

THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE:  
GREAT AMERICAN CATHOLICS: PART IV  
NO PROBLEM WITHOUT A SOLUTION, NO PERSON WITHOUT A PURPOSE  
SAINT DAMIAN DE VEUSTER AND SAINT MARIANNE COPE

- I. Saint Damian de Veuster exemplified the American spirit of taking on seemingly impossible odds, or overcoming difficulties with dedicated labor and organization, and of finding value in each person.
- A. Saint Damian was a Sacred Heart priest from Belgium who volunteered for ministry in Hawaii.
1. Born on January 3, 1840 , the seventh child (4<sup>th</sup> son) of Johannes and Catherine de Veuster in Tremelo in the Flemish part of Belgium. Two of his sisters would become nuns and a brother would become a priest.
  2. Because of the humble circumstances, his schooling ended when he was 13 and he began working on the farm. His parents in fact anticipated that he would take over the farm one day.
  3. At the age of 20, he entered seminary for the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Mary and Jesus, after his brother Augustine, who took the name Pamphili. Joseph took the name Damian after St. Damian, a physician who with his brother Cosmos, were doctors in ancient Rome who served the poor and were eventually martyred for the faith.
  4. Both Damian and his brother Pamphili wanted to be missionaries. Pamphili initially volunteered to go to Hawaii, but was unable to do so for health reasons. And so, Damian volunteered to minister in Hawaii. And, in 1884, he was sent to Hawaii, where he was ordained a priest in that same year.
  5. At first, he was simply sent to parishes of Hawaii, where he served with distinction.
- B. By the late nineteenth century, Hawaii was an independent nation, but very much influenced by Americans and English.
1. Captain Cook was the first European to come to Hawaii and stay there. He discovered the Hawaiian islands in 1788 and named them the Sandwich Islands after his sponsor the fourth Earl of Sandwich. On his second voyage, Captain Cook was killed by the natives in a dispute with his sailors.

2. Captain Cook's compatriots published books on the islands, and they became a very popular center of trade and scientific discovery, as well as a stopping place on the way to the Far East.
3. There were wars among the islanders, which eventually resulted in King Kamehameha the Great gaining control of all of them in 1795. Christian missionaries began coming to the island in 1819 during the reign of his son Kamehameha II. Kamehameha's son Hiram I became the first Christian king of the islands.
4. In 1874, there was a dispute over who would be the new monarch, between a royal official Kalākaua and Emma, mother of the former king. American and British troops came and helped to resolve the dispute in a fashion that gave the crown to Kalakaua.
5. However, in 1887, he was forced to sign a treaty that gave much of his power to a legislature that was elected mostly by the landowners. He resigned in 1891, and his sister became Queen Lili'uokalani,. But then in 1893, when she tried to draft a new constitution giving her more power, several powerful groups overthrew her and established a new government, whose successor government would be led by Sanford Dole. In 1898, the Hawaiian government voted to join the United States.

C. The commerce with other countries was very helpful economically, but led to a dramatic increase in diseases from overseas, including leprosy.

1. However, European diseases, such as smallpox, tuberculosis, measles and leprosy spread on the islands, as they had done in the Americas. Within a century, the population of the islands decreased from 300,000 to 50,000.
2. Leprosy had historically been a curse on societies around the world. The term referred both to the then incurable and (to some degree) infectious disease we now call leprosy and also to other skin diseases. In the old covenant, lepers (or anyone with a skin disease that looked like leprosy) had to stay outside of the camp. If a priest determined that the leprosy went away (which meant it was another skin disease) there would be a sacrifice and they could reenter. It was an attempt to keep the disease at bay, while still letting the victims play some role. In the Middle Ages, the Church had leper hospitals for lepers, but they were still kept apart, for the disease is contagious, although not as much as other diseases. Until the 1940s, there was no known cure.
3. Leprosy first arrived in Hawaii in 1840. From that point, it spread rapidly. In 1858, the government of Hawaii set up a leper's colony on a peninsula on

Molokai. Authorities would round up people suspected of having leprosy and deposit them on the island. And unless the person could prove his condition was not leprosy, there was no return. Although there were attempts to supply the colony, it ended up having minimal shelter and food, and no effective structures.

4. There were about 800 people there by 1873. Between 1868 and 1873, the very poor conditions led to a public uproar and some improvement. The government did spend about five percent of its revenue on the island, but the absence of people willing to work there meant that the money was mostly spent on provisions, not improvements.

D. Father Damian and three other priests volunteered for ministry on the island.

1. In April 1873, a local politician William Green wrote in a newspaper, "If a noble Christian priest, preacher or sister should be inspired to go and sacrifice a life to console these poor wretches, that would be a royal soul to shine forever on a throne reared by human love." Bishop Louis Desire' Maigret wanted to send priests, but would not require any priest there. And so he asked for volunteers.

