

It breaks my heart not to be at St. Munchin Church today for Dodie's funeral. I'm away this week giving talks at the bi-annual convention of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians in Milwaukee, and attending a committee meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy in Dubuque. Those organizations may sound impressive to you, but they are not as impressive to me as the life of Dodie Garside. My body is in Dubuque this morning, but my heart is at St. Munchin Church.

When I first met her four years ago, she told me her name was Dodie. I asked for her last name. She said, "Garside, but everyone calls me Dodie." She was one of a kind.

She was fun to be with. She enjoyed a good laugh, and she saw life through a quirky lens. But she was also filled with wisdom. I don't know if she even realized this. But it seemed that when Dodie was around, everything was going to be all right. She had a way of speaking to your heart, of telling you things that were true, in a way you could accept them. She had weathered some very difficult times in her life, and she came out on top of them all. When you had problems and Dodie was there, she could comfort you because she spoke with experience. She had had some tough days. She dealt with them. And she made you feel like you could deal with your tough days too.

She was very proud of her house. And she should be. She took an old, dilapidated building and turned it into a house of love. Inch by inch, that building experienced a rejuvenation that no one would have thought possible - except for Dodie. She could make people feel better. And she could make a house look better.

She loved her family, and the death of her grandson Luke came as a real blow. The premature birth of Zoe last month caused her immense concern. She wanted nothing more than to go visit Zoe. But it was not to be. She has gone to visit Luke instead.

Dodie was diagnosed with cancer a little more than a year ago. It is hard to believe we have lost her so quickly. She told me one month ago that she was not going to continue treating her illness. She was placing everything in God's hands. She told me she believed that God had a plan for everything, and that everything would go well. Those words struck me because they encapsulate my own belief about God: There is a plan. The plan is good. You may not realize it at the time, but in the end all will be well. It's easy for me to believe that. I don't have cancer. But Dodie did have cancer, and she still believed in the goodness of God's plan. She preached that message far better than I ever could.

She admitted she sometimes shook a finger at God. But God meant everything to her, and she hoped that she would be found worthy.

I have no doubt in my mind that God finds Dodie worthy. What astounds me most is that God found us worthy to have Dodie. He gave her to us for a short time, but she has made all the difference in the world.