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## Sister Julia Mary's second career

By R. W. DELLINGER

text only version

Nearing 60 - an age when most people are slowing down and looking forward to, hopefully, many golden years of retirement bliss - Sister Julia Mary Farley was pondering a whole new career challenge after decades as a hospital administrator in Tucson, northern California and Los Angeles at Queen of Angels and Daniel Freeman hospitals.

In 1984, Cardinal Timothy Manning had asked Auxiliary Bishop John Ward and Msgrs. Benjamin Hawkes and Patrick Languille to combine resources and establish a program providing emergency services to homeless women - the so-called "bag ladies" spilling out of the fringes of Los Angeles' burgeoning skid row.



But as often the case in the Church then and now, the nitty-gritty business of getting the high-minded project off the ground fell on the sturdy shoulders of a woman religious.

"I'm not sure how I got involved; somehow or other being Irishmen, we knew each other," recalls 84-year-old Sister Farley, barely a month after retiring July 1 as the founding director of the Good Shepherd Center for Homeless Women and Children.

Under her leadership since its stark beginnings in a former Los Angeles convent, Good Shepherd Center today includes not only an emergency shelter and drop-in center, but also four other transitional and long-term housing residences offering a wide-array of support services for homeless women and their children.

"Cardinal Manning would see the homeless women there in the area of St. Vibiana's [Cathedral]," she continues. "And I think I was wanting to change. So when he suggested it, you know, the suggestion was something that I very much wanted to do. I would say he read my mind. Then we were able to use the former convent of Our Lady of Loretto Parish as our first house for the homeless women: 267 North Belmont.

"So it all worked out very well. People were very generous, and the homeless were very much in number. People could see them on the streets. So that's how it all happened."

### The Women's Village

Of course, the development and expansion of the Good Shepherd Center - which is now recognized as a national model for helping homeless mothers and single women make the difficult transition back into mainstream society - couldn't possibly have happened without the steady guiding hand, organizational and management skills, plus the fund-raising expertise of a compassionate yet savvy individual at the helm.

Sister Farley laughs when reminded that her second career, which lasted 26 years, was arguably even more challenging and productive than her earlier hospital work, which she professionally trained for earning a Master of Health Administration degree at



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UCLA. The little mom-and-pop shelter on Belmont Street has developed into an innovative combination of services called The Women's Village, made up of three distinct phases with services that address different issues homeless women can face as they move toward independence.

Phase I, the Hawkes Residence, offers transitional housing and supportive services to formerly homeless women. The Angel Guardian Home, phase II, provides long-term two-bedroom apartments for women with disabilities and their minor children. And phase III, the Sister Julia Mary Farley Center, has 21 one-bedroom apartments for single women who are working and going to school but need more time to successfully transition into independent lives.



The center also offers services - including a computer lab, job-training and career center, and The Village Kitchen, which combines a culinary arts job training program with a café open to the public - to all residents of Good Shepherd's facilities.

Sister Farley's own transition from hospital administrator to homeless provider was anything but difficult, even though she had never worked with homeless women or men before.

"I didn't find it hard," she recalls. "I just saw the women and children as people in need, and that's what life is all about - to help one another. And you use that past experience that you have. That's a great help, too, the past experience in working with people and getting people's help. People skills are very important because you can't do all of this unless you get the help of others - and also, you know, the money."

When told that her own administrative skills must have been a major factor in the success and growth of the Good Shepherd Center, she makes a face.

"I don't know about that," she quips with a chuckle. "I know it didn't happen by itself. But if it's the Lord's work, then you're motivated by that in terms of helping people. That's part of being a religious. How are you going to help people? Well, you can help the homeless. They certainly need help."

### Chicago Irish

Growing up in Chicago in the 1930s and '40s, Sister Julia Mary Farley thought a lot about entering religious life someday. An aunt was a Sister of Notre Dame of Indiana. And being the youngest in an Irish Catholic family of six kids, she was moved when her next older brother entered the seminary. But then World War II broke out, he enlisted in the Marines and was one of the 7,100 U.S. casualties in the Battle of Guadalcanal.

When asked how her own vocation came about, an inquisitive expression comes across her face. "Hmmm," she hums, before observing, "Well, it came from the Lord." After a chuckle, she adds matter of factly, "I was raised in Chicago and came out [to Los Angeles] with my family after I finished high school. Then I became acquainted with our Sisters, and finally asked if they'd take me in." Another quick chuckle. "And that's how it happened.

"I became a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet in 1951. I liked the service that they rendered in helping to take care of the poor and those who were in need. When I was a novice and talking to my novice director and she asked, 'Why did you come?' I said, 'Oh, to teach.' And she said, 'Well, you know, the community will decide that, but it will depend on different circumstances.' So I never did get to teach."

Instead, circumstances took her on a quite different path: to St.

Joseph's Hospital in Lewiston, Idaho, and then Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Pasco, Washington. She was named administrator of St. Mary's Hospital in Tucson in 1965, and wound up her hospital career at Daniel Freeman Hospitals in Inglewood and Marina del Rey.

In 1983, she joined the staff of Catholic Charities of Los Angeles, working at Angel's Flight, the organization's shelter and outreach ministry to runaway and homeless youth in Hollywood. And a year later, she founded the Good Shepherd Center. Today the center serves more than 3,500 homeless women and children every year.

"Certainly one of the main joys of working with the homeless is giving them a place to stay and what they need in the way of food and building themselves up," says Sister Farley, who still wears the traditional CSJ black habit "And then providing them with whatever you could in terms of job opportunities. So if they can get a job, then they wouldn't be homeless no more.

"I definitely have enjoyed the one-on-one contact with women and children. I mean, being able to help people in that way, it's gratification for yourself also. Because you realize that what you're offering them is accepted and when they improve then they can help others improve. And, of course, seeing women grow and develop is wonderful."

### 'A great tragedy'

She admits there have been disappointments, too.

"The women have to want to change," she notes. "You can't do it for them. I don't know if I've gotten frustrated. I think I prayed over them. But you can only do so much for a person. If the person won't accept that help, what more can you do? So, yes, you do see people who don't want to change or those who go back to their old ways. It's a great tragedy."



In the next breath, however, Sister Farley's voice returns to its upbeat mode. She reports there have been more than enough positives in the quarter century of her second career to balance out the negatives. Moreover, a tenacious Irish Catholic faith nurtured while growing up in Chicago, where one's neighborhood was defined by the parish you belonged to, has sustained her for almost six decades as a Sister of St. Joseph.

"Faith and prayer and the realization that you're helping people does that," she muses with a knowing smile. "That's part of being a religious, I think, to use whatever God has given you to help other people. We've got to make the world a better place, got to keep working at it."

*This is the first in an ongoing series of interviews with California women religious, who reflect on their ministries, spiritual life and the Church, past and present.*

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