

# CNR: The Legacy of Service Continues

Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly, O.S.U., beloved longtime president of the College of New Rochelle (CNR), kept a prayer on her desk and read it every day. It read:

*“Gracious God, help us to work with you to make the world alive with your spirit and to build on earth a city of justice, love and peace.”*

**T**his prayer instilled a calling to service that alumni like Mary Sommer CNR SAS '71, and Pearl Sullivan CNR SNR '03, GS '15, bring to life as they devote their lives to helping others.

“When I’ve wondered if what I’m doing is any good or when I’m searching for direction, coming back to this prayer helps me to focus on what’s important and I continue to try to make a difference,” said Sommer who is still inspired by this prayer every day.

At CNR, Sommer found a passion for serving and being a mentor to others. “When I told Sister Dorothy Ann about my dream of becoming a lawyer, she was fully supportive. I wouldn’t say I didn’t believe in myself, but I certainly needed the support of this extraordinary woman who I admired.” After graduating from CNR with a bachelor’s degree magna cum laude in political science, Sommer attended the University of Notre Dame School of Law.

For the next 33 years, she worked as a litigator both in private practice and for the cities of Norwalk and Stamford, Connecticut, handling cases in medical malpractice, civil rights, insurance, dispute resolution and more. In 2008, Sommer was appointed to the Connecticut Superior Court as a judge presiding over civil, criminal, family and juvenile matters—a role that she still holds and one that she sees as a way of serving others.

“At a fundamental level, a judge represents justice and equality,” she explained. “We have a system of justice that, despite its flaws, gives everyone the chance to be

heard. Judges must be grounded in people’s real lives, in the values that are important to them, in their struggles. The more real-life experience a judge has, the more likely that judge is going to be able to listen to and decide cases with compassion.”



Photo provided by Mary Sommer

Mary Sommer CNR SAS '71

Beyond her impressive career, Sommer is involved in an astounding array of community service organizations and has received several awards for her work and service, living the life of the CNR motto, *Serviam*, which means, “I will serve.” She is the chair of the Board of Directors for Connecting Through Literacy: Incarcerated Parents, Their Children, and Caregivers (CLICC), which aims to strengthen communication and deepen bonds between children and their incarcerated parents. She serves as the chair of the Board of Directors for Hope for Haiti, which

works to improve the quality of life for the Haitian people, particularly children. She also serves on the Board of Directors for Building One Community, which aims to successfully integrate immigrants and their families into the Stamford, Connecticut area. After the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, she joined Stamford Stands Against Racism to help seek equity through community solidarity.

In all of her roles in community leadership, Sommer never loses sight of the value of simple acts of service, such as serving food at a soup kitchen. “The work of foundations and boards is critical, but direct service keeps you connected to that,” she explained. “And everybody

can do direct service. We're all called to serve each other, and we can all find some way to make a difference."

Similarly, Pearl Sullivan is no stranger to serving her community. She spent more than 14 years as a New York City police officer, primarily in the Street Crimes Unit, before retiring due to an injury. Soon after, she enrolled in the College of New Rochelle's School of New Resources, which offered a bachelor's degree program specifically for adults. "I couldn't run after the bad guys anymore, but I could still do something for my community, so I decided to go back to school," she explained. "I wasn't finished serving yet."

From the beginning, she felt that there was something different about CNR: "I went to other schools in the past, but they didn't work out for me. When I found out about the Ursuline tradition of education for service and wisdom for life, I knew that CNR was the right place for me." It also helped that her brother, Theodore Hayes CNR SNR '01, was enrolled and seeing success at CNR. Years later, her daughter, Danielle Sawyer-Green CNR SNR '16, followed in their footsteps.

## **"The College showed me that I was capable of overcoming any situation and let me know every single day that I was valuable and that I mattered."**

Before long, Sullivan was working with CNR's Co-op City campus directors to create a program called Students of Victory that offered monthly prayer services for students. She also fondly remembers participating in CNR-sponsored mission trips such as one to New Orleans where she helped rebuild homes after Hurricane Katrina with Habitat for Humanity.

More than anything, she is grateful to CNR for helping her see all the possibilities in her future. "We all have challenging situations in our lives, but overcoming those circumstances is where the true victory lies," Sullivan said.

"The College showed me that I was capable of overcoming any situation and let me know every single day that I was valuable and that I mattered."

After graduating from CNR with a bachelor's degree in psychology, Sullivan earned a master's in pastoral counseling from Iona College and a master's in public administration from CNR in 2015. She returned to CNR and spent 12 years as the Coordinator of Retention Systems, helping to connect adult students with resources, such as tutoring, child care and books, to help them persist to graduation. After being ordained by Miracle World Outreach Ministries in 2011, she decided to join the ministry full-time in 2017.

Currently, she works as a minister administrator at Miracle Worship Center

in the Bronx. The ministry is deeply involved in the local community, organizing drives for back-to-school supplies and warm clothing, distributing Thanksgiving dinners and running a food pantry. They also raise money for all kinds of international projects such as digging wells in Pakistan and Malawi and funding feeding programs in Malawi, Kenya and India.

"Being of service to others—that's all I can think about doing," Sullivan said. "I'm really happy that I'm able to spend my life doing that and to do it with a degree of wisdom, knowledge and understanding. I was saddened when the College closed, but the mission of education for service and wisdom for life lives on in every graduate."

She is right. With alumni like Sullivan and Sommer at work in the world, CNR's legacy and heart—and Sister Dorothy Ann Kelly's prayer—are still very much alive and well.



Photo provided by Pearl Sullivan

Pearl Sullivan CNR SNR '03, GS '15