

# TRIBUTE – RICHARD ROHR

By Carol Metz\*

---

## NJC 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

(\* Carol was asked to prepare and deliver this tribute if Gina Keith was unable to attend.)

I'm was so honored to be asked to do this tribute, and after soaking up all that has been shared and said and shown over the course of our time together this weekend, I'm even more humbled. All I can hope to do is to speak from my own experience and hope it will strike some place of shared life for all of us. I came to the community when I moved to Cincinnati in 1979, just a few days before the first night of that fall's session of Initiation. When I sat down at that first group meeting, I had never heard you preach, Richard, had never been to an NJ prayer meeting or Wednesday night liturgy, had never listened to any of your tapes. As each person shared how they had come to the community, that's what everyone talked about, about Richard. I felt a little ignorant.

I came for COMMUNITY. I had heard stories of New Jerusalem from my sister, Barb Paynter, and I was following a need and yearning in my heart coming out of my college experience. And so everything I then received from you (and eventually from John, and from Pat and others), from your leadership and teaching and preaching—all of that was just pure gift and grace and gravy. Icing on the community cake. And I thank you for that.

I'm quite sure that there is no one among us who would deny that you, Richard, are a prophet, a prophet who lived among us for a time, who changed lives, a prophet who is a real person, who was accessible to us, who was flawed and imperfect, but whose message, from the very beginning, has been for the purpose of revealing God to us, of revealing that big Love to us, of showing us how to live in that Love, how to respond to that Love. The words and the references and the sources—all of those may have become more sophisticated, more erudite, through the years, but God has remained unchanged, and your message has remained unchanged at its core: God loves you; God loves me; I am God's beloved; God is big in mercy and grace and forgiveness, and our lives are for the purpose of seeking to know that God and respond to that great Love, and to be that love to others. You preached it, and in community we learned to show that love to each other, to model for each other how a response could look, to live it—together. And we thank you for that.

Like any good prophet, Richard, you were so often one step ahead, always calling us—and yourself—forward. So from high school retreats came prayer meetings. From prayer meetings came Scripture study, leadership training, small groups, households, commitment and community. Once we were community, the call forward continued: lay leadership, expanded roles of women, learning to balance action and contemplation—or as we called it back then: interiority, community, and service; the horizontal of the cross that took in not only each other, but the needs and injustices of the world and society. We thank you for that.

I learned to trust my own experience of God. We learned to pray, we learned to discern God's call (remember: "the need of the Body is the call of the Lord!"), and we learned, always, always, that this God is Love. And you, Richard helped to reveal to us that Love. Were you a perfect prophet? What prophet is? But your message to us was always, at its heart, always at its center, Love. We thank you for that.

And then, like any good teacher or parent or mentor, there came the time when you stepped back and we had to move forward on our own. Whatever we may have felt about your leaving at the time, it was wise. We thank you for that, even for that.

You took your own next step, and we continued to take ours. Were we perfect? Did we hurt each other? Oh yes, and there are still wounds among us, but God continued to call us forward, as community and as individuals, together and sometimes, eventually, separately, but still—look at us!--undeniably connected. And we thank God for that.

And still God calls us forward, wherever we are, and God calls you forward, and all these years apart from each other, still we seek and discover the same God, the Christ who lives among us. “Do you see this city? Here God lives among the people.”

I’d like to close with a blessing for you from one of my favorite Scriptures: Ephesians, chapter 3. Feel free to join in this prayer:

This, then, is what I pray, kneeling before God,  
From whom every family, whether spiritual or natural, takes its name.  
Out of God’s infinite glory, may God give you the power through the Spirit,  
For your hidden self to grow strong,  
So that Christ may live in your heart through faith,  
And then, planted in love, and built on love,  
You will, with all the saints, have the strength to grasp  
The breadth and the length, the height and the depths,  
Until, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge,  
You are filled with the utter fullness of God.  
Glory be to God, whose power working in us, (in YOU),  
Can do infinitely more than we, than YOU, can ask or imagine.  
Glory be to God, from generation to generation, in the church,  
And in Christ Jesus, forever, Amen.