

Summer 2008 Newsletter

Volume 20, No. 2

Where Two or Three are Gathered: Retired Sisters Share Space and Spirit

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20) God has certainly been in the midst of three religious communities challenged with providing care and security for senior members while maintaining their mission and charism. As a result, retired religious from the Sisters of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine de Ricci, and the Discalced Carmelites now live together under one roof.

Though from different traditions and apostolates, all three communities faced the similar problem of having facilities too large to meet their current needs. The exorbitant costs of maintaining these buildings coupled with the necessity of providing space better suited for their elder members prompted these communities to consider how their properties fit into their long-range plans. The congregations undertook intensive, multi-year analysis of their goals and priorities and, in so doing, found a common solution to their retirement and facility challenges.



Peace Angel greets all who enter

Sisters of Sts. Cyril and Methodius

Founded in 1909, the Sisters of Sts. Cyril and Methodius will soon celebrate their 100th anniversary. Their sprawling wooded campus, located in Danville, Pennsylvania, is home not only to their motherhouse, but also to several healthcare facilities for senior adults. Together these facilities provide a continuum of service from independent and assisted living to skilled and memory care.

For many years, most of the care for the community's retired and infirm sisters took place at Maria Hall. The 2001 opening of their skilled nursing facility, Emmanuel Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, meant that members who required acute or skilled care could be served there. Sisters who needed limited care remained at Maria Hall. In 2004, the congregation decided to apply for a state license for thirty personal care beds within Maria Hall. Originally designed to house about ninety community members, Maria Hall was by then home to roughly twenty-five sisters. The license would make it possible for others to live there as personal care residents.

Worry continued, however, over how to maintain Maria Hall, which had originally opened in 1970. The sisters tried to increase utilization by offering space on their upper floors for the local Catholic Charities office. They also partnered with Columbia Montour Home Health Association to furnish hospice rooms for patients and families needing an alternative to their own homes. Despite these efforts, they were still challenged to keep pace with rising expenses. The community began to consider razing the building.

Various options on how to address the situation at Maria Hall were considered. Of all the choices presented, the one wanted most by the sisters residing there was to have members of other religious communities come to live with them. They got busy praying.

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Dominican Sisters, Carmelite nuns, and Sisters of Saints Cyril and Methodius gather in May to crown the statue of Mary that greets all those who come to Maria Hall.

Between 2000 and 2004, the community's leadership wrote to numerous religious congregations to explore the possibility of sharing space at Maria Hall. No one was interested. Two years later, Sister Linda Marie Bolinski, SSCM, General Superior, attended the 2006 Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) annual meeting. While at a luncheon meeting, she learned of a religious community outside of Philadelphia who was looking to relocate twenty-three retired sisters. She gave her business card to Sister Carol Gaeke, OP, Director of Personnel and Ministry for the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine de Ricci.

Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine de Ricci

The Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine de Ricci were located in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, about three hours away from the Sisters of Sts. Cyril and Methodius. Their campus was home to their motherhouse, administrative offices, and convent for retired and infirm sisters. It was also the location for two of their retreat houses.

The historic mansions that served as their retreat centers showcased the graciousness and elegance of another era. Despite their beauty, however, these buildings were ill-suited to today's needs.

They lacked air-conditioning and private baths, and their sheer size made them increasingly unmanageable for the aging sisters working there. Updating them for the twenty-first century was simply not feasible. Like other religious congregations, the Dominicans were faced with some very tough choices.

In 2003, the Dominicans leveraged support from an NRRO Special Assistance Grant with other in-

come to fund long-range planning and analysis. They secured a professional consultant who led them through a comprehensive process of retirement, ministry, and development planning. As a result, and after years of discussion, the community voted in 2005 to sell the property at Elkins Park. The sale included forty-two acres of land, five historic buildings, and a cluster of cottages and workshops.

In August of 2006, the congregation began the process of relocating their members living at Elkins Park. The greatest obstacle in this monumental task was finding a home for twenty-three of their retired sisters, sixteen of whom required some assistance with the activities of daily living. For these sisters, who were already facing the reality of leaving their life at Elkins Park, the priority was on staying together. Unfortunately, there were no congregations in the Philadelphia area with space for more than two or three sisters.

Sister Carol's meeting with Sister Linda Marie at the LCWR gathering could be written off to good luck, but neither one does. They both see the providence of God at work. Sister Linda Marie says, "I truly believe that our sisters living in Maria Hall prayed this into happening."

When the two met, the Dominicans had been able to identify a few other communities that were able to accommodate all twenty-three sisters. However, after visiting the Danville campus, they found the best fit with the Sisters of Sts. Cyril and Methodius. A primary benefit of this situation was the continuum of care available on one campus.

