



The Wheel - Joined in a Circle of Care

Newsletter of the Marian Woods Community

20th Anniversary Issue

Spring, 2021

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Celebrating 20 Years

A Conversation with Sr. Patricia Wolf, RSM



Sr. Patricia Wolf, RSM

In our 20th Anniversary year, Marian Woods Executive Director, Sr. Aileen Donovan, and Development Coordinator, Carolyn Sedotti, met with Sr. Patricia Wolf, RSM, whose early vision led to the founding of Marian Woods, a collaborative effort among five religious

communities to provide assisted and supported living for their elder Sisters.

In 1994, Sr. Patricia was serving as the President of the Sisters of Mercy, Regional Community of New York. Faced with the reality that the Mt. Mercy Motherhouse in Dobbs Ferry, New York was no longer suited to the varied and changing needs of the aging Sisters in residence, Sr. Patricia began the difficult process of searching for alternatives.

“We had to move our entire infirmary: those who needed supported living, those who required some assistance, those who were totally independent as well as our administrative offices. It was a difficult period.”

Marian Woods resident, Sr. Maureen Hally, RSM and Sr. Denise Wilke, RSM played significant roles in coordinating the moving of the Sisters during this time. Sisters requiring nursing care went to a number of local nursing homes, and the top floor at Sacred Heart in Yonkers was rented to house Sisters requiring less care. Still in need of administrative space, the Sisters were then invited by Bishop Sheridan to view the former



“Inspired by the Holy Spirit, I saw this as an opportunity to fulfill a need of the Sisters of Mercy, but also to go beyond Mercy.”

home of the late Henry Gaisman, who willed the property to the Archdiocese of New York. The property was a good fit for the Sisters’ needs and soon after, they occupied the space, which they later named Coolock House.

The scenic stretch of land surrounding Coolock House, which was also owned by the Archdiocese, helped to inspire Sr. Patricia’s vision of a home that could someday benefit elder Mercy Sisters as well as women religious of other communities. “Inspired by the Holy Spirit, I saw this as an opportunity to fulfill a need of the Sisters of Mercy, but also to go beyond Mercy. Having the property would serve as a further opportunity.”

With a clear idea of what was needed for assisted and supported living within the Mercy community, Sr. Patricia wrote to 20 Congregations of women religious inviting them to a meeting to discuss the needs in their own communities. Through these conversations, similar interests and needs were revealed. After the group met initially, they were polled again to gauge their interest in continuing this process. forming the limited partnership

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*Join us for A Virtual Event in July, 2021
to Kick-off Marian Woods’
20th Anniversary
Stay Tuned for Further Information!*

***A Greeting from Sr. Aileen Donovan, OP
Marian Woods' Executive Director***

Dear Friends,



I send this greeting to you in hope as our beautiful, burdensome snows melt and temperatures rise. The last few weeks have made up for the rested shoveling muscles of last year and earlier this winter, but today the sun is shining, reminding us that spring is on its way. How fortunate we are to experience the diversity of

the seasons, that lift us up and promise warmth and bright colors just when we think we can't bear another moment of cold and dark.

As we await spring, we once again dwell in the holy season of Lent. Reflecting on the beautiful words of the prophet Isaiah, I was especially touched by one reading and kept mulling over two phrases ***“Repairer of the breach, they shall call you, Restorer of ruined homesteads.”*** (Is. 58: 9b-14) Could one ask for more to be said of his or her life? Perhaps the national and global suffering has rendered my soul in greater need of the promise in this reading.

Recently, a colleague at Marian Woods and I shared our usual morning greeting. “Good morning, Sister. How are you today?” Cynthia inquired. I responded, “I am fine, and you?” Cynthia replied, “I am also fine.” I then shared with Cynthia what I had been told about a tribe on the other side of the world where one greets another with the same, “Good morning. How are you?” The standard response for tribal members is, ***“I am well if you are well.”*** With that simple statement they embody the awareness that we are all connected and what effects one, affects all.

