

Grandmother is a minister

By Betty Monson
special writer

"Are you a nun?" asked a senior-citizen resident of Farmington Hills Inn.

"No," Marge Roberts replied, "I'm a lay minister from St. Fabian's Church. I have come to bring you Communion."

"Oh," The resident mused for a moment. "Well, what do I call you? Mother?"

Roberts laughed as she recalled the incident.

A trim, blonde, 50-year-old, Farmington Hills grandmother, Roberts is unique. She is a certified pastoral minister, counselor, editor, and hostess of her own inspirational show on cable television. She will someday have her doctorate in ministry to cap off her other degrees: bachelor's in elementary education and master's in Religious Education.

Widowed at age 37, with three children to raise alone, Roberts had thrown herself into "productive work" to assuage her grief. A longtime convert to Catholicism, her continuing interest in religion and service led her into teaching religion and later into the ministry.

Her hazel eyes sparkling with humor, Roberts recalls that in 1980 she was the only woman among ordained ministers at the Interdenominational Institute for Advanced Pastoral Studies in Southfield, and that "it felt great to finally get some respect." Nuns and priests have traditionally been looked up to, she feels, but the status of ministerial laywomen has yet to be determined.

AS A PAID professional at Farmington Hills' St. Fabian's Roman Catholic Church, where she is a parishioner, Roberts assists her pastor, the Rev. Seamus Ryan in many ways. She conducts a Eucharistic service once a week for Catholic residents at Baptist Manor on 13 Mile, and for those of the Farmington Hills Inn on 12 Mile.

Roberts frequently attends parishioner's wakes or funerals, where she leads the rosary or gives a reading from scripture. She is available for youth or marriage counseling, and visits the parents of newborns to insure their understanding of the responsibilities of baptism. "Baptism means making a lifelong commitment," Roberts said, "and should not be undertaken merely because it is traditional."

For the women of her parish, Roberts conducts a daytime mini-retreat twice a year, sometimes employing imagery-prayer.

"During our Advent Imagery-prayer service, we focused our thoughts on ourselves as God-loved individuals," said Roberts. "We imagined standing in the presence of Jesus, and writing our problems and fears on slips of paper, which we put into a large, empty box. We wrapped the box in gift-wrap, and secured it with a ribbon. We presented this, our 'gift' to Jesus, who in turn, offered it to the Father. And so, we left our most vexing and spiritually distracting troubles in God's hands."

Roberts devotes two days a week to the Detroit Catholic Charismatic Renewal Coordinating Center, where she is pastoral minister, counselor and spiritual director. She teaches inner-healing and directs prayer groups. She also edits the Center's monthly publication, the Detroit Catholic Charismatic Renewal bulletin, which has a circulation of 3,400. She is a leader of the Christian Writers Workshop.



Marge Roberts

FOR SEVERAL months Roberts has been mistress of ceremonies for her own inspirational television show, "Amazing Grace." The public-access cable show airs out of Lincoln Park's United Cable studios on channel 28, which serves Lincoln Park, Trenton, Gibraltar and Woodhaven.

As hostess, Roberts interviews Christians whose ministry takes them in unusual directions, such as the colleague who works among the bar-mustangs of Casa Corridore, or the therapist who teaches her patients how to use meditation to help relieve pain. One of her guests spoke of a personal inner-healing, and another of a religious awakening during a death-experience.

So far, Roberts has completed about 25 segments of her show. She hopes to do similar shows for the public-access cable TV station in Farmington when it becomes operational, and as a member of the Christian Communication Council, she hopes to find some radio spots for inspirational readings.

In the Roberts family, everybody gets into the act. Husband Nick, who she married in 1972, and daughter Nancy handle the camera and sound-mix respectively for the show. At their Farmington Hills home, all pitch in with the housework and the entertaining of senior citizens invited for special holidays. A senior gerontology major at Madonna College in Livonia, Nancy works part time at Cambridge South Nursing Home in Southfield. She hopes to find employment in a hospice in Tucson after graduation, and to someday operate her own facility for the aged.

If the Roman Catholic priesthood were open to women, would Marge Roberts want to be a priest? "I'll never see it (opened) in my lifetime," she said. "Yet, I'd make a good one."

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