

# Marie imitated Christ

You likely did not know Marie Rolfes. She was one of those many people who were too great to be famous. She died last month at the age of 93. I had the privilege of celebrating her funeral liturgy.

Marie gave her life giving a life to her brother. Her brother, Fran, had Down syndrome. Marie's mother, on her deathbed, asked Marie to take care of Fran. She spent her life doing that.

I first met Marie back in the early '80s as part of the famous weekends for parents and families of developmentally disabled adults. This was a retreat initiated by the saintly Sister Justa Walton, I.H.M. For many of the retreatants, this was their only respite, their only time away from their loved one. Typically the retreat was held on one of the weekends during Lent or the Easter season. Always it was held at Bon Secours Spiritual Center in Marriottsville.

(As an aside, Bon Secours has undergone, and is still undergoing, major renovations. The rooms are all air-conditioned, with private bath and shower. As I watch the transformation, I'm often reminded of the old poem: "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan a stately pleasure dome decree." My version is: "In Marriottsville did Bon Secours a stately Retreat Center decree!" The executive director, Dr. Tom Little, is a worthy Kubla Khan! Visitors are always welcome to stop by to walk the labyrinth, to walk the wooded trail of St. Francis Assisi, to sit and meditate in the Peace Rock Garden, to pray in the chapel, or just walk the grounds.)

Excuse this commercial interruption!

Back in the old days, Bon Secours was a bit more Spartan, but no less wonderful. Our humble group always met in the Rocking Chair Room, and the group always brought plenty of snacks. I, of course, was drawn to this ministry by the highest motivation: "If you feed me, I will come!"

Marie always made her famous 10-egg cake, which also included a pound of butter! Hmmm, I wonder where my blood clots began? Thanks a lot, Marie. Your efforts to get me to heaven early are not always fully appreciated.

Our liturgies were held in the small Oratory. We would sit in a circle in front of the altar, and the Liturgy of the Word would always last a long time. The Word of God was broken open, and broken hearts were healed. The group shared their hopes and dreams and fears and worries. Always their concern was for the family member, almost never about themselves.

Marie was part of the group from St. Patrick's Parish in Fells Point. In the "old days" many of these families sat in the shadows with their loved one. Little religious education was ever provided. Sister Justa changed all that. One of the highlights in the history of this group was when Cardinal J. Francis Stafford installed Jerome as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, the first such installation in the country. If you could have seen the glow on Jerome's face as he distributed Communion, you would be forever touched.

I've said so often that the unsung heroes of the pro-life movement are the parents and families of mentally handicapped people. Yet, in our small group, none of them thought of themselves as extraordinary people. They just did what they believed was the right thing to do.

Giving their lives for the lives of others was simply their imitation of Christ. Marie was buried in a white suit. She had never married. She said that she wanted to be buried in white as a bride of Christ. May Marie enjoy the eternal love of the Bridegroom. May she rest in peace.