruss as the 7th Bishop of Saginaw. Sr. Dianne welcomes him at his installation Mass.*