

Religious Sisters in Health Care: The Conspicuous Love of Jesus

Date: 18 June 2020

Interviewee: June Ketterer

Interviewers: Beth E. Heinzeroth White and Patricia Ringos Beach

0:00 [Beth White]

There can you see me okay there?

[June Ketterer]

I can.

0:03 [Beth White]

Let me see here. There. See it looks like whoever is speaking, that's who we're going to see. But maybe I got it right this time. What I'll do, Sister June, is introduce you and then then ask you the first question. I'll thank you very much for your time and agreeing to be interviewed. And then I'll start with the first question, which is the what experiences lead you to the decision, okay?

0:28 [June Ketterer]

Oh, okay.

[Beth White]

Are you ready, Patti?

0:30 [Patricia Beach]

Ready. Ready.

0:31 [Beth White]

Okay. We're recording. Here we go. This is Beth Heinzeroth White. Today is June 18th, 2020. We are interviewing for the first time, Sister June Ketterer, Grey Nun of Montreal. The interview is taking place via a Zoom interview from Sister's Massachusetts home and the project director's Ohio home in deference to the coronavirus quarantine recommendations. This interview is part of the Religious Sisters in Health Care: The Conspicuous Love of Jesus project. And this interview will be archived in the U.S. Catholic Special Collection at the University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio. Sister June, thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed today and share with us the many experiences you've had in health care. We'd like to start out by asking you what experiences lead you to the decision to become a religious sister.

1:25 [June Ketterer]

While I was in high school, I worked after school in a Catholic hospital in order to make enough money to pay my tuition to go to nursing school. And so that was a Franciscan hospital. And I got to know some of the sisters there, and they impressed me with the way they took care of everybody. And it was inner city hospital. So for me, there were a lot of poor people in the hospital and yeah, I was - I admired those sisters. And then I went on to the school of nursing in another place, another city, another state. And, and then I got to know the sisters there who were the Grey Nuns of Montreal. And after I graduated from the School of Nursing, I decided that I would go into religious life. It was a big decision because I knew I was giving up, marriage and children, all of that. So it was not an easy decision. In fact, it was a decision I kept pushing out of my head, but eventually I had to give in. Otherwise I'd be a little crazy. So that's how I got interested in religious life. I saw that there was a shortage of sisters, just like there is today. And the hospital that I was a student nurse at the Grey Nun hospital, there were not enough sisters. Night shift had one sister, and then the students ran the hospital. And I was on women's ward then, and Sister would come along and she'd say is everything okay. And we always say yes because we didn't want her to hang around.

[Patricia Beach]

That never changed did it, Sister?

3:16 [June Ketterer]

Yeah. So I'll never forget that I had a friend on men's ward. In those days you didn't have the hospitals the way they are. A men's ward and a women's ward. I was on women's ward, she was on men's ward and we used to help each other out. And there were about forty beds on each ward. So that's how I got to really know the sisters. And I decided that they needed help. And I said, you know, if I became a sister I can help out. So that's how I got interested. I think that the Lord has really funny ways. Because if I ever thought of another reason, I don't think I would have been a sister, but I knew that they needed help and I was able to help and I was a spiritual person. So I felt that I could do okay. And if not, I would go home. And so that's how I got interested in religious life. And then when I entered religious life, it was a good relationship. I knew that I was in the right place.

4:22 [Patricia Beach]

Sister, where did you - where were you born at?

4:29 [June Ketterer]

I was born in New Jersey.

4:32 [Patricia Beach]

And then you went to nursing school?

[June Ketterer]

And I went to school in New Jersey.

4:35 [Patricia Beach]

Okay.

4:36 [June Ketterer]

But I entered a Canadian community. The Sisters of Charity of Montreal because they were the sisters that were at St. Peter's Hospital where I trained. That's how I got to know this.

[Patricia Beach]

Where was St. Peter's at?

[June Ketterer]

Pardon me?

4:56 [Patricia Beach]

Where was Saint Peter's at?

4:58 [June Ketterer]

In New Brunswick, New Jersey.

