

IHM Quarterly

summer 2013

*Sisters, Servants of the
Immaculate Heart of Mary*

Becoming native to our place

By Kathleen (Catherine Vincent) Schultz, IHM,
and Danielle Conroyd

Inside

- The Integrating Idea lives 2
- Welcome! 2
- New raffle season begins... 2
- In Memoriam.... 3
- IHM Health Care Center named one of country's best ... 3
- Baby elephants migrate to Monroe 3
- Renovating sustainably: "The mother of all models" ... 4-5
- Mother Nature gets a helping hand... 6
- Full Planet, Empty Plates 6
- A new kind of enlightenment: The IHM Chapel renovation..... 7
- Celebrating Motherhouse volunteers..... 7
- Utilities' analysis 8

Ten years later, and for years to come, IHMs will tell stories of the Motherhouse renovation. The curious ask us, "Why did you do it this way?"

Choices reflected in the sustainable renovation did not drop from heaven. We moved step-by-step, questioning, reflecting on our values, and exploring choices suited to 21st century realities and changing IHM needs.

Reading the "signs of the times" was a vital part of our communal discernment. The "signs" were manifold: perils of a global economic system built on fossil fuel energy use; deepening disparities between nations and peoples; fragile ecosystems; habitat destruction and vanishing species; limited vital resources needed for all species life; and immense numbers of people learning to "re-inhabit" new places.

Throughout this process, consciousness of our interdependence in the web of life deepened.

The IHM lexicon was filling up with new words: Closed-loop geo-thermal system for heating and cooling; constructed wetlands filter greywater; low-flow fittings and fixtures; reduce water use; maximum



use of daylight; energy-efficient lighting; sustainable floor coverings; low-VOC paints. Salvaging and re-using old materials, such as 800 original wood windows, reduced the environmental footprint.

IHM was also learning choices for the natural environment. Vegetated swales harvest rain water run-off, replenish the aquifer, nourish trees and plants, and reduce erosion. Re-establishing native meadowlands supports indigenous species of the Great Lakes bioregion.

In short, we are becoming native to our place. That is what's happening. It is a profound and beautiful story.

Real stories are not invented. They arise from a culture and embody a life ethic. Such narratives come "...from a context, a worldview, a lifeway."¹ The IHM renovation story speaks love and care for our Earth home and all its life communities, and commitment to sustainable living and learning. ☀

¹ Peterson, Anna L., *Being Human: Ethics, Environment and Our Place in the World*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif., 2001.



RENOVATING SUSTAINABLY: “THE MOTHER OF ALL MODELS”

By Molly Hunt

“We place this work in Your hands. May we move gracefully into a future full of hope, making our home in You.”

— Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

As the IHM Sisters contemplated the future of their Motherhouse — their home — in the late 1990s, several things were very apparent. The Motherhouse was 70 years old and badly in need of extensive repair. Their membership was aging; they knew they had to meet the health care needs of current and future Motherhouse residents. And they knew they had the opportunity to continue their legacy of education.

Every six years, the IHM congregation meets to determine its direction for the future. Chapter Directions 2000 were pivotal as the sisters implemented the best course of action for their beloved Motherhouse.

“We choose to work collaboratively to create a culture of right relationship marked

by sustainability and eco-justice. We will do this through our varied ministries, by educating ourselves and through our lifestyle choices, both personal and corporate.”

So, build new, using cutting-edge sustainable practices, or renovate sustainably?

The Motherhouse itself contributed to the decision. With its 18-inch concrete and brick walls, it was built for permanence, at the height of the Depression. Its sturdiness factored into the decision to leave it standing — razing the Motherhouse and building a new structure would have cost more and resulted in lower quality.

So with deep faith and courageous spirit, the sisters embarked on the journey of sustainably renovating the 376,000 square-foot Motherhouse, a journey that impacted their home, their lives and their world.

Ten years after the renovation was completed, many of the specifics are well-known:

A geothermal heating and cooling system — among the largest in the country — reduced gas usage by 82 percent between fiscal years 1999–2000 and 2011–2012. A three-acre constructed wetland and greywater system reduced water consumption by 81 percent during the same period.

Eleven acres of lawn were converted to meadow and prairie, improving the biodiversity of the site and protecting existing natural habitat. (In 2010, The National Wildlife Federation declared the grounds as an official “Certified Wildlife Habitat” site.) The reduction in costs associated with mowing lawns results in lower consumption of non-renewable energy. In the parking lots, vegetated swales handle the storm water runoff.



“Today’s global environmental crisis makes justice for the environment inseparable from justice for the poor.”

— Renewing the Face of the Earth
U.S. Catholic Bishops

Acting for justice has been part of who the IHM Sisters *are* since 1845, so acting with justice toward the Earth came naturally. They studied Earth-friendly systems and sought out architects, engineers and contractors willing to learn along with them. Review and permit agencies, unaccustomed to dealing with geothermal and greywater, also became educated.

Their Motherhouse ranks as one of the Midwest’s largest residential sustainable renovations registered with the U.S. Green Building Council; the project earned LEED-NC certification and 10 local, regional and national awards, including two from the Environmental Protection Agency.

Its impact on the environment and on the bottom line has been obvious and dramatic (see page 8). But it also affected others.

For instance, as they discerned the course of the renovation, the sisters envisioned a time when the Motherhouse would transcend their own needs and be open to others. That happened in 2010 with the licensure of 58 Health Care Center beds, and thanks to the sisters’ foresight and a dedicated staff, lay residents can recover from their post-hospital experience in a five-star nursing facility (according to *U.S. News*).

Motherhouse staff eagerly embraced the education in sustainability. The Campus Greening Committee was formed shortly after the renovation was completed, with the goals of increasing staff involvement with “green” initiatives; raising awareness of those initiatives; and investigating new ones to determine feasibility. Bottled water has been eliminated, for instance, and all-purpose cleaning products are Green Seal Certified.

And the education extends to the broader community as well.

Since 2003, the sisters have welcomed more than 10,000 visitors to tour and to learn. Colleges and universities, including Marygrove, have incorporated the Motherhouse tour into their curricula. An instructor billed the tour segment of his curriculum as “Sustainability and historic preservation: The mother of all models.” A student even changed his career goal to the environmental field as a direct result of what he learned from the tour.

At the start of the renovation, the IHM Sisters required all construction trades to do their work in the least wasteful manner. The Christman Company, construction manager for the renovation, now incorporates recycling as an important component of every project it undertakes.

Diana Van Buren, one of those integral to the design, and president of Zachary and Associates, notes that “The Motherhouse project was the turning point for my consulting practice. I tell everybody that everything I know about sustainability, I learned from the IHM Sisters.”

Joe Connors, president of Monroe Plumbing and Heating, the company that installed the infrastructure to manage the greywater and geothermal Motherhouse systems, concurs.



“The IHM Sisters’ financial commitment to the geothermal system, to avoiding the use of non-renewable resources and to the greywater system 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 — they’ve changed the way I think.” 🌻

