

Saint Marianne Cope was a Sister of the Third Order Regular in Syracuse, New York. She lived in the 1800s and early 1900s and worked much of her life with persons who had leprosy in Hawaii. She is the first Franciscan woman from North America to be canonized.

We chose St. Marianne Cope 2 because in 2009 our son Greg and his fiancé Joan were visiting Italy, and were able to attend the canonization of St. Damien of Moloka'i. They were really affected by this experience, and in 2014 they named their first baby Damien. St. Damien was not a Franciscan, but we discovered that St. Marianne Cope, OSF also went to Moloka'i to work with the leprosy patients, and ministered to St. Damien as he was dying. Much of the information in this report comes from two books: The Life and Legacy of Saint Marianne Cope, OSF, by Sister Fran Gangloff, OSF and Pilgrimage & Exile, Mother Marianne of Moloka'i, by Sister Mary Laurence Hanley, O.S.F. and O.A. Bushnell. Sister Mary Laurence Hanley was the driving force pushing for sainthood for St. Marianne.

Background on Leprosy in Hawaii

It is believed that Chinese immigrants brought leprosy to the Hawaiian Islands in the 1800's, where it spread rapidly, due to no immunity in the native Hawaiians. It was called by locals as Ma'i Pake: the Chinese disease. In 1865, the Hawaiian legislature passed a law requiring all those who contracted the disease to be quarantined on a small peninsula on the rugged north shore of the island of Moloka'i. This small peninsula was created by a small volcano many years after the rest of Moloka'i was formed. The peninsula is separated from the rest of Moloka'i by 2000' cliffs to the south and surrounded by the pounding sea on the north, east and west making it nearly impossible to escape.

The forced isolation at Moloka'i started with the first 16 exiles being dropped off on January 6, 1866. It was expected that they could sustain themselves by raising crops and fishing, but because the disease was so debilitating, both physically and spiritually, they were not able to survive. Most of them lived 6 months to 4 years. This was, of course, torturous to the Hawaiian people as family was very important to them; many family members who did not have the disease would join their loved ones on Moloka'i. The male lepers lived on the east side of the peninsula at Kalawao and the females at Kalaupapa on the west side.

G.H. Armauer Hansen discovered the bacteria which cause leprosy in 1873 and leprosy is now known as Hansen's Disease. In 1946, effective treatments with sulfonamide drugs had been developed, but it was not until almost 30 years later, in 1969, that the isolation laws were ended.

The forced isolation at Moloka'i occurred for over 100 years, from 1865 until 1969, and nearly 8000 people were exiled during those years. Even when they could finally leave, some longtime residents decided to stay in the colony as it was the only home they had ever known. Altogether, over 60 Sisters of St. Francis had come to help at Kalaupapa.

Today the Kalaupapa colony is the Kalaupapa National Historic Park. It is only accessible by plane, or down the steep cliff by mule or foot.

Early Life.

St. Marianne Cope was born as Maria Anna Barbara Koob on January 23, 1838 in Heppenheim, Grand Duchy of Hesse (in current Germany). The next year her family immigrated to Utica, New York and changed their name to Cope.

She left school in the eighth grade to work in a textile factory to support her family after her father became an invalid. In 1860, The Sisters of St. Francis came to Utica and Syracuse. Marianne discussed her desire to join them, but continued to work supporting her family. After her father died in 1862, her siblings were old enough that she no longer needed to support the family.

Sisters of St. Francis

She joined the Sisters of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis in Syracuse, New York. After a year of formation, she received her religious habit, and her new name, Marianne. The sisters prayed in Latin the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Marianne had a wonderful gift of leading and directing without rousing resentment, which led to her receiving more and more responsibility: teacher, principal, superior of the convent, founder and administrator of hospitals, general secretary of the province, and director of novices.

In 1866 she helped start St. Elizabeth Hospital in Utica, and St. Joseph Hospital in Syracuse in 1869. They treated patients with malaria and typhoid. These hospitals were among the first 50 general hospitals in the United States. She made it her practice to make no distinction of color, nationality, or theological belief in the treatment of her patients. She arranged for a medical school to move to Syracuse, and granted the Medical Students admission to the hospital for clinical instruction. She was instrumental in establishing modern sanitation practices.

In 1877 she was elected general superior, as Mother Marianne. She was in charge of 62 professed sisters, nine school missions, and two hospitals. She led the sisters in adding additional schools and hospital expansion.

In June of 1883 she received a letter which would change her life. The letter was from Fr. Leonar Fouesnal, asking for sisters to come to Hawaii to serve as nurses. He had sent out 50 letters, but only received one positive response:

Mother Marianne wrote: "I hardly know what to say in reply. Shall I regard your kind invitation to join you in missionary labors, as coming from God? I feel an irresistible force drawing me to follow this call."

When Fr. Leonor visited her in July. He told her they would be working with lepers. She said, "I am hungry for the work, and I wish with all my heart to be one of the chosen ones, whose privilege it will be, to sacrifice themselves for the salvation of the souls of the poor islanders. I am not afraid of any disease, hence it would be my greatest delight to minister to the abandoned lepers."