***How do I restore and come home
to whom I'm meant to be?***

Cynthia and I have shared that greeting several times now. Each time it is a joyful, conscious moment of connection.

We are certainly witnessing how connected we are during this global pandemic. We share the same breath, beautiful and tragic. At Marian Woods we felt the sting of Covid-19 during the Christmas holidays. Fortunately, all of the Sisters and staff who contracted the virus have recovered or are recovering, and we continue to pray daily for our sisters and brothers throughout the world who are suffering in so many ways due to this tragedy.

In this third issue of *The Wheel*, we share with you connections that brought Marian Woods into existence twenty years ago and how our community continues to reach out in different ways to connect with people near and far.

This Lent the words of Isaiah offer a personal invitation to each of us. What breaches within my own life need repair – in my prayer life, in my relationships, in my values...? How do I restore and come home to whom I am meant to be? Do I really believe that all can benefit from my efforts? This is more than enough to work on in this season of Lent, a season of renewal and restoration.

May the weeks of Lent be fruitful for you and may Easter dawn with peace and beauty in your lives and the lives of your loved ones.

Sister Aileen

Because of You

Since opening, Marian Woods has been graced by the generosity of our donors, friends and volunteer leadership.

Gifts received at Christmas have helped ease the burden of expenses related to our ongoing Coronavirus response, which includes state-mandated weekly testing, increased safety standards and staffing.

We are very grateful to all who have given and continue to give during this extraordinary time.



Widening Circles
Fasting and Generosity
 By Sr. Mary Dempsey, OP
 Pastoral Care Coordinator



Many years ago, while ministering in Pakistan, another Sister and I made a seven-hour train ride during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. During Ramadan, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. Out of respect for this fast, we chose not to bring any food for the

journey. Sitting across from us was a mother with her two young children. It was obvious that she was a very loving mother.

At sunset, cannons went off across the country announcing that the fast could end. The woman took out the flat bread and curry she had prepared and placed them on two metal plates. She reached across the aisle and gave us half of what was just enough for her family. As she reached across the aisle, she reached across distances of culture, religion and nationality in a simple and yet profound gesture of hospitality to two strangers.

“To God belongs the East and the West, and wherever you turn, there is the face of God.” The Quar’an

During this Lenten season, when we as Christians, are invited to practice the spiritual discipline of fasting, this young Muslim woman gave witness to a deeper understanding of its meaning: Fasting has less to do with taking less and more to do with seeing more. Though having abstained from food and water since sunrise, her eyes and heart were not dulled to the needs of others. She responded to us with a tender, self-giving generosity.

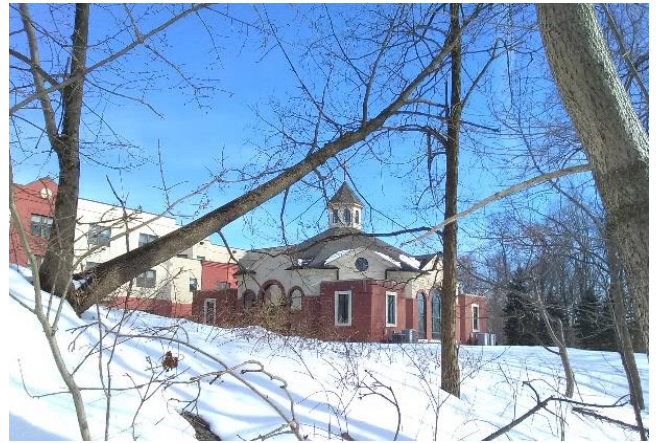
“This rather is the fasting that I wish...sharing your bread with the hungry.” Isaiah 58:7

At a time when so many people in our own country lack enough food, the Old Testament Prophet, Isaiah challenges us to see as God sees, as did the woman on the train: There are no strangers—only sisters and brothers.

Submit a prayer request to the Sisters at Marian Woods on our website at www.Marianwoods.org.

