

Brief Bio: The Reverend Marie Zealor Swayze

I am a “War Baby”, born 28 February 1943, 03:30 Eastern War Time, Bryn Mawr, PA, USA. When my father returned home after his service, WWII, US Navy Officer, we settled in Radnor Township near my mother’s parents in St. David’s, Wayne, PA.



At age five I began first grade at The Academy of Notre Dame de Namur, Villanova, and attended all twelve years there, graduating in 1960. Through those years, I became the eldest of nine children, having huge responsibility for looking after six brothers and two sisters. Yet, the most important moments of my days, aside from studies and field hockey, were my moments at Mass and private prayer. I received a call to the Vowed Religious Life at age twelve and dedicated my life to Jesus the Christ from that moment on!

Shortly after High School Commencement, I entered The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur where I lived a semi-cloistered, vowed life for six years. Having received my Baccalaureate in Elementary Education from Trinity College, Washington, D.C., I taught sixth grade in Washington, D.C. and Brooklyn, N.Y. In those days, in the Parochial School System, we taught all thirteen subjects and students numbered fifty-five in every classroom!

The years between 1960 and 1964 in Washington, D.C. gave me many opportunities to witness extraordinary moments in our nation’s history: The Assassination of President Kennedy, Martin Luther King’s Speech at the Lincoln Memorial, passage of the Civil Rights Act. In these years I worked for Civil Rights and Social Justice, following on my upbringing, where I witnessed my parents being fully involved in local and national politics and service in the community. My Religious Order firmly supported Civil Rights and Social Justice, and we were encouraged to march with our peers and to work for social justice, especially in the education of the poor and care for those on the ‘fringes of society’; we followed the Christian Scripture closely as disciples of Jesus the Christ.

Come June, 1966, I left the Religious Order, returned to “The World” as we said back then, and took up teaching in the Public School System; again, sixth grade, but not all the subjects and only twenty-five in any classroom. Aside from the difference in the classroom environment, the adjustment to life “Out

of the Habit”, literally! – left me very much in need of learning a whole new language and way of life!

After two years of teaching, I walked on a different path and discovered new talents in the banking world, working with The Continental Bank and Trust Company, Strafford, PA. My future husband, Richard Allen Swayze was a client at this Bank; we began courting over the Teller’s Window and entered into marriage on 27 February 1971.

We made our home in Paoli, and there raised our two sons, David Allen Swayze and Andrew Barr Swayze. These years gave me the deepest joy and sense of well being as well as providing me with numerous opportunities to develop my talent for community organizing, volunteer work of all kinds and then a Master Degree in Public Administration, 1983.

But, early on, I became aware that I was not well suited for the position of Township Manager. And, at the same time, my faith community at Good Samaritan Episcopal Church was calling me to Ordained Ministry! My husband remarked that he had been waiting for me to answer this Call since before we married. Off to Seminary I went in 1988, earning the Master of Divinity May, 1993, and Ordained Priest June, 1993. (As a Transitional Deacon, June 1992-June 1993, I served as Trauma Chaplain, Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania – a life altering experience – seeing first hand the results of generational poverty and its impact on all society!)

For six years I served as Interim Rector in four different parishes until my call to serve as Rector of St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, Phoenixville. Upon first look at this campus, 120 Church Street, the derelict Rectory shouted out need! The people of the parish joined in founding a food pantry, first off, and then we moved on with Dr. Lorna Stuart, to completely rehabilitate the Old Rectory (finding some \$400,000, no government funds!) and opening “The Clinic” in 2003, a medical facility to serve persons who are without medical insurance. The Clinic thrives: the staff of mostly volunteer physicians, nurses and clerical aides has seen more than 100,000 patient visits.

Richard and I moved to Phoenixville in 1999 and remained there even when my work took me away from St. Peter’s, first to All Saint’s, Norristown, as Assisting Priest for Children’s Ministries and then to Media (Assisting Priest and Pre School Director) until my retirement from full time ministry 2006, when I took up a non-stipendiary position at St. Mark’s, 1625 Locust Street, Philadelphia, where my husband had been worshiping since 1996, when I served there at Interim.

In those years, beginning in 2006, Richard and I were principal in the foundation of St. James School, an Independent Episcopal Middle School, 3217 Clearfield Street, Philadelphia, the neighborhood known at “the per-capita murder capital of Philadelphia.” Along with dozens of persons from St. Mark’s, other parishes and neighborhood partners, we put in thousands of hours of sweat equity and tens of thousands of dollars given by hundreds of individuals, numerous non-profits and for-profit businesses. We rehabilitated the Parish Hall, making a single classroom for our first class of fifth grade students. All students, boys and girls, come from the immediate neighborhood, all live well below the Federal Poverty Level. This initial class of fifteen students will graduate in July; all are placed in the ‘best fit’ independent, charter, parochial or boarding schools. Richard and I worked very hard, with many others, to create this all-day middle school and I hope that readers will visit www.StJamesPhila.org for more information and to view many photos and videos showing the broad range of opportunities for our students and families.

Richard was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, May 2012. Only 5½ months later, he died, peacefully, at home, surrounded by his most loving family. Someday a book will come out of my experience with Richard’s living and dying but not now – too raw, still, grief remains heavy, still.

Summer of 2014 I ‘downsized’ from our spacious home in Schuylkill Township and moved to a condominium on Locust Street, near St. Mark’s Church. I continue my priestly ministry and serve St. James School as Chaplain Emeritus and Board of Directors. I remain open to Our Lord’s invitation into new pathways of service, especially to persons in grief for a spouse and for new understandings about becoming more fully human, fully alive.