

Sister Patricia Wolf's remarks when accepting SOAR!'s Father Victor Yanitelli SJ Award for Service

Good evening—and almost good night! It's been a wonderful evening!

Thank you, Sister Maureen, for your introduction.

Congratulations to SOAR! on its 40th anniversary and to Bishop Whalen, and my deepest gratitude to the SOAR board of directors for selecting me to receive the Father Victor Yanitelli SJ Award for Service. Although I learned of my selection last April, I am still a bit flabbergasted, amazed and humbled.

I am so very happy to share this evening with the Sisters of Mercy, my family, and many of my colleagues and friends whom I met and worked with over these many years.

Father Yanitelli is remembered as a man for others and a man of firsts. He imagined possibilities and was not constrained by what was the norm of his time. From my bio, you know that I have been involved in many projects, crisscrossing ministries in Catholic education, justice work and leadership. I am personally drawn to be part of organizations or initiatives where the vision, mission and purpose create opportunities; where the vision, mission and purpose enhance the dignity and well-being of people, especially the most vulnerable. Where the work is directed toward change—an organization like SOAR! But permit me to briefly share a recent experience and how it intersects with SOAR! and our evening tonight.

In July, I was one of six sisters invited to Rome by The Anna Trust, a new organization which is tasked to seek solutions for the retirement needs of women religious worldwide. The organization is focused on collaborative efforts. The six of us came from the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Kenya and Zambia. All of us had experience in addressing the needs of aging women religious through a collaborative effort, be it new facility construction—in my case, Marian Woods, an inter-congregational Adult Care facility for women religious, which opened in 2001 and was founded by the Dominican Sisters of Blauvelt, Franciscan Sisters of Peace, Sisters of the Holy Child, Sacramentine Nuns and the Sisters of Mercy, and is now sponsored by the Carmelite Health System—or the projects taken on by Kenya and Zambia, creating a health network to assess health needs and deliver

solutions. One key takeaway for me was the importance of not being constrained in your thinking.

In Kenya and Zambia, where economic resources are scarce and systems for collaboration vary from strong to scant, sisters, who received little remuneration, are figuring out together how they can provide better care and quality of life for their aged members, because they were not prepared. They had planned for active ministry but not for aging. What gave them the impetus to change? They want things that are almost impossible for them to afford alone, such as hospital beds or funds to renovate bathrooms. Dignity. It takes extraordinary effort to change the way you think and to believe that together you can create a pathway to make those hopes possible. Today, they are well on their way with the assistance of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.

Forty years ago, more than a few of the congregations in this room were in the same boat. But an article in *The Wall Street Journal* announced to the whole world the true financial situation of many religious orders in the U.S. with respect to retirement, particularly women religious orders. In just a matter of months, people of means and influence who had been educated by us helped chart a different path. SOAR! was created.

Forty years later—NOW—religious sisters, brothers and priests are the beneficiaries of grants from SOAR!, one of the most dynamic and flexible funding organizations that I have encountered. Not constrained to traditional quarterly or annual grantmaking, it employs a rolling application process, so you apply when you need it. SOAR! is focused on the need and helping congregations address that need in a timely way. Their application process is simple. They offer weekly virtual office hours to assist you with your application and have posted YouTube videos to make it easier. In 2025, SOAR! awarded more than \$3 million in grants to 104 communities. I think the founders of SOAR! would be pleased but not surprised. SOAR! is a first, and “firsts” think first of possibility.

So now, friends, it is your turn to help lead SOAR! into its next chapter. I thank you for this honor and now turn the podium over to our emcee, Christine Persichette.