

**Sisters Angela Pikus and Marjorie Robinson**

---

**Sr. Marjorie—Beacon**

## **INTRODUCTION**

I've shared in the past on the process of union of the former Carmels of Barre, Beacon and Saranac Lake, founded in 2000 as the Carmel of the Incarnation. I will not speak of that process today. It was a long process leading to the decision to become a new community.

## **UNION OF THREE CARMELS**

### **HOW DID YOU KNOW IT WAS TIME TO ACT?**

By seriously looking at our communities: the realities of our communities, our profiles, our desires for Carmelite life. We were open to imagining what the future would/could hold for us. In regard to the union, we participated in the CCA processes of the early 1990s. Our own process evolved from CCA initiatives.

We asked ourselves what would be the consequences if nothing were done. We continue to believe that God wants us to respond to present reality with creativity, trust and the resources available to us. There is no perfect way or plan; I have not looked back or second guessed. I have found it is less about having the answers as it is about asking the right questions, naming one's reality, being creative, open to life and not afraid to risk.

### **WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED**

The risks, losses, and decisions to become a new community prepared and gave us courage and confidence to face new challenges, to explore life-giving possibilities and options. We have grown in trust that God works with us and through the decisions we make.

Don't wait! The median age and health of the sisters provided a "window of opportunity" for the option to unite. We would not consider union as a viable

option today. However, I believe other healthy options will present themselves if we are open.

Our decisions were made for the sake of Carmel's mission, to continue Carmelite life. Choices we have made in the ensuing years have been life-giving and for the good of the Church, community and Carmelite life. They have taught us that the spirit of Carmel is not restricted merely to buildings and externals, as important as these can be.

### **WHAT WORKED (I am aware that others have done/are doing many of these things.)**

- Sought professional help: facilitators, development & capital campaign, architect, building design, construction.
- We had sisters on committees who were capable of working with professionals.
- We had sisters who could support and do the work of carrying out the details—both leadership and supportive members.
- New construction and renovations designed for aging friendly.
- The spaciousness of monastery and outdoors helped absorb and accommodate the diversity, while creating a healthy environment for sisters to grow and live the life.
- Maintained ongoing communication with friends and benefactors (mailings, newsletters, correspondence, web site).
- Sought help on spirituality of aging in 2004-2005. (Sr. Sherryl White, CSJ) Health Care Guidelines, although outdated, were worked on and accepted as a community. We established understandings around the issue of health care, both personally and communally.
- We came to the understanding that we could not/would not turn monastery into a skilled-care facility. Could not provide 24-hour care.
- A stronger community allowed Carmelite life to flourish: liturgical life, opportunities for personal growth, communal life, ability to attract new members.
- Sought input on all aspects of Carmelite life—ongoing formation a priority.
- Yearly community retreats.
- Commitment to ongoing community building, weekly community meetings with scripture sharing. Encouraged and enabled the group take ownership for decisions.

- Had a facilitator for important community meetings—goal setting and implementation. (Sr. Chris Partisano, CSJ)
- Maintained participation in CCA, MACC, ACWR, NRVC membership & programs. (Leadership, ongoing formation, vocation recruitment.)
- Networking with other religious in many areas: leadership, health care, religious life issues, initial & ongoing formation etc.
- As health needs increased, sought resources for aging and health care (NRRO; Sr. Peter Lillian, O.Carm.)
- Hired a health-care coordinator (an RN) in 2008. (Job Description available upon request.)
- In-house workshops (e.g. “Aging in Place,” nutrition, exercise).
- Open to outside help for sisters needing assistance. Made use of available services (Medicaid).
- Housekeeping (two women at present).
- Cook, first for weekdays, then for weekends.
- Parish volunteers for driving sisters to appointments.
- Women volunteers from the parish to help with door & phone.
- Desired to share our space and prayerful atmosphere: we extended an open invitation to apostolic sisters for retreat and/or sabbatical time.
- Outdoor maintenance help.
- Property Management Company for building maintenance. Someone works with sister in charge of maintenance.
- Outside treasurer(s) to assist community treasurer.
- Occasional administrative help.
- Most recently, we have hired a food service: two prepared meals a day; food buying for all meals; clean-up after prepared meals.
- We are open to collaboration and sharing with other religious: information, experience, facilities (e.g. Sr. Jeannie in SSND infirmary in Wilton, CT). Have come to appreciate that as religious we are more alike than different; we share bonds of religious life.

## OUTCOMES

- Tremendous support from friends and benefactors—found they are happy with what we were doing.
- Allowed us opportunities for outreach, sharing of our life with others (e.g. afternoon programs for women), vocation recruitment efforts, richer liturgical and communal life.

