**Dominican Sisters of Hope**, Mariandale

<https://patch.com/new-york/ossining/sisters-hope-preserve-34-riverfront-acres-ossining>

**Sisters Of Hope Preserve 34 Riverfront Acres In Ossining**

The property is next to Ossining's 30-acre Crawbuckie Nature Preserve. Together, nearly 1 mile of shoreline is protected.

By [Lanning Taliaferro, Patch Staff](https://patch.com/users/lanning-taliaferro) | Sep 28, 2018 12:55 pm ET

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OSSINING, NY — Dominican Sisters of Hope and the Westchester Land Trust have legalized a conservation easement that prohibits further development and protects significant ecological resources, including the Hudson River. They've protected 34 acres of the 61-acre property known as Mariandale in Ossining.

As 145 Catholic Dominican Sisters, the Dominican Sisters of Hope said they are committed to protecting and preserving Earth, from changing local legislation to allow for beekeeping in 2014 to removing invasive species to building homes for blue birds to committing to a corporate stance to reverse climate change.

"This land has been an oasis in the midst of development in Westchester County," says Dominican Sister of Hope Prioress Lorelle Elcock, O.P. "We have a responsibility to be in right relationship with Earth, not over it or owning it, but caring for it. We are protecting this land so that it will be a source of healing and refuge for both humans and wildlife."

The conservation easement was donated by the Sisters, who received no financial benefit. The conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust that permanently restricts the development of a property in order to protect the land's important conservation values.

The conserved land consists of a variety of habitat types, including woodlands, meadow, wetlands, and a steep ravine through which a stream flows to the Hudson River under the Metro-North track.

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The property will continue to be owned and managed by the sisters as a retreat and conference center.

Preservation of land along the Hudson is a stated priority of the 2016 New York State Open Space Conservation Plan.

The easement also coincides with the Season of Creation, an annual celebration inclusive of Christians of all traditions. Participants commit to prayer and action to protect creation from September 1st to October 4th (the Feast of St. Francis, the patron saint of ecology).

The property is adjacent to the Village of Ossining's 30-acre Crawbuckie Nature Preserve, so that together, nearly 1 mile of uninterrupted Hudson River shoreline now is protected in perpetuity.



ABOUT THE DOMINICAN SISTERS OF HOPE

*The Dominican Sisters of Hope are 140+ Catholic Dominican sisters who are committed to living and preaching the gospel message of hope. Hailing from Newburgh, NY, Fall River, MA, and Ossining, NY, we now live in seventeen states and Puerto Rico where we serve largely in justice, social, healthcare, and education ministries. Always dynamic, we are everything from Executive Directors of homeless shelters to gym teachers to published authors. We're excited to share with you the ways we bring hope to it all.*

**Dominican Sisters of Sparkill partner with Scenic Hudson to preserve 149 acres of land in Glasco/Saugerties, New York**

The Dominican Sisters of Sparkill (Dominican Convent of Our Lady of the Rosary) announced that 149 acres of their treasured property in Glasco/Saugerties, NY was sold on January 23, 2015 to Scenic Hudson, a conservation group focused on preserving the land of New York’s Hudson River Valley area. This property has been owned and used by the Dominican Sisters for vacation and retreats since the early l 930s.

In the spring of 2010, the Sisters entered into an agreement with Scenic Hudson that allowed for the creation of the Falling Waters Preserve, permitting it to be shared and enjoyed by the public. This agreement gave the Dominican Sisters an opportunity to share the values of their land ethic with many people. New trail systems were created to provide easier public access to the preserve the land while still maintaining the Sisters’ privacy for their programs and retreats. Esopus Creek Conservancy, also based in Saugerties, assisted with the trail redesign process and aided Scenic Hudson with the ongoing maintenance of the trails.

Since opening Falling Waters Preserve to the public in late July 2011, Scenic Hudson has done a remarkable job of maintaining the preserve and allowing its beauty to be enjoyed by local community members. The preserve offers 3 miles of trails dotted by benches and gazebos, meadows descending to river bluffs and shoreline, and stunning views of two waterfalls and the Hudson River, along with a multitude of wildlife. In addition, Falling Waters Preserve boasts more than a mile of direct Hudson River shoreline and two accessible streams for the public to enjoy.

