RELIGIOUS OF THE SACRED HEART OF MARY

UT VITAM HABEANT

Highlights

Eastern American Area

Spring 2025

Rooted in Mission, Rebuilt by Love:

Marymount Los Angeles and the Palisades Fire

On January 7, 2025, fire swept through the canyons and coastlines of Los Angeles, leaving behind scorched earth, collapsed homes, and families forced to flee with little more than what they could carry. Nearly 20% of our Marymount families were displaced. Some lost everything. Others waited in the unbearable in-between, uncertain whether anything could be salvaged. The impact was both immediate and lingering — a wound that reached deep into our hearts and community.

And yet, amid the smoke and ash, something holy happened: we were held.

Our school community came together with a kind of love that doesn't need to be taught — it simply rises when people choose one another. Parents opened their homes. Students organized drives. Faculty showed up with presence and tenderness. Our Pavilion became more than a place where athletes stretched their limits; it became a place of comfort, where grief met grace, and resilience quietly took root as our community came together and filled it with meaningful donations for our extended Marymount family.

But perhaps the most humbling and hope-filled part of our journey was discovering that the love stretched far beyond our own hilltop. Across the country, Marymount New York reached out — not with a press release or a distant sentiment, but with prayers, funds, handwritten notes, and deep compassion. In a moment of overwhelming need, *you saw us*. And you moved toward us with open hands and open hearts.

You reminded us what it means to be a global network not just in name, but in spirit. What it means to be rooted in the charism of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary: to respond with action, to accompany with love, and to never look away from the suffering of another. Your generosity brought tangible relief — but even more than that, it brought us back to ourselves. It reminded us that we are not alone, that the mission binds us across oceans and ZIP codes, and that the heart of this work is — and always will be — love.

As we entered Holy Week, we were more attuned than ever to the story of loss and resurrection. Through your solidarity, we felt the stirrings of Easter morning — the quiet return of hope, and the strength to begin again.

From all of us at Marymount Los Angeles: thank you. You were the outstretched hand when we needed it most. You were the light flickering in the dark. You were family.

Dawn Regan, Interim Head, Marymount High School Los Angeles

A Response from the Leadership Conference of Women Religious to These Times

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) is an association of the leaders of congregations of Catholic women religious in the United States. The conference has nearly 1270 members, who represent approximately 66 percent of the 35,000 women religious in the United States. Founded in 1956, the conference assists its members to collaboratively carry out their service of leadership to further the mission of the Gospel in today's world. As members of LCWR, the RSHM felt it important to share with you LCWR's response to these tumultuous times.

Over the last several years we have watched with grave concern a global and national shift in values and priorities that is negatively impacting the health of the planet and the lives of millions of its most vulnerable inhabitants. Policies enacted by many governments, including our own in the United States, as well as choices being made by citizens, point to a rapid dismantling of values that we consider bedrock for the future of the global community.

During these years, we have continuously discerned how we, as women religious, can most effectively respond to these shifts. Recent changes in this nation point to a need for us to consider this question with great seriousness and to live our vocational call as women religious with a depth that may have never been required of us previously. The public proclamation each of us made at our profession of vows reminds us of our responsibility to be women of God living amid the deep challenges of the world – fearless of embracing and embodying the priorities of the Gospel.

What we are witnessing in society today goes against the principles that we, as Catholic sisters, have labored for centuries to nurture and protect. Recalling these beliefs is an important exercise for us as we are confronted with rhetoric that urges us to change course and actions that oppose our principles. These values, around which we have spoken publicly and that have guided our lives, include:

- The belief in the inherent right to life of all human beings and the dignity of each life
- The commitment to the Gospel demands of love, welcome, and care for all people, especially those who are most vulnerable
- The duty to welcome immigrants and provide care and aid to all in our land, while insisting on comprehensive immigration reform
- The responsibility to stand against violence in all its forms
- The commitment to dismantle systemic racism
- The belief that care of our planet Earth requires our attention and action
- Respect for the journey of all persons into the wholeness of their humanness
- The work to alleviate poverty in all forms

Staying steadfast to these principles in the face of powerful forces working towards contrary purposes may be one of the hardest challenges we will encounter – collectively and individually. The efforts to be the face of compassion and hope amid actions that create chaos and fear will not be easy. This is a time when we will need one another, and a time when we can lend our voices and our support to many of the organizations and people of faith who are laboring to bear witness to the dignity of each person.