2. That same month, Fr. Damian wrote to the Father General of the order, "Many of our Christians here at Kohola also had to go to Molokai. I can only attribute to God an undeniable feeling that soon I shall join them. . . . Eight years of service among Christians you love and love you have tied us by powerful bonds." In May the Congregation approved of him and three other volunteers going to Molokai for three months each.

3. Father Damian was the first to go to the island. Bishop Maigret introduced him to the island, and many of them were overjoyed. But the instructions were to keep a distance from them to avoid infection. Father Damian soon said that he should stay on the island full time rather than exchange the post with the other three priests. Bishop Maigret agreed with this recommendation.

E. Father Damian slowly improved the situation on the island, with attention both to religious and material needs.

1. There was a chapel in the colony dedicated to St. Philomena but no housing for him, other than the covering of trees. Being good at carpentry, Fr. Damian built his own rectory and improved the church.

2. The people were physically decaying and dying; and the physical decline often made it very difficult to minister to them. At one point, Fr. Damian wrote, "Many of time, fulfilling my priestly duties at the lepers' homes, I have been obliged, not only to close my nostrils, but to remain outside to breathe fresh air." He even

took up smoking a pipe to relieve the oppressive smell. Despite the repulsive condition, he would come to their homes and minister to them personally.

- Doctors would occasionally come, but they would almost never touch the patients. They often simply left medicine behind.

3. Father Damian soon established a cemetery and a Christian Burial Association to be arranged for funerals and bury the dead. Fr. Damian himself made the coffins. This point emphasized a realm beyond this world, and the communion of saints. At one point, he wrote, "The cemetery, the church and the rectory form one enclosure; thus, at nighttime, I am still keeper of this garden of the dead, where my spiritual children lie at rest. My greatest pleasure is to go there to say my beads and meditate on that unending happiness which so many of them are enjoying."

4. Abandoning the prohibition against touching the lepers, Fr. Damian would anoint them, clean them, and bandage their wounds. He also repaired and upgraded their houses, both for physical comfort and to give them a sense of dignity.

5. He also taught the natives to raise animals, engage in farming and even music. He formed a small band, and even organized foot races.

6. Slowly the colony took on an improved state, with production, education and worship. An Englishman, Edward Clifford wrote in 1888, "I had gone to Molokai expecting to find it scarcely less dreadful than hell itself, and the cheerful people, the lovely landscapes, and the comparatively painless life were all surprises. The poor people seem singularly happy."

7. Even before he had the disease, Fr. Damian would refer to his congregation as "we lepers," emphasizing that he suffered much with them, including isolation from the world.

6. Mass attendance increased dramatically, and he had to enlarge the church several times.

7. When the previous superintendent, who was himself a leper and a lawyer died in 1878, Fr. Damian was appointed to the post temporarily. However, he gave up the position because the congregation did not want a priest in a government post.

F. Fr. Damian was willing to take courageous actions to oppose vice and get people's attention.

1. He took on the public authorities, sometimes vehemently, about helping to improve the situation. Sometimes, he would be vehement and insulting in his letters, but he needed to shake people up.
2. He also preached vehemently against vice, and would break up drinking parties, including one area called “the crazy pen.”
3. Three assistants were given to him, but none of them worked out.

G. The efforts gradually got attention from newspapers around the world.

1. Funds began coming in to improve the lot. Some accused Fr. Damain of playing to the press too much, but he lived very simply on the island.
2. In 1881, Princess Liliukalani visited Molokai and declared Fr. Damian a member of the Hawaiian Order of the Knight Commander of the Royal Order of Kalakaua.
3. The press did tend to present him as doing everything by himself; and that exaggeration got both the government and his congregation annoyed.
4. The Hawaiian government also did not like the extra publicity about the conditions of the lepers that he was bringing in, and insisted that they were doing everything they could. His own order was also concerned about his coming in contact with the lepers. Two other priests of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart had contracted the disease while in Hawaii.
5. There were also people who thought that leprosy was solely spread by sexual contact. Fr. Damian opposed this belief, but also recognized that sexual contact did spread the disease.
6. The government also disapproved of his constant visits to Honolulu because it violated the isolation policy. Sometimes they did stop him; and at one point his bishop heard his confession on board a neighboring ship, with both speaking in French to disguise the words.

H. In 1884, Father Damian contracted leprosy, and died gradually from it. But he kept active as long as possible.

1. In December, 1884, he realized that he must have leprosy because he could not feel hot water when he accidentally stepped in it.
2. Nevertheless, he continued ministry, and at times increased his emphasis on building projects, knowing that he had little time. A Japanese doctor Masano Goto became tending to him in 1885. A former Civil War soldier Joseph Dutton

came to help him in July, 1886. Mr. Dutton had been an alcoholic, and his marriage had failed. But here he remained for 45 years until his death at the age of 88. A few months before Fr. Damian's death in 1889, James Sinnet, who had experience with hospital work, joined Fr. Damian in his administration and care for the poor. He would also help with Fr. Damian's burial. At that time, he left and went into anonymity.