Many people shared their excitement and appreciation for having access to this land. Thus, with the end of the 5-year agreement approaching, the Dominican Sisters felt it natural to consider selling the preserve so that the land could continue to be shared and well-cared-for in perpetuity.

The Sisters’ Land Ethic upholds respect for planet Earth, our human responsibility in caring for Earth, and the belief that Earth’s benefits are for everyone to enjoy. Reverence for all creation is a central part of the Congregation’s mission statement. Prompted by the belief and deep interest in sharing the beauty found on their beloved property, the decision was made to sell a portion of the property to Scenic Hudson.

Sr. Mary Murray, President of the Dominican Sisters of Sparkill, remarked, “The Dominican Sisters, like many congregations today, find ourselves in need of new approaches to continue to meet our mission and goals. Working with Scenic Hudson has proved to be a wonderful way to continue our mission with a different approach to meeting needs and extending our mission for years to come.”

Scenic Hudson President Ned Sullivan said, “Scenic Hudson thanks the Dominican Sisters of Sparkill for their commitment to the community, love of nature, and willingness to work with us to create this very special place for the public to enjoy. People from all walks of life will find joy and inspiration here experiencing nature and all its treasures, and Scenic Hudson is honored to have worked with the Sisters and the Esopus Creek Conservancy to make it all possible.”

**# # #**

**Sisters of Charity of New York**

**What else can be done with our land?**

In 1917, John and Mary Halloran donated one hundred and fifty acres of land in Stanfordville, New York, to the Sisters of Charity. The land known then as Hillcrest Farm included a hunting lodge and two barns. The Sisters continued to oversee the active farm and made improvements on buildings and property until the 1940’s when the land was left fallow.

In the fall of 1998, the Sisters of Charity established Sisters Hill Farm, a Community Supported Agriculture farm on this land. The Farm seeks to create a just relationship between people and the earth through the growth of healthy food, outreach to the poor, and community building activities.

**How did this come about?**

With a vision for the future, a group of Sisters of Charity, members of the Global Team formed as a result of the Chapter of 1995, led this effort by responding to a call in the Chapter’s Vision 2000 statement, … *….” to reverence creation in a spirit of interconnectedness with all that is, living* *responsibly.”*

The Sisters were concerned about the food situation in our country - the growth of agribusiness and the consequent loss of family farms, the lost connection between people food and farms, and the need to care for the land in a sustainable way.

In 1997, a proposal to establish a farm on land inherited by the Sisters in 1917 in Stanfordville, NY (Dutchess County,) was submitted to the Board of the Sisters of Charity. This was followed by additional research by the Team along with congregational education and involvement.

The proposal was accepted by the Board in 1998, and the farm became a reality. Sisters Hill Farm is a Community Supported Agriculture Farm owned and operated by the Sisters of Charity of New York. It produces vegetables weekly from May 31 to the first week in November for approximately 250 members.

In Community Supported Agriculture, members take a risk along with the farmer and pay a fee “upfront” in advance of the season. This guarantees production expenses for the farm as well as salaries and purchase of equipment etc. In exchange, members receive a weekly or bi-weekly “share” of the harvest. ( see U-Tube for examples of weekly shares.)

Most people, unless they have their own garden, have never seen or tasted food on the day it was picked. Sisters Hill Farm grows produce for its members based upon how it tastes, not for how well it is going to hold up during shipping. The farm consistently produces high-quality, pesticide and chemical free crops using organic methods of farming. The produce is usually distributed the day of or within days of being harvested. Instead of buying processed, packaged and waxed produce that has traveled hundreds of miles, CSA members are able get excellent quality vegetables directly from the farm.

In keeping with the mission of the Sisters of Charity who have been advocates for the poor since their founding in 1809, a portion of the weekly harvest - approximately 10%, is donated to soup kitchens, food pantries, etc, as well to individuals who could not otherwise afford to be members. Many subsidized shares are also available.

