



Parish Heartbeats: Stories of Faith In Action

God's Little Pencils

God works in truly wonderful, mysterious ways. Many women who have participated in the Christ Renew His Parish (CRHP) retreats at St. Margaret Mary can personally attest to the uniqueness of both the opportunity and the spiritual growth that comes from it. Two remarkable parishioners, Jennifer Nolan and Marcia Mackenbrock, took two years to find each other in the midst of the CRHP experience and have spent the last six years sharing their gifts with others as the Spiritual Directors of the women's CRHP retreat.

When women attend the CRHP retreat, they find themselves at all different stages of life and faith. Some are comfortable in their faith and anxious to delve deeper. Some are testing the waters, unsure of what a personal relationship with God would mean for them. They come to the weekend without knowing what to expect and often without knowing anyone else who will be attending. While the Giving Team of women parishioners provides the substance of the weekend retreat, it is the loving, faith-filled guidance of Jennifer and Marcia, along with Sister Madelyn Gould, that will allow the women to continue their faith journey.

"We are called to be in community with one another," says Marcia. "We come to know God by being with people who are seeking God. There is an intentional mystique around CRHP because the power of the experience cannot be described. It is unique to each woman. But there can be no doubt that God calls each group of women to be together because they were meant to cross paths at this time in their lives."

God worked hard to bring Jennifer and Marcia together. Though they attended the same CRHP retreat, it was a large group and their paths did not directly cross until two years later when Sr. Madelyn approached Marcia to fill a leadership role. Sr. Madelyn asked Marcia to choose a co-leader and Marcia credits the Holy Spirit with inspiring her to choose Jennifer. In the six years that they have worked in tandem, they have become spiritual sisters and have continued their own faith journeys by participating in the Ignatian Retreat, a year-long

commitment to faith development, as well as many of the other Adult Formation offerings provided by the parish.

Jennifer and Marcia find their roles as spiritual directors to be a humbling and extremely fulfilling ministry. "We approach each group uniquely," explains Jennifer. "We respond to where they are as individuals and match our faith development activities to the groups' dynamics. Inevitably we find ourselves receiving immeasurably more than we give. We try to always let God guide our hands and words and are brought to our knees by the insights and wisdom he offers us."

Marcia adds: "It's like Mother Theresa said: 'I am a little pencil in God's writing hand.' Jennifer and I are merely conduits for God's message of grace and love to each CRHP group we mentor. The Holy Spirit is never absent from any CRHP gathering!"

They both believe that their initial CRHP experience led them to a more active role in parish leadership, expanded their faith, and opened them to opportunities to serve by reflecting the light of faith back to others. "We are honored to use our skills as educators and leaders to help other women develop their own relationship with our Creator," shares

Jennifer. Marcia concurs. "Seeing the transformation of the women we serve as they grow in faith is deeply moving. Sharing this ministry with each other makes it even more enriching."

If you are interested in making the next women's CRHP retreat or men's CRHP retreat contact Sr. Madelyn at 630-369-0777.

- by Cabrina Attal



Jennifer Nolan (left) and Marcia Mackenbrock

Parish Heartbeats is an occasional bulletin column that celebrates the ways St. Margaret Mary parishioners make a difference in the lives of others.