

Mary Genino, RSHM
Remembering Peg Dolan, RSHM
Sacred Heart Chapel
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“I have come that all may have life and have it to the full.” This was the favorite scripture of our founder, Jean Gailhac, and the Word of God that captures our RSHM charisma and zeal. As Peg once said that, “each one of us is a word of God spoken only once.” This Scripture for me, for us, articulates the “Word of God spoken only once” that was Peg Dolan. Peg was full of life and lived life to the full! Until those few hours, before she drew her first breath in the presence of our living God, she engaged fully in life! As always she was acutely aware of who was in her presence, ever attentive to their personal history and solicitous of their need. She also managed to keep a hand in orchestrating what was happening to her and around her.

Peg was a Good Shepherdess. She knew and cared for God’s own, for each and every one of us in a unique and special way. Peg knew all by name, literally and in the scriptural sense of grasping and embracing the core of our beings. Peg held all those she knew with great respect and affection. Peg gave new meaning to the term “Extended Family,” perhaps she understood, long before most of us, that all God’s creatures and creation are encompassed in that term. She welcomed all peoples as if they were her near and dear ones! She knew their names, spoke of their giftedness, inquired about their concerns and prayed for their needs. At no time in her life was the gate to this beloved flock of hers closed. As with all of us gathered here, Peg knew and cared for her health care providers, those she met in these last three years, as if she had known them, like our God knows us, for a lifetime. You could not go anywhere with Peg without meeting and greeting one of her own. She made real and concrete the Gospel of hospitality. Her graciousness, acceptance and warmth abounded. In the presence of an individual or in the midst of a crowd, Peg’s gaze was engaging, her attention was focused and her laugh was infectious. Indeed, Peg was energized by people and in turn was a source of energy and courage to people.

Peg did not take the role of gatekeeper lightly. She valued what was good, right and just. In her ministries as teacher, counselor, spiritual guide, mentor, as a friend and or colleague, she did not shy away from situations where these values were challenged, nor would she allow her “flock” to run. Peg was steadfast in the face of difficulties, she stood with those who struggled or grappled with fear or indecision, reminding them of who they were and who they were called to be. Peg’s passion for God’s poor and any of God’s own who were troubled, knew no bounds. She was also zealous in her passion for making God known and loved. In these endeavors, she gently and at times not so gently nudged her flock to follow. Peg had a gift for hearing that word of God, so uniquely whispered in the heart of the other, and for empowering those she encountered to speak their word, to make the Word of God spoken only once in them, their gift for the life of the world.

I believe that Peg was able to be this Good Shepherdess because she was able to say “yes.” As far as I could tell, “no” was not a part of her vocabulary or her way of being.

“Yes” was Peg’s posture toward life and stance in life. Because she always said “yes,” Peg saw so much goodness and potential in others, for our world.

As was mentioned before, she had great devotion to Notre Dame du Oui, Our Lady of Yes. This image of Mary reflects the Mary of the Annunciation and the Mary of the Visitation, the woman who both received the Word of God and brought that Word of God to family and neighbor. This was the Mary of the Scripture that served as a model for Peg. This is the Mary she emulated in living out her vocation as a Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary. From the moment she said her first “yes” to religious life, Peg lived that “yes” to the full. Her “yes” was and is reflected in her commitment to her Community, her relationships and in her service to God’s people. Peg’s “yes” was and is a revelation of God, the God who resides in and among us, the God in whose presence she now enjoys the fullness of life.

Peg’s “yes” changed her and those in her worlds. Peg brought to all an encounter with the living God that was at times startling, inspiring, playful or awesome. Her personal encounters with God sustained her, gave her strength and made her bold in conviction. Our founder once said, “Our lives must be shining examples...for if words attract, it is example that inspires.” Thank you Peg for being an example of so much that is good in people, right with relationships and just in the world. May we be inspired by Peg’s example, her “yes” to use our “yes” to make God known and loved in our worlds today, to be Good Shepherds and Shepherdesses of God’s flock, of God’s creation.

Peg also had great devotion to our founder, Jean Gailhac. In one of the last letters that he wrote to our sisters he said, “Despite the weakness of my body, my heart has no weakness and my soul has not lost its memory. You are always present to my spirit and you are always in my heart.” These are the words that I feel the Peg of God’s heart speaks to us today. Peg leaves with us the gift of her presence and a place in her heart.