

Litchfield's Wisdom House says farewell to Sister Rosemarie Greco

By Ben Lambert, Connecticut Register Citizen

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LITCHFIELD — Over the course of her career, Sister Rosemarie Greco experienced a physical and spiritual journey that took her away from Wisdom House, then back again, as she taught and considered the Catholic faith.

She is now set to step away from the Litchfield interfaith center, as she plans to retire after 27 years as its Executive Director.

Greco said Wednesday that she grew up in close-knit New York City family, with her extended family at hand, living within a few blocks. Her father was a watchmaker and musician; her mother a seamstress.

She attended Catholic school, and it was there that she became interested in the idea of becoming a nun and living a monastic life, following the example of her teachers.

“There was just something in their manner, especially the community that I entered, I thought — a certain simplicity about them. No veneer — they were who they were,” said Greco. “(It was) not an elite group of people, who were called to serve the poor in hospitals and in spirituality. And I was just attracted to them — I just felt a call, since probably late grade school and even into early high school.”

After a time working on Wall Street as a clerk, Greco followed that childhood impulse and came to Wisdom House, then a center of spiritual development for the Daughters of Wisdom, to train to become a nun in 1963. It was a calling — an inclination that propelled her.

“There’s something that grabs your spirit, that kind of pulls you along, that says, ‘it’s feeling right, and you’re giving how you want to give,’” said Greco.

She entered the service of the church, traveling to St. Louis, New York, Uganda, Colorado, and Dayton, Ohio, studying and teaching. She came back to Wisdom House in 1990, and has remained there since.

The chance to see people question and grow in their faith and spirituality kept her there, she said. Over the years, Greco said her teaching and consideration of spiritual beliefs shifted from the strict tenants of the Catechism to a broader interpretation of the church's teachings, drawing on the omnipresence of God, commonality with other religions, and the shifting world. She also established Wisdom House's Mary Louise Tritchet Gallery, a space that welcomes artists from around the country, as part of the organization's ministry and public presence.

"Catholic means universal, and what I did is try to get back to that, and to the basic Catholic teachings that say 'we welcome everyone.' The scriptures say everyone is welcome," said Greco. "This is the larger world that we live in, the new cultures that were coming into our awareness... it's all part of spirituality." She said she helped transition Wisdom House into a place welcoming to all faiths — a shift mirrored by other such institutions. It is now a retreat and conference center which "welcomes women and men who value seeking and learning in a contemplative environment," according to its website.

That transition lends itself well to the name and focus of Wisdom House, she said. She hopes people have considered it a safe place to explore big questions, experience diversity and art, and have some peace, especially in the natural bounty of the place.

"I think that's an important thing about wisdom, in a sense — even though wisdom is the name for God in the Hebrew scriptures. But wisdom is also understanding and being able to befriend others, welcome them," said Greco. "We started that, and you see how much more important it is today with everything going on. If what we can do here is that — a piece to help people take another step towards understanding — then I'm really happy with that."

She hopes the place will continue to advance in the years to come, addressing contemporary concerns, and remain open to people and ideas.

"On your doorstep, people can come with things that you've never thought of — take a chance. Respect them, listen to (them), see if it can work out, because you may be opening up a whole new world for yourself and for others," said Greco. "It's really been a great journey; I've got to say that."

Greco noted Wednesday that her time at Wisdom House has helped her become more appreciative of nature, which is "a presence of God," she said.

Wisdom House announced this week that it has created a fund in Greco's honor, which will "help to ensure the environmental sustainability" of the property and "to support and maintain the beauty and viability of the 70 acres in our care for years to come."

Those wishing to make a donation in honor of Greco can send a check to Wisdom House, 229 East Litchfield Rd, Litchfield, CT 06759, and should designate on the check that it will be put toward the Rosemarie Greco Ecology Fund.

Wisdom House will hold a celebration of service for Greco Dec. 17 at 2 p.m.

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