BVM Sisters Share Their 'Dear Carmel Home'

by Angie Connolly and Jon Aguilar

Along the bluffs of the Mississippi River, Mount Carmel has been in the care of the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in Dubuque, Iowa, since 1889. This small piece of earth was nurtured, shaped, and changed by many generations before the BVM Sisters: from glaciers and the river to prairie grass and mighty oaks to animals and more, and at its present state, their sacred home. For many, it was where young women climbed the steps of the Motherhouse to enter religious life, and now, where many sisters are coming home to continue their ministry in retirement.

And once again, this small piece of Earth will be nurtured, shaped, and changed.

A Plan for the Future

This summer the BVM Sisters—in a joint venture with Presbyterian Homes & Services (PHS), a non-profit senior housing corporation based in St. Paul, Minn.—will break ground to build a new state-of-the-art, earth-friendly senior living community on the Mount Carmel campus.

The construction plans come after years of careful consideration by the congregation as a response to the aging of the BVM community.

As the number of sisters diminishes, President Teri Hadro, BVM shares, "we

wish to open our campus for residence by women and men from the greater Dubuque area." Teri continues, "Our collaboration with PHS creates an opportunity to continue our care for our sisters, share our beautiful campus, and provide quality senior residential and healthcare services."

The new center will include 60 long-term care center suites, 42 assisted living apartments, and 20 memory care apartments. The Motherhouse will become the "town center," housing amenities for residents and neighbors to enjoy; the Motherhouse Chapel will continue as the place for liturgical activities for the BVMs.

Renovated spaces will provide for congregational offices, a BVM heritage room, and ministerial outreach, including the Roberta Kuhn Center, which provides education and leisure opportunities for nearly 600 seniors from the greater Dubuque area.

Teri explains, collaboration with PHS is a natural choice because their mission aligns with that of the BVMs: "to honor God by enriching the lives and touching the hearts of older adults." PHS, which has worked with other women religious congregations, operates 47 senior communities in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa.

