Marcia’s husband has just sat down in his favorite chair next to the pile of reading materials dominated by magazines and periodicals from the world of finance. He has just opened this issue of *Vision*, spotting his wife’s name opening this story, intuitiong that something strange is happening here, and reading these words with a knowing knot in his stomach. For Marcia has surely told him about the raucous laughter that erupted in the circle of people gathered around her near the registration table at our symposium in Philadelphia.

Grabbing my arm minutes before the laughter broke out, Marcia introduced herself and with lots of energy and excitement told me how much she enjoys my writing in *Vision*. I thanked her for her kind words, but she was hardly done.

“No, no, I’ve got to tell you something. My husband reads your article faithfully. He wouldn’t miss it. And you got to understand my husband’s world is finance and that is all he reads.”

She pauses with an afterthought, but barely for a breath. “Oh, and a few race car magazines.” And then slipping into a conspiratorial whisper, she adds “and Playboy.”

Others are joining this growing circle as Marcia with high hilarity sums up this mother of all compliments: “Yes, my husband reads finance, race cars, Playboy, and Joe Driscoll.”

No greater sisterly love—in this city of brotherly love—than to lay down one’s humor for one’s friends. We need light and laughter in an often dark and somber world. We need God tickling our fancy in unexpected moments of joy when we men and women are tackling our furor in unexplainable moments of sadness.

So as I crisscross the country in the serious work highlighted in our symposium theme, “comprehensive spiritual care for our sick and dying,” I am also discovering the wonderful orb of light and laughter within this community of persons whose life mission most often is to accompany God’s people through the valley of darkness.

So how about another story of light and laughter from the road?

In Albuquerque we shared our hotel with another national conference
group consisting of the husbands and wives of heroic fighter pilots from the skies of World War II. Our facilitator was standing outside the ballroom when she watched this elderly woman walk up to one of her companions with complete bewilderment and exclaim, “Why on earth would Catholic chaplains be talking about Viagra?”

Don’t worry; we weren’t. After all I can’t imagine anyone bringing Viagra to a dying person, can you? Maybe it was an East Coast accent that added an “r” where one didn’t belong—they do that you know—and so Viaticum was transubstantially changed to Viagra.

Another story?

Jane came to the Albuquerque conference with her blood brother, Brother Ed. A lovely, gracious, and charming older woman, Jane and I shared some delightful moments here and there during the days. She was engaging in her stories of a full and lively life in the suburbs of Philadelphia.

When we announced that we would be celebrating the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick with the “seriously ill” in our midst, we invited persons to approach one of the symposium leaders if they wanted to receive the sacrament. Jane came up to me, took my hand, and indicated her desire to receive the sacrament. Then with a most serious demeanor and with a most proper diction added, “However, Father Joe, I need to tell you that I am not seriously ill, but I am seriously old.”

The light and laughter twinkled out of a mischievous eye.

I don’t suppose it would be productive to look around the corner for another story. Would it?

Back in Philadelphia, a woman religious stood in the corner with a red face and tears in her eyes. I instinctively hurried over to see what was the matter, but by the time I arrived I now saw laughter lifting head and veil up and down in convulsive humor.

“What is it?” I asked.

She motioned to a piece of paper in her hands. “I just checked out.” More laughter. “Read it,” she said putting the paper into my hand.

It was the hotel bill and I started reading the printout and never got further than the tickle of the second line. The computer identified her address as “Immaculate Exception”!

I am not sure if she was an IHM (Immaculate Heart of Mary) —a
large Philadelphia order—but if so this mistake goes right to the heart of one’s charism.

Chicago brought a few challenges to orthodoxy—or at least its perception—where of all places, of course, we had the largest gathering of bishops, nine, including Cardinal George. After some heated discussion, attempts at “damage control,” etc. (no boredom that night), I finally crashed into my bed of despair.

I dreamt that night of being in a “Communist” country and trying to escape through this long journey of underground tunnels (all night long!) and finally, I am escorted to freedom by the very soldiers I was dodging. I am on the “other side” now looking back through he barbed wire to the tunnels. Then it occurs to me with sinking despair, “oh no, I have to go back in there.” That’s when I wake up.

Climbing out of the tangle of sheets from a night at battle, I step on the floor and think “that was one helluva restful night.”

So I face into the morning and the first person I meet is Archbishop Pilarczyk (Cincinnati) in the ballroom. Though I don’t know him well, I am quite fond of the Archbishop and have always admired his clear thinking, straightforward manner and quick wit, especially as I observed him when he was President of the then National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

“Good morning, Archbishop,” I say.

With a wide grin he responds, “Good morning, Joe . . . And what heresies do you have for us this morning?” We both laughed as I exclaimed, “You never know what a new day brings, Archbishop.”

Today tell a story of light and laughter from the roads that you travel. In doing so, let our marvelous God tickle your fancy. ♦