

Biography Of Mother Marianne Cope

Family and Early Life

Mother Marianne, formerly Barbara Koob (variants: Kob, Kopp, and now officially Cope) was born on January 23, 1838 and baptized the following day in what is now SE Hessen, West Germany. She was the daughter of farmer, Peter Koob, and Barbara Witzenbacher Koob. Peter Koob's first wife had nine children before she died, only two of whom reached adulthood.

By his second wife, Barbara's mother, Peter Koob had five children in Germany, and five in the United States. In 1839, the year following Barbara's birth, the family emigrated to the United States to seek opportunity.

The Koob family became members of St. Joseph's Parish in Utica, N.Y., where the children attended the parish school. In 1848, Barbara received her First Holy Communion and was confirmed at St. John's parish in Utica, when in accordance with the practice of the time, the bishop of the diocese came to the largest church in the area to administer these two sacraments at the same ceremony.

When Peter Koob became a naturalized citizen in the 1850s so did his children who were minors at the time become American citizens including his daughter Barbara. Mother Marianne wrote of experiencing a religious life calling at an early age and that the following of her vocation was delayed nine years because of her family obligations. The oldest child at home, she, after completing an eighth grade education, went to work in a factory to support the family when her father had become an invalid. It only was at the time that her younger siblings were of age to be self-providing that she felt free to enter the convent. She did so one month after her father's death in the summer of 1862. She was twenty-four years of age.

Growth in Religious Life

Barbara entered the Sisters of Saint Francis in Syracuse, N.Y. and, on November 19, 1862, she was invested at the Church of the Assumption. She soon became prominently known as Sister Marianne.

One year later at the same church on the same day of the month, Sister Marianne was professed as a religious after which time she served as a teacher and principal in several beginning schools in New York State. She had joined the Order in Syracuse with the intention of doing schoolwork, but her life soon became a series of administrative appointments. As a member of the governing boards of her religious community, she participated during the 1860s in the establishment of two of the first hospitals in the central New York area, St. Elizabeth's in Utica (1866) and St. Joseph's in Syracuse (1869). Both hospitals begun by the Franciscan sisters had unique charters for their time being open to the sick without distinction as to a person's nationality, religion or color. These two hospitals were among the first sixty registered hospitals in the entire United States.

Leader in the Field of Medicine

Mother Marianne began her new career as nurse-administrator at St. Joseph's in Syracuse, N.Y. in 1870, where she served as its head administrator for six of the hospital's first seven years. Her change in ministry to hospital leadership had come about because a special need for someone with unique abilities and talents arose at St. Joseph's. No hospital had succeeded in Syracuse before the one begun by the Franciscan Sisters. It often was said that no challenge ever seemed too much for her. She possessed the intelligence and charisma of a facilitator and the energies of a woman motivated by God alone.

St. Joseph's, the first hospital opened to the public in the city of Syracuse, owed much of its creation to her as well as its survival. She became an innovator in its management in order to provide better service to patients. Long before the importance of cleanliness measures in the care of the sick was known scientifically, she was strict in advocating practices such as simply washing one's hands before ministering to the patients.

It was during her time of leadership that the College of Medicine in Geneva, N.Y. moved to the fledgling Syracuse University to become the College of Physicians and Surgeons, thus starting a new arena of medicine for the upstate centralized New York area. No small reason for this new choice of location for an established college to move to Syracuse was that Mother Marianne had accepted the medical students for clinical instruction at St. Joseph's. Far ahead of her time in furthering patients' rights, she stated in a letter of negotiations with the Medical College that it was the right of the patient in each and every case to decide whether or not he or she wished to be brought before medical students. Often she was criticized for accepting for treatment "outcast" patients, such as alcoholics, an affliction which was frowned upon for hospital admittance by the medical profession at the time. Unsurprisingly, she became well known and loved in the central New York area for her kindness, wisdom and down to earth practicality.

