

Partners in Legacy

by Denise LaPorte

Editor, IHM Journal



Making a difference. Leaving a legacy. This is a desire common to human persons since the beginning of time.

Since its own beginnings, the IHM community has worked to make a difference in the world. An ongoing desire to work for the reign of God continues to call the IHMs to choices that respond to the world's needs. Says **Mary Katherine (Michael Andrew) Hamilton**, IHM Vice President, "Perhaps more than ever before, IHMs today are becoming aware that the difference we need to make includes a commitment to the seventh generation – those whose very future depends on today's choices and actions."

"All aspects of the project have been guided by the IHM community's mission to sustain and nurture the well-being of all persons and all of nature as God's good creation."

The IHM renovation project on the Monroe Campus reflects that growing awareness. When the IHM community determined that the Monroe Motherhouse required immediate attention to meet its sisters' retirement needs, the IHMs were at a "new moment" in their history. Recognizing sustainability as a moral mandate in this 21st century, they reflected on how the renovation and renewal of the entire Monroe Campus could position the community to respond to the social, ecological and spiritual needs facing the world and its people today.

"Educators since our founding, we determined that the choices and actions around this project could continue to teach us and others in new and exciting ways," Sr. Mary Katherine explains. "All aspects of the project have been guided by the IHM community's mission to sustain and nurture the well-being of all persons and all of nature as God's good creation."

Education is transformative; it holds possibilities for growth and change at the very heart of the learner. From the project's outset, sisters and associates have learned and prayed about how to live sustainably, and how the renovation process and vision for the campus could actually make the difference for which they hoped.

Sr. Mary Katherine notes that such decisions aren't always easy. "We had done a lot of homework, researching the critical needs of humanity and the state of the Earth. As costs increased and the economy faltered, we chose the risk of going forward with the original vision. We did so conscious of the risk-taking spirit of our founders, with faith in a God who calls us to make a difference. We have been transformed as individuals and together as a community."

That learning curve has already extended beyond community members. This past July, several of the team partners in this massive project spoke to more than 300 IHM sisters and associates gathered for a project update and the annual Jubilee

celebration. The partners came, of their own accord, to confirm that the IHM hopes of making a difference with the campus renovation had already begun – that they, too, had been transformed through their involvement as project partners.

“We have been challenged and stretched and changed as much by the process as by the work,” began renovation project director **Danielle Conroyd**. “(We) represent hundreds of individuals who have worked on this renovation project either on the campus itself, in factories, or in other offices here and in other countries. We have become a learning community and have told others about what we are doing. Many others have already come here to see this landmark project and to learn from our experience.”

This experience involved becoming a team that would depend on one another for expertise, support and humor throughout this multi-year endeavor. Faced with creating new sustainable systems in a 70-year-old building, they would learn and remove barriers to progress together.

Initially, for example, greywater conservation systems were virtually unknown to most project team members, and within the agencies and municipalities approached for permits. Said **Bob Behrendt** of the civil engineering firm Mannick & Smith, “When we started the project, our firm of 150 had never heard the word ‘greywater’ before. We began as a

facilitator on the project, essentially introducing the project team to review and permit agencies. We found the agencies wanted to use existing rules, and those rules put up many roadblocks.

“What we did was educate ourselves.

Greywater is common in California and Arizona. We got copies of their state legislation, updated ourselves on principles and designs, and suddenly moved from our role as facilitator to being part of the team. We became educated and then became an advocate. Now greywater is a specialty. We’re creeping and walking before we can actually run. But because of what we’ve learned, we’ll be frontrunners and educating others.

This is a true testament to your mission.”

The Christman Company, general contractor on the Monroe Campus project, has

become expert in creatively adapting and reusing materials on site and searching out reuse opportunities elsewhere. Marble partitions reused for window sills and countertops, old asphalt paving pulverized and used as aggregate base under new asphalt, and stair guard railings and bricks reused in renovated areas, are just a few of more than 20 materials saved from Michigan’s landfills.

Commented **Ron Staley**, Vice President of Christman, “This has been a great learning opportunity for all of our staff. By taking a little time, a person can find many sources to recycle materials. Something as simple as identifying separate dumpsters can make a difference. It impacts the cost as well as

Photo by Denyse Burkhardt



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the reuse of materials. The Christman Company is now issuing a waste recycling policy for all of our projects." Mr. Staley illustrated this when talking of Christman's

recent renovation of the Marygrove College auditorium. With a few phone calls, he turned up a community group greatly in need of 450 seats originally slated for a landfill.



As one of the nation's largest projects to incorporate green building practices, the Monroe project is registered with the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC).

Christman has worked closely with the IHMs and the architect, Susan Maxman & Partners, in the documentation process for the Council's LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification. Christman now plans to have a group of its staff certified in the LEED program to implement the specifications as frequently as possible in its construction and historic preservation projects. "It's all because of you that this has come about," Mr. Staley concluded, "and we thank you."

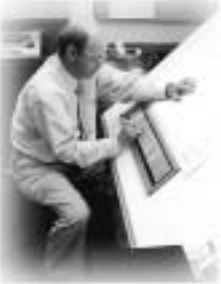
The testimonies of these and other team members "brought home" the transformations already occurring as a result of this project. This "mother" site, where IHM sisters first educated and formed thousands of young women who studied at St. Mary's Academy or who joined the IHM community, is continuing as a center for learning as well as for elder care. Through sustainable living, processes and systems, IHM sisters and associates, project partners, neighbors, friends and visitors will continue to learn from and teach one another well into the 21st century.

Joe Connors, President of Monroe Plumbing and Heating, is a lifelong Monroe neighbor to the IHM campus and now a team partner. Monroe Plumbing and Heating installed the infrastructure that would manage the Motherhouse greywater and geothermal systems. As the concluding





As part of the greywater system, grey water goes to this constructed wetland for natural treatment before returning to the Motherhouse for flushing toilets. The plantings are part of the cleansing process.



Photos by Denyse Burkhart

Joe Connors of Monroe Plumbing and Heating told the IHM community, "You've changed the way I think."

speaker at the July event, Mr. Connors testified eloquently to the transformation he has experienced on this project. "As I look back at the people who have affected me the most, it's generally been people who have strong beliefs and are willing to act on those beliefs. We meet a lot of people that can talk the talk, but there are very few people who can walk the walk.

"Your financial commitment to the geothermal system, to avoiding the use of non-renewable resources, and to the greywater system, is so impressive that you've changed the way I think about things – how I think about the environment, how I think about trying to reuse things. That is probably the biggest compliment I could give you – you've changed the way I think. Imagine that, a 50-year-old conservative Republican! I just want to say thank you."

Desiring to make a difference and remain faithful to its founding legacy, today's IHM Community couldn't imagine a better compliment.

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