



100 Years in Orange: How to Use A Barn

The Burnham property, which Mother Bernard purchased in Orange in 1922, was more than a stately Victorian home. It was a significant piece of property surrounded by orange groves, gardens and animals. It is noted that when the Sisters first arrived in Orange, there were pigs and chickens on the property -- perhaps a cow and a couple of horses as well. Off to the side of the main house, was a very large barn. While the Sisters may not have kept the farm animals over a long period of time, they found numerous ways to use the cavernous barn space during the next several decades.

The original home did not have a large kitchen. The Sisters needed a big kitchen as well as three dining areas. The barn was easily converted to match these needs. Over a period of time, what was most needed was sleeping space -- especially for those who were young and fit. And so, a second story of the barn was created, and that was turned into a dormitory. The formal title of this sleeping area was St. Joseph Dormitory -- "S J D" for short. It was designed in a most practical way -- a row of beds, side by side, separated by curtains for a bit of privacy. The curtains, however, did not separate those who snored from those who were bothered by snoring. The quarters were spare and tight, one might say grim -- a couple of toilets, two sinks and two showers. Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange have long prided themselves on practicality and ingenuity -- making the most of whatever was handed to them.

Families who paid tuition at Holy Family School and Mater Dei High School in the 1950s most likely did not imagine that the well-educated Sisters who taught their children by day returned to the Sisters' Motherhouse by night to sleep in a barn.

In the mid 1950s, a more expansive and up-to date kitchen was built, as well as separate dining rooms for the high school girls, postulants, novices and professed Sisters.

As the use of the barn shifted from decade to decade, it served as a library for awhile and provided badly needed classroom space until a college was built.

The long-term plan was for a larger Motherhouse with more sleeping quarters, as well as a college building where the younger members could speedily complete their baccalaureate degrees. Those buildings were not completed until 1960. In 1958 and 1959, we were encouraged to ask for bricks from our families for Christmas -- the cost of a brick set at an estimated \$1.00. My father thought that he could get bricks for a more modest price! Just the same, my parents got the point. The Sisters had an eye to the future. They were moving forward with zealous faith, and they wanted to enlist the help of all.