We are now facing a time that differs in many significant ways from any previous period in which most of us have lived. Lives around us are at stake. All evidence shows that we will be seeing an increase in moral violations.

In the time ahead, we will need to be women who stay informed, listen carefully to all voices and perspectives, and engage in serious and deep discernment to make wise choices so that we do not contribute hatred, fear, division, or violence to the world. Our decisions should lead us to become even more fully who we are called to be – bearers of love who refuse to relinquish our moral authority nor languish in despair. May we wholeheartedly embrace the call of the church to be people of hope and live this call with all our being for the sake of the world and its future.

Faith in Action: Six Decades of Ministry and Mission

A native of the Washington Heights area of northern Manhattan in New York City, Sister Mary Lang's RSHM journey has taken her to numerous locations to minister to marginalized groups in our society.

L to R: Postulant Mary Lang, Sr. Barbara West, RSHM, and Novice Sr. Robert Marie

Sr. Mary (pink vest) celebrating Palm Sunday Mass with children in one of Amacuzac's pueblitos.

Mary attended the Academy of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Park Terrace, entered the community in 1963, and was professed in 1965, so she is celebrating her 60th jubilee this year. After teaching for a few years at Marymount School of New York, Mary embarked on a journey that would characterize her religious life. A friend from grammar school who had volunteered in the mission Diocese of Pueblo, Colorado, encouraged Mary, along with two other RSHM Sisters, to participate in a summer program there. This led to their receiving permission from the provincial, Sister Jogues Egan, RSHM, to establish a team ministry serving the Hispanic community at Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Pueblo.

In Pueblo, Mary also worked at a state home and training school for developmentally disabled adults. This experience introduced her to special education and, in 1973-74, she received a grant enabling her to earn her master's degree in special education at Teachers College, Columbia University. She then worked with adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities at AHRC in the Bronx, NY.

During her "vacations," Mary spent one summer in Bogota, Colombia, studying and living with a family and working on her Spanish. In 1978, she spent time in Honduras working with orphans.

Then came a call from Sister Kathleen Fagan's, RSHM, brother, Monsignor Emmett Fagan, who invited Mary to help for a month as a residential supervisor at Regina Residence in Long Island in a program for young pregnant women. The month became seven years that Mary still treasures. Coaching the women through labor and delivery led her in 1986 to nursing school at Marymount University in Arlington, VA. In 1988, Mary began nursing at Franklin General Hospital (now Long Island Jewish Valley Stream), not in obstetrics but in the psychiatric unit where she found incredible meaning in being a listener.

By 1993, another invitation arrived, this time from Sister Mary Heyser, RSHM, who was directing the Campaign for Human Development in the Diocese of Venice, Florida. Both Marys, and Maureen Kelleher, RSHM, an immigration attorney, lived in Immokalee, FL where sisters from various congregations were ministering, with Mary Lang providing health care to immigrants through a community outreach program.

Two years later, another phone call came as Sister Martina Crowley, RSHM, the provincial, invited Mary to go to Mexico to join sisters from the Eastern and Western American Provinces and the Province of Brazil to establish an interprovincial community and ministry in Amacuzac. Mary remained until 1999; the RSHM stayed in Amacuzac until June 2014.

Returning to New York after a sabbatical, Mary's ministry shifted again. In 2002, with Sister Frances Lane, RSHM, she co-founded our RSHM ministry at Centro Corazón de María, established at St. Rosalie's Parish in Hampton Bays, Long Island, a ministry that continues today. Mary remained for 16 years, engaged in a variety of programs "to help newly arrived individuals and families become independent successful contributors to the community."

When Mary retired from Centro Corazón de María in 2018, she returned to Immokalee to work with immigrants. Then, in 2019, she traveled with Sister Mary Heyser and Extended Family member Clare Horn to the border to Annunciation House in El Paso, TX, and again in 2021, towards the end of the COVID pandemic, to Laredo with Clare to volunteer with other religious in processing and assisting arriving immigrants from Mexico and Central America.