Thus, it happened that even before the advent of nursing schools in the United States by her working on the side of doctors in Syracuse from one of the country's most progressive medical colleges, this dedicated woman of God was in a position to gain the practical information regarding hospital systems, nursing techniques and pharmacy work—all of which she later put to good use in Hawaii.

Call to Hawaii

Mother Marianne was prepared well for the unique call which came to her attention in 1883 when she was opening her mail as Superior General, a position she then had reached in her religious community in Syracuse.

In 1883, the United States was still the land of the pioneer. Religious communities serving the immigrants and others had their hands full, including the Franciscan Sisters of Syracuse, N.Y. Priorities in needs were difficult to determine and understandably the pleas from the faraway Sandwich Islands for a capable leader to begin a system of

hospital nursing went unheeded by dozens of religious communities. That is, it did so until it grasped the heart of Mother Marianne as the most pressing need of her time. Her entire personal affirmation in regard to an acceptance of the mission was given when she found out that the main challenge was to minister to leprosy patients. "I am not afraid of any disease....," was her rare response to such a mission. Her devotion to Saint Francis of Assisi who cared for the sick poor confirmed her resolve that the call to Hawaii was God's Will.

Six sisters were chosen from among the thirty-five volunteers of her community. Mother Marianne accompanied them to the Islands to help them get settled in their assignments. On November 8, 1883, as the SS Mariposa entered the harbor of Honolulu, the bells of Our Lady of Peace Cathedral rang and crowds gathered on the wharf to see the sisters. No one was ever to be disappointed at the great expectations that their coming promised. Only two years later, so much good had been accomplished that Mother Marianne was decorated by King Kalakaua of Hawaii with the medal of the Royal Order of Kapiolani for acts of benevolence she planned and developed to help the suffering people of the Kingdom.

A series of beginnings replete with trials and tribulations had taken place. In 1884, at the request of the government she set up Malulani Hospital, the first general hospital on the island of Maui. Called back with haste to the hospital in Oahu, she had to deal with a government appointed administrator's abuse of leprosy patients at the Branch Hospital at Kakaako, an area adjoining Honolulu. Her demand to the government to choose between his dismissal or the sisters' return to Syracuse resulted in her being given full charge of the overcrowded hospital. Her expected return to Syracuse was then delayed when her leadership was declared by government and church authority to be essential to the success of the mission.

And, the work kept increasing. Another pressing need was fulfilled when a year later, in November 1885, after she convinced the government it was a vital need to save the homeless female children of leprosy patients, the Kapiolani Home was opened. The unusual choice of location for well children to dwell in a Home situated on leprosy hospital premises was made because no one other than the sisters could be found to care for those so closely associated with people with the dreaded disease.

Renewed Call to Molokai

Blessed Damien De Veuster rightfully is viewed as Apostle to Lepers. Yet, this good priest did not act alone particularly in regard to providing care or protection or shelter for leprosy patients. Besides her own agenda, Mother Marianne is known to have brought to fruition many programs which Damien envisioned.

Marianne met Damien for the first time in January 1884, when in apparent good health, he came to Oahu to attend the opening of a chapel dedication at the hospital she was to head. Two years later, in 1886, after which time he had been diagnosed with leprosy, Mother Marianne alone gave hospitality to the outcast priest upon hearing that his illness made him an unwelcome visitor to church and government leaders in Honolulu. She

arranged his care with sensitivity to his feelings and made sure he was treated well during his short stay on Oahu. Her caring turned other leaders around to his favor especially after a visit by royalty was arranged to take place at the hospital.

Soon afterwards, the situation for the care of leprosy patients began to change. Most new patients had not been sent into exile at Molokai for a number of years. But, in 1887, when a new government took charge in Hawaii, its officials decided to close the Oahu hospital and to reinforce the former alienation policy. The unanswered question was who would care for the sick who would be sent to the settlement for exiles on the Kalaupapa peninsula on the island of Molokai.

