

I'm Sr. Barbara Schiavoni. As a Grey Nun of the Sacred Heart, our roots go back to 18<sup>th</sup> century Montreal and St. Marguerite D'Youville. Although she was born over 300 years ago, Marguerite's life story resonates with the experiences of women today.

She was born into a faithful French Canadian family. As a young child, Marguerite came to know God as a loving father through the examples of her father and great-grandfather.

Marguerite was married at age 21 to a handsome, charming man named Francois D'Youville. Shortly after their marriage, his true nature emerged. He was away a lot, dishonest in his business dealings, and ran up many debts. Despite his failings, Marguerite loved him and did all she could to make a happy home. Of their six children, only two sons lived to adulthood. Imagine the heartache of losing four children in infancy.

Marguerite became a widow at the age of 29. Heartbroken, a single mother and responsible for her husband's debts, she turned to God in her distress. She felt God's deep consolation and heard God's call to care for others who were in need.

Marguerite was a fine seamstress. She opened a small store where she sold clothing and church vestments. She was successful, and as she made her way, she began to visit the poor and the sick, bringing food and clothing, and praying with them. Her absolute trust in Divine Providence saw her through this and many other challenges.

Soon other women sought to join her. In 1737, Marguerite and three friends established a household together. They committed themselves to God with the purpose of caring for people in need, and opened their home to those who had nowhere to go. This was the beginning of the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, also known as Grey Nuns. (Now the story of our colorful name is for another time!)

Marguerite was asked to take over the administration of the General Hospital of Montreal, which had been mismanaged, and she threw her whole self into the task. Now this wasn't a medical facility, it was an almshouse or shelter for the destitute. Marguerite made it a place of safety and dignity for her guests. In her words, *"I look into the eyes of the poor and see Jesus looking back."*

As Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart, our mission is to be signs of God's constant and unconditional love, following St. Marguerite's legacy of loving service. I believe our charism intersects in many ways with that of the Redeemer Sisters: *to care, comfort and heal.*

We have had a long history together!

When Holy Redeemer Hospital was being built, your sisters stayed with the Grey Nuns at our Melrose motherhouse. Then, when the hospital opened, you cared for our Sisters with love and compassion- and continue to do so.

In the late 1980's, you began ministry to homeless women and children at Drueding Center. Grey Nun Sisters Mary Sharon Walsh and Elaine Fahey worked with you to establish and serve in this ministry. To this day, Drueding provides a safe, supportive, nurturing environment where women are empowered to grow toward self-sufficiency and families can flourish. It was my privilege to minister at Drueding for several years. In the early years, two Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart worked at Drueding. Sister Eileen Spanier served as volunteer coordinator and Sister Maureen O'Hara taught the children to garden and compost.

Redeemer 2-5-23

As Marguerite D'Youville opened *her* home, Sisters of the Redeemer have opened *your* homes to us and we are most grateful. When we could no longer provide skilled care for our aged Sisters, St. Joseph's Manor welcomed them.

In 2015, Lafayette Redeemer welcomed Sisters who had been living at our Motherhouse and in other locations. The Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart have become an integral part of the Lafayette community, developing friendships and offering prayerful support to the lay residents. This is a blessing for all.

Having our Sisters come here (*Huntingdon Valley, PA*) to Magnificat was another gift. The kindness and care that you showed them was a great blessing.

We thank you, Sisters of the Redeemer, for the privilege of partnering with you as together, we share God's unconditional love and *care, comfort and heal*.