5:01 [Patricia Beach]

Oh, that was also, okay.

5:02 [June Ketterer]

Yeah. I grew up in Newark and I went to school in New Brunswick.

5:11 [Beth White]

Now, when you think about the early days of your nursing life and your professed life because as a registered nurse, you enter the order pretty quickly after becoming an RN, is that right?

5:24 [June Ketterer]

Yes. I was an RN and I worked for one year after I became an RN. Then I entered the Grey Nuns of Montreal.

5:32 [Beth White]

You know, just as an aside, when you said you tried to put in the back of your mind the decision to become a sister and it kept coming to the front. We have heard that over and over again that there's just no - not saying - you can't say no to God. They all said –

[June Ketterer]

You can't get it out of your mind. And who wants to be a nun? You know, you'd give up marriage, you give up children. You give up your own ability to live your life the way you want. In those days it was very strict to enter religious life. I've been a sister for sixty-one years. So that's a long time and religious life has changed a great deal.

[Beth White]

So you have been from the time of blind obedience to making more decisions for yourself and –

6:24 [June Ketterer]

Right. I had a very strict life as a young sister. Wasn't bad, but it was different as I was a nurse already I didn't go to bed at 9:30. 'Til I became a nun and I had to go to bed at 9:30. Oh, my God, that was the hardest thing.

6:42 [Beth White]

I bet it was. Did you always work day shift?

6:48 [June Ketterer]

Oh no, I worked in a hospital that rotated your shifts, okay. So you worked days you worked three to eleven, and you worked nights in those days, you didn't have a settled night shift. Or a settled day shift, they were rotated.

7:03 [Beth White]

Yeah. That was like when I graduated too, and I don't know how in world I lived through that, actually.

7:09 [June Ketterer]

I know, I don't either, but we made it see because that was what was done.

7:13 [Beth White]

That's what it was done, yeah. And when you think about those early days and now, things have changed a lot in society or can you think of two things that might stand out as being especially significant to your life as a sister and, and how they've affected you?

7:33 [June Ketterer]

To my life on a sister?

7:35 [Beth White]

How the two changes in society - can you think of a couple of societal changes that really affected your life as a sister?

7:44 [June Ketterer]

I think the societal changes. The idea that when I was young sister, a lot of people didn't go to college. People went to high school and maybe they went to two years of college. Don't forget it's sixty-one years ago. And then as things changed, women became more educated, they went from high school into nurses training into college. I got, I became a nurse. Before I got my bachelor's degree. When I was a nurse, they were starting to have bachelor's degree in nursing at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. And everybody thought that was because they wouldn't get enough experience - on hand experience. So that transition was going on. And ten years later or fifteen years later, I went on to get my bachelors, but I worked for ten years as an RN before I had my bachelor's degree. And then I went on to get my masters. And then I didn't get a real doctorate. But I got an honorary doctorate from the university in Ohio. So you know you see that evolution in health care went around the changes in the country in the United States. So you can still go to South America - [sound cuts out] -Educated beyond your basic training. It's fascinating. United States moved quickly, I think. And I think that that's - what was the question?

9:35 [Beth White]

Things have changed so much in the last sixty years. What are two big things that you can think of that have affected your life as a sister?

9:46 [June Ketterer]

Oh as a sister. Well, I think when I entered the community, there were lots of sisters. Now, we had at that time we had two thousand sisters in our community. And there were two hundred of us in the United States. Now there's two hundred sisters in the whole community and fifteen of us in the United States. So the transition was the change in the number of women religious, that went from a great number until a much less great number. Quality didn't change, the numbers changed.

10:25 [Beth White]

The quality remains high.