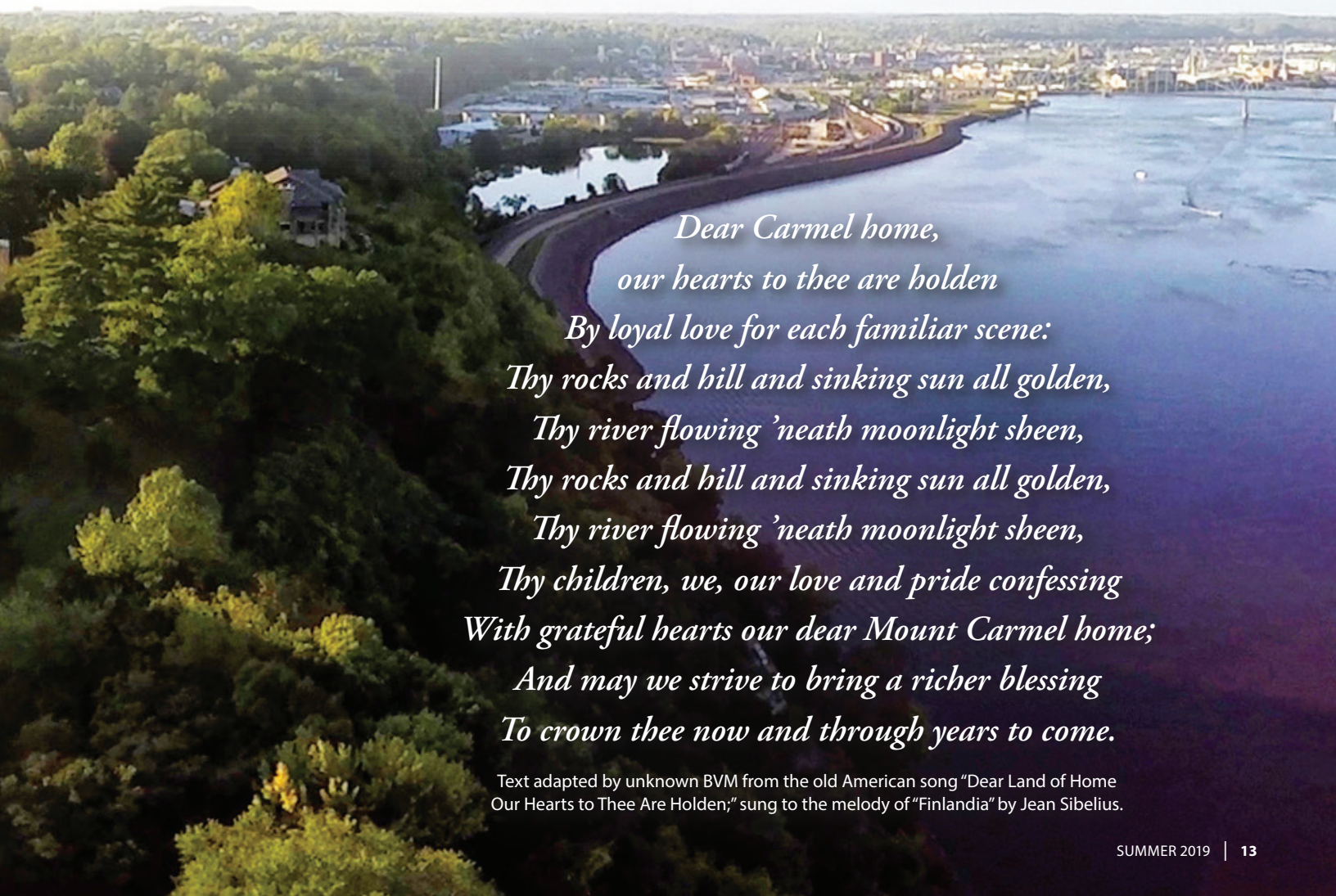
The Mount Carmel campus currently provides housing and care for 150 BVMs and has more than 250 employees. Following the transition, staffing and management responsibilities will transfer to PHS allowing the congregation to continue to focus on BVM life and mission.

"We are making every effort," says Teri, "to retain our current employees whose wonderful care for BVMs through the years has ensured quality healthcare, an abundance of opportunities for spiritual, mental and psychological growth, and lots of choices for social interaction and service to others."

After the transfer of sisters to the new building, the existing structures of Marian Hall, Caritas Center, and BVM Center will be deconstructed to make way for an additional 115 independent living apartments on the north side of the Motherhouse.

> "We're a happy, joyful, spiritual group of people. We're accepting it as a call from God. Something else is coming.
>
> *God has God's plans, and we're accepting that."*
>
> —Helen Wolkerstorfer, BVM

Dear Carmel Home continued on p. 14.



Text adapted by unknown BVM from the old American song "Dear Land of Home Our Hearts to Thee Are Holden;" sung to the melody of "Finlandia" by Jean Sibelius.

Ritual of Gratitude

Sisters, associates, and employees gather for a Ritual of Gratitude at Mount Carmel to show appreciation for the land which has been in the Sisters' care since 1889. Photos, music, and props were used to represent air, earth, water, and fire—elements that have given us energy, life, good health, and prosperity. Pictured above (top to bottom) are Carol Marie (Joseph Louis) Baum, BVM; Andrea Pierce; Vivian C. (Lauren) Wilson, BVM; and Mike Johnson.

Dear Carmel Home continued from p. 13.

BVMs, Associates, and Employees: Together on the Journey

As BVM leadership and PHS administrators finalize plans to make way for the new senior living community, sisters, associates and employees gathered for a Ritual of Gratitude.

"Let us be grateful! Celebrate this day; God is within us leading our way." This song by BVMs Mary Alma (Robert Emmett) Sullivan and Eliza Kenney, sung as a response to the litany of gratitude, provided the direction of the ritual to give thanks for the past, celebrate our solidarity today, and trust God's leading into our future.