Sisters Hill Farm reached a milestone in 2016, with I million pounds of vegetables harvested with more than 10,000 pounds donated.

The “community” aspect of Community Supported Agriculture is an important aspect of the farm. Community is fostered by member interactions with each other and with the staff at the weekly distribution sites -the farm and Mount Saint Vincent in the Bronx. Several pot-luck picnics along with music from a local band, are held throughout the season giving members additional opportunities to get to know one another. A weekly newsletter provides interesting information about food and the workings of the farm, as well as insightful reflections from staff members. For members not sure of how to use certain vegetables, recipes are provided in the newsletter and on the website.

Farmer David Hambleton has developed a model apprentice program, and Sisters Hill Farm is widely recognized as an excellent farm for the training of beginning famers. Many instructional videos have made at the farm, and may be found U-Tube. Several former farm apprentices have started their own farms. The mission of education of the Sisters of Charity continues !

To model the use of renewable energy, forty solar panels have been installed at the farm. As you can see…..

IT’S MORE THAN VEGETABLES! For further information see [www.sistershilfarm.org](http://www.sistershilfarm.org)

**Maryknoll Sisters**

**ECOLOGICAL CONSERVATION: A Mission Imperative**

Mary Ellen Manz, MM and Margaret Gaughan

(Appeared in MARYKNOLL magazine, May/June 2012, pp 28-31, printed with permission)

In this centennial year of their founding, the Maryknoll Sisters are leaving an ecological gift for future generations. Through a legal agreement, or easement, the Sisters are preserving in perpetuity 42 acres of wetland and woodland area on their 67 acre center in New York.

“We are giving this land extra protection forever so that no major development will ever be allowed on it,” says Sister Doreen Longres. who so-directs the Maryknoll Sisters Environmental Office with Sister Janet Miller. The two Maryknoll sisters have been working on the conservation easement since 2007. They and their congregation will join with friends, neighbors and local dignitaries on June 3 to celebrate the official designation of the conserved area.

Caring for the earth has long been a priority for the Maryknoll Sisters. “We have seen the devastating effects of exploiting the land on the people we serve throughout the world,” Longres says. The Sisters take to heart the words of Pope Benedict XVI: “The degradation of the environment is a pressing moral problem that threatens peace and human life itself. We cannot remain indifferent to what is happening around us, for the deteriorat5ion of any one part of the planet affects us all.”

Ministering to peoples of ancient traditions and cultures, the Sisters have become deeply aware of the reverence those people hold for God’s creation and the responsibility all of us share to care for it. At their assembly in 2002 the Sisters declared, “We are impelled to live in a way that testifies to the integrity and sacredness of all creation.” They have reaffirmed that statement by striving to put it into practice throughout the world.

In Darién, Panama, for instance, Maryknoll Sisters Melinda Roper and Jocelyn Fenix witnessed the growing destruction of nature’s ecological system when big companies began buying up the land for teak plantations, chopping down everything and contaminating the soil and water with chemicals. The Sisters started a pastoral center to teach farmers to renew the land by using compost and organic farming methods.

Recognizing the effects of land abuse worldwide, Maryknoll Sister Francis Kobets became an agriculturalist. Her current work in Zimbabwe has evolved into Orphans’ Education and Agricultural Support (OEAS), a charitable organization assisting more than 1.200 orphans through education, health and nutrition. A key element of OEAS is practical agriculture. This program provides see, fertilizer, methodology and encouragement for the children to grow vegetables for their own consumption and to provide a bit of money to help with school needs.

In Luzon, the Philippines, Maryknoll Sisters created a sanctuary to offer people a spiritual focus on caring for creation.

Back at home, Maryknoll Sisters have been seeking ways to help save the environment. Establishing a special-projects desk, which became the Environmental Office, was a first step. “The goal of our office is to enter into environmentally friendly practices here as we do overseas,” says Longres, who began working in the office in 2003 after serving for 21 years in Peru, where she learned reverence for the land from the Aymara people. Miller, who served in Tanzania and Panama and taught agriculture in Zimbabwe, joined Longres in the Maryknoll Sisters’ Environmental Office in 2005.