10:28 [June Ketterer]

And because of that change, we had to find creative ways to continue our institutional ministries. Because we had a lot of hospitals and nursing homes and schools for the blind. throughout the whole Canada and the United States. And here in the United States, that change was strong in our institutional ministries. And so we had to find ways to continue the

mission, which was care - healthcare of the poor and underserved and keep our sisters up to par. But knowing that we won't be around much longer in our institutions. So that was the big thing with - I was the provincial superior in the United States - that we were faced with a big change, lack of sisters, to minister in our, in our congregations in our communities. So I had to find ways to continue the ministry and make sure we had enough lay people to take over. I call my age group the transitional age group because we used a lot of sisters and then we had a smaller amount of sisters. So we had to transition our ministries from religious women to lay people. And that was a challenge. And then people would say, it's never going to be the same. Don't do that. They won't do a good job. I said no, we're not going to be around, so we're gonna have to do that, and let's find a way to choose good leaders in the community and give them all the support they need to guide our institutions into the future. And that's been successful. Because I think half the success rate is because we choose good people. You can't just fill positions with people who are unqualified and don't want to be there or don't like the mission. And that's going to be a failure. So we used to make sure, and I passed that on to the people, if you have an empty job, you don't have to throw it right away. Find the best person to fit that job. So if the CEO leaves, get a good CEO [in the?] workplace. So now we have no sisters in our institutions. All of our institutions are run by lay people, including our health systems. So we have all lay people, and they're doing great job. I really admire for a people that takeover from a group of religious because they face the fact that some people don't want the sisters to leave. And they don't look forward to having lay people. you know, we have to change that attitude. We have to focus on the mission. What is our mission in these institutions? How is it going to continue to serve the poor? And if we change that focus from poor us we're going to have to leave to how are we going to continue that vision and we'll find people that can do it, we've been very fortunate. In our congregation because all of our institutions are totally lay now and they're successful and they pass on the mission, I think there's a way to do it. But it's not transition is not hard. You have to have strong people during transition times. In order to help people to understand the purpose of it and change from poor us, we're not going to be around to let's see what's going to be around. So we can keep that mission alive. So I look at all of our institutions, they're doing a great job, they're celebrating the feast of Marguerite d'Youville they have a spirit that that's what's important for me. That we transfer this spirit of service to the people who are taking our place. And so hopefully that's what's happening. I go back once in a while and see the people that are continuing the mission.

14:55 [Beth White]

And I know they're happy to see you. You know, that is the foundation of this project, Sister, trying to identify what it is that people, leaders such as yourself have actually done to get the idea across of how to carry on the mission. And, you know, one of the questions that we were going to ask you is and you've already answered it. And one of the questions was, do you think that sisters are necessary in a healthcare institution to make it distinctly Catholic? And you've said no, if you choose the right people.

15:32 [June Ketterer]

Yes. I don't think we're unnecessary, but our transition time is necessary that we transfer, the mission well, and not with a sense of oh poor us, it might not make it. No, with a sense of this is our mission. This is our service. And we're happy to transfer it because it'll

continue, will continue and continue. Well, we've been fortunate because all of our institutions are continuing well.

16:04 [Beth White]

What kind of steps did you use to, to teach lay people how to take your place?

16:14 [June Ketterer]

Well, I went around when we were first making the transcripts, I went around to every board of directors in every institution to tell them the plan for us leaving. And I had one institution where the board stood up and said they were going to all resign because they didn't want the sisters to leave. So I said, Well, write out your letter of resignation and mail it to me. Don't give it to me tonight because I think you should think about it. Not one person wrote a letter of resignation on any of the boards because they had permission to do so. And I said, I'll, I'll accept it just write a good reason. You can't write a good reason if you're just mad.

17:02 [Patricia Beach]

We'll that's right. How affirming though that they thought it couldn't be done without you.

17:10 [June Ketterer]

We're fortunate. So and then the next thing was the reality. I met with all the institution employees. And employees I've met with every institution twice. And the employers were asked to come to one or up of those meetings. Some people didn't come at all. Some people came to make sure you didn't change your mind, came twice. But it's wonderful to see people wanting to find out what's happening. Because there's also rumors that go around - you know one rumor was that the sisters got kicked out 'cause there wasn't enough of us. So we got kicked out so the boards got upset over that one. So anyway, the transfers went well.

