

REMEMBERING MARGARET

Dolly Cardwell, July 3, 2011

Margaret Nelson was my friend and a friend of the Church of the Covenant for 57 years. We met in 1954. Margaret, Joe and their three boys, Joe, Randy and Mitch decided to look into the newly formed Church of the Covenant, which was only a short walk though the woods from their Spottswood Place home. I was a 16 year-old RMWC freshman who also began attending this little church. Margaret nurtured and counseled me through my college years, through my years as a young wife and mother, and we grew in time to be close and dear friends. I am very grateful for her faith in me, her wise counsel, her gentle but firm conviction, her one-of-a-kind friendship. The Church of the Covenant community proved to be right for both of our families.

Margaret was the loving and busy stay-at-home mother of six young children throughout the 1950's and 1960's, before returning to teaching in 1969. Can you imagine the faithful sustaining of meal preparation for eight people every meal for roughly five years? Think of all the band aides, kissed knees, bedtime stories, birthday parties, beds made, outfits ironed, help with homework, graduations and so much more! Margaret's family was a joy to her- the homemaking, the raising of their children and maybe even the cooking most of the time. Joe was right by her side every step of the way, absent only while tending his work as scholarly and beloved professor of so many students at Lynchburg College. In 1976 the Nelson family moved from their home overlooking the LCF ball field to their beautiful home- Lockhaven- on Link Road. This active young mother with children in tow was equally supportive of her husband, accompanying him far away on several sabbaticals as well as close at hand on Sundays when he was filling pulpits in our

area; many of those Sundays she would play the piano for the service. As the Nelson children gained their independence, Margaret, who was already teaching, set to work on her Masters in Education at L. C. completing her degree in 1978, the same weekend that her oldest son graduated from medical school. Margaret Angela reminded me this week that Margaret chose to attend Joe III's graduation from MCV rather than her own ceremony to receive her Master's Degree held the same weekend. One of the loves of her life was working with young children. So many young children- her own, her grandchildren as well as her students- benefited from her patience, her love of learning, from her sweet light-hearted spirit and her encouragement as they grew.

As their nest emptied, Joe's and Margaret's home became a welcoming place for so many. To mention a few Laurant Berteloot from France and Weignand Jongen, from the Netherlands, who while counselors at Camp KBY found a second home in Lynchburg with the Nelsons. Margaret communicated her sensitivity, caring, kindness, and hospitality in so many ways. One I shall always remember was her invitation to Will and me for Thanksgiving dinner the first year that both of our sons had moved out of the country. What gratitude to be among this welcoming family that potentially bleak and lonely Thanksgiving Day!

Margaret and Joe entrusted their children to to our church school at the Church of the Covenant. In addition to the three older boys, along came Margaret Angela and then two more brothers, Tommy and David, who were close in age to Will's and my two sons. John Withrow, Beth Mahler, Vince Sawyer, Will and I were among those privileged to teach, to enjoy and to nurture these and other children into the faith and into our community. I remember Margaret's participation in dinner preparation for the School for Christian Living in the early years- helping to cook

for forty, on more than one Wednesday afternoon. For many years her lovely arrangements graced our altar for worship. And I'll never forget though nervous all the week before, how she so willingly and ably played the piano on many a Sunday morning in the absence of our pianist- Sue Yates, Mary Jane Ould, Beth Mahler, or one of the few in between, all predecessors of Susan Gough and Alys Hickcox. More recently Margaret and Joe could be found serving tables and hosting in the Lodge for a Thursday evening dinner. Margaret worked to catalog and bring into some order the disorganized storehouse of cassette tapes from worship through the ages at the Church of the Covenant while Joe worked on various other Mary and Martha Group projects. Our new website bears signs of her work; even after she became ill, she and Joe gathered faithfully with the Mary and Martha Group for work to benefit our community as their focus. Her eye for decorating is still evident in the ambiance of the parlor, as it was Margaret who chose patterns and colors for the furniture, the valences, and the carpet and then donated the funds to obtain them. A lot of living and community has taken place in the past ten years in that lovely room.

Margaret's journey through her illness over the past few years was not easy. Experiencing the waning of one's energy and one's spirit is hard, but Margaret was a trooper. As time passed though she yielded as we all must do at some point in our life and just relaxed and trusted those around her, her family, her God and the staffs at Westminster-Canterbury and Lynchburg General Hospital to care for her and to do what was in her best interest. Through it all, for better or for worse, in sickness and in health Joe was her constant companion. Their family rallied around their mother just as they continue to comfort and assist Joe as he seeks to adjust to his new life. June will be a challenging month. Summer, though, is a maximum healing time. Isn't it a blessing that the life-giving, life-refreshing, healing Sun is

very present now and in all the Junes to come, to aid and assist with the recovery work to be done? We hope the Nelson family will call upon our church community in addition to their myriad of family and friends, who are available and waiting to comfort, to listen, to remember and to support in any way they are needed.

An earthquake is a shocking and life-changing event, similar in some ways to the loss of someone we love. It was John Muir who said of his surroundings after an earthquake: “The streams will be singing a new song. Rough places will be made smooth. Smooth places will be made rough. We look for harmonious notes in the song of creation, varied and different expressions of God's love.” He was convinced that landscapes often surprisingly yield new life after what appears as pure confusion, upheaval and ruin. We seek today the new song and the new life that may come out of this deep upheaval and loss. We pray that God will deliver our eyes from tears, our hearts from despair and grant us the peace that passes all understanding. I take comfort in these words of St. Francis de Sales:

“Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow; the same everlasting Father who cares for you today will take care of you tomorrow and every day. Either He will shield you from suffering, or He will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace, then, put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations, and say continually: The Lord is my strength and shield; my heart has trusted in the Lord and I am helped. The Lord is not only with me, but in me and I in Him.”