

# THE SAINT MARIANNE COPE WINDOWS

*In the Mother Marianne Chapel, St. Joseph & St. Patrick Church, Utica, NY*

by Philomena Lawrence

In 1883, Hansen's Disease, better known as leprosy, was a disfiguring and incurable disease. Nevertheless, Franciscan nun Mother Marianne Cope of upstate New York selflessly volunteered to minister to the stigmatized lepers forced into exile on Hawaii's remote Molokai Island, a calling she answered for 35 years. Nearly a century later, on October 21, 2012, thousands attending the ceremony witnessed Pope Benedict XVI proclaim the "Beloved Mother of Outcasts" a saint.

In *A Song of Pilgrimage and Exile, The Life and Spirit of Mother Marianne of Molokai*, authors Sister Mary Laurence Hanley, OSF, and O.A. Bushnell note that Saint Marianne had a guiding principle for her work: "Charity is the greatest of all virtues... What little good we can do in this world to help and comfort the suffering, we wish to do it quietly... unnoticed and unknown."

The exemplary life of this nun is beautifully documented in stained glass in the Mother Marianne Chapel on the grounds of the church today known as St. Joseph & St. Patrick Church in Utica, NY, where she grew up.

Four windows, measuring approximately three-feet-by-six-feet, dominate a pair of adjoining walls in the small chapel. The east- and south-facing windows are bathed in soft sunlight during daytime services, such as the Mother Marianne Prayer Group and Franciscan Order meetings. Visitors find themselves awestruck by the contrasting dark and pastel colors, dominant figures, and intricate details, and also by the spiritual and earthly symbols incorporated into the windows' designs.

The Rev. Father Antone M. Kandrac, OFM, Conv., now serving as a priest in the Albany diocese, served as pastor of

the church when the chapel was dedicated in 1991. He chose the themes for the four windows, which highlight significant events in Saint Marianne Cope's life.

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Baut Studios, Inc., established in 1927 in Swoyersville, PA, designed, created, and installed the windows. The company, which also manufactures its own patented aluminum window and door frames, has shipped completed stained glass art to churches worldwide.

Such examples of the collaborative efforts between theologians, artists, and craftsmen date back to early Christian times. In their book *Christian Symbols, Ancient and Modern: A Handbook for Students*, authors Heather Child and

Dorothy Colles explain the historic significance: "The elaborate web of allegory and meaning developed by early writers of theology was passed on by them to artists and masons who translated them into visual form ... For many centuries, the Church was their principal patron, and it is not possible to understand the development of Western art without some knowledge of the history of Christianity."

The *Annunciation* window is positioned to the left of the altar, closest to the chapel's entrance. It depicts the Virgin Mary at prayer, dressed in traditional blue and white robes, as the archangel Gabriel brings her the news that she is to be the mother of Jesus, the Son of God. A dove, representing the Holy Spirit, appears above the archangel, while a bright red vase filled with white lilies is displayed in the bottom right-hand corner. As noted by author Clara Erskine Clement in her book *A Handbook of Christian Symbols and Stories of the Saints*, "The Lily, wherever seen, has but one signification, which is chastity and purity."

According to Father Kandrac, "The *Annunciation* window is particularly appropriate for the chapel because both the Blessed Mother and Mother Marianne answered God's call to serve Him in ways they didn't quite understand." He adds, "Mother Marianne welcomed the invitation to care for those afflicted with leprosy, a highly infectious disease, as God's will for her life."

Off to the right of the *Annunciation* window is the one dedicated to Saint Francis of Assisi, the founder of the Friars Minor, the order of Franciscans. He is shown on bended knee, his gaze fixed upon a crucifix, while elongated panels of a bright yellow hue illustrate the connection between Christ's crucifixion wounds and the stigmata on the





IN MEMORY OF  
CHARLES H. BICK

*St. Francis of Assisi*





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*Neither Mother Marianne Cope nor any of the sisters who accompanied her ever contracted leprosy in their years of tending to the sick and dying of Molokai.*





*Barbara Koob, the young girl who was born in Heppenheim, Germany, in 1839, and whose family emigrated to Utica, New York, when she was two years old. The young Barbara Koob (later changed to Cope) is shown in this window at her desk in the parish school at St. Joseph's in Utica.*





*Annunciation*



saint's own hands and feet. St. Francis is traditionally considered to be the patron saint of animals; authors Child and Colles note in their book that ecclesiastical art often portrays him receiving the stigmata.

