



Taking Care of What You Love

Creating an Environmentally Friendly, Intergenerational Living and Learning Center

Be the change you want to see in the world. Although this statement is most often attributed to Mahatma Gandhi, he didn't actually utter those 10 words. Even though Gandhi didn't make this statement the way we attribute it to him, it is indeed good advice, and has a profound, spiritual truth to it. This simple statement can also be used to describe the inspiring work being done by the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ at The Center at Donaldson in Indiana.

The Center at Donaldson, or just The Center, can be found neatly tucked into the farmlands of northern Indiana, where the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ have created an oasis of multiple ministries that operate in harmony with each other and the environment. To understand The Center, one must first understand the foundation of the Poor Handmaids and the journeys that lead them to Donaldson, Indiana.



MoonTree Studios
Fearlessly Creating



The Beginning

Catherine Kasper was born in 1820 in Dernbach, Germany. After the death of her father, Kasper worked as a farmhand for 10 cents a day in order to support her mother and herself. In 1848, Kasper, along with four other women who shared her concern for the poor and powerless, moved into a little house and began nursing the sick of Dernbach while also providing housing for village widows and orphans. In 1851, Kasper and those four women proclaimed their vows, thus forming the religious community, the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ. Over the next several years, the Poor Handmaids expanded throughout Germany, the Netherlands and England.



Coming to America

The journey to America was put into motion when a request was received from the Diocese of Fort Wayne, Indiana. Shortly after the U.S. Civil War ended, the Indiana diocese sought help for ministering to the many German immigrants who had settled in the area. The request was made directly to then-Mother Mary Catherine Kasper, now Blessed Mary Catherine Kasper. Eight sisters were eventually chosen from a volunteer pool of over 200 to make the journey to America. Leaving on August 14, 1868, the eight sisters journeyed by ship, train and hayrack before arriving on August 28 in the town of Hessen Cassel, just outside of Fort Wayne. Within days, the sisters began teaching in the parish school, nursing the area sick and setting up their first American Motherhouse.

In 1922, the sisters ventured out from the city of Hessen Cassel, relocating their Motherhouse to the expansive farm fields of Donaldson, Indiana. At that time, the nearest town was seven miles away and travel by car was still novel in the area; still however, these Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ were undaunted by the journey or the tasks at hand.

"They needed to raise their own food," explains Sister Mary Baird, PHJC, naturalist, *The Center at Donaldson*, "so they started with the beef and grain farm." By the 1930s and 40s, there were five farms that supported the relocated Motherhouse; in addition to the beef and grain farm, there was a poultry farm, dairy farm, vegetable farm, sheep and pigs and at one point, nearly 400 apple trees. "They had all they needed to support themselves, especially in the winter months," states Baird. "By that time, they had also founded hospitals in Chicago and Fort Wayne so some of the food raised here, for instance, the eggs, were delivered to those big hospitals."

The Motherhouse and beef and grain farm over time expanded and grew into an environmentally friendly, intergenerational, educational, living and learning center made up of six ministries: *Ancilla Beef and Grain Farm*; *Ancilla College*; the *Catherine Kasper Life Center*; *Earthworks*; *MoonTree Studios*, and the *Lindenwood Retreat and Conference Center*, collectively referred to as *The Center at Donaldson*.



Ancilla Beef and Grain Farm

Today, the *Ancilla Beef and Grain Farm* comprise 150 acres of pasture ground which is home to over 100 head of cattle. In addition to the cattle, the farm grows hay, corn, alfalfa, oats and soybeans which are used as feed for the cattle. "Our cattle are only fed what we grow or make here," explains Tim Reinhold, co-director, *Ancilla Beef and Grain Farm*, "They're allowed to roam the pastures and are grass fed, grain finished, hormone and antibiotic free." Reinhold and his father, Joe, both lifelong farmers, serve as co-directors of the *Ancilla Farm*. "I love to farm" states Reinhold, "and the sisters have given me the opportunity to keep doing what I like to do and for me and my father to continue to work together." Adds Joe Reinhold, "It's great working for the sisters, you get to take care of the land doing something you love to do."

The cattle are raised in a caring environment, with very little confinement and no harmful additives to their diets. They spend spring through fall grazing in the pastures with their diet supplemented by hay and silage during the winter months. Once the calves are weaned, replacement heifers for breeding are identified and started out in the pastures. The top 30 or so larger weight steer calves are also identified and started on grain feed, so within 100 days they will be the first ones ready for market. Once sent to the butcher, everything is inspected and cut to specification. The beef is then used at *The Center*, as well as sold to the public, where it has become a popular and healthy choice for the local residents.

The beef and grain farm models rural family farming, raising cattle and grain in an environmentally friendly and natural way. The goal of this ministry is to help sustain *The Center* as well as contribute to the local community. The sisters humane way of farming earned the *Ancilla Beef*

and *Grain Farm* a River-Friendly Farm Award from the state of Indiana. The statewide initiative recognizes farms that implement farming processes that are protective of the rivers, lakes, streams and all waterways, keeping the cattle out of the water sources and the water clean.

The sisters recently hired an ecological relationships director to work with the farmers and the sisters to assess the different parcels of land and determine the best way to continue to care for the land and keep it healthy and thriving.

Also fairly new is the agricultural program at *Ancilla College* where students not only learn in a classroom setting but are able to go out to the farm on a regular basis and supplement their classroom lessons with hands-on experience.

Ancilla College

Ancilla College is a private, two year, coeducational, liberal arts college. Initially established to provide higher education for prospective members of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, the college expanded its curriculum and began to accept students from the local area during the late 1960s.

