

St. Mother Marianne Cope

(January 23, 1838- August 9, 1918)

January 23, 2024

January 23rd is that special day we celebrate the **Feast of St. Mother Marianne Cope**—our **beloved local saint!**

It was on **October 21, 2012**, that **Pope Benedict XVI** canonized **Mother Marianne Cope** and became known throughout the universal Church, **St. Marianne Cope!** **She is also known as St. Marianne of Molokai, for obvious reasons we will soon discover!**

Mother Marianne Cope was **canonized** along with another **North American woman, Kateri Tekakwitha**, known as the **“Lily of the Mohawks”** (1656-1680).

These two **holy women**, one living in **Utica** and the other living in **Auriesville**, a distance of less than an hour apart by car, lived in different centuries and in different areas, but **both have graced us** for living in **Central New York**. It was in this state they were raised, received their **faith** and their **“calling.”**

Their **exemplary** lives of **holiness** have **blessed us all** and continue to do so **for all New Yorkers and beyond!**

Interestingly, when **Mother Marianne** was **canonized**, there had been only **10** other **Americans** who had been **canonized** before her.

I. Some Family background Information.

She was born on **January 23, 1838**, in **Heppenheim, Grand Duchy of Hesse, Germany**, as **Barbara Koob**, later anglicizing her last name to "**Cope**." The following year her family emigrated to the United States, settling in the industrial city of **Utica, N.Y.** They became members of this parish, **St. Joseph**, where **Barbara** attended the parish school. By the time she was in **eighth** grade, her father had developed a disability. As the oldest child, **Barbara** left school to work in a **textile factory** to support her family. **Barbara**, her father, and her siblings became naturalized as an American citizens in the **1850's**.

Barbara received her **First Holy Communion** and her **Confirmation at Historic Old St. John's Church**.

By the time their father, **Peter Cope**, died in **1862**, the younger children in the family were of age to support themselves, so **Barbara** pursued her long-felt **religious calling**.

She entered the novitiate of the **Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis** in **Syracuse, N.Y.**

After a year of formation, **Cope** received the religious habit of the **Franciscan Sisters** and the new name **Marianne**.

She became first a **teacher** and then a **principal** in newly established schools for the region's German-speaking immigrants. Following the revolutions of 1848, more **German Catholic immigrants** entered the United States.

By 1870, Sr. Marianne Cope had become a member of the governing council of her religious congregation. She helped found the first two **Catholic hospitals in Central New York**, with charters stipulating that **medical care** was to be provided **to all, regardless of race or creed**. She was appointed by the **Superior General** to govern **St. Joseph's Hospital**, the first public hospital in **Syracuse**, serving from **1870 to 1877**.

As a **hospital administrator**, **Mother Marianne** became involved with the move of **Geneva Medical College of Hobart College** from **Geneva**, N.Y. to **Syracuse**, where it became the **College of Medicine at Syracuse University**.

Mother contracted with the college to accept their students for treating patients in her **hospital** to further their **medical education**.

Her ***stipulation in the contract***—again **unique** for the period—was the ***right of the patients*** to **refuse care** by the **students**.

These experiences helped prepare **Mother Marianne** for the special ministry **God** was **"calling"** her to!

Call to Hawaii

In 1883, Mother Marianne Cope, by then **Superior General** of the congregation, received a **plea** for help from **King Kalakaua of Hawaii** to care for **leprosy sufferers**.

More than **50 religious congregations** had already declined the **King's** request for **Sisters** to do this because **leprosy** was considered to be highly contagious. She responded enthusiastically to the letter:

"I am hungry for the work, and I wish with all my heart to be one of the chosen Ones, whose privilege it will be, to sacrifice themselves for the salvation of the souls of the poor Islanders...I am not afraid of any disease; hence, it would be my greatest delight even to minister to the abandoned 'lepers.'"

But before making her long journey to the remote **islands**, **Mother Marianne** radically changed **medical practices** on the **mainland**.

Mother Marianne by this time had already opened **St. Elizabeth Hospital in Utica**, in **1866** and in **1869**, **St. Joseph's Hospital in Syracuse**.

At that time, **hospitals** had a very **bad reputation**. **Why?**

Because doctors had limited medical knowledge and even **less understanding** of how **diseases spread**. Most **patients** who turned to **hospitals** for help never left them **alive!**

Mother Marianne started to change that, first by **instituting cleanliness standards**.

