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# Patsy M. Iannolo, M.D., Ph.D., P.C.

**Internal Medicine, Emergency Medicine & Pharmacology**

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## History of the founding of the Marian Center

The history of the Marian Center begins in 1990 during a pilgrimage to Medjugorje by Dr Pat and Nancy Iannolo. As strong believer's in Marian Apparitions they heard about Medjugorje in the mid 1980's. After unsuccessful attempts to conceive or adopt a third child of their own over a 7 year period they were encouraged to send a petition to Medjugorje in 1988 by friends who led a pilgrimage that year. Approximately three days after the delivery of the petition to one of the visionaries Pat and Nancy were approached by a local Obstetrician who advised them of his patient who would be giving a baby up for adoption in November.

Their friends led another pilgrimage in July of 1990 and the Iannolo's joined in order to give a personal thank you in Medjugorje. Nancy signed up for the trip as soon as she heard about. Dr. Pat took more time, struggling with the decision to go. "At the time it seemed like there were so many reasons for me not to go and I told everyone all of them. These included professional obligations, the financial difficulties of a failing business enterprise and being 9 time zones away from 3 children in a place where overseas telephone service was not a high priority."

Friends and family started to wear down his resistance. One day at morning Mass the parish priest who was to be the spiritual director for the trip knelt down beside him and asked him 'why are you fighting the Holy Spirit'. According to Dr Pat, " I hadn't looked at it that way before and I hesitated to respond. To be honest I felt I had a close relationship with the Blessed Mother but at the time I felt afraid of Jesus and not close to Him or the Holy Spirit. So I said to Father that I was open to the Spirit but felt that I could experience the fruits of Medjugorje right in Syracuse. I also told him that I had read everything I could obtain regarding the events happening there and was going to regional and national conferences. I expressed that I did not feel that I would gain anything else by going there."

Ultimately, Dr Pat did join the trip and in spite of their financial stresses they brought along their 11 y.o. daughter, Maria, as well as sponsoring a trip for once of the parish Franciscan sisters, Sister Nicollette Vennaro. In looking back he said "Once I made the decision I became excited. In retrospect I had not been telling people my true reservation for making the pilgrimage. While I cannot say that it was the Holy Spirit, I had the strong feeling that in going to Medjugorje my life would be changed. I struggled with whether I wanted to risk that change. At 36 years old I had become adjusted to the life I was living and the responsibilities I was fulfilling. I was afraid of what the change might be." Dr Pat says he finally reached his key insight, "I realized that my previous answer to the priest was easily turned around on me. If the Blessed Mother wanted to change my life for her Son she would do it in Syracuse or Medjugorje, my choice."

The request to Dr. Pat happened on the first night in Medjugorje. "At that time in my medical career I was primarily working nights in the emergency department so my biological clock was never the same as most peoples'. After the overnight plane flight and the ensuing

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days journey I found myself wide awake at 2 a.m. and had gone out to the patio of the guest house to pray a rosary. The patio had a direct view of the cross on Mount Krizevac and I was praying while watching the colors of the cross change. I was all by myself on the patio and a voice spoke to me with a simple message, 'Build a Marian center'. He says, "It was as simple as that and that's all that was said. After all the years of studying apparitions, the travel to and attendance at conferences, the months preparing for that pilgrimage and the long hours spent to reach Medjugorje the thought that I would build a Marian center never lodged in my mind. I had to be sitting on that patio, at that time after the long journey in order to get the message. Now as I am being asked to recall all of this it reminds of Elijah. When Elijah lay down to die in the desert, God could have given him the message. Instead God sent the angel to refresh Elijah and he had to cross the desert and hide in a cave in the mountain. It was then, finally, that God spoke to Elijah in a whisper."

Anyone who knows Dr. Pat would know that once someone gets his wheels turning he likes to dig right in and now he had to spend the rest of the pilgrimage waiting to get started. "It was my first experience with a locution but the gentleness and the import of the message were unmistakable. Furthermore, the change in my life that I was concerned about was actually something I could do. I did not tell anyone about the locution but prayed about it daily. As the week progressed it became obvious to me why the locution came on the first night. The rest of the week was filled with personal and group experiences that served as an affirmation of the request and throughout the week I developed a sense of trust in the Blessed Mother that she would walk with us in this request."

According to Nancy the first time she heard about the locution was the last night of their stay in Medjugorje. "Pat, Maria and I were sleeping in a third floor bedroom of the guest house when we were awakened around 3 a.m. by an earthquake! Everything was shaking and our companions were all running outside to get out of the building. They were calling to us to come out but Pat wasn't making any move to leave. He smiled and told me nothing would happen to us, that we were given a mission by the Blessed Mother and that we had a lot of work to do." Nancy went on to say, "He told me the specifics of the occurrence of the request and his ideas for using the lower level of what is now our office for the center. As usual I raised all the practical questions as we rode out two after-shocks. I reminded him of the financial mess that he had created for us with his construction business dreams and that we had no resources for taking on any other projects. He also knows my strong faith in Our Lord and the Blessed Mother and his ultimate response was to laugh and tell me it was my idea to come to Medjugorje. Then he went back to sleep!"