3. Fr. Damian once again asked for another priest to help him and to hear his confession. And, in May, 1888, Fr. Louis Lambert Conardy, another Belgian and a priest of Oregon, came to join him. But meanwhile, it was very difficult.

4. He could not join his brothers in the Sacred Heart House in Honolulu due to the isolation of lepers. And he could not even use the same precious vessels as other priests were using. He described this rejection as the greatest of his sufferings.

5. Gradually, this once very vibrant priest suffered more and more ailments, with his skin deteriorating, and even breathing becoming more difficult. One doctor wrote, "The skin of the abdomen, chest and back are beginning to show tubercles, masses of infiltration. . . . The membranes of the nose, roof of the mouth, pharynx and larynx are involved; the skin of his cheeks, nose, lips, forehead, and chin are excessively swollen. . . . His body is becoming emaciated"

6. In 1886, his mother Catherine found out from a newspaper about his leprosy, and died a few days later.

7. He had to endure even slanders about him. Some opponents said that his leprosy came from sexual contact. For example, Rev. Charles Hyde, a Presbyterian minister in Honolulu wrote to his friend Rev. H.B. Gage and accused Fr. Damian of being a publicity mongerer, hinting that he had had an affair that led to his leprosy. Fr. Damian's Redemptorist congregation ordered a physical exam to conclude that he had no other venereal disease.

I. On March 23, 1889, Fr. Damian was bedridden and, on April 15, Monday of Holy Week, he died.

1. Shortly after his death, Robert Louis Stevenson, who was seeking treatment for tuberculosis in Honolulu visited Molokai and tried to draw up an unbiased account of Fr. Damian's life. After gathering the evidence, he wrote back to Rev. Gage saying, "I am strangely deceived, or they build up the image of a man who, with all his weakness, is essentially heroic, and alive with rugged honesty, generosity, and mirth."

2. Mahatma Gandhi likewise wrote the following comparison between the secular powers and the Catholic Church, “ The political and journalistic world can boast of very few heroes who compare with Father Damien of Molokai. The Catholic Church, on the contrary, counts by the thousands those who after the example of Fr. Damien have devoted themselves to the victims of leprosy. It is worthwhile to look for the sources of such heroism.”

3. In 1977, Bl. Pope Paul VI declared Father Damian to be Venerable Damian, a designation that confirms that he lived a life of heroic virtue. In 1995, Pope St. John Paul II declared him to be a blessed. And in 2009, Pope Benedict declared him to be a saint. In the canonization homily, Pope Benedict commended St. Damian for his great courage in leaving homeland and being among the lepers. He said, “Let us remember before this noble figure that it is charity which makes unity, brings it forth and makes it desirable. Following in St Paul's footsteps, St. Damien prompts us to choose the good warfare (cf. 1 Tim 1: 18), not the kind that brings division but the kind that gathers people together.”

II. In the last years, Fr. Damian received critical assistance from Saint Marianne Cope and the Franciscan sisters she brought over from New York. St. Marianne Cope exemplified the American virtues of dedication and a willingness to take on the status quo, and so improved the conditions of patients in New York and Hawaii and became a medical pioneer.

A. Marianne was raised in a devout Catholic family that had immigrated to the United States from Germany.

1. Marianne was born on January 23, 1838, and named Barbara, the oldest child of Peter and Barbara Koop in Hessen, in the Grand Duchy of Hesse, now in western Germany. Peter had been widowed and had nine children by the previous marriage. Peter and Barbara would have four more children.
2. Her family came to New York in 1839 and all of them became citizens in the 1850s. All of the children went to the parish grade school in Utica, New York. Barbara in particular was devout and thought about religious life from an early age.
3. When her father became an invalid in 1853, she ended schooling worked in a factory to support the family.
4. When her father died in 1862, she was then free to enter the religious life that she wished for.