Mother to Outcasts

Mother Marianne herself again responded to the plea for help coming from the new Hawaiian government leadership in 1888. Her response would take her into a lifetime of exile together with those she served.

Because her presence was the necessary agent for the success of the mission, she then considered whether or not by her accepting the challenge she ever would be able to return home to see her beloved family and friends again. Again, she followed the path of sacrifice. It clearly was God's will.

“We will cheerfully accept the work...” she courageously responded upon her reception of an official appeal from government authority asking for someone to found a new Home for leprosy women and girls at the Kalaupapa settlement. “Our hearts are bleeding to see them shipped off,” she wrote to Damien at Molokai. Her role was clear to her in following God's will regardless of her personal losses because as she explained in mail sent home to Syracuse, it had been her intent to set up a mission at Molokai from the beginning to give care to the exiled patients.

Arriving at Kalaupapa several months before Damien's death with two youthful assistants, she was able to console the dying priest by assuring him she would provide care for the patients at the Boys' Home at Kalawao on the opposite end of the settlement. And, happily, two weeks after the death of the self-sacrificing priest on April 15, 1889, at a Board of Health meeting in Honolulu, it was she who was chosen officially by its officials to be Damien's successor at the Boys' Home. She then set about building up an entirely new Home, which was renamed in honor of Henry P. Baldwin, its chief benefactor. After the time of its completion, she suggested Brothers be invited and the very same day as their arrival in 1895, she withdrew the sisters working there under her supervision to work with her at the needy Bishop Home. “Brother” Joseph Dutton who once assisted Damien and who then later became her assistant was placed in charge of the Baldwin Home by the government.

Heroine of Molokai

The psychology of Mother Marianne in treatment of patients was known to be far ahead of her time. She never forgot the value of education and productively sponsored or advocated programs or classes in connection with hospitals in Syracuse, Honolulu and

Kalaupapa, always featuring lessons which were chosen to suit the needs of the individuals to be served. At Kalaupapa, she incited an interest in color harmony, needlework, and landscaping. For spiritual direction, the pastor of St. Francis Church was invited to give instructions to the patients at the Home and non-Catholics were free to see their pastors.

The legacy of Mother Marianne continues its far-reaching effects in health care and education in Hawaii in many ways. The Franciscan Sisters run medical centers in Utica and Syracuse, the latter hospital owing a special note of gratitude to Mother Marianne. And, although the numbers of patients at Kalaupapa are few today, Franciscans still serve there although in a more limited role.

In 1927, the sisters had opened St. Francis Hospital in Honolulu, which today provides a wide-ranging health care system which extends to the other major islands in Hawaii. Franciscan Sisters work at several schools and minister to parishioners in the Islands. But what lives on most is the story of compassionate care brought to others by Mother Marianne in the spirit of Christ and His follower, Saint Francis, a comfort which is given to the body and soul of each individual encountered.

At her death on August 9, 1918, of natural causes, Mother Marianne was extolled as "Heroine." Robert Louis Stevenson, almost thirty years previously, in his visit to Kalaupapa had expressed his own appreciation of Mother Marianne and her sister-nurses. He wrote poignantly in verse of the inspirational effect on the viewer of finding "beauty springing from the breast of pain" in the comforting presence of devoted nurses: "He marks the sisters on the painful shores. And even a fool is silent and adores."

Sainthood Cause

The Sisters of Saint Francis began collecting materials soon after Mother Marianne's death for her eventual canonization. On Oct. 24, 2003, theologians at the Congregation for the Causes of Saints declared her heroically virtuous. On Apr. 19, 2004, Pope John Paul II issued the decree officially naming her Venerable. On Dec. 20, 2004, after receiving the unanimous affirmation of the Congregation, Pope John Paul II ordered a decree to be issued authenticating a miracle attributed to Mother Marianne's intercession. On May 14, 2005, Venerable Marianne Cope was beatified. Another verified miracle happening after her present status of Blessed would lead to her canonization.