Then, in what had been a pattern in her life, she received another phone call from leadership, this time from Sister Catherine Patten, RSHM, who asked her to join the Marymount Convent community and staff. At present, Mary continues at the convent while also volunteering at the RSHM LIFE Center Legal Services office and at the Grace Episcopal Church food pantry in Ossining.

Mary's RSHM life has been one of always saying "yes" to unexpected invitations to, in the words of our mission statement, enable "the powerless, the deprived, the marginalized, the voiceless to work effectively for their own development and liberation." On the occasion of her 60th Jubilee, we celebrate her with our admiration, gratitude and prayers.

Joanne Safian, RSHM

UN Remains Committed to Global Social

Earlier this year, I attended the 63rd Session of the Commission for Social Development (CSocD) at the United Nations. This commission, one of eight created by the UN's Economic and Social Council in 1946, advises and assists in carrying out the UN's work. In 1995, CSocD convened the inaugural World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, Denmark, where participating governments agreed on the need for people-centered development and pledged to eradicate poverty, create full employment, and foster social integration.

This year's session focused on strengthening social solidarity, inclusion, and cohesion as member states continue working towards fulfilling the commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development. They also looked forward to the 2nd World Summit for Social Development, scheduled to be held in Doha, Qatar, in November 2025.

On my first day, I attended part of the Ministerial Forum on strengthening solidarity and social cohesion. Later, I participated in a side event, *From Copenhagen to Doha: Advancing the Global Social Development Agenda.* Both sessions featured ministers from various member states, including Finland, Sweden, Guatemala, Uganda, Djibouti, Qatar, Poland, Belgium, and Iraq. Common themes included actions and policies, sharing experiences, and best practices for strengthening solidarity. The goal of the Commission for Social Development is clear: people-centered development, ensuring no member of society is left behind.

H.E. Ambassador Krzysztof Maria Szczerski, Permanent Representative of Poland to the UN and Chair of the Bureau for CSocD63, highlighted how the world has changed over the past 30 years since Copenhagen. He emphasized the need for member states to assess current challenges — including poverty, inequality, natural disasters, climate change, misinformation, and the erosion of trust — and reaffirm their commitments to sustainable societies and social justice. Policies must be anchored in inclusion, social justice, and solidarity, with solutions focused on tangible results, including poverty reduction, social integration, and employment for all.

At the Civil Society Forum on Friday, representatives from various civil society organizations, including NGOs and community groups, gathered to exchange ideas, amplify their work's impact, and ensure that the voices of the marginalized are heard by policymakers. Ambassador Szczerski stated that civil society has led the way in focusing on people's well-being, shaping global policy discussions, and holding politicians and governments accountable. He reminded attendees that social development cannot be an afterthought; it must be an integral part of nations' planning processes.

Navid Hanif, Assistant Secretary-General of Economic Affairs, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), discussed the economic dimension of social inclusion and emphasized that civil society serves as the moral compass for the UN. Noting that progress in existing programs has been mixed and that inequalities continue to increase, he called inequality "the disease," with poverty as its "symptom." To achieve peace, we must address inequality.

Matthias Jobelius, Executive Director of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung United Nations and Global Dialogue, focused on challenges such as the rise of nationalism, climate change, inequality, and wealth concentration in the hands of a few. He suggested that instead of focusing on poverty, we should address extreme wealth. Concentrated economic power often translates into political power, with the wealth of the richest 10 billionaires growing by $100 million per day. However, thanks to the efforts of civil society, trade organizations, the UN, and others, new political initiatives like establishing a minimum corporate tax and taxing high net-worth individuals are under consideration.

Continuing this discussion on wealth and finance, Anita Thomas, Chair of the NGO Committee on Financing and Development, emphasized that solidarity must be more than rhetoric. She advocated for financial systems that promote debt relief, tax restructuring, and sovereign debt reorganization. Civil society and NGOs must actively engage in financial discourse to address inequality and ensure social development is integrated into financial planning.

In another panel on "Grassroots Perspectives and Intergenerational Collaboration in Strengthening Solidarity, Social Inclusion, and Social Cohesion," speakers highlighted the frequent exclusion of young people and women from decision-making processes. The need to remove barriers to participation for young people, older adults, indigenous peoples, and women was underscored. A panelist from Kenya posed a thought-provoking question: "What do I do every day to be inclusive?"