Working with other religious communities, the Maryknoll Sisters have established their own land ethic. “We believe we must look at our place in the span of creation and see the interconnectedness,”

says Longres. “We are called to consider the good of the land not as an object but as an entity that hosts various aspects of life.”

The Maryknoll Sisters partnered with the Westchester Land Trust, a local organization dedicated to preserving open space now and for the future. Together they identified the 42 acres of wetlands and woodland on the Sisters’ property as worthy of preservation. Wetlands are ecologically significant areas for water storage to prevent flooding and provide groundwater recharge, habitat for threatened and endangered plant and animal species, natural filtration to purify water, and they are aesthetically pleasing.

Working with the Westchester Land Trust has been very helpful, says Longres. The group will ensure the integrity of the easement, the creation of which Longres regards as “a testimony to the Maryknoll Sisters’ commitment to live more responsibly and protect the earth.”

“I hope it will encourage others to do whatever they are able,” she says.

Miller stresses the historical significance of preserving a portion of the Sisters’ center. “It is our home,” she says, “the place that nourishes us, the place of healing and reconnection when we return from overseas mission.” Pointing out that caring for the land was important to Mother Mary Joseph Rogers, founder of the Maryknoll Sisters, Miller adds, “I am grateful this land will be here for future generations.”

**Sisters of Our Lady of Christian Doctrine**

On June 29, 1910, Mother Marianne Gurney and her companions celebrated mass for

the first time in 173 Cherry Street on the Lower East Side of New York City. This was

the beginning of the Sisters of Our Lady of Christian Doctrine. After fourteen years of

settlement work in Madonna House, Mother Marianne's dream of having a place in the

country was realized. Mother wanted a place in the country where the people the

Sisters ministered to on the Lower East Side could come and breathe fresh air, and also

establish a novitiate, and a place where the Sisters could rest and make retreats. In

Nyack, NY a farm of some fifty acres was up for foreclosure. John Whalen bought this

farm and donated it to the Sisters. Unfortunately, he died before the mortgage was paid

off, and the Sisters had to finish paying it off. The property was at the foot of Hook

Mountain, stretching from the Hudson River to west of Route 9W. It also included

another lot of eight acres which was not adjacent to the larger property but was about a

block distant from it on Midland Avenue. On July 16, 1924, the Sisters acquired the title

to what would become the Marydell Motherhouse and Novitiate.

Just two months later, groups from Madonna House as well as novices were making

retreats. By the next summer, Marydell Camp was receiving girls (and boys for an

occasional week or two), and sixty-four years of summer camping began.

From the beginning, the Sisters and their neighbors have enjoyed an amicable

relationship. At some point, Mother Marianne revealed an astute political sense. The

Sister's property was right next to Nyack State Park. If Nyack residents wanted to use

the park they had to walk through Marydell property or go all the way to the other side of

the mountain and down into the park. Mother Marianne made it possible for visitors to

reach the park by donating a strip of property to the Village of Upper Nyack. This strip

became and extension of North Broadway.

For many years, Mother Marianne traveled at least once a week from Nyack to the

Lower East Side. It was obvious that, for her, the Sisters presence in Nyack was an

extension of the work in Madonna House. Mother died in 1957. In 1960, the

motherhouse was condemned by Nyack's Fire Department. Sister Ursula Coyne, the

new Mother General, and her council discovered that Mother Marianne truly lived by

faith. There was no money in the bank. The Sisters supported themselves by

'collecting' (begging) in different locations in New York City and environs. Obviously,

there was no money for tearing down and rebuilding a new motherhouse. The

Archdiocese of New York advised Mother Ursula to sell four acres of the property near

the Hudson River. Using the money from those acres, the community could buy a new

motherhouse. The Brake Shoe estate, in Suffern, NY had been used by that company

as a county club for its employees. It had tennis courts, a baseball field, picnic grounds,

acres of woodland, and a swimming pool. The motherhouse soon moved to Suffern.