The Dominican sisters began moving to Danville in August of 2007. Three or four sisters were moved at a time. A family member or another member of the community accompanied each sister and helped her unpack and get settled. Pictures were hung, easy chairs were positioned, and by October, all the sisters were in their new home.

At Maria Hall, the Sisters of St. Catherine de Ricci occupy space on two floors, with members requiring personal care support residing just above those in independent living. Each sister has a private room with a shared bath, and there is a large common room where the community can gather.

There are also eight sisters living at Maria Joseph Manor, the assisted living center. All residents of Maria Hall share the same dining room, and the Sisters of St. Catherine de Ricci and the Sisters of Sts. Cyril and Methodius join together for morning and evening prayer.

Although the move went well and the transition was made as smooth as possible, leaving was not easy. In the months leading up to the relocation, there was, understandably, much sadness. In early August 2007, the congregation met for their final gathering at Elkins Park. Based on the poetry of T.S. Eliot, their theme was: *The ending is where we begin.*

Once in Danville, the Dominican sisters put all of their energy into embracing their new home. Sister Carol notes that as difficult as the move was, the end result has been far better than anyone dared to hope. “The Sisters of Sts. Cyril and Methodius have been beyond gracious,” says Sister Carol. “There is at Maria Hall that intangible sense of warmth and hospitality and of them really wanting us there.”



Carmelite Sisters

Like the Sisters of Sts. Cyril and Methodius and the Sisters of St. Catherine de Ricci, the Discalced Carmelite Sisters, formerly of Elysburg, Pennsylvania, owned a sizeable property. Located on ninety-two acres of hillside overlooking the town of Elysburg, their cloistered monastery included lovely grounds, a chapel, and cells for up to twenty-one sisters, the maximum number allowed at a Carmelite monastery.

Like the other communities, maintaining the property while providing for aging sisters became increasingly costly. The Carmelites were forced to consider alternatives. To facilitate this process, the Carmelites worked with Sister Sherryl White, CSJ, editor for NRRO’s newsletter, *Engaging Aging*. A Special Identified Need Grant (SING) provided by NRRO helped with securing a long-range financial forecast. Using this and other data, Sister Sherryl assisted the congregation over a three-year period

with defining their needs, establishing goals, and planning for the future. It became apparent that the sisters would need to sell their home in Elysburg. The Carmelites faced not only the challenge of relocating but also of finding space that would allow them to continue to live out their monastic lifestyle. And of course, they wanted to stay together.

As it turned out, the answer was in their back yard. Their Elysburg monastery was only a few miles away from Maria Hall. Sister Joan Lundy, OCD, Prioress, remarked, “The sisters of Sts. Cyril and Methodius had always been good friends. They helped us when we first established our monastery in Elysburg in 1961.” Maria Hall had space enough for the community to stay together, and it also offered the personal care support required by some of their members.

The congregation made the unanimous decision to relocate to Danville. They moved in early 2008 and are now involved in the final stages of the sale of their monastery. At Maria Hall, the congregation of twelve has a private wing, and each sister has her own room. They also have a large common room with a small kitchen area.

Like the Sisters of St. Catherine de Ricci, relocation for the Carmelites meant coping with the deep sense of loss they felt at leaving their beautiful monastery. It also presented the special challenge of creating a cloistered atmosphere in the midst of two apostolic religious communities. To this end, the sisters worked with Fr. Kieran Cavanaugh, a Discalced Carmelite priest from Washington, DC. He helped them both to create an enclosure at Maria Hall and to establish a horarium that incorporates the traditional elements of prayer, work, and meditation.

Still, the Carmelites have had to make certain accommodations to their normal routine. For example, it is not really feasible to eat in silence in the midst of a bustling dining room. But the Carmelites are not dismayed. “We don’t expect it to be exactly the same as our life in Elysburg,” says Sister Joan, “and we have discovered that we have much in common even though we are from three different apostolates. It has been a truly wonderful experience of religious life.”

A Leap of Faith Rewarded

There is today a new energy at Maria Hall. Perhaps it is the happiness that comes from making new friends. Or it could be the comfort found in discovering connections among people with different histories but a common purpose. Maybe it is relief that the uncertainty of the past few years is over. Most likely though, it is simply the peace that comes from trusting completely in God's plan and following where He leads.

The challenges involved with the transitions for these communities have been overshadowed by the joy and companionship they have found in each other. Perhaps the best example of how fully these three communities love and respect one another can be found in the Jubilee celebrations that took place this past spring. Jubilarians from all three communities were honored at a special Mass. Each sister renewed her vows according to her own community's tradition. Following the Mass,

a grand reception was held for all. Together they celebrated—separate in mission and charism but one in faith. It was, after all, a leap of faith that brought them together.