It was inspiring to witness many nations' commitment to ending inequities and promoting social justice on a global scale. I was heartened to see how members of civil society can influence policies at local, regional, national, and global levels.

Cathy Wilkins
Director, Communications & Advancement

Justice

L to R: Sofija Kac, RSHM-NGO intern, and Sr. Veronica Brand, RSHM

L to R: Sr. MaryBeth Moore, SC, Virginia Dorgan, RSHM, and Sr. Veronica Brand, RSHM

I CALLED AND YOU ANSWERED

– Psalm 138:3

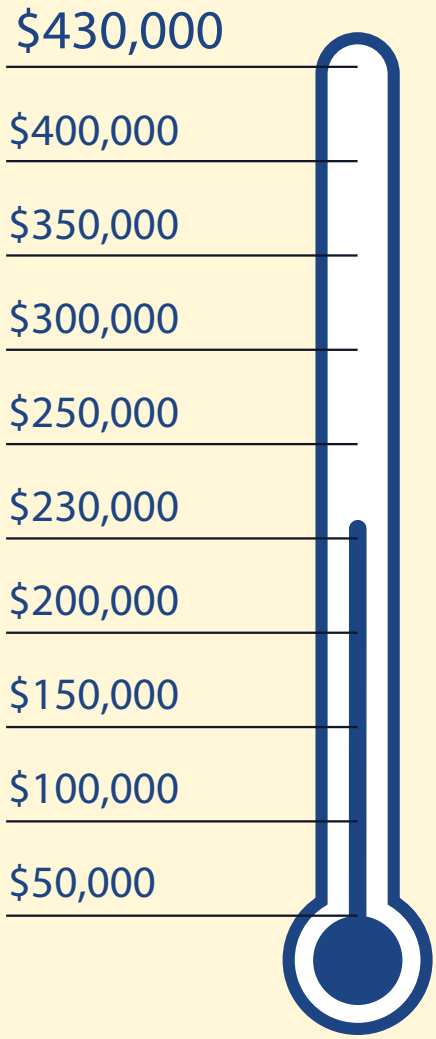
Thank you to all who have responded to our request for support to fund the replacement of the entire Call Bell System (medical alert system) which is critical to ensure that our sisters receive comprehensive care, especially in times of emergency.

The existing system was designed to offer instant response when a convent resident needs help and is an invaluable component of the health and safety of the community. The **current system has exhausted its useful economic life, and legacy parts are no longer available**, making repairs to the system problematic. The scope of work includes the replacement of the system (wall units and in-room emergency communications) and the introduction of wearable lanyards or pendants aiding any affected individual on-site outside the radius of a mechanical pull cord. The peace of mind this will give resident sisters and staff will be priceless.

Thanks to your generosity, we are half-way to our goal of $430,000.

If you would like to help meet our goal, you can mail your donation to:

RSHM Advancement Office
50 Wilson Park Dr
Tarrytown, NY 10591



Please make checks payable to the **Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary**.

If you would prefer to donate by credit card, you can call **914.631.4407**, or to donate online, visit **rshm-east.org/donate**, then, select Project Call Bell from the drop-down box.

CSW69: Celebrating Wins, Confronting

In March, the United Nations hosted the 69th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW69), marking the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to empower women and work towards achieving gender equality. The platform for action addresses poverty, education, health, violence, armed conflict, the economy, power and decision making, institutional mechanisms, human rights, media, environment and the girl child. I was able to join Sister Veronica Brand, RSHM, our NGO representative, in attending several presentations during the Commission.

While there have been successes and advances over the years, there is still much work to be done to create a more equitable and just world for women. The feminization of poverty, unemployment, climate change, continued violence against women and the exclusion of women from leadership roles in governments and institutions of power are challenges that have yet to be overcome. We were consistently reminded, "Women's rights are human rights."

Sessions addressed various economic and social issues impacting women and several advocates shared their inspirational stories of overcoming poverty, domestic violence, sexual harassment and gender-based violence to become activists for women's rights in their home countries and around the globe.

