

EDITORS' NOTE: In the following essay, Marie Sanders recounts what she believes to be a miraculous cure of her multiple sclerosis. Sanders, a parishioner at St. Thomas the Apostle Parish in Irondequoit, attributes the improvement in her physical condition to her devotion and prayer to Mary. Her claim of a miraculous cure has not been verified by any church authority, nor has the Catholic Courier been able to obtain medical confirmation of Sanders' improved condition.

By Marie Sanders
Guest contributor

I grew up as what some people refer to as a "paper Catholic." That is, my sense of what it meant to be Catholic came from C.C.D. instruction, which was too brief to teach me to understand, much less appreciate, my faith.

The failure to teach such fundamental topics as Jesus' real presence in the Holy Eucharist as well as how to pray the rosary and the Stations of the Cross contributed to my inability to believe in the value of weekly attendance at the Sacrifice of the Mass. I therefore attended Mass less frequently as the years went on.

One day in the summer of 1983 — after my freshman year at Middlebury College in Vermont — I suddenly developed optic neuritis, which rendered me blind in my left eye in only a few hours.

I was pretty upset when the blindness hit me. I didn't know what to think. I thought maybe I had been reading too much.

I went to my ophthalmologist, who suggested that the blindness might be linked to multiple sclerosis, which affects the nervous system and can lead to speech disorders and the loss of muscular coordination.

I returned to school in the fall, but still had problems with my vision. I also suffered from other symptoms linked to multiple sclerosis, including: great exhaustion (even after sleeping 12 hours); poor coordination, even though I had been a figure skater (I would often bang my shoulder when passing through doorways and I would also periodically stumble over my feet); ice-cold hands and feet; and numbness randomly affecting areas of my body for a few weeks at a time.

The following summer I was hospitalized and given high-dosages of steroid therapy because of poor mobility on the left side of my body — the after-effect of a two-day migraine headache. The doctors took a sample of my spinal fluid, and after analyzing it, diagnosed that I had multiple sclerosis.

Fortunately the medication I was given was effective and my mobility was pretty well restored so that I could return to my studies. Because of the latest attack, however, I was unable to remain in sunlight for long periods of time because exposure to the sun brought back the symptoms of previous attacks — and also chronic migraine headaches.

With these new limitations I was forced to lead an increasingly isolated existence.

For the first time in my life, I remember seriously questioning the power of God in my life and why He had allowed this illness to happen to me. I must say that although I was angry at Him, He had certainly gotten my attention.

I graduated from Middlebury College in 1986, with a degree in Russian and German. I began graduate studies in German at Washington University in St. Louis, Mo.

In January, 1990, I began following a gluten-free diet, which meant avoiding foods made with most grains, except for rice and corn. I learned about the diet from a man with multiple sclerosis who had read about the gluten-free diet, tried it, and said it had made his symptoms less severe.

As part of the diet, I began to bake my own bread, using rice flour and potato starch flours. I also avoided granulated sugar, cakes, and red meat.



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor
Marie Sanders holds the rosary she says turned gold after her visit to Medjugorje.

Within six months of following the diet, I got fewer migraine headaches per month. I was thrilled for the extra time this afforded me.

It was also about this time that my mother began talking to me about Mary's apparitions in Medjugorje. My mother went there on pilgrimage in May, 1990, just a couple of weeks before I arrived home for a month's vacation.

She invited me to go to a healing Mass, which I did largely out of curiosity. At the Mass, I went up to be blessed by the priest and was ready to return to my seat when the next thing I knew, I was falling backward — it seemed in slow motion — and found myself on the floor.

I "rested in the Holy Spirit" for a little while. When I got up, I was filled with great peace. I had received the gift of faith.

I began to pray the rosary my mother had given me from Medjugorje. Before long I was praying it every day. I also began to attend weekly Mass and to enjoy it.