Once back home Dr. Pat first discussed the locution with his Pastor/Spiritual Advisor. "It was easy to approach Msgr. Yennock about this. He is a wonderfully spiritual priest with a great love for Our Lady. He is also a firm believer in the truth and fruits of Medjugorje. We were in the church by ourselves standing along the right side aisle. As I was explaining the circumstances of the locution and my ideas for a Marian center I noted that he had his hand in his right pocket. The more we talked, the more I could distinctly hear him fingering and

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tumbling his Rosary through his fingers." The decision by Msgr. Yennock to support the Marian center idea was not a quick one that day but it ultimately was a favorable one. He has said, "I wanted to be sure that Pat really knew what he was getting himself into. I understood that there were over 200 Marian Centers in the U.S. at that time and the concept was not a new one. However, I wanted to be sure he understood the spiritual and material challenges of starting an endeavor like this one. Additionally, it was important assess his dedication to this cause as he and Nancy were essentially starting this by themselves from their own funds. They had an empty space, faith and their monthly income. I was intrigued with the high volume of traffic that passed their building each day and that a Marian center would be a unique spiritual outreach for the community. Also, the Iannolo's are wonderful 'people-persons' and I thought the strength of their personalities could carry the endeavor a long way."

Regarding the center having its "roots" in Medjugorje, Msgr. said, "I also wanted to be sure that the center offered a more comprehensive representation of the messages of the Blessed Mother and I emphasized that the center needed to be rooted in the more traditionally accepted apparitions and messages of the Blessed Mother." In agreeing to be the Spiritual Director for the center and supporting the Iannolo's in the community, Msgr. Yennock gave Dr. Pat some initial tasks. "I asked him to obtain the permission of the Bishop, to approach other priests in the area to obtain their opinion, to start "beating the bushes" at the upcoming Sacred Heart Conference in August and to call a meeting to assess the interest level of members of the community for a Marian Center."

According to Dr. Pat the meeting was encouraging and daunting. "Everything he suggested was correct and appropriate. In retrospect I admired his ability to assimilate my request and respond to it in such an insightful way in that *impromptu* meeting. On the other hand I was laughing a bit to myself, too. Here was this group of people including my wife and my Pastor who were encouraging me to go to Medjugorje and I came back with this mission. Now it was my turn to say 'show me your faith'." "After my laugh I was still wondering how to do all of this. I was working almost 120 hours a week at the time and a lot of what had to come next was meant for someone who sat at a telephone and computer most of the day." "I decided to start by looking for interest in core group of people. These included members of our pilgrimage, in particular Peg Sopchak and Joseph and Diane Celentano. Additionally, we met with Fr. John Ahern and Father Stephen Wirkes. They all had a strong belief in the apparitions of Medjugorje and had connections with the local Blue Army and Legion of Mary."

Nancy recalls Dr Pat coming home after the meeting with Monsignor Yennock. "Pat said to me 'Ok here we go' and described for me the challenges and the list of people to contact." "Pat has never shirked challenges and he was really animated with this one." "He told me that Monsignor had given two criteria. First, do not try to duplicate what is being offered in the churches. Second, go ask the permission of the Bishop." Nancy paused and then related the following: "The hard decision was whether we should approach Bishop O'Keefe in person or by letter." "Pat said with his usual dry humor that 'Juan Diego was

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given a better calling card than we had' and I certainly agreed." "Ultimately we decided to ask the permission of the Bishop by letter with the offer of meeting in person if he would like us too and we mentioned that we had engaged the consent of Monsignor Yennock to be the Spiritual Director if the project went forward." "Within the week we had the Bishop's gracious permission to start the Center as an outreach and information center associated with the Diocese of Syracuse."

Over the course of the ensuing year volunteers to build the center, start the newsletter and form the corporation and Board of Trustees all came forward from different parishes and backgrounds. Notable members of the Lay leadership in Syracuse besides those mentioned above included Gloria Anson of the Sacred Heart Center, Jane Pigott of the Theresians and Syracuse Right to Life, Theresa McCarthy(Brusa), Beverly Gualteri, Father Regis Rhoda and Mary Navarra to name just a few of over 50 core people who became involved. Many of them can be seen in the photo gallery. Through suggestions of many and through observing the characteristics of many of the Marian centers across the country at that time the scope of the CNY Marian Center was expanded to include many of the traditional Marian apparitions including Guadalupe, Lourdes and Fatima as well as many others.

Dr Pat and Nancy have many notable memories of the early years and when asked for two of them Dr Pat chose these:

" In the beginning of the Center people were donating statues and stained glass windows for the prayer chapel. At that time Ivan a visionary of Medjugorje was visiting a home west of Syracuse and one of our volunteers was invited. The statue of the Blessed Mother that was donated for the prayer chapel was brought along to the event. On arriving the volunteer was asked to place our statue off to the side of the room as the hosts had already set up a statue of their own for the apparition of our blessed mother." "Ivan was praying in front of the hosts' statue as were the rest of the guests when at the appearance of the Blessed Mother to Ivan he began to walk on his knees away from the hosts' statue to stop in front of the Marian Center statue on the side of the room. Our Lady chose to appear in front of the statue that is in the Marian Center prayer chapel to this day."

" At our 5th Anniversary celebration we were blessed by a visit from Bishop James Moynihan who had succeeded Bishop O'Keefe as Bishop of the Diocese of Syracuse. After all of the warm greetings and hugs all around the Bishop was asked to lead us in a decade of the Rosary." "His response?... ' Why just a decade? Why not the whole Rosary?' and indeed he led us in a beautiful recitation of the Rosary. What a blessing and affirmation for all of us!"

The affirmations and miracles surrounding the center have been numerous throughout the years including physical healings, conversions, locutions, apparitions and many unique events in which individuals have been touched by the love of Mary and the Blessed trinity. The Center's main theme of St. Louis de Montfort: 'To Jesus Through Mary' remains a calling card for all.

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