One of the most pressing issues facing women and families today is that of human trafficking. Panelists shared multinational efforts underway to bankrupt the business of human trafficking through data sciences and financial intelligence. As a highly organized criminal enterprise, human trafficking generates $236 billion annually and 27.6 million victims. Data scientists now employ artificial intelligence to track financial activity and develop predictive capabilities. This helps determine where traffickers operate, how best to disrupt the "supply chain" and establish criteria to help identify victims of trafficking. Additionally, countries and municipalities must continue to strengthen policies and enforcement, increase the use of financial intelligence units and continue collaboration across the globe.

While not exclusively a "women's issue," extractivisim, or the extracting of raw materials for sale on the global market, often with limited processing in the region where they are extracted, places a significantly larger burden on women. Extractivisim results in environmental degradation, including pollution and depletion of water resources. Women, especially in rural and indigenous communities, bear the brunt of these impacts as primary managers of their households and community water supplies. According to data from the World Health Organization, more than 1.8 billion people worldwide live in households without accessible water supplies. In Guatemala, transnational companies have depleted resources and contaminated water sources through clear-cutting forests and mining. Here, indigenous women are leading the resistance and rallying their communities to stand up for their rights, despite facing violence, displacement, criminalization and humiliation.

Similarly, women in conflict zones suffer when water is allocated to citizens disproportionally, a situation often described as the "weaponization of water." For example, following the 1967 Arab – Israeli War, Israel confiscated all wells and springs in Gaza and the West Bank, restricting access. Daily water allocations for individual use in drinking, cooking, bathing and sanitation were capped at 19 gallons for Palestinians compared to the 79 gallons for Israeli settlers in the occupied territories of the West Bank. Palestinian women face additional threats as they travel farther to collect the water, negotiate check points, wait in long lines or run the risk of being harmed. Since the most recent conflict in Gaza, 90% of the water there is unfit for consumption. Of the 10% of potable water available, each of the 2.4 million people in Gaza are only permitted a daily emergency ration of 13 gallons. Despite these life-threatening circumstances, Palestinian women continue to advocate on behalf of their people.

In addition to presentations by lay NGO members, scholars and advocates, representatives from several women's religious communities presented a panel, "Women and Church Action for Gender Equality." Sisters who spoke reminded attendees that women have been at the

Challenges in Women's Rights

forefront of the fight for equality for many years citing role models including Mary Ward, founder of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Congregation of Jesus, who in 1617 stated, "Women are in no way inferior to the other half of the human race, namely men."

Panelists also recognized Anna Maria Dengel, founder of the Medical Mission Sisters, for her tenacity, vision and contributions to helping provide necessary medical care to women in the missions particularly during childbirth. In the early 1900s vowed women religious were not permitted by canon law to practice medicine. To circumvent this, Dengel created a "pious society." In 1936, after membership in the "society" had grown, the Church approved sisters' working in medicine and recognized the women as a religious congregation.

Just as they have always done, religious sisters identify the needs of their times and meet challenges head on – creating educational and healthcare institutions, ministering to the poor, marginalized and vulnerable, and supporting the oppressed. While today's issues might seem daunting, sisters continue to follow in their founders' footsteps and remain hopeful knowing that their voices – joined with those of other women around the world – will lead to solutions that are not only sustainable, but also empowering to women and girls.

Cathy Wilkins, Director, Communications & Advancement

UN Photo/Mark Garten

"General Audience with Pope Francis" by Catholic Church (England and Wales) is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

