

# What does **God** want me to do?

“**W**hat does God want me to do?” Margaret Snow turns 90 on March 31, and she’s still asking God that question.

Asking Him – listening to what he has to say – and putting her faith in his way – has brought untold blessings to this spry Polish Catholic who lives on Grand Rapids’ West Side.





## A visit to her house goes like this:

If you're a grown-up, like me, you're greeted with fresh coffee and cinnamon rolls. If it's dinner time, she might make her famous Swiss steak (her parents once owned a restaurant, Milan's Barbecue, on Grand Rapids' Northeast Side – and knowing how to cook is in her genes).

If you're a wee bit younger – say, a little girl of tea-party age – you might be invited to partake of Earl Grey (honey- or cream-sweetened, of course) and cookies at a dining-room table adorned with lace.

Neighborhood boys also knock on Mrs. Snow's door. One 10-year-old boy who especially enjoys Mrs. Snow's company once said, "Mrs. Snow, are you an old lady who acts young or a young lady who looks old?"

"I love it," Mrs. Snow says, chuckling, "Being born just a day away from April Fool's, there's a little of that silliness in me."

She's raised six kids and, over the years, had a hand in helping countless others. Now, neighborhood children stop by when they could be playing video games.

Sweet, simple moments like these still happen in our jaded world? Indeed, they do.

## Interviewing Mrs. Snow for a FAITH article goes like this:

She's ready for you – more prepared than you are – and has written up, on several sheets of loose leaf paper, the highlights of her very active nine decades. And yet, a funny thing happens when you're reading these notes later: You realize she's talking about others.

And during the interview, she tells you, "Now, please don't make this about me. This is about Catholic Charities West Michigan."

And so, it's with Catholic Charities that we'll begin.

## For the least of my people . . .

Catholic Charities West Michigan (CCWM) for many years was known locally as Catholic Human Development Outreach, Catholic Social Services and, before that, the Catholic Service Bureau. It seems as though the community-based agency operated by the Diocese of Grand Rapids has always been in existence.

When the hungry of the region need meals, there's God's Kitchen in Grand Rapids, Meals on Wheels, Loaves & Fishes and the Christian Community Center in Muskegon. When individuals or families need counseling or help with substance abuse problems, CCWM is there. When women facing unplanned pregnancies aren't sure where to seek assistance, they can turn to CCWM. These are just a few of the services provided by CCWM over the years to thousands of people – regardless of background or religion.

The agency dates to 1946 when then-Bishop Francis Haas determined the Diocese of Grand Rapids – which at the



>> Margaret Snow, age 28

time included 29 counties and stretched from the Indiana border to Traverse City – needed a formal bureau to administer social services.

Just a few years earlier, young Margaret Mary Milanowski had graduated from Aquinas College and spent a year teaching at Sheldon School in Grand Rapids. Her Polish language skills and giftedness working with children garnered a scholarship to Catholic University's National

Catholic School of Social Service. She would study in the master's in social work program at the Washington, D.C.-based university and, upon graduation, was planning to work for the United Nations helping with rehabilitation efforts for children in Poland affected by World War II.

At first, Margaret hesitated to leave her mother and siblings for Washington – four of her six brothers were away, serving their country in the waning days of the war. Her dad had passed away years before, and Margaret's teacher's salary helped the family.

But her mother, who had emigrated from Poland, was adamant that she accept the scholarship.

"You go," she said to Margaret. "You can never have enough education."

So she went, and the young Margaret loved her studies and the nation's capital.

"They were light-hearted times: "We



>> Margaret Snow, (nee Milanowski) upper right corner, in her graduation program.

>> Margaret says the rosary – as she has for years – a decade each in English, Polish, Latin and the Italian she's learning.



took trolleys all around; and Georgetown med students 'were available,'" she winked.

She met Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, founders of the Catholic Worker Movement. "It was mind-boggling how they gave of themselves," Margaret said.

Once, she was invited to a private Mass followed by a lunch that included then-Ambassador Joseph Kennedy and actress Ingrid Bergman. The celebrant was Msgr. (then Bishop) Fulton Sheen, a member of the Catholic University faculty.

"He had this splendid apartment with a private chapel where he said Mass, and I was stunned by how beautiful and elaborate it was," Margaret recalled.

A housekeeper pulled the wide-eyed young Margaret aside and whispered that the bishop had to do "a lot of entertaining of important people." Then she showed Margaret his bedroom.

"It was so spare, simple. Just a cot," Margaret said.

Margaret successfully completed the MSW program in 1945, but the plan to help rehabilitate orphaned Polish children had been sidelined when the United Nations sent the children to another country. Margaret stayed on in Washington, working locally for Catholic Charities.

About a year into her work, she received the call to join the Diocese of Grand Rapids' newly formed social services bureau.

"When I was summoned by Bishop Haas, I was so reluctant to leave DC," Margaret wrote. "My brother, John, had come to the Catholic University Law School and was able to live with me. I loved working for Catholic Charities. . . . And my social life was thriving!"

