

A Twenty-First-Century Shepherd

By **Mary Louise Mitchell, SSJ**

I speak to you tonight because I'm the president of Bill Shannon's Congregation. I didn't really realize it until Sunday when a sister said: "Bill entered with me in 1942," and then another sister said: "I'm not sure when he got his final profession cross but he has one because it is in the coffin." He does have one, so my rough estimation is that Bill has been a Sister of Saint Joseph for well over 60 years.

On Sunday when Bill departed to the fullness of the Resurrection, I went to the community liturgy, and I began to feel very sad. I can't imagine Bill not rolling down the aisle, as he always rolled down the aisle every Sunday, and suddenly I thought: "Mary Lou, you now have a new image for what it means to be a shepherd in the twenty-first century." Bill Shannon was our shepherd, not only of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, but he was a profound shepherd for the whole church of Rochester. If you think of Bill, if you reflect on how Bill cared for each one of us, how he



loved us, how he called us, we now understand more deeply what it means to be a shepherd, what it means to be for the Church of Rochester. Bill believed that the Lord was his light and his salvation and Bill was not afraid. Bill was not afraid to call us to growth, to conversion, to love, to change. And he did this gently, yet firmly.



Mary Louise Mitchell, SSJ

As I reflect on Bill Shannon, I also realized on Sunday that this might be another reality for the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Rochester, and for the Church of Rochester. When the Sisters were founded in 1650 France, there were six women living the life that so profoundly spoke about church that a young Jesuit, as he watched and related to them, named what he was

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experiencing in them. Then he wrote down what he was experiencing and challenged the group to keep growing, to keep becoming the church that they were being called to be. His name, the Jesuit, was Jean Pierre Medaille. For the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Rochester and for the church of Rochester, we also have a Medaille: it's Bill Shannon. Bill Shannon saw something within this community. Bill constantly called us to live what he saw more deeply, to be the disciples of Jesus for this community. Bill is gone, but Bill's words are not. They are the seeds, the seeds that we are called to plant within our hearts and to let become more fully the vision of Bill's church, our church, God's Church. And so, my sisters and brothers, all we need to do is pick up a book, a reflection, a homily, and we have the seeds to go forth.



William Shannon with Mother Agnes Cecelia, Sr. Jeanne, Sr. Sarah