“This rather is the fasting that I wish...sharing your bread with the hungry.” Isaiah 58:7

The Leaning Tree
 By Sr. Beverly Vetrano, OP



A Leaning Tree on the Marian Woods Campus

Roots weakening and letting go
 The tree has fallen
 But the strength of another
 Being the symbol of support
 Embraces this leaning tree.

The seasons come and go
 And the leaning tree
 Loses leaves and continues
 To lean in the cold and snow.
 The sun shines, and the winds blow
 And the rains come showering down.
 Embracing the leaning tree.

All that we need to do in life
 Is to acknowledge our roots that
 Weaken in time.

Give in to letting go
 Recognize and accept the
 strength of God and others.
 As we continue to lean
 On the power of this embrace
 So generously shared with us,
 And the leaning tree.

***Celebrating 20 Years
A Conversation with Sr. Patricia Wolfe, RSM***

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that became Marian Woods, Inc.—the Franciscan Sisters of Peace, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, the Sisters of St. Dominic, Blauvelt, the Society of the Holy Child Jesus and the Sisters of Mercy, New York Regional Community (now part of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas).

The Marian Woods Board of Directors was formed, and a grant was received from the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) to underwrite a feasibility study which identified immediate and long-term needs. The study also confirmed that communities did not have the resources to provide this level of care on their own, and a collaborative



Celebrating the Chapel Dedication Mass on October 21, 2001- The Most Rev. Robert A. Brucato, DD (l) and Rev. Senan Taylor, OFM Cap (r)

effort was the only practical way to accomplish this.

established their convent and administrative space several years earlier.

A construction loan, guaranteed by the five congregations was obtained, and a capital campaign, chaired by author Mary Higgins Clark followed with over \$2.5 million in gifts received.

Purchasing the land from the Archdiocese of New York was the next step in the process, and on July 29, 1999, the Board of Directors acquired an 11.2-acre tract of land in Hartsdale, New York. This land was part of the Gaisman Estate, where the Sisters of Mercy had



Leadership team members, Sr. Mary Pius Keane, OSS (l) with Marian Woods Resident, Sr. Maureen Hally, RSM (r) at the Chapel Dedication

Marian Woods resident and Archivist, Sr. Ellen Marie Robarge, RSM was Sr. Patricia's secretary at the time, and she recalls the

building of Marian Woods. "Each day I would look out of the windows of our offices in Coolock House to check the progress of the construction crews."

In the spirit of collaboration, committees of Sisters were formed with members from all of the five Congregations. They would make decisions on every aspect of life at Marian Woods. These committees included Finance, Property, Sacred Space, Naming and Environment. "There were so many who served on committees: Sisters Barbara Werner, OP; Helen Wacker; FSP; Justine Marcucci, FSP; Mary Pius Keane, OSS; Jeanne Ronzani, SHCJ, and Margaret Brackett, RSM," recalls Sr. Patricia.

Marian Woods Chapel, which was funded by the Ladies of Charity was conceived of carefully, and with much consideration of the Sisters' needs. "So many aspects of our religious life are supported by a



Early Congregational Leader and current Board Chair of Marian Woods, Sr. Helen Wacker, FSP at the Chapel Dedication Mass

sacred space. When our Motherhouse closed, we knew the feeling of being without a place where we could gather for important occasions. So, the decision was made early on that there would be a real chapel at Marian Woods that would be a place of worship, while being comfortable for the people in it."

To support this vision, a liturgical architect, who was also a priest was hired. Fr. Richard S. Vosko brought scripture, liturgy, theology and mythology into his design. The theme of creation

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***Celebrating 20 Years
Members of the Marian Woods Community Share
Special Memories***



Sr. Mary Elizabeth Dolan, RSM with her sister, Sr. Ellen Gerard, RSM at Marian Woods

Sr. Mary Elizabeth Dolan, RSM, resident came to Marian Woods on August 1, 2001 along with her sister, Sr. Ellen Gerard, RSM. Before retiring, both enjoyed working at St. Michael’s Home, a residential school for children and adolescents in Staten Island, NY. Sr. Mary Elizabeth worked as a house mother, Sr. Ellen, who passed away in 2009, as a teacher and CCD

coordinator. Sr. Mary Elizabeth recalls celebrating her Golden Jubilee at Marian Woods along with her family and friends. “Marian Woods is a wonderful place. We have daily worship which is so important. We enjoy many activities as well as lovely private rooms in a beautiful setting. Over the years I’ve gotten to know so many wonderful people, and we have become close companions.”



