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## **After 50 Years of Dedicated Service, Villa Maria College President Sister Marcella Marie Garus Announces Official Retirement**

*Private, co-educational Catholic institution reflects on five decades of transformative leadership,  
while preparing for exciting new opportunities in College's future*

BUFFALO, NY – After 50 years of ongoing service to Villa Maria College and its thousands of students, faculty, and alumni, Sister Marcella Marie Garus has announced her upcoming retirement, effective June 2018. A Buffalo native, Sister Marcella served for 40 years as Villa Maria College president, making her one of the longest-tenured presidents of a higher education institution both in both Western New York and across North America.

Sister Marcella's legacy at Villa Maria College began in 1968 through the role of business administrator, a position she held until her appointment as president in 1978. In this leadership role, Sister Marcella's dedication to faith, education, student and faculty experience, community impact, and continued institutional viability was a hallmark of her service.

Some of Sister Marcella's most notable accomplishments include: the transformation of Villa Maria College from an associate degree-granting college to a bachelor's degree-granting institution—adding six associate degrees and 14 bachelor's degrees; the leadership of college fundraising efforts resulting in millions of dollars raised to benefit students, and; launching of the college's Visionary Plan, which yielded a 30 percent growth in enrollment and a 10 percent increase in retention.

"Sister Marcella's enormous contributions to Villa Maria College will be forever felt by so many within this community, and we're incredibly thankful for all of her years of passionate, effective work," said Catherine Grantier Cooley, partner, Hodgson Russ, LLP, and chairperson of the Villa Maria College Board of Trustees. "Sister Marcella is a generational visionary, and the improvements she has continually made have not only kept the college going, but also primed us for future growth. As the search for our next president begins, we're confident that the coming years will be bright."

As a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Felix of Cantalice, Sister Marcella devoted herself to educational service and the task of making Villa Maria College a truly faith-based, student-centric institution with premier programs in art, music and health science. In addition to instilling advanced organizational processes that modernized the college's administration, Sister Marcella helped create various new academic programs in fields such as occupational therapy, digital filmmaking and digital media, and communication that welcomed a diverse array of students interested in these versatile disciplines.

"Villa Maria College was very fortunate to have such a dedicated leader at its helm for four decades," remarked Robert D. Gioia, president of The John R. Oishei Foundation. "Sister Marcella's vision to create a nurturing, student-focused, creative learning environment will make a positive impact on many Western New York lives for years to come. We believe the college will continue to prosper because of the strong foundation that Sister Marcella has laid."

"As an alumnus of Villa Maria Academy and Villa Maria College, and now as alumni association president, I can attest that Sister Marcella has always made me feel welcome at Villa Maria College," said Sabrina Pisano, '03, president of the Villa Maria College Alumni Association. "She has made Villa Maria a place where people not only go to learn, but also to grow as professionals in a welcoming community."

Though Sister Marcella took great strides in improving Villa Maria College's academic programs and administrative/organizational processes, equally prominent is her efforts to advance the creation and renovation of new spaces and structures, in order to further enhance the campus environment. These initiatives include the St. Joseph Memorial Walkway, the Art Shop, Felician Hall, St. Francis Residence and the Paul William Beltz Family Art Gallery. Significant upgrades and improvements were also made to the campus library and athletic facilities during Sister Marcella's tenure.

A recipient of various accolades and honors, Sister Marcella was awarded the prestigious Bishop's Medal for Catholic Education, the Governor's Award for Excellence in Education, the New York State Senate Women of Distinction commendation, the Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities Higher Education Leadership Award, and the Am-Pol Eagle Citizen of the Year designation.

A true steward of the Villa Maria College vision and mission, Sister Marcella's allegiance to the institution and its enduring spirit of excellence allowed her to celebrate both its 25<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> anniversaries, a unique and meaningful experience for any leader in higher education.

"Sister Marcella has been a graceful, quiet, humble leader in higher education for the past 50 years, and as high quality an individual as I have ever had the good fortune to know," said David Rust, executive director of Say Yes Buffalo. "She has enriched the Villa Maria College community with a focus on high quality education for its students, while building a culture for her colleagues that made Villa Maria College a place where people enjoyed working. Her legacy is extraordinary, and her contributions will continue to be felt by so many students for years to come."

Villa Maria College intends to commence a formal leadership search in the coming months, with more details on that effort made available to students, faculty, alumni and the public in the near future.

## **About Villa Maria College**

Villa Maria College is a private, Catholic college, founded in 1960 by the Felician Sisters. Located in Buffalo, NY, Villa Maria is the premiere student centered college in Western New York characterized by an unyielding commitment to student success.

Offering Bachelors and Associates degrees in 18 different academic programs, Villa Maria's strength lies in studio-based education, a 9:1 student to faculty ratio, and educators who bring their real world experience into the classroom. Students learn and grow with a culturally diverse population that lives its core values instilled by the Felician Sisters. Students participate in intercollegiate athletics in eight sports as the Villa Vikings and are involved in nearly 20 clubs and organizations on campus. Villa Maria is home to the Achieve Program for Students with Learning Differences, and an academic success center which provides robust academic support for all students. For more information call 716.896.0700 or visit [www.villa.edu](http://www.villa.edu).

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