Shortly after I returned home for Christmas vaca-

tion in 1990, I discovered while I was praying that gold hearts appeared on many of the beads on my rosary. I was so surprised; I have stared at the rosary many times since. I still treasure the rosary, and the hearts are still there.

By the end of my Christmas break I expressed an interest in going to Medjugorje with my mother if she ever returned there. As a result she booked a trip in May as a graduation present for earning my master's degree in German.

Beginning in December, 1990, I had also begun to suffer additional visual difficulties. My eyes burned continuously regardless of the rest that I gave them. At the university I discovered that reading would give me a terrible migraine within an hour.

I had a three-and-a-half hour examination with a neuro-ophthalmologist and two other consulting doctors in St. Louis. They determined that there was nothing they could do to improve the situation. It was no longer possible to remain a student.

About five weeks before our trip, the soles of my

feet became numb. They remained numb for about three-and-a-half weeks, and I was afraid of that numbness spreading up my legs. I wondered if I would be able to make the pilgrimage at all. Even if I went, I imagined that I would probably just sit around in the guest house and the church for a week. Still it would be exciting to be in the place where God's mother was appearing.

The week before our trip I again attended healing Masses with the same priest through whom I had been blessed in the Holy Spirit the year before. I experienced special blessings during the Masses. I felt great heat on the left side of my neck, the left cheek, and going into my left ear — the affected areas varied from Mass to Mass. After the last healing Mass we attended, my mother and I went directly to the airport to take off for Medjugorje.

We arrived in Medjugorje on Pentecost Sunday, 1991, at apparition time. I remember being amazed that I didn't experience the usual effects of multiple sclerosis after having been awake more than 24 hours. Although I was very tired, I didn't have a migraine.

On Monday I saw the Blue Cross that marks the site where Mary first appeared to the seers. I attended morning and evening Mass, and looked at souvenir shops for about an hour. I went to bed early that night because I was tired and didn't feel up to climbing Apparition Hill for the late evening apparition.

The next day, we went to St. James Church to hear Fr. Jozo Zovko's talk to the pilgrims. We arrived at church well in advance on Tuesday to get good seats for his address. While I listened to him speaking German to the pilgrims, a sensation kept passing in waves over me. I was unable to keep my eyes open although I heard everything he said.

Fr. Jozo then spoke to us through an English interpreter. At the beginning of his talk he called an Asian-American woman to come forward and give testimony about the miraculous healing she had from cancer within a year-and-a-half after visiting Medjugorje. Her words really touched my heart and I thought, "Maybe there's hope for me."

At about three-quarters of the way through his talk I suddenly began to feel very ill. I felt too weak to leave the church, though, and it wasn't long before I couldn't even sit up. I leaned my head on my mother's shoulder and wondered what was happening to me.

As Fr. Jozo concluded his talk and called on the Blessed Mother to intercede to heal the sick, I was suddenly able to sit up in the pew. Then Fr. Jozo asked everyone to kneel and bow their heads for God's blessing. Because I didn't feel well enough to kneel, I just sat and put my hands on the pew ahead of me. When Fr. Jozo raised the crucifix from the altar table and blessed the congregation with it, something wonderful happened and I felt well again.

I stepped into the main aisle of the church and took a couple of steps, and I realized that God had cured me because I had perfect balance. I felt like a baby — completely refreshed all over. I immediately told my mother that I was cured.

By the time we got out of church I was laughing, giggling and beaming ear to ear. My mother and I sat down at a bench about 50 feet from the church door, and I told her what had just happened. I leaned on her right shoulder — not for support, but in a friendly manner — as we talked.

Suddenly this tremendous energy began to pour out of the left side of my body in waves, pushing my mother like a feather almost off the bench. This was the side of my body that had been most affected by multiple sclerosis. This jerking movement occurred on and off for 15 to 20 minutes.

I have been completely healthy ever since. I have no more dietary restrictions, no more migraines, no more clumsiness, no more reading restrictions.

All I can say is, "Praise the Lord for His great mercy on me."

Woman credits 'cure' to God's healing action

Insight