

## FEATURE

# Deacon, wife journey with grieving pilgrim

By Kathleen Schwar  
Assistant editor

Deacon Bill Skeeters' new camera had videotaped only two images from his Deacons Jubilee 2000 pilgrimage to Italy in February.

One was the group's arrival at the Hotel Florence; the other was a quick pan of the group. He recalled viewing the film with his children back home.

"There was their mother; she turned around and waved," he said, from his home in Louisville, Ky. "Then there was Dave and Beck. That's all there was to the film."

His wife of 43 years, Dolores "Dodie" Skeeters, died of a heart attack on the sidewalk outside Florence's Church of the Holy Trinity shortly after arriving.

Dave and Beck — Deacon David and Rebecca Cadregari of the Diocese of Rochester, both trained as emergency medical technicians — were there to help.

Deacon Skeeters recalled the morning of Feb. 17, after the buses had emptied. The 87 deacons and their spouses were walking the narrow road to Holy Trinity. Dodie was lagging behind. "She told me to go on," he said. But when he walked back to meet her, just outside the church, he knew something was wrong.

"She looked at me and said, 'Hold me,'" he recounted. "I took her in my arms, and she died."

"We fell to the ground together. I started applying CPR, when a fellow tapped me on the shoulder who happened to be David. He said, 'Let me relieve you.' His wife, Becky, started blowing into her mouth."

The Cadregaris remained with Deacon

Skeeters throughout the ordeal, going without food and sleep for hours, and skipping two days of their pilgrimage in Florence and Venice. They finished out the pilgrimage's week in Rome and several days in Israel, but in a changed mood and always thinking of Deacon Skeeters.

There was never any question they should help, Deacon Cadregari said. He recalled what happened as he and his wife were bringing up the rear of the group.

"About 30 feet outside the entrance of the church, I saw a group of people surrounding someone sitting down sick," he said. "So I came forward and noticed there was a general panic, that no one had taken charge. I said, 'Rebecca?' And she said, 'Yeah, go!'"

He attempted CPR for 10 or 15 minutes until Italian authorities arrived and took over. A priest emerged from the church to anoint Dodie. Police arrived to keep people moving along.

The Cadregaris took turns watching over Dodie and Deacon Skeeters, who fainted several times. While the two deacons were in an ambulance, "I went back, knelt down, put my hands on her head and just prayed over her," Rebecca recalled with difficulty even several months later.

She carefully gathered Dodie's jewelry, passport and other personal belongings to give to Deacon Skeeters.

"I was a nervous wreck," Deacon Skeeters said. "They stayed with me till I was on the plane. They didn't go eat or nothing."

The couple never left the deacon for 32 hours. Rebecca kept watch over Dodie until the coroner arrived. Deacon Cadregari accompanied Deacon Skeeters to the hos-



John Powell/Photo intern

Deacon David and Rebecca Cadregari stand outside of Holy Ghost Church in Gates on Sept. 17. Both serve on the parish's ministerial staff.

pital, the consulate's office and the travel office. Both remained with him through the night in a hotel. They managed to assure him it was best to return to his family in Kentucky, and saw that he got an escort on a plane back home. In the end, the deacon waited 12 days for his wife's body to be returned home. She was buried March 1.

God certainly placed them in the right place at the right time, Deacon Cadregari maintained. "I was the only person who spoke enough Italian, who had a medical background and was quite used to doing crisis work and also had had the opportunities to do grief counseling. There were people who spoke better Italian, there was a nurse, there were people who had done grief counseling. But all three?"

The Cadregaris married 18 years ago after meeting Jan. 8, 1981, in an EMT class at the Rochester Institute of Technology. The deacon then was employed as a dispatcher for Monroe Ambulance and equipment technician for ambulances sent to remote hospitals to pick up prematurely born infants. Rebecca was a volunteer with the Henrietta volunteer ambulance. Both have worked in various other emergency medical jobs as well.

Today they serve at Holy Ghost Church in Gates. Deacon Cadregari is a computer technician for Kodak's Global Technical Services. Rebecca is a legal secretary for Petrone & Petrone, C.P., law firm.

They've also kept in touch with Deacon Skeeters.

"I know there's been a real friendship that has been struck between both of them," said Deacon Brian Karley, director

of the Louisville diocesan diaconate office.

"He calls Bill regularly and talks to him. He's done a real good job following up," Deacon Karley said. "It was just one of those things. It was Dodie's dream always to visit Rome and see those areas, and they had just saved enough money to be able to do it."

In the months since the incident, Deacon Cadregari acknowledged asking "why" and the answer at which he arrived.

"I realize God puts a ministry in our way and it's our job not to walk around it," he said. "God gives us unique skills to work with our ministry every day."

That is true for anyone, he insisted, whether ordained or lay. "Find a situation to use your skills. Just use them."

Louisville Archbishop Thomas C. Kelly, OP, formerly of Ithaca, has recognized the Cadregaris with a letter of commendation. He also spent a couple of days with Deacon Skeeters back home.

Deacon Skeeters, meanwhile, acknowledged having a hard time returning to preaching at St. Gabriel's the Archangel, a parish of 2,300 families.

"Father (Bill Hammer) kept urging the longer you wait the harder it will be," he said. "So I preached about David (Cadregari). The first Gospel preached that in order to follow me you must die to yourself. Give up what you have and follow me."

"I don't know if I could have done what David did," he continued. "To give up two days of it to be with someone you don't know. It is the ultimate sacrifice — to die so someone else can live."



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