

## “IT WAS A “GOD THING”: A STORY OF LOVE & COMMUNION”

Written by Joanne Henderson

I want to share with you about my friend, Delores Caralluzzo, who passed away on December 30th, three days before her 81st birthday. We became acquaintances—and later friends in such a way that we both said it was a “God Thing”.

We first met at Lutheran Hospital where she was a patient, and I an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. One morning I knocked on her door at the very time she was speaking on the phone to Sara Krohnke, our pastoral care minister at St. Boniface. She was registering to join St. Boniface. Delores lived in Waukee and as her health declined in recent years, she felt a strong need to renew her faith and become part of a church family. However, due to her illness she was not able to attend Mass. I am also a pastoral care volunteer at St. Boniface, so when she returned home, I continued to take Holy Communion to her and check on her often.

Our friendship didn’t develop overnight—nor did it come naturally. I questioned many times where God was leading me. But as time passed, I learned to appreciate Delores’s strong will and I admired her perseverance, and she learned to trust and feel comfortable with me. Delores had no living family members, but she became family to me and I to her.

In our time together I learned many interesting things about Delores. She was born in New Jersey, and was an only child. Her parents owned a restaurant—which explains her love of cooking. She supported herself all her life as a cook, working in various institutions, restaurants and even as a cook on an oil rig off Louisiana.

Although Delores struggled with physical and mental illnesses, she was very smart and very capable of taking care of herself. You may have seen her in her motorized wheelchair crossing Hickman Road to her doctor, or in Fareway, the Dollar Tree or Goodwill - some of her favorite places. This past year took a toll on her health and she began the process of moving to an assisted living facility—a daunting task for someone like Delores who was on public assistance. She was fearful of losing her independence and couldn’t imagine not being able to cook for herself.

For most of her life, Delores walked her journey alone, but through her brokenness and struggle she was led to Christ, in the Eucharist and became part of a church community. I am honored to have been her family. I pray she knows what a blessing she was to me. I learned valuable lessons in my own journey and I’m grateful that our paths crossed.

Delores died alone in her apartment— as I think she would have wanted. She was often alone, but I believe she had more friends than she thought as many stopped by her apartment in tears after her death.

Father Chinna celebrated a beautiful funeral Mass in our chapel one Thursday morning during the 8am Mass where many St. Boniface parishioners were present. They didn’t know her and she didn’t know them, but that didn’t matter - a St. Boniface community was there to pray.

Delores did not have savings, or even a checking account. The only money that she had was usually kept in a plastic baggie in the form of coins. But with the help of our wonderful St. Boniface Outreach ministry we were able to give Delores a proper burial at St. Mary’s Cemetery in Dallas Center. Thank you to all who give to the outreach ministry and make such a difference in the lives of so many people.

Like Joanne and many other volunteers at St Boniface, I have felt God’s presence when sharing the Holy Eucharist with others in the midst of pain and suffering. It is a peaceful and humbling feeling. God calls us to be present in the lives of others by extending the same kindness and compassion that He shows each of us. Unfortunately, Delores’ story is not unusual; many people do not have family members who are able to care for them. The parish is so blessed to have Joanne and all the pastoral care volunteers who serve in this ministry at St Boniface. Let us pray for those who are sick and all those who care for them; may our hearts be open to hear God’s voice if we are also called to this ministry. ~Sara Krohnke, Pastoral Care Minister