18:03 [Beth White]

You know, when you think about transferring authority and so forth, I'm sure you had to give advice to lay people on numerous occasions. Can you recall some of the advice that you gave to lay people? I mean, I do think that saying you need to carry on the mission might be understood by some but not all. What kinds of advice did you find that you were giving pretty often?

18:29 [June Ketterer]

I used to give conferences on about the transition that I used to start with the history of the institution. And I learned a lot myself. I learned about the mission of every institution. And I, over the years, changes had been made, big changes had been made that we - people didn't recognize them as changes. And I used to say now how do you think the employees felt like that when they no longer had sisters on the boards. How do you think that affected the boards and, and people began to think about things and really fine. You know, it was a

hard change. But in the future people already know that now but we still have a process in every institution for orientation. And the orientations usually include a little bit about the history and then about the transitions from religious ministry too. I mean from religious ministry to the lay ministry. And so people learn about the difficulties of transitions, the effort that needs to be made to make a healthy transition. And I've seen some of - I live in assisted living now, part of Covenant Health Systems. Oh, that's important for you to know. In 1983, we started Covenant Health Systems. Which is a health system that really oversees all of the institutions that are members of that. Most of them are Grey Nun ministries, because that's how it started. But then congregations of other women religious joined. So we have seventeen different religious communities involved. They transferred or nursing homes and things like that into Covenant Health Systems. So it didn't stay the same it started out very small. Now it's mostly older nursing homes or nursing homes taking care of older people, older individuals. So that's another big transition.

20:42 [Beth White]

Is that the juridic person, Sister? Is Covenant Health the juridic person?

20:50 [June Ketterer]

Yes.

20:51 [Beth White]

Okay.

20:52 [June Ketterer]

We covered it all together. Okay. Yeah. We used to be the juridic person.

0:58 [Beth White]

Oh, you did.

21:00 [June Ketterer]

Now, Covenant Health is its own public juridic person. So it was started in 1983. And then I forget what year we made it its own public juridic person but that means they report directly to Rome. There's a dicastery in Rome under which Covenant Health Systems reports now, it used to be Covenant Health Systems reported to the Grey Nuns, the Grey Nuns reported to Rome. Now the Grey Nuns are out, so you have Covenant Health reporting directly every year. They send a report. They have a five year report at most every five years, which is a summary of everything it's worked very successfully. And then Rome, the dicastery, reads that and sends a letter of comment concerning the report and congratulates Covenant for the things they've done well. And if they have suggestions that they'd like more like one. I don't know. I don't have an example in my head because we don't get very many letters like that. But Covenant Health does a great job, very faithful to their report and Rome. The

dicastery - I'm not sure which bishops are in that dicastery anymore. I'm getting older myself. So I said, I was 85 the other day.

22:33 [Beth White]

You're so articulate. Oh my golly, happy birthday.

22:37 [June Ketterer]

Thank you. I was 85 on June 2nd.

22:40 [Beth White]

Oh my golly.

22:42 [June Ketterer]

But I have a good history. Yeah, what's happened in healthcare now. So that's always helpful.

[Beth White]

Now, did I understand you to say that Covenant Health was mainly nursing and or housing for the elderly, or are there hospitals in Covenant Health?

22:59 [June Ketterer]

Oh, there's four hospitals, four or five. Small number of hospitals But there's a lot of nursing homes. So I don't have a report. I can look it up for the best numbers but I'm not my office right now. I'm up in a nice, neat office.

23:20 [Beth White]

Now, you certainly don't need to get us numbers.

[June Ketterer]

My office has papers all over.

23:24 [Beth White]

So you borrowed a nice neat office. You know, it's difficult to explain the, the kind of care that is received at a Catholic institution versus a secular institution. Our friend Joe Cardone, Father Cardone, has said, you know, of course Jesus in every healthcare institution. But in Catholic institutions, it's part of who we are. We actually identify as that. Now that the sisters are not in health care directly anymore, how do you see when you make visits, how do you see at the bedside that Catholic identity is still being followed?