So, she asked God: "What do you want me to do?"

It didn't take long for her to hear his answer, and it didn't take long for her to answer his call:

She moved back to her hometown.

Waiting at Catholic Service Bureau for her to jump in as



### G. R. Girl Will Help Bind Poland's Wounds of War

When the girl got up tomorrow for Poland arrives a big step for her, Miss Margaret Mary Milanowski of the Diocese of Grand Rapids, is going to be one of those who lend a hand to the war-torn Polish people. She is going to be one of the first to be assigned to work under the United States Relief and Rehabilitation Administration.

A year ago, Miss Milanowski, who is a graduate of Catholic Central High school and a member of the National Catholic School of Social Work in Washington, D. C., by the national bureau committee for Poland, was to prepare to go to work for Poland rehabilitation.

Miss Milanowski, who taught in a high school one year after her graduation from Catholic Central, was awarded the scholarship and she was able to begin her studies in England in December, 1943. She returned to Grand Rapids in the fall and she is now working with the national bureau committee for Poland in Washington, D. C.

"Her studies in social work were in the United States," she said. "I went to England in December, 1943. I returned to Grand Rapids in the fall and I am now working with the national bureau committee for Poland in Washington, D. C."

and with students of that area who, through the aid of the United States Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, are being sent to Poland to help in the rehabilitation of that country.

For good reason two members of the family of Miss Milanowski are serving in the United States Army and Navy, and she is working for the United States Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in Washington, D. C.

A member of the United States Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in Washington, D. C., is Miss Margaret Mary Milanowski, who is now working for the United States Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in Washington, D. C.

In all there are 11 of the United States Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in Washington, D. C., and Miss Margaret Mary Milanowski is one of them. She is now working for the United States Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in Washington, D. C.

For years she has been a member of the United States Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in Washington, D. C., and she is now working for the United States Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in Washington, D. C.

"We worked hard and we had to get without any other help," she said. "I am now working for the United States Relief and Rehabilitation Administration in Washington, D. C."

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Margaret Mary Milanowski, who she promised to help in the rehabilitation of Poland in the same service department of that country, will be helping in the rehabilitation of Poland under the United Nations relief and rehabilitation administration a year hence. She is now in Washington, D. C., to complete studies at the National Catholic School of Social Work under a scholarship awarded her by the national bureau committee for Poland.

a case worker were Father Joseph C. Walen, director; Fred Lenhard, supervisor; and Pat Eardley Ghering, the first case worker hired on. Together, they got the agency off the ground.

*Margaret, writing, recalled:*

The agency [originally] was located on Leonard Street NE between College and Lafayette, at St. John's Home, then an orphanage. Msgr. Walen had living quarters there and the Dominican Sisters were in charge of the children. At first, we worked for summer placements with rural families for the older children. As time went on, we tried to reunite some of them with their biological families, find foster homes and adoptions.

One success story: A childless Catholic couple from Texas stopped at St. John's when I was on duty one Saturday and asked me if there were any children they could take to their cottage near Muskegon. However, they were not licensed. They promised to attend to that matter and came back the following week with the proper license. Three children from the same family went with them (one girl and two boys). The children stayed



>> Margaret's husband of 60 years, Judge Roman "Bud" Snow, who served as judge in West Michigan for three decades. Judge Snow, shown at left in 1949, passed away in May 2009.



with them the whole summer. By the next year, this couple adopted all three. I was privileged to get a picture of the girl as a prom queen years later!

Another story: One time, with two children in the agency car, the weather turned to sleet and snow. I was miles away from Grand Rapids. Luckily, I found a restaurant where the children and I had something to eat. A couple of truckers (after learning the kids were on their way to St. John's) led me all the way – one in front, one in back – right up the driveway to St. John's. *Bless them! Thank You, Lord!*

The agency work also led Margaret down the path to her future husband, Roman "Bud" Snow.

One day, after taking three little boys from St. John's to a doctor appointment, they stopped at a friend's ice cream shop on



>> (circa 1946) Margaret and Patricia Eardley Gehring, two of the first employees of the then newly created diocesan Catholic Social Services (now known as Catholic Charities West Michigan).

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Bridge Street. Bud Snow was there. Margaret remembered Bud from Catholic Central High School. He had recently graduated from the University of Detroit School of Law.

He asked her about her work and she talked about how she would take the children on various appointments and day trips. Often, she would take a few of the St. John's children on Sundays to her brother's cottage at Ottawa Beach.

“That following Saturday, he telephoned me, asking me if I was taking any children to the beach on Sunday and could he come along? ... The rest of the summer we spent together, taking children from St. John's to the lake.”

When they brought the children back to St. John's, Sister Leo would say, “You wore them out; you put them to bed!”

And often, Bud would help the children with teeth brushing and night-time prayers. Sister Leo was impressed. So was Margaret.

“I liked that about Bud,” she said. “They were glorious times – I was blessed.”

