

## Central Houses Strive to Meet Sisters' Needs

### Facility directors and staff honor sisters' lives of fidelity

In the Spring 2021 issue of *Alive* magazine, several of our sisters share their stories of life in retirement (“Honoring Lives of Fidelity,” pages 4-6). At the Wisconsin facilities where many of our retired sisters reside communally, a unique form of compassionate, expert health care stays true to ensuring that these women enjoy the safest and most comfortable life possible.

At Our Lady of the Angels convent, our memory care facility in Greenfield, Wisconsin, administrator Jane Morgan and her team keep a watchful eye on individual sisters, while ensuring treatment plans that respect their dignity.

“Our team meets every week to discuss the welfare of each sister,” Jane said. This group is represented by many disciplines: social work, programs and activities, dietetics, behavioral health, occupational and physical therapy, pastoral care, sister community leadership, and medical.

“We specialize in person-centered care,” Jane continued, “in which each sister is involved in her health care. Our focus is on interventions needed to achieve a sister’s individual goals.”

Jane assures that the convent meets the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of the School Sisters of St. Francis and School Sisters of Notre Dame residents. The unique challenges of ministering to seniors with dementia and related memory care needs while restricted by pandemic protocols was detailed in the Fall 2020 issue of *Alive* magazine. (The magazine is available for online reading at [www.sssf.org/SSSF/media-room/publications.htm](http://www.sssf.org/SSSF/media-room/publications.htm).)

### Prioritizing Creative Engagement

A lot of energy necessarily has been devoted to helping seniors in all our “central houses” in the Milwaukee area cope with feelings of isolation while in quarantine. Cathleen Kelling, RN, a lay associate of the community, serves as executive director of Sacred Heart, which serves about 80 sister residents.

“All of the sisters at Sacred Heart have been affected in a profound way by the pandemic,” Cathleen said. “The staff needed to get creative and utilize the resources available to keep sisters engaged.”

Cathleen noted that although CDC and local health guidelines have precluded sisters from gathering for Mass, the use of technology through streaming services allows sisters to watch Masses celebrated locally and nationally. They are also able to view funerals and other Masses celebrated at St. Joseph Chapel, the magnificent, historic worship space at the St. Joseph Center motherhouse.

Arts, history, and geography programs are also made available for viewing inside individual sisters’ apartments. In the same way, sisters can also watch and participate in staff-facilitated exercises and games. Finally, sisters are connected to families and friends off campus through Zoom video conferencing, and occasional in-person gatherings give sisters an opportunity to enjoy holiday and religious celebrations in a safe, socially distanced manner.

“The sisters have been very grateful for the diligence of staff,” Cathleen said. “The staff, in turn, have been awed by the resilience our sisters have shown.” Still, she underscores the continued need to screen anyone who enters Sacred Heart for symptoms of COVID-19. “We know that the coronavirus will be around for a while yet.”

## **A Lifetime of Devotion**

At the Maria Linden Senior Community on the St. Joseph Center campus, more than 70 sisters and lay tenants live in community and as independently as they are able. Designed to allow residents to age in place, Maria Linden offers assisted living services as well as support from outside entities.

Tina Rawlins, RN, a lay associate of the community, is services manager at Maria Linden Senior Community. Having ministered with the sisters for 35 years, Tina has demonstrated her devotion to their care in a number of capacities both in Campbellsport, Wisconsin (at St. Joseph Convent) and in Milwaukee. She has been known to step in for overnight shifts when needed, while keeping up her vibrant energy supervising nursing staff, developing programs for residents, and producing a monthly newsletter for them.

“We offer enriching daily activities and personalized one-on-one time with our assisted living tenants, especially those who like company or want help with organizing, sorting, and reading correspondence,” Tina said. “We plan services around their preferences and abilities. These visits have been vital to reduce loneliness and depression during COVID. Other tenants like the freedom to do their own thing. All residents have an indoor route to St. Joseph Chapel.”

As at Sacred Heart and Our Lady of the Angels, Maria Linden turned to technology as a way to help residents cope with “safer-at-home” protocols. To keep sisters in the loop through their area community meetings, Maria Linden staff provided tutorials on Zoom video conferencing and social media platforms. “Requests to learn more about computers, smart phones, and other gadgets have grown into both a weekly tutorial as well as one-one-one support,” Tina said.

There have been opportunities for residents to learn Google Meet, Google Duo, and FaceTime. “Our book club went virtual on Google Meet,” Tina said. “Also, 30-minute travel programs on YouTube allow small groups to ‘visit’ castles, mountain scenery, coastal destinations while safely distanced.”

An important adjustment favoring compassion for residents was made this year in response to the “no visitor” policy of hospitals and rehabilitation centers. A sister was able to choose to return to Maria Linden from hospital for hospice care, so that she could end her life’s journey with her sister community.

“We were able to provide for her comfort in her own apartment while following Department of Health guidance until her passing,” Tina recalled. “She appreciated having her sisters around her as well as visits from a priest for anointing. It was a very special time for all.”