Positioned at right angles to the St. Francis window is one featuring young Marianne dressed in her parochial school uniform while seated at a wooden desk typical of that era. Shown clearly behind her is the front wall of the original St. Joseph's Church. Over the years, after the school was closed, the building was renovated, and a portion of it became the chapel dedicated in Mother Marianne's honor.

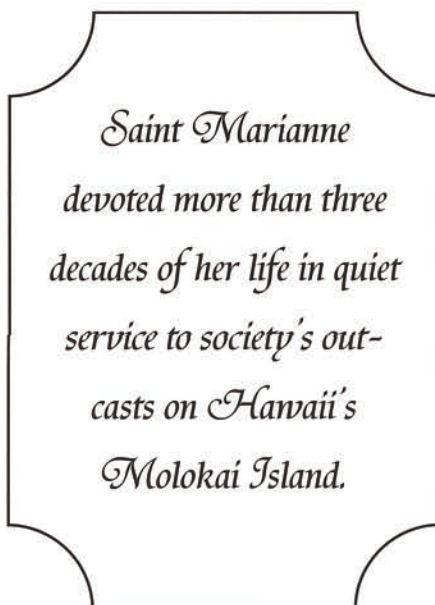
The fourth window in the series, the only one with an operational ventilator, depicts Mother Marianne in her somber nun's habit, calmly ministering to the needs of a bandaged leper, who represents the hundreds of afflicted patients she and her fellow sisters cared for in Molokai. In the background, palm leaves appear to sway, giving the viewer a glimpse of the tropical Hawaiian flora.

Betty Frank, a member of the Secular Franciscan Order, attended St. Joseph's School, as did her mother before her. According to Frank, "The Sisters of St. Francis strongly believed that Mother Marianne would someday be declared a saint, and they worked diligently for 40 years to get all the documentation needed for her canonization."

Mother Marianne Cope's path to sainthood is a fascinating one. Born in Heppenheim, Germany, and baptized Barbara Koob, she emigrated to the United States with her parents and siblings in 1839, when she was two years old. Like many other immigrants from their hometown, the Koob family settled down in Utica, NY, where the children attended St. Joseph's parochial school.

The Sisters of St. Francis, who taught at the school, played a decisive role in Mother Marianne's decision during her teenage years to join the

Franciscan order. Records of her life indicate that she had chosen to dedicate herself to God at the age of 15 but felt duty



bound to work at a local factory to support her parents and siblings while her father was too ill to work. Only after his death in 1862 did she follow her calling and join the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis of Syracuse.

Mother Marianne's admirable dedication to her religious vocation, combined with her commendable work ethic and organizational skills, made her the perfect candidate for several leadership positions within her order — including that of school principal, mother superior of her community of sisters, and founder of two hospitals in upstate New York.

But she readily gave up all that was familiar to her to accept the Kingdom of Hawaii's Catholic Mission's urgent request to send sisters who would operate the island's hospitals. Declaring that she was "not afraid of any disease" and accompanied by six nuns who had also volunteered to accept the challenge, Mother Marianne set sail for Hawaii in 1883.

Legend has it that Mother Marianne promised the sisters that none of them would contract leprosy. None ever did, even though they cleaned and dressed the

lepers' open sores, along with attending to the physical and spiritual needs of the outcasts and their offspring. Mother Marianne's first hand knowledge of efficiently running a hospital, along with the importance of maintaining cleanliness and proper hygiene, proved to be significant factors in the success of the hospital facilities.

Heide Baut Cebrick, a fourth-generation Baut Studios artist who worked on the design and creation of the chapel's stained glass windows, feels honored to have had a role in bringing Mother Marianne's life and work to the public's attention long before she was declared a saint. "Working on the face of the saint as a youngster as well as an adult was particularly challenging," observes Cebrick, adding, "Unlike the Virgin Mary, whom no one living today has seen, photographs of Mother Marianne are readily available, so I had to make sure the features were realistic rather than stylized."

The chapel's diminutive size also required Cebrick to pay special attention to her choice of colors. To allow the optimum amount of light into its limited space, she chose a variety of colors that are light and lively while also soothing and warm. The backgrounds of each window are comprised of an assortment of geometrically shaped glass pieces which direct the viewer's focus onto the respective figures. Cebrick summed up her extensive and painstaking work on the project as a labor of love and admiration for the saint.

Mother Marianne Cope died in 1918 at the age of 80, after devoting more than three decades of her life in quiet service to society's outcasts. She has now taken her place in the communion of saints, and her praises will be sung throughout the world for all ages.