24:10 [June Ketterer]

I think the most important thing, people giving service at the bedside is their spirituality that, that is passed on that this is not just any old person, this is an important person and you have the opportunity to serve that person. And so you do it with respect, identity, you maintain the identity of the person. On, I think we have to keep ourselves updated so that we know and we're good at our job. We cannot just sit down and say, you know, poor us we don't have enough sisters we're short of nurses that's the big thing around here is we're short of nurses. And it's true. I've heard that my whole life I've been a nurse for 60-some years now. My whole life we don't have enough nurses. We need more nurses. And then you say no there's no more nurses you have to fix your work schedules so that you can carry on ministry as best as possible. But don't sit down and say poor us, we need more nurses. Because then the answer comes back, sorry, the budget's gone, no more nurses.

25:26 [Beth White]

So you keep your eye on the mission.

25:29 [June Ketterer]

Yeah. Well, I think nurses, everybody is essential. I was talking to our housekeeper the other day. You know, the big thing now is congratulating all the nurses and doctors for serving with this new virus people with this new virus and our hospitals out here in Massachusetts are full. People are on respirators. It's really a big thing. One housekeeper came to me and she said, I said where do you work and she's told me, hospital. I said what's your job, and she said I'm a housekeeper. I said great then you're the one who keeps the rooms really clean so that people can get in. But they never get acknowledged, it's always the nurses, the doctors, nurses, social workers. So you have the dietary people that bring up the trays, and right now because of this pandemic, I live in assisted living and we can't go to the dining room anymore. So they have to bring our food up to our apartments. So I was talking to them once in a while they come up and you know, they're really busy getting everything ready. And sometimes people never say thank you. Thank you. So I said, you know, I really appreciate all you're doing, will you let them know in the kitchen. The trays come up nice, food is good. We're doing okay, everybody's getting better. We had four people with the virus and they all got better, we had one man who died. But he had many other problems. So you see all these people that are working to serve us and dietary often gets left out. And housekeepers, they should be proud of the work they do, especially with us in our same little apartments. Eating and sleeping and dragging all over. You know, it's great to have them acknowledged sometimes.

27:28 [Beth White]

Absolutely.

27:30 [June Ketterer]

Yeah. It's a big thing. We can't forget, it's not just nurses and doctors, it's a global group that are coming up to do their job and we need to give them a clap ovation.

27:44 [Beth White]

I'm glad to hear you say that because Patti and I couldn't probably not agree with you more. I've reached the end of my questions. Patti, what questions do you have for Sister?

27:55 [Patricia Beach]

Sister June, it's so good to talk with you. Yeah. Yeah. So, Sister, how many years were you at St. Vincent's?

28:03 [June Ketterer]

I was there for five years and then I came back for five more years, and then I came back for five more years, I've been there for fifteen years.

[June Ketterer]

Because you are, you are really fondly remembered and like Beth and still missed and I wondered, does anything stick out with you during your time at St. Vincent's, like any experiences or patients because you were a woman at the bedside too, even though your job wasn't a nurse, what kinds of things for the individual do you think? For, for an individual patient like, like we've talked a lot about the systems and the boards and the transition. But, you know, are there any stories about a particular patient or family that you hold close?

28:53 [June Ketterer]

Well, I remember at the information desk at St. Vincent's, they're the first people that are seen when people come into the hospital. And the other people that I think often get lost are the people who answered the telephones. Some people never come to the hospital because somebody's grouchy on the telephone. So I think it's important that we meet with those two groups because they're the face of St. Vincent's. Some people might never come inside St. Vincent's or anyone of our institutions, but they get presented by the voice on the telephone. People who call in. And I think people who are at the information desk, if they're in a good mood, a bad mood, that comes across in the way they greet people. So I have a woman that when I was at one of our hospitals came into the hospital and in the lobby was a picture of St. Marguerite d'Youville, who's the foundress of our community. And I saw her later and I said to her, whatever made you come to the hospital? She said, you know, I'm new in town. I didn't know the hospitals, but I came to your hospital and there was a picture of a saint up there. She's not too beautiful, but she looked like an old saint. So that was a tribute I knew I was in a Catholic hospital, and I knew that I would get good care. Now, that's a concept. Some place along the line, she experienced good care and bad care and made the reference in her mind. And then in the emergency room at one of our hospitals in New Hampshire, I was sitting there one day and this woman came in with her little boy and his hand had been cut, and he was bleeding profusely and I was sitting in the waiting room waiting for somebody else. So I said, to her, wait a minute, I'm going to go in ER and let them know that you're here, they'll be out soon. So I go into the ER and I tell them about this little boy that's profusely bleeding. That staff came right out, talked to the mother, and

