

A HEARTY FAREWELL... WITH HEARTFELT GRATITUDE

SISTER BARBARA HAHL, CSC,
RETIRES



Since second grade, Sister Barbara Hahl, CSC, has known she wanted to live her life in service to others. At age 18, she dedicated herself to Christ, entering the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross in South Bend, Indiana.

SISTER BARBARA HAHL, CSC: IN THE HABIT OF SERVING

Because her family moved around a great deal – her father was an engineer and moved his family 10 times before she was 14-years-old – Sister Barbara Hahl, CSC, was familiar with more than one congregation of women religious, but chose Holy Cross because of their mission and kindness. And, although nothing could deter her choice, one interest delayed it for a time.

“I always knew I was called to be a Sister, but baseball kept me from entering the convent sooner,” she recalls with a chuckle. Sister had been an avid follower of the South Bend Blue Sox all through high school. The Blue Sox were part of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League, which existed from 1943 to 1954, and was featured in the 1992 movie “A League of Their Own,” starring Rosie O’Donnell, Geena Davis and Tom Hanks.

“I covered second base and couldn’t let my teammates down by not finishing the season, so following high school graduation in 1956, I delayed entry into the order until the season ended,” she says.

Sister Barbara entered on September 15, the Feast Day of Our Lady of Sorrows. Sister’s delay until this date was prophetic because that’s the same date upon which the Sisters of the Holy Cross chose in 1903 to found the Mount Carmel School of Nursing. She has served on the Board of Trustees since 1994, when MCCN graduated its first class after having transitioned from the School of Nursing in 1990.

In 1956, the majority of Sisters in the United States were afforded only two career choices: nursing or teaching. Sister Barbara started as a math major at Saint Mary’s College – across from the University of Notre Dame – but quickly chose to follow her love of music, art and culture by switching her major to history.

“I wore the postulant habit to class and didn’t really care for it. A three-quarter length skirt with waist-length cape and veil was quite an encumbrance, but I wore it for one year until I made my first vows in 1959 and took the full habit with white veil,” she recalls.

After first vows, postulants began learning more about theology, church history and philosophy, while finishing their degrees in secular subjects.

Sister Barbara took the black veil upon making her Final Profession of Vows in 1962, at which time she was given the heart-shaped medallion she faithfully wears to this day.

“Before too long, many who had taken vows at the same time I did began leaving religious life and today there are only a few from my cohort left,” she says. According to Georgetown University’s Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate study, the number of women religious in the United States declined from 180,000 in 1965 to fewer than 50,000 by 2014. The Second Vatican Council (1962—1965) accounted for most of the losses; societal changes leading to expanding career opportunities for women accounted for the rest.

TEACHING AND HEALTH CARE

After earning her 1966 undergraduate degree in history, Sister’s baseball experience came into play. Having been in a fielding position, she was well-equipped to juggle the myriad of students for whom she would be responsible over the next 15 years. She taught everywhere from the upper-class community of Valparaiso, Indiana, to the inner city of Chicago and places in between, alternately serving as elementary or high school classroom teacher, and principal.

By the time she earned her graduate degree in history from Indiana University in 1972, Sister Barbara – along with women religious from most U.S. congregations – had left her habit behind and begun thinking about the next play.

Her experience on a baseball diamond again came in handy, as she was able to quickly pivot to respond to her interest in – and aptitude for – health care. Holy Cross Hospital in Salt Lake City was her first health care assignment. While there, she took engineering classes at the University of Utah to help in her work with management engineers at the hospital.

“While I was at Holy Cross, they asked me to take over the medical records department, which was in disarray to say the least,” she recalls. “With computer equipment and the electronic medical record just coming on the scene, I was able to clean that up in about two years and was recruited back to South Bend as a planner at St. Joseph’s Hospital.

“In 1981, I received a call from Sister Carolita (Sister M. Carolita Hart, CSC, administrator from 1979—1982) who was heading up Mount Carmel East, which at that time had only been open about 10 years. She was looking for an assistant administrator, and that is how I came to be in Columbus, Ohio,” she notes.

MISSION AND COMMUNITY AT THE FOREFRONT

Sister Barbara’s ability to take the long view, anticipate actions and react quickly were welcome attributes in modernizing systems at the new hospital, which drew upon her experience in computers and engineering management.

“The buzzword in health care then was ‘data driven,’ as I recall. I spent two summers back at Notre Dame to earn my MBA (Master of Business Administration), which I think helped me do a better job in overseeing administrative areas and later, some clinical areas,” she says.



In 1983, Sister Gladys Marie Martin, CSC, arrived from California as CEO of the then soon-to-be incorporated Mount Carmel Health System and, recognizing Sister Barbara's business acumen as well as team-player attitude, Sister Gladys put her in charge of all new building projects.

"I had already overseen construction of the new wing at Mount Carmel East and was asked to oversee construction of the new patient tower at Mount Carmel West. At that time, the convent – which was quite old and in need of drastic maintenance, was demolished on the Franklinton campus. I really felt I didn't know much about the building trades, but I learned quickly," she chuckles, adding, "from that time it seemed any new business that came on board, I was put in charge."

Mount Carmel Health System took shape during this period, and Sister Barbara helped to create community businesses such as Hospice, Homecare, several Outreach programs, and a host of other endeavors that are now part of Mount Carmel. Sister remained in business development roles until 1996, when she moved into overseeing Mission, a

role she fulfilled for more than two decades until 2018, when she was named senior vice president, Community Services. In 2019 she continued in that role as emeritus, and in December 2020 returned to the Motherhouse of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Cross in South Bend, Indiana.

"Of course, reaching out to serve in the spirit of the Gospel has always been key in whatever activity I've been part of," Sister Barbara asserts, explaining that Mount Carmel has long had a good batting average with the community, starting more than 130 years ago with the Sisters of the Holy Cross coming to Columbus in 1886 to administer the hospital, to present-day care provided through the Mobile Coach and street medicine team.

"These concerns will always remain 'home base' for me – seeing that the lost, the poor, and the underserved are treated with reverence, dignity and respect. And, I will continue to pray for them and for Mount Carmel," she adds.

Well played, Sister, well played!

SISTER BARBARA HAHL, CSC, RECEIVES HONORARY DEGREE



Sister Barbara Hahl, CSC, senior vice president emeritus, Community Health and Well-Being, Mount Carmel Health System, was lauded with the MCCN Honorary Doctorate, Doctor of Laws, in recognition of her long service on the College's

Board of Trustees and her commitment to keeping the Mission, Vision and Core Values of the College at the forefront of its decisions and deliberations.

"We are delighted to honor Sister Barbara, who has served on the College's Board of Trustees for many years," said Tanya Hahn, chair of MCCN's Board of Trustees. "We also honor Sister in her retirement from Mount Carmel, and for representing our founders, the Sisters of the Holy Cross."

In November 2020, Sister Barbara was honored by the Ohio Hospital Association with the James R. Castle Distinguished Service Award. Congratulations to Sister for these honors, her long service, and well-deserved retirement.

