

# Hospitality minister draws on scriptural faith

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Over the past year, Myra Humphrey lost her mother, grandmother and 29-year-old fiancée — all of whom died of heart attacks.

Humphrey, 26, who currently serves as hospitality minister at Corpus Christi Parish, 864 E. Main St., recalled that the loss of three loved ones in one year shook her life's faith to its foundations. She was plunged into near suicidal depression after her mother died last August, Humphrey said.

"I couldn't stop crying," she said. "I had a sense of just wanting to give up."

While deep in the throes of despair one night, a female friend of Humphrey called and comforted her over the phone. She remembered her friend repeating three times verses 28-39 from chapter 11 of St. Matthew's Gospel:

"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy, my burden light."

"It was amazing," Humphrey said. "I felt a supernatural presence of God. I felt heat, and light and joy. It was almost like an out-of-body experience."

She credited this experience for crystallizing her desire for a vocation.

"It was at that point that I realized God's word is a living word for those who hunger for it," she said.

Humphrey decided that somehow she would commit to a ministry on behalf of Christ. Currently employed as a licensed practical nurse at Rochester Psychiatric Center, she noted that she felt she had some sort of calling for years.

"I've always been attentive to doing my work as if I was doing it for the Lord," she said.

A convert to Catholicism six years ago, Humphrey was recommended for Corpus's hospitality position by Father Robert T. Werth, pastor of St. Bridget's Church, 175 St. Bridget's Drive.

Corpus was looking to hire an African-American staff member, Humphrey said, and Father Werth had been impressed with her participation at St. Bridget's, where she sang in the choir and even preached last November.



Erik Kunkel/Photo Intern  
Myra Humphrey, a hospitality minister at Corpus Christi Church, Rochester, greets Holly Tribble before a May 7 folk Mass.

"My pastor saw this gift in me," she said. "Since I'd gone through what I'd gone through, I was committed to encouraging people in the Lord."

Hired last February, Humphrey now works 20 hours a week as a nurse and 20 hours a week at Corpus. Her parish duties include greeting parishioners at Masses, occasional preaching from the pulpit, and evangelizing in the surrounding neighborhood.

The hospitality minister sometimes goes door-to-door, inviting people to attend services at Corpus Christi. In other instances, she uses everyday meetings with strangers as an opportunity to evangelize.

She recalled one meeting with a harried woman at a bus stop. The woman was cursing and bemoaning her situation after missing the bus. When Humphrey pointed out that the bus' destination-sign stated that it was not in service, she and the woman struck up a friendly conversation in which the stranger bared her troubles to Humphrey.

"Maybe you just need to invite Jesus into your life," she told the woman, who agreed to accept the minister's in-

itation to attend Mass at Corpus.

Humphrey herself gradually converted to Catholicism. As a baby, she was not baptized into a particular Christian denomination. Her family, however, did attend Baptist services, and — on her own — she explored different Christian denominations in the city.

She found herself particularly attracted to churches that emphasized regular Bible study and daily self-examination in the light of Christian teaching. Yet, studying the Word of God wasn't always a pleasant experience, she noted.

"The Bible was frustrating and confusing," Humphrey said, adding that she believed her inability to grasp the Scriptures at times stemmed from a lack of faith. "My heart just wasn't in a place where I was willing to let God reveal himself to me."

Nonetheless, through "fellowship" with other Christians who read the Bible, she gradually came to love the Word of God. She began attending St. Bridget's at the insistence of a life-long friend who asked Humphrey and her sisters to attend services with her one day.

"I felt I was kind of led by the Lord," she said of attending St. Bridget's, where she eventually joined its Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults program. "I was there first, and after the fact, I realized I needed to confess Christ."

Over the past few years, as her faith has become stronger, Humphrey has participated as a volunteer worker in such events as the 1988 Billy Graham Crusade and the 1991 Black Catholic Revival.

When asked where she draws the courage to speak with complete strangers about Christ's love for people, she explains that she feels almost driven to share the Gospel with others.

"It starts with a purpose in your heart," she commented. "As I was walking with the Lord in our Christianity, it became really real to me that it is the responsibility of a Christian to spread the good news."

Christ can lift people out of depression and hopelessness, she added.

"You just have to totally sell yourself out to the Lord," Humphrey concluded.

## Correction

In the May 7 edition of the *Catholic Courier*, a page three article, headlined "Violence reaches Rochester in wake of King verdict," incorrectly attributed a quote to Bridget Burch that should have been attributed to Cedric Lambert. The quote, corrected, is as follows: "It stunk," Lambert said of the King verdict. "It was a license to beat up on a black man."

## Acknowledgement

Last week's page-one illustration and typography were based on the cover Sister Estelle Martin, RSM, designed for the 1982 publication of *The Fire and the Thornbush*.

# PREACH PENANCE AND PEACE TO ALL THE NATIONS,

## Beginning from Jerusalem.

Faithful to the mission handed on by our founder, St. Francis of Assisi, in 1217, we imitate the life of Jesus Christ through religious, educational and social services to bring Christ to the native and pilgrim peoples, and preserve those shrines which embrace the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you desire to serve God in our Middle East Mission as a brother or priest?



Vocation Director  
Holy Land Franciscans  
1400 Quincy St. N.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20017  
Phone (202) 526-6800

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Education \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_



## SHARE A GREAT COMPASSION

The Dominican Sisters Of Hawthorne.

We nurse incurable cancer patients in our seven free, modern nursing homes, located in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Massachusetts, Georgia and Minnesota. Many who enter our community have no prior nursing experience, but we all share a great compassion for the suffering and delight at being able to help them. We seek women who are full of love for Christ, and desire to join a congregation with a strong spiritual and community life.

R-NY

"I will obey God anywhere, at any time, with courage!"  
Rose Hawthorne, Foundress.

### R.S.V.P

Sr. Marie Edward, O.P.  
Vocation Directress  
Dominican Sisters of Hawthorne  
600 Linda Avenue,  
Hawthorne, NY 10532  
(914) 769-4794

Dear Sr. Edward  
Please contact me with additional information about planning a visit to your Community  
I would like to know more about your Community

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_  
State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone \_\_\_\_\_