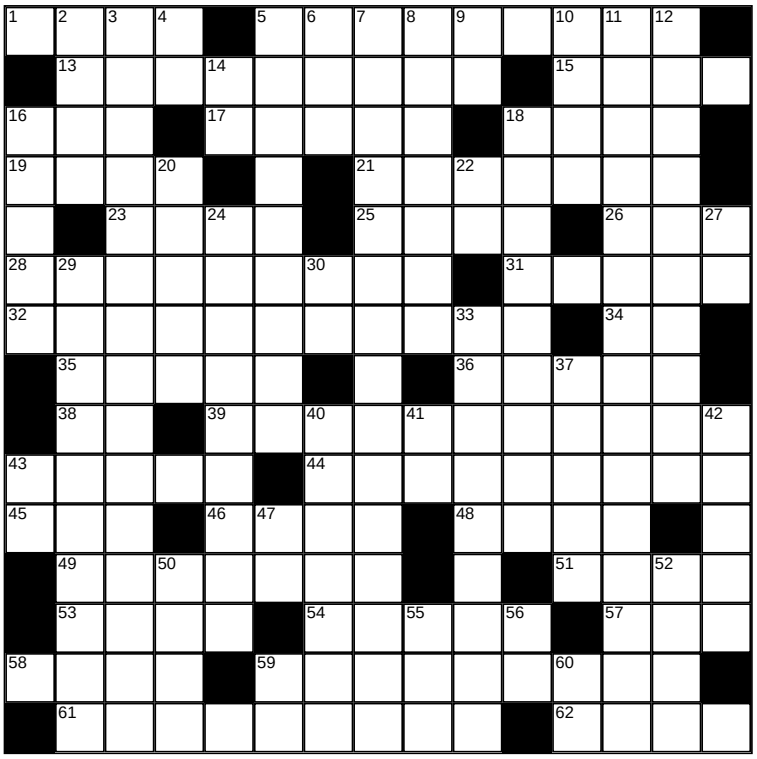
We celebrate the life and legacy of Pope Francis: His care for those marginalized, his passion for creation, his work for peace. May he forever rest in the glory of the Triune God, having served the People of God with Gospel joy.

We congratulate and welcome His Holiness Pope Leo XIV, extending to him our heartfelt wishes and prayers for his ministry as Shepherd of the Universal Church.

Photo/Vatican Media

HIGHLIGHTS PUZZLE: High Church

The themed clues in this puzzle are elevated parts of churches. Answers are posted at: **www.rshm-east.org/category/newsletter**



Across

1 *It's similar to the hollow upper half of a sphere
5 One most skilled at bundling hay
13 Irish actor who played Leopold Bloom in Ulysses
15 Aware of
16 ---ipedia
17 Colorado ski resort
18 Bone marrow transplants, abbr.
19 Summers in Paris
21 *It rhymes with people
23 South American Treaty Organization, abbr.
25 Small stream
26 Female sheep
28 Song: "___ ___ ____ Doodle Dandy"
31 Lehigh University Financial Aid, briefly
32 Immersed in corruption
34 Registered Nurse, abbr.
35 Urban
36 On and on and on
38 Degree after a BA, perhaps
39 Radio Corporation of America in home territory, briefly
43 My Individual Retirement Acct.
44 Traps nocturnal bird of prey
45 Office of Special Services, abbr.
46 New Haven Old Guard, abbr.
48 *Qualifier of bishop or diocese
49 Venetian rowboat
51 Mister in Munich
53 Body of work
54 Agricultural yield online?
57 National Basketball Assoc.
58 Long journey
59 Those who get it?
61 One lost in Paradise?
62 Unit of force in the metric system

Down

2 Leave out
3 Mike's responsibility is the op-ed page, briefly
4 Letter before "em"
5 MD in MA capital
6 Especially, abbr.
7 She's gone to Rent-A-Cop
8 Having ten levels
9 Degree before an MA, perhaps
10 Walk following an injury
11 Ear Nose and Throat Physician learns O.Henry, briefly
12 *...By any other name, still a window
14 Open Access, abbr.
16 We tell little lies
18 *It towers for whom it tolls
20 Speak up
22 Elevated train line, briefly
24 Tasks for the teacher's assistant, briefly
27 East Delaware, abbr.
29 Blood and guts of a mummy?
30 Chemical formula for potassium iodide
33 Approximately when
37 East Newark School, abbr.
40 A single prescription, briefly
41 __ Cl, chemical formula for salt
42 Download American Restaurant Association, abbr.
43 EL__, one of the muppets
47 Three of these and a bottle of rum...
50 Put it in the microwave, briefly:____ it
52 Right Side Broadcasting Network, abbr.
55 Radio Corporation of America, abbr.
56 Puerto Rico, abbr.
59 Pulmonary embolism,abbr.
60 Short form of Edward

Bea McMahon, RSHM

RSHM Highlights is a production of the Communications and Advancement Office of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Eastern America.
Editors: Maureen Egan, Bea McMahon, RSHM, Catherine Vincie, RSHM, Cathy Wilkins, and Clevie Youngblood, RSHM | Design: Barbara DeAngelo

Address Service Requested

Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary
50 Wilson Park Drive
Tarrytown, NY 10591

RELIGIOUS OF THE SACRED HEART OF MARY
UT VITAM HABEANT