

My History



Wrestling with Change for the Sake of the Mission

Many years ago, in the 1930's, I was known as the Levasseur farm, a gorgeous, long strip of land extending along Halifax Street and the Sebasticook River in Winslow, Maine.

For a number of years my purpose was to feed a large family and offer coveted hay for the herd of cows supplying milk for the region. The eventual demise of the owner resulted in my being partitioned among his several children who built their homes along Halifax Street, which still left me with many valuable acres of land unused except for periodic haying.

In the 1960's the pastor of St. John's Parish, Fr. Emmanuel Grondin, spied me as an environmentally sound area of natural beauty with the potential to carry out his dream of establishing a local novitiate for the Sisters of St. Joseph to assure a flow of candidates as religious teachers for his sixteen-classroom parish school. At a time in history when many young women responded to the call of serving God and Church, a spacious tan-brown brick building with the river as a backdrop was erected by the Sisters to accommodate them. My natural scenic beauty, vast rolling fields and ornamental trees contributed to the silent, contemplative atmosphere needed to prepare for religious life. By 1969 a section of the building became the Provincial Headquarters of the Sisters. Unfortunately, vocations to religious life began to decrease considerably and this, in 1971, necessitated the transfer of the novitiate to Lewiston.

Simultaneously, society saw a great need for child care, Marriage Encounters and Engaged Encounters to stabilize the family unit. The need for new ministries was evident. St. Joseph's Day Care Center was founded and occupied two large rooms of the ground floor; the Christian Life Center utilized the living sections for retreats and workshops of all kinds from 1972 to 1981.

Concurrently, new societal urgencies became clear in the area - the need for protective housing for the elderly with specialties for the handicapped. My wonderful location, a semi-rural space with innate attractiveness, was ideal for this new people-oriented purpose. Once again, my land was subdivided into different parcels, with a large portion retained for the Sisters' ministry.

From 1981 on, churches realized the imperativeness of participation in the family life ministry and developed their own programs, thus decreasing the use of my building for this ministry. At the same time, my facility was used for two short-term services: the answering of a birth-line telephone contact from distressed unwed mothers-to-be and the temporary sheltering of abused women and children.

Meanwhile, the Ursuline Sisters, in the process of discontinuing their boarding school, wanted living quarters for some boarders from 1983 to 1987, or until they could finish their senior year. At this point in time, my building was used at a slower pace, but time and resources were directed to further enhance the landscaping.

In 1990 came a call to minister to women suffering from addiction. In cooperation with Mid-Maine Medical Center, which offered the medical rehabilitation, I became Sara's Place, my purpose being to offer living and social accommodations complementary to the restoration of the whole person. Many women benefited from this program until in 1994 the government and insurance support was discontinued, and hospitals looked elsewhere for assistance.

A recent revival in spiritual hunger in the Church, plus the Sisters' desire to minister to women who are discovering their role in Church and society, necessitated another wrestling with change for the sake of service. In 1994, the leadership of the Sisters felt called to respond; to facilitate this search for the Creator, His creation and His purpose for each human life, as St. Joseph Christian Life Center I was reoriented with a new focus.

With decreasing numbers of Sisters, a call for cooperation between religious orders became evident, if this project was to be initiated. Under the able direction of Sr. Frances Thomas, a Mercy Sister, I was renovated to offer a more home-like atmosphere and numerous and varied programs were developed to meet the human, spiritual and social needs of the People of God.

Most recently, in June 1999 following much prayer and reflection, I received a new name - "Living Water Spiritual Center" - reflecting a more inclusive mission and purpose as well as highlighting the focus on eco-spirituality. And with a new name came the mission statement:

*With care and love,
we offer sacred space for all —
to seek the Divine
and to embrace the interconnectedness
of all creation.*