gave him what he needed temporarily because they had a tragic accident in the ER they were all very busy. He had to wait a little bit. So they explained that to them and they explained to the mother and wrapped his hand. That mother was so pleased, just because somebody paid attention. He still had to wait, but he waited in a better attitude and the mother had a better attitude first of all because she knew that if she was ever in an accident, she would get primary care in the ER and not have to wait, but somebody else with just a bleeding arm might have to wait. So it's those things that people tell me. Their experiences, experiences can ruin things. That's why it's so important that the person at the information desk has a welcoming attitude. Now she doesn't have to say much or he doesn't have to say much, but it's the appearance of your face that makes a difference. Sometimes we forget that. Now, how did I get onto that?

32:27 [June Ketterer]

Oh, no, because I asked you for examples of how of things that stick with you. So thank you for that. If you think about, we talked about some of the changes in society, but what about changes in health care? What, what strikes you as one or two big changes that when you became an RN, you could have never imagined?

32:50 [June Ketterer]

When I became an RN, I worked in a city hospital in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and then we had a men's ward and a women's ward. We don't have that anymore. Yeah. And I was working on those two wards when people decided to put people men and women next to each other, there was a big uproar when that happened to have men and women on the same floor. So it's so old now that people don't –

[Patricia Beach]

There's dormitories that have men and women on the same floor.

[June Ketterer]

Oh, yeah. I worked at a fourteen bed office when I was in high school. I worked in on of our hospitals and fourteen beds in the room and in the middle of the room was a desk. And on that desk was a paper about everybody in that room we didn't have ICUs in those days. So in that fourteen bed area you have people that belong in ICUs and people who are ready to go home the next day. So there was a transition of people. You learn how to prioritize who needs more help. In those days you got, there would be two nurses usually two nurses and maybe three aids to take care of those 14 people. And two of the aids would be, would be ICU patients, people that should be in an ICU. And they would keep the nurses really informed on how that person's health - you had to be smart to be a nursing assistant in those days. And I did that for four years while I was going to high school. And I loved it, and that's what helped me make my decision to become a nurse. And then later on after I graduated from nursing, I went back to that same hospital to work because it was such a good hospital. And then I worked there a year and then I became a Grey Nun. And then after the novitiate and becoming a Grey Nun then I went back to nursing. So it's, it's fascinating, I think, it's how God operates in life. You know, we, we, we say yes to becoming

a sister. But we don't know what the future holds. It's just like when you get married, you say yes. Well, you don't know what the future holds. So it's saying yes. Before, you know, I often think of the Blessed Mother. She said yes to being the mother of Jesus. She didn't know what the future held. She didn't know he was going to be crucified and die on a cross and all that. But the strength of that, yes, was enough to carry her. And for us in religious life, it's the same thing. You make your commitment to God and all these other things are changes in life. And then it's the same in nursing and in society. Society in my lifetime has changed many, many times. And you make your commitment to live, you know, gotta live while you're alive. So you make your commitment to live and to do the best you can to create a better world. So that's what I believe, that's my philosophy.

36:13 [Patricia Beach]

Yeah. Make your commitment, that, that's powerful, it really is. So, Sister, I would also say that through these interviews and talking with some other people, they often quote you and I don't know if they're quoting you correctly or not about, yeah, don't you just hate a question that starts like that. But they say something along the lines of, well, you know, Sister June said that when she might be the last Grey Nun to leave. But the Grey Nuns, the spirit would stay there or the ministry would continue. Is, is that a pretty accurate thing of what you said?