- B. Sr. Marianne Cope rapidly progressed in religious life as a member of the Sisters of Saint Francis of Syracuse.
1. She entered the Sisters of Saint Francis of Syracuse (now called Sisters of St. Francis of Neumann Centers), a branch of the Third Order Regulars in 1862 and began teaching at Assumption School in Syracuse, eventually becoming a principal. The order had been founded by three religious sisters in 1855 and was expanding rapidly. They had just arrived in Syracuse in 1860, and were heavily involved in education and ministering to immigrants.
  2. Her talents at administration were evident, and the order quickly put her on several governing boards. Thus, she was involved in establish St. Elizabeth Hospital in Utica and St. Joseph Hospital in Syracuse in 1866 and 1869 respectively. These hospitals admitted all patients, regardless of race or religion, which was considered progressive for the era. Sr. Marianne was named a member of the Governing Board of her branch of the Franciscans in 1870.
  3. She took over as administrator of St. Joseph Hospital in 1870 and advocated patient's rights, including the need for cleanliness and treating alcoholism as a disease. The Geneva College, a training college for doctors, moved to Syracuse and became the College of Physicians and Surgeons of the University of Syracuse partially to be near St. Joseph. Sr. Marianne allowed student doctors to minister to the patient's but only with the patient's approval. She remained administrator of the hospital until 1877.
  4. Sr. Marianne was elected mother provincial in 1877 and unanimously reelected in 1881.
- C. Now Mother Marianne and 34 other Franciscan sisters volunteered to the apostolate in Hawaii.
1. In 1883, the church in Hawaii and even King Kalakaua sent letters to 50 congregations to help out in Hawaii, especially with the lepers.
  2. Mother Marianne determined that there was a great need, and volunteered to go to Hawaii herself. Thirty four other sisters from the same order likewise volunteered to go to Hawaii. She then wrote back to the Diocese in Honolulu, "I am hungry for the work and I wish with all my heart to be one of the chosen ones, whose privilege it will be to sacrifice themselves for the salvation of the souls of the poor Islanders.... I am not afraid of any disease, hence, it would be my greatest delight even to minister to the abandoned 'lepers.'"

3. They arrived in November and set to work immediately on improving the hospitals and orphanages, at first at Branch Hospital in Oahu. In 1885, Mother Marianne and the sisters established the first hospital in Maui. Within 2 years, she received the medal of the Royal Order of Kapiolani.
  4. The government of Hawaii asked Mother Marianne and her sisters to take over another hospital where, according to Sister Leopoldina Burns, who was one of her main assistants wrote, "Fat bedbugs nested in the cracks (of walls). Brown stains upon walls, floors, and bedding showed where their blood-filled bodies had been crushed by desperate patients. Straw mattresses, each more or less covered by a dirty blanket, lay upon the unswept floor. ... Blankets, mattresses, clothing, and patients all supported an ineradicable population of lice,"
- D. In her concern for the patients, Mother Marianne was willing to take on government officials. When, for example, a government appointed administrator was abusive toward patients at Branch Hospital in Oahu, she demanded his removal, or said that all the sisters would leave. The government replaced him.
- E. Mother Marianne also provided crucial support to Father Damian in caring for the lepers.
1. She met Fr. Damian in December, 1884, when he came to Oahu, before his leprosy was apparent.
  2. When he returned in 1886 with leprosy, she cared for him at a home for lepers in Oahu. In 1887, the government began reinforcing the isolation policy of having most lepers in Molokai. And so Mother Marianne established a new hospital there and the government used it as the first place for new arrivals.
  3. After Fr. Damian's death, Mother Marianne took over the work at Baldwin Home, the place that cared for the men and boys on Molokai, in addition to her involvement in government administration. There the order built a new building for women with the help of a prominent businessman Henry Baldwin.
  4. The sisters left the hospital to the Brothers of the Sacred Heart in 1895.

F. In addition to competence and compassion in medical care, Mother Marianne emphasized both in New York and Hawaii the need for physical beauty, including landscaping and decorations, as well as bright clothing. She also focused on education in the hospitals and orphanages. Thus, she promoted distribution of religious education materials to all people, even non-Catholics.

G. Mother Marianne eventually grew frail and was confined to a wheelchair and eventually died in 1918. Even in a wheelchair, she remained in Hawaii and would visit and advise where she could. Neither she nor any of the sisters caring for the lepers ever themselves caught the disease.

H. Once it got started, the process for Mother Marianne's canonization was rather rapid.

1 In 2004, Pope John Paul II declared her to be venerable, confirming her life of heroic virtue. In 2005, he declared her to be a blessed after the requisite miracle granted on her intercession was confirmed.

2. In October, 2012, Pope Benedict declared Mother Marianne to be a saint in the same Mass where he also canonized St. Kateri Tekawitha.

3. The Vatican website says of her, "Mother Marianne's invaluable example of never-failing optimism, serenity and trust in God inspired hope in those around her and allayed the Sisters' fear of catching leprosy. She taught her Sisters that their primary duty was 'to make life as pleasant and as comfortable as possible for those of our fellow creatures whom God has chosen to afflict with this terrible disease.'"

4. In the canonization homily, Pope Benedict said, "At a time when little could be done for those suffering from this terrible disease, Marianne Cope showed the highest love, courage and enthusiasm. She is a shining and energetic example of the best of the tradition of Catholic nursing sisters and of the spirit of her beloved Saint Francis."