

## Love blooms a second time around at church

By John Strange  
Catholic News Service

SOUTHERN PINES, N.C. — Charlie and Sophie Dupont are getting a second chance at love, not that their first chances weren't successful.

Sophie was married 58 years to first husband Ernest; Charlie was married 47 years to Valerie. Their spouses died within three days of each other in July 1997.

Charlie and Sophie, both 80 years old, had never met until this summer, when each volunteered to help with vacation Bible school at St. Anthony of Padua Church in Southern Pines. Fifteen weeks after they met, Father James F. Butler, St. Anthony's pastor, presided at their Aug. 8 wedding.

"Think of the circumstances that led up to us even meeting," said Charlie, looking at his bride of just a few weeks.

Charlie, a retired Air Force pilot, had spent years fallen away from his Catholic faith, he told the *NC Catholic*, newspaper of the Raleigh Diocese.

"I went by the Golden Rule," said Charlie, explaining the philosophy he held while away from the church. "I figured that if I treated everybody right, He'd take care of me upstairs."

After serving 23 years in the Air Force, he retired in 1974 as a lieutenant colonel and moved with wife Valerie to Southern Pines.

They were happy, but then Valerie became ill. "My wife had three cancers in the two or three years," Charlie said. "I spent all my time taking care of her."

He said that when she died about 14

months ago, he was completely devastated. "I didn't care about anything," he said. At this point the Golden Rule "wasn't enough."

He found himself in St. Anthony's. "I just walked in; it was open," he said, explaining it was his first time in a church in years.

He tracked down Father Butler, and they talked.

"Charlie was going through a grieving process, and he came to the point where it was time to take charge of his life and put it in a new direction," said the priest.

Sophie's story began in Pittsburgh, where she had been a volunteer at her parish. She and husband Ernest moved to Southern Pines at a doctor's recommendation. A year after her husband's death she checked in with St. Anthony's to see what she could do.

The church welcomed her help. "It was wonderful," she said. "They all accepted me, and hugged me, and made me feel real comfortable."

When the parish's vacation Bible school started in May, someone assigned Charlie and Sophie to work as a team. Their friendship "clicked," Charlie said, and they spent a lot of time together. But both were cautious.

"We knew all about being lonesome, we knew about wanting to be with people, we knew about rebounding," he said. "We kept telling ourselves 'watch out. We just want someone as a companion.'"

"And finally came the day when I actually said to myself, 'Charlie, you're kidding yourself. You love her.' I found out you can have a second love in a lifetime," he said.



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Sophie and Charlie Dupont were married by Father James F. Butler this August after meeting as volunteers for vacation Bible school at St. Anthony of Padua Church in Southern Pines, N.C.

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