36:59 [June Ketterer]

Yeah that was at St. Vincent's, I think.

37:01 [Patricia Beach]

Yeah, I think so.

37:03 [June Ketterer]

Grey Nun. And then another sister came after I left, Sister Marcia. Marcia Wiley, she came late. She was actually the last Grey Nun to leave. She was yeah, she came after me and she left. She left just about well, I don't know, maybe ten years ago. She was, she was in northern Canada and she came back to the United States and went to St. Vincent's. That's a long time. Usually we say that the Grey Nuns left, but the spirit stayed behind. The spirit, spirit of service. You know, because we used to talk a lot about St., St. Marguerite d'Youville when I was there. She's the woman we follow as Grey Nuns. And, you know, it was a spirit about her, to keep looking forward, to do what you can in the situation you're in. She was a woman of great experience and great value, then she didn't sit around feeling sorry for herself. It was something special about her. Now she lived in the 1700s in Canada. She's our foundress. So Marguerite d'Youville, her life is such a value to all of us Grey Nuns because she lived through two wars. She lived through the Indian and Canadian war and then, and then the French and Canadian war. So her spirit was so strong she took care of soldiers on both sides of the war. Whoever came to the hospital got taken care of. Now, people in her day - hospitals were not like our hospitals. I mean, they were places where people when they didn't feel good. But they didn't have any kind of ICUs or anything like that. It was a whole different style and you've got taken, it was more like, places you went when you were in the process of dying.

39:09 [Patricia Beach]

I find it remarkable. You're the fifth, fifth Grey Nun that we talked to, Sister, yeah. And every one of those interviews, we talked about a woman who lived over three hundred years ago. Yeah. Isn't that remarkable?

39:29 [June Ketterer]

She's a great image, someone to follow for us.

39:34 [Patricia Beach]

And maybe for more than just the Grey Nuns maybe for those of us who are not Grey Nuns too, I don't know.

39:41 [June Ketterer]

Oh yeah. In Canada, you know, Marguerite d'Youville that's where she's buried, she's buried in the town where she grew up and was baptized. And I went to that ceremony when they exhumed her body, when she became a saint, they exhumed her body. And then we brought it to Varennes, Varennes outside of Montreal is where she's buried, there's a shrine to her there. And I remember that night was a very, very snowy night, icy cold and very snowy. And there were a line of cars and police and everything that took us and her body over to the new place. And I'll never forget people on the roads they just stood back and let all these cars go by. Some I'm sure didn't know what was going on. Some people thought, oh, it's a funeral. Some people knew what it was and they were part of the process. And so it was interesting to see how people were present for the transfer of Saint Marguerite d'Youville's body. And now she has a great shrine there and people come from all over to pray at her shrine. It's about fifteen miles outside of Montreal. And she still influences the heart of millions.

41:10 [Patricia Beach]

And you know, when we were talking to Sister Dorothy Thume, I'm sure you know her. She made some very nice parallels between the two. She said, Blessed Catherine McAuley and St. Marguerite d'Youville and she said and she said this a couple times too, stuck with me about how one woman can change the world.

41:37 [June Ketterer]

Yep.

[Patricia Beach]

That's pretty strong too, you know?

41:40 [June Ketterer]

And they all start out with a lot of criticism. It's not easy to be a leader in the world, and we get these great foundresses. Foundresses are very strong people, when you read the history of people that started congregations, and they have to be strong and they have to be focused on what they want to achieve. Because they get a lot of criticism home. They used to throw stones at Marguerite d'Youville, they thought she was real crazy. When she'd go out and walk down the street and people would throw stones at her to get her out of the way.

42:19 [Beth White]

What did she do that caused them to think she was crazy?

42:22 [June Ketterer]

Well, her husband died. She was married. When her husband died, she was, she had a debt of what was thirty thousand in those days, would have been millions more than that now. And so she set up a, a place to make money. She sold dry goods, all kinds of material and ribbons, all that stuff. And that's how she paid off this debt, and people thought that was absolutely nutty.

