

40th Anniversary Celebration of CCGD Covenant in 2013

Our Covenant is like Marriage by Therese Caffey

I have the joy of being one of the people who made first covenant. When I think about that experience, the thing I think of most is all the times that night I said, “Lord, if this doesn’t happen, I’m not going to do this.” And the ironic part was I was one of the people who kept saying to Bobbie, “Don’t you understand! God wants us to be a community?” But Bobbie was still not convinced and he would just look down at me and smile.

When we went to Mass at the chapel that night my first reaction was, “Lord, this is the way religious women make vows. I can’t do this. This is too permanent.” And it was like “yes, you can do it, not because you can but because I want it.”

You heard Joe Tinker talk about non-residential household. We were going up by household to make the covenant, and I’m saying, “Lord, I’m not in a household, I can’t go up by myself, Lord.” Russ Keenan came over to me and said, “You know that we have been praying about you coming to live with us. So, will you come up and make covenant with our household” God had just destroyed my first excuse.

The next objection was, “Lord, if you have me do this, you’re going to have to come down from Heaven yourself and tell me to leave when it is time because I won’t leave unless you do.” However, the years went by and lots of things happened and it became very clear to me and to Barbara O’Brien, with whom I lived at the time, and who is also a covenant member, and to Father Paul, who was my spiritual director, that God was asking something different of me. God really was asking me to leave this community. I have been trying to remember when I left, and I can’t. I know that it had to be sometime in the early 1990s and I came back in 2000.

In 1980, Barbara O’Brien moved into residential household with me. At first it was suppose to be three years until she finished school. But then she decided to stay at least one more year because she wanted to spend her first year of teaching living with an experienced teacher. Much later, she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer so we started looking at our lives and realized that it had been twenty years that we had lived together in household. We laughed about it and said, nobody could have lived with either one of us, except the two of us. But other people did live with us from time to time.

The one thing that was my one hard and fast rule in my household was, “Do not go to bed angry.” The scripture says do not let the sun set on your anger, because you give Satan a chance to enter in. So that became our hard and fast rule, and in all those twenty years. We never went to bed angry with each other.

When Barbara was diagnosed with ovarian cancer we had not been in Community for awhile but several people in this Community just would not let go. (I’m giggling because Alice Clauss is one of them and I’m sitting here looking at her) She just would not let go. She call and visited all the time and just acted as if Barbara and I were still members of community. And I know Mary Matasso didn’t let go in her heart either. She just kept praying and waiting for me to come back.

When Barbara was dying I was going to the hospital after school, staying with her all night and going from the hospital to school the next morning. Doreen Diller was not working at the time and she said, “You can’t do that!” and I said, “Well, you can’t either.” She said, “Yes, I can. Are you going to rob me of the chance to serve you?” So Doreen kept a constant night vigil and Alice was always there during the day. People began to come and be with Barbara and I through her last days and because of such kindness from so many community members I realized that no matter what I remembered, or no matter what had happened, the tie with this Community could not be broken.

When we make covenant, it’s like a marriage. If there are only two of you and you’re married, your marriage is not going to work. If there’s only you and this Community in your covenant, this is not going to work. God has to be the third member of your covenant because it is only by God’s faithfulness that we are able to be faithful to any covenant we make. God is the one who calls us into covenant with one another, and God does not change. If any of us has been called into covenant, we are called into covenant – not even until God moves us somewhere else, but forever. You heard Joe Tinker, we all are called to be a part of this body no matter what else may change in our lives.

I taught religion for more years than some of you have been alive, and one of the things I always said to my Confirmation students was, “I understand that it has to be your decision to be confirmed or not. You cannot make this decision because Mom wants it or Grandma wants it, or Dad wants it. It has to be between you and God. But I pray that you will decide to be confirmed because if you don’t the entire church will be poorer for the lack of your gifts.”

Well, that same thing is true in this room. That same thing is true in this Community. All of us are made richer by the gifts of each other. When one of us chooses to leave or not to try each day to be faithful to our covenant, all of us are poorer because of that choice. God is the one who called us. God is the one who is faithful and God is the one who chose this group of people, not willy-nilly, but because he has called us to be a people set apart for him. And that is what he will make us into, that is what he is still trying to make us into. We keep hearing, "Submit, surrender, give everything to me." He is begging each of us to surrender to Him not only for our individual good, but for the good of all of us.

The other thing that I remember most about First Covenant is this: we say our anniversary is March 24th, and it is, but Joe said that it was in the wee hours of the morning by the time we were done. Guess what that is. That's March 25th – that's the Feast of the Annunciation, that's the feast of Mary's fiat. From the beginning of our lives together God has given us a model for the surrender and the fiat he is asking of us. What better model can he give than his own Mother?