Home of the *Chargers*, the college offers on-campus housing and participation in sports such as baseball, softball, basketball, soccer, volleyball and much more, plus a variety of student activities, organizations and events. "We have an intergenerational campus out here," explains Sister Loretta Schleper, PHJC, former provincial counselor, Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ. "We have the youth at the college and we have our senior sisters at Catherine's Cottage, who come out and watch and support our sports teams. The students love the support and interaction with the sisters."



Catherine Kasper Life Center

The Catherine Kasper Life Center (CKLC) is a faith-based retirement community that offers an independent living option, as well as a licensed, skilled nursing facility and includes the Maria Center and the Catherine Kasper Home.

The Maria Center offers residents a community atmosphere while allowing them to live independently with a variety of living options from one and two bedroom apartments and studios to efficiencies all with private bathrooms, full kitchens or kitchenettes. Residents have many amenities like housekeeping services, maintenance services, spiritual wellness and security features, as well as many activities, retreats and educational programs from which to choose.

The Catherine Kasper Home is a licensed, skilled nursing facility which provides both short-term rehabilitation and long-term nursing care. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services has awarded them a five-star rating.

Earthworks

Earthworks is an environmental education facility which focuses on teaching, demonstrating and promoting the interconnectedness of all creation. Education classes and experiences are offered for children and adults.

Earthworks features a greenhouse, herb and vegetable gardens, wetlands, a forest environment, small lake and a variety of farm animals. The goal of Earthworks, for both adults and children, is simple, according to Cheri Ringer, coordinator of Earthcare Education, Earthworks, "That they learn to love nature, love the land, the animals, everything that God has given us and then appreciate it and want to preserve it."

Summer programs are offered for children ages 6-10 which teach them about the environment, healthy eating, interacting with the animals on the grounds and respecting and living in harmony with nature. The children are taught how soil, water, air and humans are interconnected. Recycling is a recurring theme throughout the summer, as is nutrition. "We take the kids on a greenhouse tour, where they're able to pick salad tomatoes right off the vine and eat them," explains Ringer. "They get so excited! We show them where lettuce, broccoli and cauliflower come from so they know how these vegetables are raised."

Helping the poor and marginalized--the mission of the sisters--is front and center at Earthworks, with scholarships being offered to those who are not able to pay. "We don't want any child to not be able to come to Earthworks because of the lack of funding," stresses Ringer. "We not only provide funding and scholarships for them, we work with the county in providing transportation for them to Earthworks."

Adult education classes are also offered in topics like cheese making, bread making and environmental issues. "There's always a need for continuing education on environmental issues, like recycling and eating whole foods, no matter what the age," states Ringer.

Baird sums up the purpose of Earthworks best, "You take care of what you love. If you teach someone to love nature and the earth you've done a great deed."

MoonTree Studios

MoonTree Studios is The Center's art eco-spirituality center whose mission is to work with both people and the environment giving participants an opportunity to explore the interconnectedness of art, nature and the Spirit within.

"Our community has been clothing the naked, educating the ignorant, feeding the poor and at this point in time, we are very much taking our mission to the next level," relates Sister Nancy Raboin, PHJC, retired director of MoonTree Studios, "by looking at the whole idea of sustainability and how to have people enter into relationships through artmaking and their spirituality and through the earth."

Workshops or classes are not offered at MoonTree Studios; however, *experiences* are. "We use a transformational learning model," continues Raboin. "We don't have workshops or classes, we have *experiences*. We do not have teachers or instructors, we have *facilitators*. We do not have students, we have *participants*. We decided to change the vocabulary, so it does not connote a hierarchical, product-driven type of art. Process will always be much more important than product. Process is where you're asking questions, you're using creativity."

MoonTree Studios houses a fiber studio, a painting, drawing and enameling studio, a clay studio and a 2D/3D studio.

The building itself was built to be sustainable and is gold level LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified with the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), meaning it is resource efficient, uses less water and energy and helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Lindenwood Retreat & Conference Center

The Lindenwood Retreat & Conference Center is built on the shore of The Center's Lake Gilbraith, which provides a tranquil, peaceful setting surrounded by nature. Lindenwood offers a variety of programs and retreat workshops for men and women, personal retreat space, as well as space for other organizations to host their own seminars, conferences, workshops or meetings.

The meeting rooms can host anywhere from small groups to several hundred people. The overnight accommodations feature 54 guest rooms, each with a private bathroom and shower, individually controlled heating and air conditioning, wireless internet, linens and towels, with a variety of meal options available.

Lindenwood also has an outdoor labyrinth featuring walking paths and benches for reflection, a prayer garden for meditating and reflecting, stations of the cross and of course, Lake Gilbraith with a path for outdoor walks.

While six ministries existing in unison on one campus seems complicated, Schleper puts it all into perspective, "This place is more than just an address. There is a central part that really has a pulse, it is growing and dynamic and moving. The groups relate and collaborate with each other. We believe that if we work together we can sustain the whole thing."

And how does all of this relate to the mission of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ? "It's with the core values, it's the dignity and the respect of not only people but of the land and animals --it's one of the Poor Handmaids core values," explains Schleper. "With attentive ear and courageous heart is what we say. It was our foundress' wish that we listen to that small voice within and the courageous heart is once hearing the Spirit, you're willing to follow what the Spirit calls you to do."

It seems the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ in Donaldson, Indiana, through The Center, have found a way to listen with attentive ear to that small voice within and have had the courageous heart to follow it, and with that the sisters have become the change we'd all like to see in the world. ☀️