The simple "**act of handwashing**" **between patient visits cut** the **spread of disease** significantly. **Mother Marianne's wisdom and knowledge even earned some criticism for caring for alcoholics medically and professionally.**

She began to treat their **addiction problem** like a **disease** which was seen by **many experts** at that time as a **moral failing** and not as a disease and therefore, unworthy of any help! **Mother Marianne** changed that **attitude** and manner of treatment.

Departure for Hawaii

When **Mother Marianne** arrived in **Hawaii** with her **six sisters**, **church bells rang**, and a gathered crowd **cheered** to welcome them to the **Island**.

Within a year, **Mother Marianne** established the first general hospital on **Maui**.

The facility was so successful that **King Kalākaua honored** her with the **Medal of the Royal Order of Kapiolani**.

Mother Marianne also opened the **Kapiolani Home**, which cared for the many **female orphans** of patients with **leprosy**.

At the **government's request**, **Mother Marianne** took over another **badly run medical facility** in **Honolulu**. **The hospital, which was supposed to house only 100 patients, housed 200.**

Its **deplorable conditions** were described in a **diary** kept by one of her fellow **Franciscans, Sr. Leopoldina, she writes:**

"Fat bedbugs nested in the cracks of walls. Brown stains upon walls, and floors unswept, and beds covered with dirty blankets covered with lice."

What did Sr. Marianne and her sisters do in such crisis?

The usual approach,

“They would go to the place, rollup their sleeves and clean up the place while offering those suffering patients the help they needed and lots of TLC. ”

Mother Marianne’s efforts were so **successful** that her patients were allowed to remain on the **main islands**.

However, **in 1887** a **new government** took charge. Its officials decided to close the **Oahu hospital** and **reinforce the old banishment policy**. **Mother Marianne** decided to follow them to **Molokai**, even though it meant she would never return back to **Honolulu**.

In November 1888, Mother Marianne moved to **Kalaupapa**, on the **Island of Molokai**. She cared for the dying **Father Damien DeVeuster**, who was called the **Apostle of Lepers**, and was already known internationally for his work in the leper colony. **Mother Marianne** began to take over his burdens until his death on **April 15, 1889**. **Fr. Damien was canonized in 2009**.

When **Father Damien died**, the government **officially** gave **Mother Marianne** charge of care of the **boys** of **Kalaupapa** along with her current role in caring for the **colony's female residents**. A prominent local businessman, **Henry Perrine Baldwin**, donated money for the **new Home**.

Mother Marianne and **two assistants, Sr. Leopoldina Burns and Sr. Vincentia McCormick**, opened and ran a new **girls' school**, which she named in **Baldwin's** honor.

Mother Marianne took over these facilities and gave them life. **Fr. Damien's patients** had been living in **rudimentary huts**. They **dressed** in rags.

Mother Marianne wanted to improve their **life**.

She raised money and started **programs** that gave the **ill population** a much more **dignified life**.

- **Mother** set up classes for patients.
- **Mother** worked to beautify the environment with gardens and landscaping.
- **Mother** offered patients proper clothes, music, and religious instruction.
- **Mother** could not cure them, but she could make their lives better.
- **Mother Marianne** made sure that those who eventually ended up dying of the dreadful disease of **leprosy** **died** with great **dignity** and great **love**.

Eventually, a community of **Religious Brothers** was sought to come and care for the **boys**.

After the arrival of four **Brothers of the Sacred Heart in 1895**, **Mother Marianne** withdrew the **Sisters** to the **Bishop Home** for **leprous women and girls**.

Joseph Dutton, originally from the state of **Vermont**, was given charge of **Baldwin House** by the government.

Incredibly, to this day none of the **Franciscan sisters** ministering on the islands of **Hawaii** have ever contracted **leprosy**—that is, **Hansen’s disease!**

Mother Marianne died of natural causes on **August 9, 1918**, at the age of 80. She was buried on the grounds of the **Bishop’s Home**, on the **Island of Molokai**.

In 2005, her remains were brought to **Syracuse** for reinterment at her **Motherhouse**.

In 2014, her remains were returned to **Honolulu** and are enshrined at the **Cathedral Basilica of Our Lady of Peace**.

Interestingly, the two women whose **miracles led Mother Marianne Cope canonization** are **Kate Mahoney** and **Sharon Smith**, both from **Syracuse**.

I close with one of **Mother Marianne’s** beautiful sayings:

“God gives life; God will take it away in His own good time. Meanwhile it is our duty to make life as pleasant and as comfortable as possible for those of our fellow-creatures whom God has chosen to afflict.”

St. Mother Marianne Cope, pray for us!