## **WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU HAD DONE SOONER OR DIFFERENTLY?**

- Establish understandings for change in community: jobs, offices, responsibilities. Create avenues for change.
- Have back-ups prepared and ready to take over before a sister is no longer able to do her job. Often crises precipitate change without warning.
- Do something about the enormous amounts of clutter and “stuff” that sisters have accumulated.
- Put in place better evaluation or time limits to assess employees (e.g. cook). Maintaining clearer boundaries between employees and sisters is an ongoing issue.
- Seek administrative help.
- Recognizing when something is too much and must be let go of (e.g. our community mailings, newsletter, care of the monastery). However, I admit that some things you just have to do for as long as you can.
- Have independent medical person evaluate and assess sisters’ needs for care, levels of care, time to transition.
- Make better use of the assisted-care rooms and space we designed.
- Challenge sisters to cultivate personal resourcefulness and responsibility.
- Stress importance of the common good.

## **REDEMPTORISTINE AND CARMELITE NUNS 2013**

The Redemptoristine Nuns’ monastery was in Esopus, NY, about 40 minutes from Beacon. They had been active members of MACC (Metropolitan Association of Contemplative Communities) from its beginning. The Carmelites and Redemptoristines had collaborated on all events and programs during MACC’s 40+ year history. Sisters from both communities served in leadership roles in MACC.

In 2011 the Redemptoristines’ monastery and property had been sold by the Redemptorist Fathers. The sisters spent two years looking for a new home and had found nothing suitable. In early 2013 they were given three months to vacate temporary housing and had nowhere to go.

At that time in 2013 our community was scheduled to address one of our goals—use of building/property. As we began discussion on use of the building and property, sisters began to voice the desire to invite the Redemptoristines to share the monastery with us. We had empty rooms at Beacon, and both communities lived a contemplative lifestyle. In the process of renewal, both communities were similar in their understanding of contemplative life, theology, liturgical life and living of community. The Redemptoristines had six sisters needing housing (three would move into an assisted-care facility until they qualified for skilled care).

It was truly the guidance of the Holy Spirit that enabled us to make the decision to invite the “Red Nuns,” as they are affectionately called, and that they accepted the decision—all within 24 hours! Sometimes you just know what the right thing to do is.

**Important:** We remain two separate communities sharing space, building, property, common elements of the contemplative life. (Cf. Beacon’s letter to Carmels, families, friends and benefactors in September 2013.)

I believe the work of union of our three Carmels, as well as sisters’ openness and commitment to community building, prepared us for the decision to invite the Red Nuns. One step leads to another, one risk gives you the courage to take another, one leap of faith allows God to open another door.

### **WHAT DID YOUR COMMUNITY GAIN FROM YOUR DECISION?**

- Both our union of three monasteries and the acceptance of the Redemptoristine Nuns to share our building resulted in a more vibrant community and liturgical life. The decision for union has allowed our community to continue with quality Carmelite life longer than any one of our former communities would have been able.
- Stronger witness of Carmelite & contemplative life.
- With the Redemptoristines, these years have allowed each of us more time to consider our future and options, while providing a quality contemplative life for each group.
- More cost-effective use of building, space, utilities, maintenance etc.
- Opened us to new models of Carmelite and contemplative life.
- Found that many of the externals of Carmel are not carved in stone.

### **THE BEACON MONASTERY**

Change is accelerating and the future is here for many of our communities, especially those with a higher median age.

With sisters' deaths over the years (half the community), there are available rooms in the monastery. Advantages of new construction and renovations done at Beacon in 2000: elevators, spacious rooms, aging friendly construction & renovations, surrounded by natural beauty, availability of daily Mass. Making full use of the building makes for cost effective services, utilities, maintenance etc.

Is there interest in CCA to consider possibilities for the use of the monastery at Beacon? Examples: use for newer members; small group & team meetings; time for respite and retreat; or????

No matter what interest there might be in CCA to consider a collaborative use of the Beacon monastery, Beacon Carmel will continue to move forward in exploring life-giving options for our community's future.

**ARE THERE WAYS IN WHICH YOUR COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE TIES IN WITH THE JOURNEY TO EMMAUS? (The general theme of the meeting)**

At times I feel like the disciples and apostles after Jesus' death: "We had hoped.... We thought..." They could handle Christ's death—weeping, mourning, running away to a safer, more familiar life—but reports of his resurrection held worse fears, triggered denial and turned them in on themselves. It was too new, too much change, unimaginable. Overcome with grief, they were unable to imagine the possibility of Jesus' resurrection. Sometimes the pace of change and daily concerns can paralyze me, can blind me to the Stranger who walks beside me.

"What sort of things?" God invites me to share all I see and experience, to speak from my heart. God doesn't make me deny my feelings and insights; doesn't water down my experience; doesn't give me pious statements or false hopes. When I experience the inability to look beyond disappointment, the Stranger enlightens me. "Were not our hearts burning?" This is what makes the journey of despair a journey of hope. I know the burning in my heart, know that I can trust it. I do trust the burning in my heart....

"Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." At times I speak these words to the Lord, perhaps in resignation to my present reality. However, it is through ritual, in openness to life and the day at hand, in familiar gestures of hospitality that my eyes are opened and my heart expands; I am set free to dream

and to imagine what can be. I recognize the path to follow. I may retrace my steps, but I am now a bearer of hope, promise and new life.