Hawaii

She picked 6 sisters from the 35 who volunteered to go with her. She led the sisters from New York across the U.S. by train and from San Francisco to Honolulu by boat. The sisters settled at a convent in Honolulu and began their work at Kaka'ako Hospital, a leprosarium. This is where doctors determined which patients had leprosy and which had other diseases with similar symptoms..

The sisters, knowing the need for sanitation, worked diligently to improve the terrible conditions at the hospital, despite a lack of cooperation from the administration. Mother Marianne insisted on cleanliness and constant hand washing, which she had instigated in the New York hospitals.

There was a lot of tension between the Catholic and Protestant missionaries, and also between the native Hawaiian's and the government officials. Marianne was very adept at navigating the political land mines, and developed close relationships with all. She saw a need for a home for healthy girls of parents with leprosy, and founded Kapi'olani Home in Honolulu. She traveled to Maui and set up a hospital and school at Wailuku

In November, 1888, Mother Marianne and two of the sisters went to the leprosy colony on the peninsula on Moloka'i. Mother Marianne knew she would never see New York again. Fr. Damien was ministering to the boys at Kalawao, and Mother Marianne and her sisters cared for the women and girls at the new Bishop House at Kalaupapa. Fr. Damien had already contracted leprosy, and Marianne ministered to him until he died 6 months later on April 15, 1889. She was then put in charge of the boys of Kalawao as well as the women and girls of Kalaupapa, until a replacement for Fr. Damien could be found.

Mother Marianne continued her work with the lepers for the rest of her life. When she died she had worked with the lepers for 35 years. She died of kidney and heart disease at age 80 on August 9, 1918. She never contracted the disease. Was this due to divine intervention, or her insistence on strict sanitation standards?

Beatification and Sainthood

Sister Mary Laurence Hanley was a Sister of St. Francis in Syracuse, New York for 67 years. For 37 of those years, she devoted her talents and energies as the Director of the Cause of Blessed Mother Marianne Cope. It was she who got the "cause" presented before the Cardinals and Pope in Rome. Before Sister Mary Laurence died in 2011, she was able to see Mother Marianne beatified, but not canonized.

First miracle

In 1993, Katherine Dehlia Mahoney (Kate Mahoney), a 14 year old who lived in Utica, New York, was diagnosed with germ cell ovarian cancer. After surgery and chemotherapy, she became gravely ill. Sr. Mary Laurence visited Kate and touched her with a relic of Sister Marianne. After an intercessory prayer crusade by Kate's family, the Sisters of St. Francis at the Syracuse Motherhouse, and the hospital workers, Kate was healed of multiple organ failure.

October, 2003, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints declared Mother Marianna to have been "heroically virtuous."

In April, 2004, Pope John Paul II declared her Venerable.

On May 14, 2005 she was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI, his first beatification ceremony. Over 100 followers from Hawaii and 300 Franciscan Sister attended. For this ceremony, her remains had to be exhumed so they could be moved from Kalaupapa to the Mother House in Syracuse, N.Y., where a temporary shrine was established in her honor. Many of the Sisters, patients and residents were present for the exhumation at Kalaupapa. There were many mixed feelings about her remains leaving,

but some factors softened the impact of this event. Not all of the fragments could be removed so some of them remained in the ground and this was very consoling to the residents who loved her.

A second miracle occurred in 2005, a New York woman named Sharon Smith had a critical infection which was shutting down her organs. The doctors said there was nothing else they could do and she was going to die. One of the Franciscan sisters visited Sharon and asked Sharon's friend to pray for an intercession from Mother Marianne Cope. She brought some soil from Mother Marianne's grave and pinned it to Sharon's hospital gown. By January, 2006, Sharon was cured. This life changing experience qualified the Blessed Marianne Cope for sainthood.

On December 6, 2011, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints found that the second miracle could also be attributed to her intercession.

She was canonized by Pope Benedict on October 21, 2012, (just three years after St. Damien was canonized), along with Kateri Tekawitha, a 17th century Native American. She is the first Franciscan woman for North America to be canonized and the 11th American Saint. Her remains were then re-interred at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Peace in Honolulu.

Named the "beloved mother of outcasts", St. Marianne offers a model for the inclusion of all persons and all of God's creation in the spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare. Many praised the sisters who served as missionaries to Hawaii:

"As Franciscans, they drew a different circle, a circle that included rather than excluded. The whole Franciscan mission was started because of a decision by St. Francis to redraw the structure of society – to include anyone / everyone of God's people, and St. Francis always included those with leprosy in his circle of concern".

Saint Marianne Cope Shrine and Museum

We contacted the Sisters of Saint Francis at the Saint Marianne Cope Shrine and Museum in Syracuse, N.Y. They were extremely excited about us giving this report. They sent us a lot of materials. We have prayer cards and a novena to share with all of you. We now have two special destinations for future trips: The Shrine and Museum in Syracuse, and the Kalaupapa National Historic Park on Moloka'i.