

# **Camp GLOW smiles brighten Howard County parishioner's battle with cancer**

Jane De Hitta is blessed with two strong "families."

When the 24-year-old parishioner of Church of the Resurrection in Ellicott City was diagnosed with breast cancer, she came to lean on both.

De Hitta is the youngest of five siblings. The one closest in age, Sister Philomena Clare De Hitta, is a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Penance of the Sorrowful Mother. Another, Sara, for more than a decade has been a regular "companion" with Camp GLOW (God Loves Our World), a series of weeklong residential experiences for adults with disabilities.

Jane De Hitta formally joined that outreach as soon as she turned 18, the minimum age for companions.

Last February, less than two weeks after her 24th birthday and just a few days after she had helped with "Night to Shine," a prom experience for those with special needs at her home parish, De Hitta learned that she had breast cancer.

"The Lord provides the grace and the strength," she told the Review. "If I believe that he is going to work through my cancer, I should be able to believe that he is going to do everything in his power to work through everyone's struggles."

Throughout that challenge, De Hitta remained determined to be a part of Camp Glow at the Monsignor O'Dwyer Retreat House in Sparks, where she could be found the week of June 17-21.

"It's become the highlight of my summer," she told the Review. "It's my family."

This year, her involvement meant skipping a round of chemotherapy treatment.

"Camp GLOW was one of the first things I thought about when I was diagnosed," she

said. "I didn't know how I was going to react to chemo. I didn't know (if) it was going to get worse as I went along or if it was if I was going to get weaker, or how I would feel."

Her commitment to a program directed by Deacon William Fleming is only strengthened by its ongoing need for reliable companions.

"It's been really hard (for Camp GLOW) to find companions," she said with visible emotion. "Bill and I were talking about ... how it's been a struggle. I didn't want to be the one who couldn't come. That was definitely something I had to surrender to the Lord. I didn't want to *not* be here."

Her hair has fallen out and she is obviously not 100 percent, but the campers don't see her physical weakness.

"I see her faith and she gives me hope," Deacon Fleming said. "For a young woman her age, always smiling, it's inspiring. ... Campers accept her for who she is. She means the world to them."

De Hitta is pursuing a degree in social work from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, with an eye on working in geriatrics or those with special needs. Her Camp GLOW experience offers an insight into those populations.

"Some of the most moving parts for me, is when I'm serving campers in their menial tasks," she said. "(Things) that we take for granted, they can't do on their own, they need assistance.

"One of my first years I was working with this elderly woman who had a walker. She needed to be encouraged to do things. She was very slow and was apologizing all the time.... I see people in their weakness (and that) makes me see me and my weakness. It shows me where the Lord is.

"This is one of the places where I see Christ most, and where I have the opportunity to love him most."

In the same way that campers welcome the help of companions, De Hitta is more accepting of assistance from others.

“I have to learn to let people save me,” she said. “I can’t do the things I (normally) do when I’m struggling with the side effects of chemo.”

To that end, De Hitta related how a camper alleviated her own stress with a shared intention at afternoon Mass.

“One of the campers,” she said, “goes, ‘I would like to pray to the Lord. I just want to thank you for the nurse who came into my room at 4 o’clock so that I would get my meds. Thank you so much!’

“That’s what I needed, that joy and laughter and gratitude for the littlest things.”

*Paul McMullen contributed to this article.*