Three Dominican Sisters, two Carmelite nuns, and three Sisters of Sts. Cyril and Methodius celebrate a total of 440 years of consecrated religious life at Maria Hall's combined Jubilee celebration.

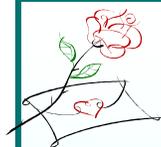


Person Centered Care Workshops II

Thanks to a generous grant from *The Retirement Research Foundation*, NRRO is pleased to announce that we will again be offering our Person-Centered Care Conference. Person-centered care is an approach that respects the dignity and individuality of older adults by striving to furnish them with autonomy in their daily schedules, greater meaning in their activities, and involvement with their care choices. Data gathered over the past several years is beginning to show that this model of elder care not only increases senior adult and staff satisfaction but also reduces cost.

The training will assist participants in implementing the person-centered care philosophy in their own environments. Workshops will be offered next February in the Baltimore, Maryland area and in April in the Chicago area. Exact dates are still to be determined. Watch for more details in our next newsletter and on our website.

If interested in attending, please contact Andrew Small, asmall@matherlifeways.com. In your e-mail, please include your mailing address, phone number, and your preferred training site: Baltimore, MD, or Chicago, IL.



If you would like to make a bequest or restricted gift to the National Religious Retirement Office, the following information should be used:

To the United Conference of Catholic Bishops Incorporated for the **exclusive** purpose of assisting Roman Catholic religious orders in the United States to provide for the retirement needs of their elderly members.

Please send changes in address, phone, E-mail or congregational leadership to NRRO c/o Jean Smith so that we may keep our records and mailing lists updated.

Thank You!





Welcome Brother Bob!



We are happy to announce that Brother Robert Metzger, SM, will be joining the NRRO staff as the Assistant Director of Planning and Education. Brother Bob is a member of the Society of Mary (Marianists), Province of the United States. He has served his community both as Director of Finance and as a member of the Council. He also has volunteered as a consultant for NRRO and NATRI since 1987. Brother Bob will begin his service at NRRO on August 25th. We look forward to welcoming him to our team.

Message from the Executive Director

The people who make a difference in your life are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. They simply are the ones who care the most.

This quote, taken from an e-mail that has been circulating the internet, sums up what is referred to as the Charles Schultz Philosophy. The basic premise of this thinking is that, when asked, most people cannot recall the Most Valuable Player of the 1964 World Series or the first woman to win the Nobel Prize. On the other hand, nearly everyone can name a teacher or mentor who has impacted them profoundly. Ultimately, these are the individuals, not someone on television or in a newspaper, who make a difference in our lives.

This point was demonstrated recently in the media coverage following the death of television journalist Tim Russert. Many friends and colleagues spoke of how various individuals had shaped his life. The names discussed included not only presidents and world leaders, but also two of Mr. Russert's teachers, Sister Mary Lucille Socciarelli, RSM, and Father John Strum, SJ. The fact that their names were mentioned again and again reveals the tremendous influence these religious had on him.

The continued success of the Retirement Fund for Religious (RFR) is another manifestation of the far-reaching impact of women and men religious. Since its inception twenty years ago, the RFR has consistently garnered the highest amount of any national collection in the Catholic Church in the United States. This was true again in 2007 with a collection total of \$31.5 million, the sixth time that the appeal exceeded \$30 million.

We are deeply grateful to the many donors who continue to honor the religious who have touched their lives. It is both amazing and humbling to realize the ongoing effect of the service that religious give.

There are people and causes with much greater name recognition than the RFR. Yet, like Mr. Russert, our generous benefactors continue to acknowledge that their lives have been enriched by the many Sister Mary Lucilles and Father Johns of this world. And these religious continue to pray daily, often by name, for each person whom they have had the privilege to serve. The relationship is alive and well, and we trust that it will continue into eternity. I think Charles Schulz had it right. It is not the rich and famous who touch our lives most deeply but rather those who touch our minds and hearts.



In Christ,

Sister Janice Bader, CPPS

"NO EXERCISE IS BETTER FOR THE HUMAN HEART THAN REACHING DOWN TO LIFT UP ANOTHER PERSON." Tim Russert

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CALENDAR



CMSM/LCWR Assembly, Denver, CO	August 1-4, 2008
Consultants In-Service, Darien, CT	September 23-25, 2008
<i>Special Assistance Grant Applications Due in Office</i>	September 30, 2008
CMSWR Assembly, Belleville, IL	October, 9-12, 2008
Grant Review Board Meeting, Washington, DC	November 3, 2008
NATRI Conference, Denver, CO	November 18-21, 2008
Supplemental and Special Assistance Grant Awards Distributed	December 2008
Retirement Fund for Religious National Collection Date	December 13-14, 2008
* Direct Care Assistance Application packets mailed	December 29, 2008

* Formerly known as Basic Grant applications or Eligibility Forms



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