Healthcare Aide, Janet Kerr

Janet Kerr, Healthcare Aide has worked at Marian Woods since its opening. In her role, Janet assists the Sisters with all tasks of daily living such as meals, laundry and personal care. She says, “Helping the Sisters has brought so much joy to me.” A native of Jamaica and mother and grandmother of three, Janet landed the job after just three

months in the United States. The first in-service training took place at Sacred Heart in Yonkers, and Janet recalls feeling the anxiety of being in an unfamiliar place when she traveled there. “I felt lost, but everything changed after I went through those doors.” Soon after a second training, Janet was on the job filling the 3:00 – 11:00 pm shift as the only evening Healthcare Aide. “I love everything about my job, especially the Sisters—their kindness, the peacefulness of this place, and the sacredness of the Chapel. It’s been such a blessing.”

Mary James, Therapeutic Recreation Coordinator



Recreational Therapy Coordinator, Mary James, CTRS

says, “One year into this global pandemic, I recall with great delight our twenty years of recreation at Marian Woods. Like a tapestry of treasured memories, so many lives woven together; Sisters, staff, friends, family, visitors and performers and more. Each has contributed her gifts; song, dance, stories, experience, presence and laughter. Over the years we’ve embarked on trips and adventures too numerous to count, enjoyed themed parties, seasonal gatherings and special events, and, each according to her ability has shared life in its multi-dimensional fullness.”

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was selected by the Sacred Space Committee. The five founding communities are honored by the etchings on the Chapel atrium windows.

The Naming Committee made the decision to adopt the name Marian Woods in honor of Mary, the Blessed Mother. The underlying spirituality of Marian Woods which is foundational, was stressed in everything, including an emphasis on nature. Five trees, planted on campus, represented the five founding Congregations.

The Marian Woods Prayer, which is said daily at Mass is reflective of the spirit of all the founding Congregations. This sense of unity at Marian Woods exists today and is deeply rooted in prayer life. “During the planning process, Sisters prayed the Rosary each Wednesday, in each of the founding Congregations. Every community had a voice, and praying at the same time was such a unique and powerful event.”

When asked how she kept on the path of establishing this home, Sr. Patricia says, “At each point of decision, there was always another affirmation, so I never questioned whether it was to be.”

Marian Woods participates with AmazonSmile. For questions call 914-750-6046.

Spotlight on Sisters

Sr. Theresa Kane, RSM

Interviewed by Carolyn Sedotti



Sr. Theresa Kane, RSM

In this issue's *Spotlight on Sisters*, we focus on Marian Woods' resident, Sr. Theresa Kane, RSM. Sr. Theresa served as president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and president of the Sisters of Mercy in the US. In her long career, Sr. Theresa has also held positions in healthcare services administration and as college professor, teaching a variety of courses including Religious Studies, the History of Women and Career Readiness.

Her recently published biography, *To Speak the Truth in Love: A Biography of Theresa Kane, RMS*, written by Sr. Christine Schenk, CSJ, provides an intimate portrait of Sr. Theresa's life and faith, and details the ground-breaking moment in October, 1979 when she addressed Pope John Paul II at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC requesting women's full participation in all areas of the Roman Catholic Church.

This historic moment, which served as a catalyst for the women's movement in the church, was met with resounding approval from Women Religious everywhere longing for change. At the same time, it provoked anger and disapproval from those who did not share this vision of equality. In a recent interview, Sr. Theresa speaks of her remarkable life as a Sister of Mercy with great joy, and a striking peacefulness.

Can you describe the role of faith in your life?

