



HONORING NATIONAL BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

# Nuns face breast cancer with faith and community

Sister diagnosed with breast cancer: 'I was overwhelmed by support'

By Meredith Moss  
Staff Writer

TROTWOOD —Nuns, like the rest of us, face human challenges ranging from fears to illness.

They may also face breast cancer.

But in addition to medical care, religious women have a couple of added benefits when it comes to battling disease: Their faith and built-in community.

"I believed that prayerful support would help me get through it," says Sister Rosemary Goubeaux, a Sister of the Precious Blood who works as a hospital chaplain at Good Samaritan Hospital. "I believe prayer makes a difference in both attitude and healing."

Ten years ago, Sister Rosemary had gone to the doctor for her annual check-up and mammogram when she was called back because of a suspicious spot.

"I felt so good I thought they must be mistaken," she remembers.

When that spot turned out to be cancer, Sister Rosemary immediately asked the members of her order to put her on a prayer list.

"The Sisters prayed, sent cards and e-mails, called, and some offered healing touch," she said. "I was overwhelmed by support."

She especially sought help from her retired sisters who live at the motherhouse at Salem Heights.

"They are a powerhouse of prayer," she says.



Sister Judy Niday (left) and Sister Rosemary Goubeaux, both breast cancer survivors, believe living in the Sisters of the Precious Blood community as they do is an asset when dealing with crises such as their illnesses. Staff photo by Jan Underwood

Living in community means there are always others around who care. For the past three years, Sister Rosemary has lived with three other sisters at a farmhouse owned by the order. One of them, Sister

Judy Niday, has also faced breast cancer. She serves as spiritual care coordinator at Mercy Siena Retirement Center.

"In those days, the older sisters thought breast cancer was a death

sentence and that I was going to die immediately," says Sister Judy who was diagnosed in 1978 and had a recurrence in 1987. "I was in my transition year and they felt they were losing a younger sister too early."

Something she'd learned earlier as a teacher in Colorado helped immensely.

"I had the experience of working with hospitalized children and I learned visualization techniques," she says. In one case, for a young girl close to death, she suggested the child visualize thousands of angels entering her immune system to fight and control the disease.

"She's now an adult," Sister Judy is happy to report. "For myself, I visualized being surrounded by a soft white cloud that held me, and that's how I pictured my God holding me in place until I was healed."

She passes that healing forward, always writing a note of encouragement to any sister who has been diagnosed.

Sister Rosemary also uses her personal experiences in her work.

"I feel it has made me a lot more sensitive to people experiencing cancer," she says. "I work with oncology and a lot of breast cancer patients, and often sit with family and friends to affirm them when their loved ones are going through surgery or treatment. I also work with a 'Living with Cancer' support group."

She's convinced an individual's deep faith can help when it comes to healing.

"You need God's help, but you also need people around you that can be caring and understanding."

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