Welcoming all to the ritual, BVM Vice President Lou Anglin shares, "We are grateful for all that we have considered to be ours for 130 years, that which we have lovingly called 'Our Dear Carmel Home.'" Lou continues, "This land tells a story that holds the stories of thousands of lives in our time—including those who lived here and those who worked here."

The sharing of prayer, music, and photos of Mount Carmel through the years reminded all present that, as Bertha (Dolorose) Fox, BVM reads, ". . . we are together supporting one another on this journey as Mary Frances Clarke expressed so well, 'I have no fears as long as you are working unitedly that God will aid as in the past.'"

Mount Carmel Administrator Sarah Rentz welcomes the developments. To her, "change is good." During the event, she heard BVMs share the many different phases of the property throughout history—the sisters responding to each phase with, "And it was good."

"What we do as staff is good," says Sarah. "We'll do it differently, and we'll do it in buildings that look different, and that's okay."

During the ritual the chapel erupted into an excited buzz as participants took time to share their own stories of surviving change, the wisdom gleaned from those experiences, and their feelings about the changes at Mount Carmel.

Employee Patty DeVries, coordinator of environmental services, felt the ritual made employees feel

more connected to their "home away from home."

Patty has worked with the BVMs for 40 years, so seeing photos of sisters and employees from years ago reminded her of her BVM friends and the many ways Mount Carmel has changed over her time. "I'm very close to the sisters," says Patty. "I'm excited for them."

As the ritual came to a conclusion all left with the words of Mother Clarke etched in their hearts as Mary (Mercedie) McCauley reads: "None but our dear Lord knows what, or how, my heart feels for you. I send my love to each of you."

The solidarity with Mother Clarke and with one another will surely lead all who live and work at Mount Carmel through these next years with trust, gratitude, affection, and joy!

Area Residents Welcome Opportunity

Dubuque area residents have also expressed their excitement about the new senior living community and the BVMs sharing their home with area residents.

Rev. Msgr. Thomas E. Toale of the Archdiocese of Dubuque has witnessed the kindness of the BVMs firsthand. To him, the Sisters of Charity are doing what they've always done.

"Throughout their entire history the BVMs have always responded to the needs of the people that they were with and whom they served," he says. "This is an extremely important need at this time in the city. It will help many people in many ways."

Longtime friend and neighbor Jeanne Quann adds that there are currently no senior living options for people on her side of town. "This is making a home for people," she says. "Do the sisters at Mount Carmel have to start doing this? Do they have to take in people? No, they don't have to, but it's another extension of their love."

It's an extension of the BVMs' "Dear Carmel Home" that is being nurtured, shaped, and changed into something new for others to enjoy.

"All things come at a time they're needed, and this is a new time for us," says BVM Vice President LaDonna Manternach, ". . . It's all for our new mission that we have for this place to welcome others. It's a new beginning for area seniors, and it'll be a new beginning for BVMs, too."

This rendering illustrates the new senior living community that will be located south of the Motherhouse. The plan calls for 60 long-term care center suites, 42 assisted living apartments, and 20 memory care apartments.

Rendering by Pope Architects.

Just a *Pinch*

Follow us on Facebook to keep informed of the progress of the construction: **Facebook.com/BVMSisters.**

Hug a Tree *Prayer Circle*

In anticipation of the removal of trees to make way for construction, BVMs and associates gather on the grounds of Mount Carmel for a special prayer service.

Roberta Anne (Caritas) White, BVM describes the event:

"Our prayer service reminded us that from our youth as postulants we have lived with these trees. They have seen us grow from youth, through middle age, to the present. And we have watched these blessed trees also grow over many years. So, we wish to thank our trees for their loving, beautiful presence with us here at Mount Carmel. We also ask their permission and forgiveness in order to cut what is needed to build our new retirement buildings."