

# Catholic Comedian Performing Again After Cancer Battle

By Denis Grasska

SAN DIEGO — Have you heard the one about the Catholic comedian who beat breast cancer?

For more than 20 years, Judy McDonald has brought her Catholic-infused comedy to parishes, youth conferences, retreats and other venues.

But a breast cancer diagnosis last September, followed by a bilateral mastectomy in late October, sidelined her for several months. Through it all, friends and fans have supported her with prayer and an online fundraising campaign ([youcaring.com/judymcdonald-958920](http://youcaring.com/judymcdonald-958920)).

Now cancer-free, the 41-year-old said she's "trying to get the word out that I'm alive and still funny."

"Cancer takes away a lot of things," she said. "It took away body parts, and I lost a good six months of my life just trying to get better, but it doesn't take away my sense of humor and what makes me uniquely me."

Her return to stand-up comedy came in late March, when the San Diego native performed for about 170 people at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

"It was an important show for me," said McDonald, who has since performed in Hawaii as well. "Just about a month [earlier], I was flat on my back and, to be up again on stage, being funny, just meant the world to me."

There is a history of cancer on both sides of McDonald's family. Her mother and sister are both breast cancer survivors and, for the past two decades, she has been in the habit of getting biopsies "every time I'd



**MAKE 'EM LAUGH:** Catholic comedian Judy McDonald and her service dog, Chewbacca, are seen at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

sneeze, basically."

So the diagnosis, though unwelcome, didn't come as a complete shock.

But at no point during her recent challenges did she lose her sense of humor.

"Whatever doesn't kill you gives you material," she quipped, noting that she found herself constantly taking note of the many absurdities of her situation that could be referenced in her stand-up act.

McDonald, who also deals with depression and post-traumatic stress disorder with the assistance of a service dog, said her sense of humor was akin to "battle armor." It wasn't a means of disguising or concealing inner turmoil, and she can't recall being frightened

at any point or having her faith in God shaken.

Her humor was a key factor in her own healing process.

"I like to say that humor is the best medicine, unless you're shot," she joked. In that case, "it's direct pressure on the wound, and then get to a hospital."

At the same time, McDonald explained, her good-humored take on a difficult situation doubled as an act of charity toward her doctors and other medical personnel, whose jobs are already made difficult by so often having to be the bearers of bad news. It was also a boon to family members and friends, lessening their own anxiety about

her welfare.

Now, back on stage, McDonald is able to reflect on her own recent experience as she addresses audiences that might include fellow cancer survivors, people currently battling cancer, or those who have either lost a loved one to the disease or are watching them struggle with it. Hoping that her comedy will lighten their burdens, she said, "that's a ministry that I am so honored to be a part of."

A person can invite God into any situation, she said, and while that doesn't mean it will be "all happy and butterflies," it does mean that even the most difficult crises can be faced with a calmness that will surprise others.

Inviting God into her life is nothing new for McDonald, who for years has approached her stand-up routines with a prayerful request that God tell her what He wants her to say and what her audiences need to hear.

For her first five years as a professional comedian, she said, she used to plan her sets down to the second. Since she has given up some control and left some of the specifics up to God, she said, her success has only increased.

McDonald said her recent performance at The Catholic University of America was "such a good testimony to the faithfulness of God and what happens when you just let Him be God and get out of the way."

"I can only see myself getting, not [necessarily] funnier, but I guess trusting more and letting the Ultimate Ghost Writer help me with my material."