

One day early in the summer of 2020, I ran into Melonie in the flower section of Whole Foods. Even at the height of the pandemic she was in caring service mode, picking up flowers for a friend. As we caught up – in our masks - amidst the June roses, I could see her wheels turning.

I have come to know that Melonie had a charmingly sly way of presenting a wonderful idea of her own in the form of a question, which made you feel - well, kind of like it was your own idea, too. On this particular day, Melonie says, in her lilting soft-spoken way – “now, I know you bring flowers to folks a lot, too...what do you think of us doing this for our parish community during the pandemic?” When my eyes lit up, she knew that I loved the idea. And so, she continued.

“Well, you see, Lex here [she said, gesturing to the burly teddy bear of a manager of Whole Foods’ flower department] has offered to give us day-old flowers that perhaps we could re-purpose and bring to people. Do you think we could actually pull this off?” (Note here that the scheme was already afoot!) Without missing a beat, she asked, “You arrange flowers, don’t you?” (Also please note that Melonie already knew I was a fellow flower lover who, indeed, did arrange flowers. Also as a footnote: she herself, *did not* arrange flowers – at least, not yet☺) Without a moment’s hesitation, I was all in – thus our 5-year collaboration began.

In the summer of 2020, Melonie and I were a 2-woman team, working through logistics and developing the the bones of the flower ministry. She’d visit Lex and pick up flowers every Friday, bring Dollar Store vases to my house with the flowers – I’d arrange, and she and I would split up deliveries. As a Care & Share’s attendee at pastoral care meetings, Melonie took the lead role in choosing weekly recipients, while I was the worker bee who put together a spreadsheet and arranged flowers – soon sharing my non-professional skill set, coaching her to arrange flowers, too.

*Within our very first deliveries, it was clear that God was working within this new ‘mini-ministry’.* The day we delivered to an elderly parishioner on her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday who tearfully exclaimed, ‘how did you know it was my 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, and my children aren’t allowed to visit me?!’ We didn’t. Week after week, we heard more stories like this.

Our initial deliveries were focused, confidentially, upon those who emerged from pastoral care meeting notes. From there, Melonie turned her attention to the elderly, frail, and potentially most lonely within our community. Nurses, health care workers, elder care facility residents, fire fighters, health department workers were also regular recipients of our Whole Foods floral bounty. We both found great joy – and shed tears sharing stories of those special deliveries.

After about 6 weeks of handling flowers by ourselves, we realized that this new mini-ministry was not sustainable without seeking help. We knew that it would be easy to build a volunteer base within the caring community of St. Paul's, and just a few weeks, we'd organized and trained a dedicated team of volunteers to help arrange and deliver flower arrangements. Between us, Melonie and I developed a system – which over time, as you all know, operates as a well-oiled machine – largely due to the commitment and shared passion of the ministry's volunteers.

While the ministry worked mostly seamlessly week to week (because, you know, *God*– **and** incredible volunteers) – we did have our challenges. Over time, Amazon's ownership of our local Whole Foods created a layer of stress for our flower vendor Lex, which impacted his ability to provide us flowers consistently. Melonie to the rescue! Masked marvel that she was during that time, she didn't hesitate in hitting the streets. And, while I helped nurture our donor relationships, it was my more extroverted partner who secured those key relationships with flower vendors as we've needed to re-establish them several times over the past 5 years. As a team, we were bound and determined to keep this ministry going. To date, we have delivered more than 1,000 flower arrangements – and countless buckets and bouquets of flowers within the local community.

Our dedicated corps of volunteers will continue to support our community by spreading cheer and kindness, spreading Melonie's legacy of love, with flowers.

We *still* hear “how did you know that I was going through (this struggle/challenge/loss)....?” on a regular basis - as our volunteers can attest. God is working within and among us in the magic of the flower ministry.

What a joy and a privilege it has been to work with and get to know Melonie. I will miss her quick and dry wit, her astute powers of observation – her irreverence, her faith, her perseverance, her zest for life – but mostly, her kind and caring soul – and compassionate presence in my life and in the lives of so many others.

*In Loving Memory,*  
*Linda Cozzolino*

08-25-2025