"My parents were both from religious families—my mother especially. We attended Mass on Sunday and knelt each night to recite the Rosary. So, from the time of birth, religion and faith were natural, it was how we lived. The motto I adopted as a Sister of Mercy—My God, I trust you—speaks to having trust in God, above all things as well as to be graced with the virtues of hope and faith. And, at times, I've asked myself why didn't I trust God enough? Although faith is innate in my system, I work to cultivate it."

Your biography goes into wonderful detail about your early experiences with your family. Can you talk about how they have guided and shaped you?

"My parents were very supportive—my father always said he would help us in every way possible, as we pursued our aspirations. My mother, whose brother was a Josephite priest, was thrilled that both my sister, Nancy and I had entered religious life. I grew up in the Bronx--we lived in a building that had 18 apartments. There were many large families, like ours that had seven children or more. Although many of the families were Catholics from Ireland, like my parents, there was quite a mixture of ethnicities and faiths. What was significant was that we became one community. No one locked their doors. We were like an extended family, with an appreciation and tolerance for each other's customs, culture and religion. My parents were instrumental in us learning tolerance."

The title of your biography, *To Speak the Truth in Love*, taken from Ephesians 4:15, refers to your respectfully and courageously speaking on behalf of many women during your address to Pope John Paul II. What changes were you pleased to see following this historic moment?

"It opened up a more honest and candid dialogue between women religious and the male church leadership. Although it could be stressful, for the first time, we were speaking to the men in authority from our hearts, and as equals."

What have been your greatest joys and challenges?

"My joys come from many places. My family and friends have given me great joy. Being a Sister of Mercy, and living at Marian Woods. I've made so many wonderful friends here. I've loved teaching. I've lived a graced life, and am humbled by it all. One challenge I experience is to continue to want to be informed and active, to keep giving, to be interested and enthused. The last four years have also been a political challenge, and I welcome the years ahead with President Biden."

How can your story inspire Women Religious and all people of faith?

"Over the years, many people have asked me, how could you have ever done that? Some people were inspired, and some did not accept it. I hope it can provide a path to further empowerment, hope for change, and unity among Women Religious as well as all people of faith."

Gratitude in the Time of Covid

By Sr. Patricia Kenny, RSM

On reflection, the Sisters at Marian Woods had many words on the subject of gratitude and they gladly shared some of them. Universally appreciated is the very idea of Marian Woods and the courageous Community leaders, generous donors and wise advisers who made it happen. Twenty-one years ago, when the doors opened, nothing quite like this had ever been done in this part of the country. The Sisters whose names are remembered on the Memorial Board by the chapel, would tell you if they could the many ways their lives were blessed during their sojourns here.



During this time of COVID-19, there has been plenty to lament, but hard times often bring to light unexpected and overlooked blessings. Sr. Justine Marcucci, FSP says, “It’s been a trying time and a hope-filled time.” She regrets days lost without the benefit of

daily Eucharistic celebration, the absence of her family and friends and the blessings of good weather. But she is grateful for the generous services of those who always provide for us, our daily Communion service, more time for reading, prayer, and her favorite hobby, crocheting.



Sr. Eileen Walsh, RSM has grown in her appreciation of simple things: a special plant to which she now pays more attention; subtle changes in the weather and the sights and smells she notices on her now more frequent walks. “I’m also slowing myself down,” she adds citing opportunities to

spend time in chapel, sharing our lives and gifts without the pressures and obligations we had before.



Sr. Marlene Brownnett, SHCJ observed that while COVID halted our comings and goings, it launched a series of excursions into poetry, Scripture and quiet observation: T.S. Eliot’s poem Ash Wednesday begins, “This is the time of tension between dying

and birthing . . . Teach us to care and not to care, to sit still even among these rocks, our peace in His will.” She points us to Psalm 46 that urges us to “. . . be still and know that I am God,” and to recognize the gifts of goodness, kindness and generosity that surround us all here at Marian Woods.