[Beth White]

Because a woman was doing that?

42:56 [June Ketterer]

Yeah. And they used to and he had a drinking problem. And they thought when he died - that she was still drinking that she was taking over and he made liquor and sold it to the Indians. He took their furs - in those days they bartered a lot - so he would take the Indians furs and he would give them liquor. So they thought she was doing the same thing and she would go down the street and people would throw stones at her as they thought she was kind of bewitched. That's a tough part of the story. She survived it and she was 71 when she died. We think people in those days -

43:42 [Patricia Beach]

That was so old. Oh my gosh. Yeah.

43:48 [June Ketterer]

People died in their forties in those days.

43:55 [Patricia Beach]

Sister, I think that is there anything that we should have asked you that we weren't smart enough to think of?

44:03 [June Ketterer]

No, I went over all of these questions. Yeah. you talked about Catholic identity carried on now by lay people. You know, we've had successful transitions, thank God.

44:17 [Patricia Beach]

Yeah, I think you articulated that nicely.

44:22 [Beth White]

You know, you explained that in such a great way. I understand now, how it is that the transition occurred and how purposeful it was. How you started out by explaining to the board and then managed to explain to everybody what was going on.

44:42 [June Ketterer]

Yeah. It was a tough time because it took a lot of energy and I had a lot of energy then. I was only in my forties, so I had a lot of energy. Now it's kind of slowing down. And I think God walks with, you, you know, no life is easy, no transition is easy. You just have to believe what you're doing and ask the Lord to accompany you and to give you the grace you need. And I think that's why I tried to do and I used to tell people, you know, don't give up. Don't give up. Make sure your vision is clear. And then ask God to help you along the way and make sure it's not just an achievement for yourself: "This is what I want." No, it can't be. It has to be the best for the mission. And sometimes what you want is not the best. So there's a whole process for letting go, because sometimes our egos get mixed up with that, what we want to, we want to achieve. So you cannot let your ego go, know what's going on, and then make decisions that can help you move into the future.

46:00 [Patricia Beach]

Those are hard won lessons, aren't they?

[June Ketterer]

They're all hard lessons, but they work, I'm eighty-five now and I'm still alive. So I didn't die young. I'm going to die old.

[Patricia Beach]

Good. Sister, it was great to see you. Great to talk to you. Thank you for your time this afternoon, and I hope we get to Massachusetts later this year.

46:29 [June Ketterer]

I hope you do, too. Try to come, yeah. It's a nice city, it's a historic city. It's where the Revolutionary War began, though, it's an important place. And then there's time. You have to stay in a hotel though we don't have any guest rooms.

46:48 [Patricia Beach]

And Sister Jean told us that. That would be fine.

46:53 [June Ketterer]

Yeah. I'm looking forward to it. We don't know when it's going to be.

47:00 [Patricia Beach]

Yeah, I will keep in touch with Michelle. Like I said, she's been very supportive of this project and, you know, maybe we can even coordinate with her or maybe we'll come separately. Whatever is best.

[June Ketterer]

Oh, that would be nice. Yeah. Either way is okay. It's always nice to see people. Yes. You know, because we're all retired here. I can't travel anymore. So I wanted to go visit one of my brothers. And the doctors wouldn't let me. They said my lungs are not good, they said the airplane would kill you all this kind of stuff.

47:37 [Beth White]

Oh dear.

47:38 [June Ketterer]

I don't think - I've been on planes all my life and I never had trouble. And they said, no, we're not going to give you permission now because now we'd be in trouble.

47:49 [Patricia Beach]

This is a strange time with that. It is a strange time. Okay. Okay. Well, thank you. Okay.

48:00 [June Ketterer]

If you can't come with Michelle, then come by yourself.

48:02 [Patricia Beach]

Okay. Thank you, Sister.

48:04 [June Ketterer]

It'll be fun.

[Patricia Beach]

I'm going to - I'm gonna stop there.