At this time, since the Sisters' motherhouse was in Suffern, the Marydell property was

used primarily in the summer during the camping season. A trusted custodian of many

years, Mr. Turner, lived in the original farm house and cared for the property year round.

The property included a little cemetery at the bottom of the hill, containing the graves of

ten members who had died. Uneasy that these graves were unattended for the greater

part of the year, when the Archdiocese opened a new cemetery in what is now Airmont,

burial lots were bought and the remains of those sisters were moved to Ascension

Cemetery.

Meanwhile, while Marydell Camp continued to flourish, the Sisters felt a better use could

be made of the Nyack property throughout the year. Retreats, conferences, and the use

of the facilities by many different groups soon become a common occurrence for

Marydell. By 1970, the Sisters who work at Marydell began to live there all year round.

When Mr. Turner died, the Sisters renovated the farm house and named it Mary Gurney

House after our founder. Four of our Sisters moved in, adding another local community

to the property.

As the years have progressed, vocations have become a rare occurrence for the

congregation, and the median age of the Sisters rises. The summer of 1988 was the

last season for Marydell Camp. While different activities continued on the property, the

Sisters took two years to discern where the Lord was leading them in the use of the

property. In 1990, Marydell Faith and Life Center was opened. No longer a resident

summer camp for girls, it is now used by different summer day camps as well as

numerous groups for all kinds of reasons. However, as the Sisters continued to age,

they became aware of the need to plan for the future. The property we were blessed

with is one of great beauty. Nestled at the foot of Hook Mountain, it slopes down toward

the Hudson River, with beautiful river views. During community chapters and

assemblies, the Sisters expressed a clear desire that this property be protected. From

as early as the late 1980's, our archives reveal documents of conversations that were

begun with groups such as Scenic Hudson, Trust for Public Land, and the New York-

New Jersey Trail Conference, among others. In 2014, with the help of some members

of the Board of Marydell Faith and Life Center, serious conversations were begun with

Trust for Public Land. Due to the dedicated, determined and hard work of Ben Weiland

from Trust for Public Land, and the steadfast commitment of the Sisters for the

preservation of this gift, on Earth Day of 2017, thirty acres of our property were

dedicated as an extension of both Nyack State Park and Rockland State Park.

‘Marydell-on-Hudson' came into existence. The Sisters have kept ownership of ten

acres that house both Marydell Faith and Life Center and Marydell Convent. Wishing to

protect this property also, a conservation easement has been placed on these ten

acres.

The strip of eight acres which is not adjacent to the property has been put up for sale at

market price. However, here also, the Sisters continue to listen to where God is leading

them. While the Sisters delight in what they have been able to accomplish, the Village

of Upper Nyack and, perhaps the entire County of Rockland, are genuinely glad this

property is being preserved..

The words of Rabbi Ariel Russo of Nyack may be a good way to end:

*"What is the connection between the Israeli Women of the Wall and the Nuns here at*

*Marydell Faith and Life Center in Nyack? I believe this week's Torah reading has*

*something to say about both organizations and their recent news.*

*Last week we witnessed history in the making as the Israeli government designated the*

*creation of a permanent and separate area of the Jerusalem Old City's Kotel for mixed*

*gender praying. The organization, Women of the Wall, has been advocating for this for*

*the last 27 years.*

*Once laws are developed...then comes the work of making a place holy. The Marydell*

*Faith and Life Center right here in Upper Nyack is owned by nuns...It is very important*

*to the Sisters that this very special place for them be preserved and now it will be.*

*There are many private developers that showed interest in the property, but maintaining*

*the natural holiness of the land was extremely important. Sister Veronica describes the*

*land...this way. "You walk on the land and you don't have to pray," she explained.*

*"You're just praying. You look around and the beauty of it all lifts your spirit."*

*The nuns' values and experience of this site as a sacred space were an important part*

*of the process driving this sale. It is not always easy to make significant, financial*

*decisions based on core values. It is often a sure way to lose money. Preserving the*

*physical, naturally beautiful land enhances Upper Nyack and the experience for visitors,*

*and in some ways perpetuates the sisters' work and commitment to holiness in the area*

*for generations to come."*