Sr. Theresa Condon, RSM considered the pandemic a disruption in her life until she realized how it provided an opportunity to share the intrusion, trouble, and fear of cancer treatments in her sister Mary’s life. Being able to be with her for those months became a quiet/retreat time

for which she will always be grateful.



A blessing Sr. Sheila Kelly, RSM learned to cherish is awareness of many things we take for granted. As we age and our health and safety needs increase, the administrative, health care, maintenance and food service personnel adjust and adapt in ways we hardly notice. The seamless weaving of spiritual, educational,

celebratory and memorial services and events into the long days of pandemic has been remarkable.



For Sr. Elizabeth McCarthy, RSM this strange year was a time of waiting and wondering. She watched the seasons quietly change while we waited and wondered when and if changes in restrictions would open our doors, connect us again with our families and friends and lift our hopes for a vaccine that

would change everything. In another way she found it a peaceful time with less distraction, more time to pray, to find other ways to maintain connections and to welcome the blessings that found us, even in our isolation: silence outside and inside; caring staff ‘round the clock and awareness of how we are loved even in terrible times.

Marian Woods now accepts online donations.
To make a secure contribution via our website, go to www.marianwoods.org, and click Donate.

Covid-19 Vaccines Arrive at Marian Woods

In a well-coordinated effort, Sisters and staff at Marian Woods have been vaccinated against the Coronavirus. In preparation, Marian Woods healthcare and administrative staff worked extensively with CVS Pharmacy in Hartsdale, NY to plan all aspects of the effort.

On vaccination day, the recreation room at Marian Woods Convent was converted into a Covid-19 vaccination clinic managed by representatives from CVS Pharmacy, who administered the Pfizer vaccine to Sisters and then to staff. Vaccine recipients were then observed for adverse reactions. The vaccine, which was given in two doses--the first on January 14, and the second on February 4, 2021 offers newfound hope for a return to normalcy, especially for those living and working in communities of elder populations like Marian Woods that have been disproportionately affected by this deadly pandemic, and state-mandated lock-downs.

Marian Woods Executive Director, Sr. Aileen Donovan, OP said, "This represents a new beginning for all of us as we work and pray for the eradication of this virus. We thank God for the scientists, and all who worked so hard to create the vaccines so quickly."

Marian Woods continues to employ all state-mandated measures such as weekly testing, increased safety standards and social distancing to prevent the Coronavirus.



Sr. Carlita Volmer, FSP receives her first dose of the Coronavirus vaccine at Marian Woods Convent on January 14, 2021, days before her 99th birthday.



What are the chances? Marian Woods Director of Maintenance, Rob Horan is vaccinated alongside resident, Sr. Benedict Paonessa, FSP. Sr. Benedict was also Rob's first grade teacher at St. Columbanus Elementary School 45 years earlier!



Sisters marking their jubilees are pictured at a celebration at Marian Woods. L - r Srs. Georgiana Sanders, Helen Scannell and Eileen Walsh

Jubilarians Honored

We congratulate the following Sisters who celebrated Jubilees in the last year:

75 years, Sr. Helen Scannell, RSM
70 years, Sr. Connie Gaynor, FSP
70 years, Sr. Maureen Hally, RSM
70 years, Sr. Benedict Paonessa, FSP
70 years, Sr. Rose Vermette, RCD
65 years, Sr. Leona Donahue, RSM
65 years, Sr. Theresa Kane, RSM
65 years, Sr. Ellen Marie Robarge, RSM
60 years, Sr. Christine Hennessy, RSM
60 years, Sr. Patricia McDermott, FSP
60 years, Sr. Cathy O'Hanlon, OP
60 years, Sr. Georgiana Sanders, RSM
60 years, Sr. Beverly Vetrano, OP
60 years, Sr. Eileen Walsh, RSM

Stay in Touch:- We welcome your feedback. Please contact Carolyn Sedotti, Office of Development, 152 Ridge Road, Hartsdale, NY. Email: csedotti@marianwoods.org or call 914 750-6046.

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