

# Howard County retreat center celebrates 50 years

MARRIOTTSVILLE - When Sister Rose Marie Jasinski entered the Sisters of Bon Secours, she was in the first group to begin formation at the order's new building on more than 300 acres in Howard County.

That was in the early 1960s, and religious vocations shortly after saw a decline. Within a few years, it was determined that the building would not be full of young women in formation, but that did not discourage the sisters from finding a new use for the facility.

The Retreat and Conference Center at Bon Secours opened in 1968, and it has been contributing to the order's mission of healing the mind, body and spirit ever since. It is celebrating its 50th anniversary throughout the 2018 year.

"(The retreat center) is part of our overall healing ministry," said Sister Rose Marie, who now serves as the country leader, overseeing all Sisters of Bon Secours in the United States. "We consider our healing ministry to be very holistic."

Each year, the center hosts approximately 150 retreats sponsored by the center and 300 conferences held by outside organizations. Some are overnight programs, and guests stay in the 70 overnight guest rooms, each with its own bathroom. The cross-shaped building also features a chapel; rooms in various set-ups for small- and large-group discussions and presentations; up-to-date technology for presentations; open-air and enclosed porches; a dining hall; and a gift shop.

A lake, gazebo, labyrinth and Peace Garden complete the outdoor spaces.

To celebrate the center's anniversary, a Pathway of Peace is being installed, creating an easy walkway from the center to the Peace Garden. Bricks can be purchased and personalized with an inscription to support the retreat ministry at Bon Secours.

"In this world environment, you can't have enough peaceful places around," Sister Rose Marie said.

The retreat center is open to the public and welcomes visitors for daily Mass or as a place to unwind. It is said that if a person visits, the only question someone will ask is whether or not he or she would like a cup of coffee.

The building has a fitness center and Wi-Fi. Some people book a stay at the retreat center as an individual. Spiritual directors are also available upon request.

"The property is big enough that you can just be with yourself in the midst of a lot of other things going on," said Paul Gallagher, the founder of Making All Things New, a program that uses the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola to guide those with chronic illnesses.

Gallagher started hosting three-day retreats at Bon Secours while working on his doctor of ministry degree from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Ignatian Spirituality has the characteristic of *cora personalis*, Latin for "care for the whole person," and the center helps him focus on this through his retreats.

"Bon Secours touches all three of those aspects (body, mind and spirit) and addresses them very nicely," Gallagher said.

The dining staff works with him to create healthful meal choices, and the bookstore stocks books that he recommends to retreatants.

Gallagher said he has heard retreatants say they feel "cared for" at the center, and

he agrees wholeheartedly. He said dealing with a chronic illness can be dejecting, but Bon Secours is kind and uplifting to all visitors.

Many Sisters of Bon Secours work in healthcare, as Sister Rose Marie - a Baltimore native and product of Shrine of the Little Flower Parish school and The Catholic High School of Baltimore - did as a nurse for the majority of her career. The corporate offices for the Bon Secours Health System are located on a different section of the Marriottsville property.

There are currently 30 sisters in the United States, and a handful more in formation. Sister Rose Marie said the numbers are not concerning to the order, which has always been small. The work of Bon Secours, she said, is carried out by many people - religious women and lay employees side-by-side.

On the property are multiple townhomes where some of the Baltimore-area sisters live. Women in formation also live in the property's townhomes, which Sister Rose Marie said makes it feel full-circle.

The Sisters of Bon Secours in the United States meet at the retreat center twice each year in May and November and are able to enjoy the space.

"We consider this our home," Sister Rose Marie said. "But we're very happy to share our home."

Click [here](#) for a schedule of events at Bon Secours.