Margaret and Bud married on June 25, 1949. She worked one more year at Catholic Service Bureau and then left when she was pregnant with their first child.

### Whatsoever you do ...

God had plenty in mind for the young couple. For starters, she and Bud would bring into the world and raise six children.

They kept things light with laughter: “For example, on Mother's Day, Bud would give me a card that said, ‘Happy Mother's Day ... from a fellow who feels somewhat responsible.’ Bud was always joking like that,” Margaret said.

Bud's law career in West Michigan would blossom and span four decades, three of those decades as a judge. Meanwhile, their West Side house near Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish was always abuzz with activity. The bustle would increase when Margaret became a social worker for Grand Rapids Public Schools. Sometimes, she and Bud would take in children who had nowhere to go.

“Bud was an absolute angel,” Margaret said. “One morning he was up early making breakfast for the kids and a little boy didn't believe he was a judge – because certainly a judge wouldn't be making breakfast and doing dishes!”

As the kids grew older, Margaret had more time to volunteer. She became a Job Corps project director as part of the Catholic organization, Women in Community Service. She served on



>> A photo of Margaret and Roman "Bud" Snow's children taken years ago at John Ball Park, across from their West Side home. (front row, left to right) Barbara, Judith, Michele; (back row, left to right) Mary Ann, Paul and Catherine.

>> Margaret at the head of the table of a recent tea-party she hosted for her special guests - children from her neighborhood.

numerous boards, including the Family Service Association, Child Haven Guild, the YWCA, the Grand Rapids Historical Commission, Sacred Heart Parish's Board of Education and, yes, Catholic Social Services.

The days – and decades – flew by.

Fast-forward to February 2009 when Bud, then 90 years old and retired, fell at home and sustained a severe neck injury.

"The doctors said he wouldn't make it," his son Paul Snow said.

But when Bud woke up, cracked open an eye and jokingly started giving his own eulogy, family and staff at Saint Mary's Health Care were astonished.

"His first words to those of us gathered around him were, 'Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today ...'" Paul said.

It wasn't his time, and a few weeks later, Bud walked out the hospital doors – albeit with a halo-like device stabilizing his head.

Back at home, Margaret and Bud didn't tip-toe around the topic of death; in fact, they'd have a good laugh at it.

"I would say to Bud, 'You've always been such a gentleman. It should be ladies

first.' And he'd say, "Margaret, if you did that to me, I'd never speak to you again!"

Three months later, Bud fell again, this time sustaining more life-threatening injuries. He died on May 24, 2009. The Snows had been married 60 years.

"We had a good alliance for a long time," Margaret said.

She carries his spirit in her own gusto for life. In November, she made a pilgrimage to Rome and St. Peter's Square.

Back at home, neighborhood children are always dropping by as well as her adult children and grandchildren.

She's busy as ever. But she's also reflective.

Every day, she says the rosary – as she has for years – a decade each in English, Polish, Latin and, since she's been to Rome, in the Italian she's learning. When the weather is good enough, she walks to Mass everyday at St. Anthony Parish near her home.

God's will is always in her mind. At the end of the notes Margaret wrote for this interview, she asked, "What is my future?"

And then she listens. ☺

## Catholic Charities West Michigan

In November 2007, Catholic Social Services of Grand Rapids joined with Catholic Social Services of Muskegon and Catholic Human Development Outreach to form Catholic Charities West Michigan (CCWM), which serves the 11 counties of the Diocese of Grand Rapids.

>> The programs and services of CCWM have three distinct areas of emphasis:

- **Community Outreach** – including food, shelter and pantry programs: Casa de la Paz Emergency Shelter, Catholics Acting on Social Teaching - C.A.S.T, Christian Community Center, Foster Grandparents, God's Kitchen, Immigration Assistance, Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry, Low Income Pharmacy Care, Project Rachel (Post Abortion Reconciliation and Counseling), Senior Companions.
- **Behavioral Health** – counseling services for individuals and families: Family, Individual, and Child Counseling, Substance Abuse Treatment, Domestic Violence Group Counseling, Psychiatric Services, Premarital Preparation.
- **Child Welfare/Family Preservation** – programs that strengthen families and help keep children safe—including food, shelter, and pantry programs: Adoption, Post Adoption, Post Adoption Search Services, Abstinence Education and Support, Families First Program, Family Centered Services, Group Decision Making Program, Reunification Program, Family Issues And Parenting Program, Foster Care, Parenting Education Program, Healthy Start/Healthy Families Program, Early Impact, Strong Families/Safe Children Program, Step Down Program, Teen Parenting Program, Pregnancy Counseling and Support.

>> For more information visit [ccwestmi.org](http://ccwestmi.org), or become a fan on Facebook.



>> Margaret shows a photo of a Honduran boy that she sponsors through the Christian Foundation for Aging (CFCA), a Catholic lay organization that sponsors children and elderly in developing countries throughout the world.