

# SENIOR LIFESTYLES

## Canandaigua woman honored for her work, faith

By Jennifer Burke  
Editorial intern

For Mary Bigham Farren, dedication to the Catholic faith began at a young age.

Born in 1916, Farren was raised on a Canandaigua farm, which is now the home of the Notre Dame Retreat House. She received a Catholic education, beginning at St. Mary's School and concluding with her graduation in 1936 from Nazareth College.

While Farren was at Nazareth, Sister Theresa Marie, the dean at the time, brought Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, founders of the Catholic Worker Movement, to speak to the students. Farren and her sister, Margaret Driscoll, met both Day and Maurin, and Farren subsequently made the Catholic Worker Movement an integral part of her life. Since then, she has been trying to live her life in accordance with the justice and charity of Jesus Christ, which is the movement's aim, as set forth on the Catholic Worker Web site ([www.catholicworker.org](http://www.catholicworker.org)).

Meeting Day and Maurin had a profound impact on her. "Their way of life and the Catholic Worker Movement became (my) way of life. While still in college I started a Catholic Worker group among the students," Farren said.

Day's visit to Nazareth College was the beginning of a long friendship between Day and Farren.

"Through the years we were in touch, and when she would come to Rochester she usually stayed with us," Farren said. "She had a pleasant smile and a quiet sense of humor. When she spoke to groups, she was very serious and direct ... but she wasn't se-



Photo courtesy of Mary Bigham Farren

Mary Bigham Farren of Canandaigua (left) poses with her sister, Margaret Driscoll. Farren recently won an award for her work helping those in need.

rious all the time."

With Day's help, Farren and several others started the St. Joseph's House of Hospitality in 1937. According to Farren, the house had humble beginnings.

"We went to old St. Joseph's Church, which has burned down, and asked them to send someone over to us that needed food," she recalled. "That was our first ambassador, and I've been friends with him for many years. We started the house on Rome Street. That street is not there any more."

Farren's commitment to the Catholic Worker Movement didn't stop after the House of Hospitality was founded. She married Arthur Patrick Farren in 1943 and they raised four children together. The Catholic Worker Movement has been a very strong theme in her family, Farren said. One daughter now lives a simple life of voluntary poverty and a son has dedicated his life to the peace movement.

Farren continued to serve others not only through the Catholic Church, but also through the Monroe County Department

of Social Services, where she worked for several years. In the '50s and '60s, she was active in groups such as Mother's Circle and the Interracial Council of Rochester.

Farren's half-century of work on behalf of people in need has not been lost on those around her. That's why she was presented with the first-ever Works of Love Lifetime Achievement Award during the Diocese of Rochester's annual Consistent Life Ethic Dinner and Vita Awards Presentation in May.

"For me, she's just been a real inspiration and a source of support because of just who she is and how she's lived her life," said Giovina Carosco, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes. "They (Farren and her family) have committed themselves to living the ideal of the Catholic Worker Movement."

Farren continues to be involved with the Social Ministry Committee at her parish, St. Mary's in Canandaigua, and also provides moral support to the staff of Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes.

"She is just incredibly supportive of our work and frequently writes me little notes to encourage me. It's wonderful to know there's someone out there who supports this work and to have this kind of inspiration behind us," said Scarlett Emerson, a staff member at Catholic Charities of the Finger Lakes.

"It's all rooted in her deep faith," Carosco added. "The depth of her faith is what sustains her, and her ability to share it with so many people. She doesn't go out and preach or teach it; it's just part of her. Mary has a way of looking beyond the surface and into the hearts of people."

## Priest writes account of his ongoing battle with cancer

By Connie Cissell  
Catholic News Service

SYRACUSE — If Father Joseph Champlin ever had doubts about how much he is loved, they must have disappeared by now. Large cardboard boxes in his office are filled to overflowing with cards and letters from people whose lives he has touched in some way.

The messages were written to buoy his spirits and give him hope as he faces his greatest challenge to date — a difficult battle with a rare form of bone marrow cancer, Waldenström's macroglobulinemia.

For a 72-year-old man who is often seen jogging around Columbus Circle in downtown Syracuse, the thought of such a disastrous blow to his health was somewhat shocking.

During his recent rounds of chemotherapy, the priest who rarely took an aspirin has had to ingest 11 pills a day for a week. His therapy is repeated every six weeks. He said his cancer is treatable, but not curable.



Dr. Gary Tyndall, the priest's friend and personal physician, spoke to parishioners at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, where Father Champlin is rector, earlier this

year about the illness.

The life expectancy of a patient with Waldenström's is typically five to seven years, Tyndall said. "But, most people who are diagnosed are over 65. A lot of patients die from other things besides the cancer," he said.

Father Champlin is the author of approximately 50 published works, and when the diagnosis came he decided he wanted to write about it. His publisher at first thought it might not be worthwhile for Father Champlin to be so preoccupied with himself during this time. But, the people

around him thought it might be a good idea.

He began the first chapter of his manuscript about a month after he decided to write it. The working title is "From Time to Eternity and Back."

"The first chapter came very fast," he said. "I just wanted to get it down on paper. When I deeply experience something it tends to come out through my writing."

Father Champlin writes everything by hand. His typist of the past 25 years types out the manuscript and then he goes over it.

"I don't need a big block of time to write or a special space or environment," he told *The Catholic Sun*, Syracuse's diocesan newspaper. "And I almost never rewrite. I think I have it in my head the way I want the chapters to be so I almost never rearrange things."

Father Champlin's illness did not keep him from running this year in a Memorial Day race to raise money for the Guardian Angel Society at Cathedral School, as he

has done for the past four years.

The first year he had 200 supporters onboard and raised \$3,600 in donations. This year, more than 600 people contributed more than \$45,000.

The program raises money for the school and for children by providing scholarships for at-risk, mostly non-Catholic students who are from below-poverty-level homes.

"He's touched so many people over the years. He's a good person and people want to give to this; they want to be a part of what he's doing," said Kathy Fedrizzi, director of development for the school and the Guardian Angel Society.

Sister Mary Jane Wilcox, a Daughter of Charity who has been the principal of Cathedral School for 10 years, said Father Champlin's struggle and his ability to cope is grounded in his spirituality.

"He's an amazing man. One of the most important characteristics he has is that he is very prayerful. He has a very deep spirit of faith that guides him. What he does is very successful because he puts it in God's hands," she said.



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