

# CATHOLIC UNIVERSE BULLETIN

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## Rosary Hall: 50 years of changing lives



PHOTO BY WILLIAM RIETER

LaLeiscia found the strength to give up her addiction to alcohol, cocaine and heroin through the pioneering treatment program at Rosary Hall.

By Nancy Vondrak  
Cleveland

LaLeiscia's sable brown eyes and her infectious smile reflect sincere gratitude. It's been four years and 10 months of sobriety for the 36-year Cleveland woman. Her life today is a far cry from a life of addiction to alcohol, cocaine and heroin not all that long ago.

She credits God and Rosary Hall for having saved her life.

St. Vincent Charity Hospital's Rosary Hall, Ohio's first inpatient drug and alcohol treatment program, is celebrating its 50th anniversary. Founded by Sister Ignatia Gavin in 1952, Rosary Hall has helped more than 50,000 men and women overcome addictions that show no prejudice. People of all religions, races, educational backgrounds and financial sta-

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tuses have been treated at Rosary Hall.

Sister Gavin chose the name Rosary Hall Solarium to commemorate October 7, which is the Feast of the Holy Rosary and the day in 1952 on which she received permission to open the treatment center. The name also incorporates the initials of Dr. Robert H. Smith, a recovering alcoholic and co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous with whom Sister Gavin had worked.

In two months' time Sister Gavin raised more than \$60,000 and secured much volunteer labor to enable Rosary Hall to open in December 1952.

A strong believer in the power of prayer, Sister Gavin would kneel in the hospital's chapel each day at 3:00 p.m. with visitors and patients to pray the rosary. Even after her death in 1966, the practice continued into the 1980s.

Since its inception, Rosary Hall has added several facets to its 16-bed inpatient treatment facility. In addition to a five-to-seven-day inpatient detoxification program, a 20-session outpatient program is available at both St. Vincent Charity Hospital in downtown Cleveland and a satellite office in Independence. About 125 patients are treated at Rosary Hall through inpatient detoxification, assessment, and/or outpatient programs each month.

Marty Prendergast, Rosary Hall's executive director, has strong convictions about his work.

"As an alumni of Rosary Hall who has gone on to serve as its executive director, it is a testimony to the value of this abstinence-based, 12-step-oriented program in the treatment of addiction", he said.

Today Rosary Hall is considered a pioneer and leader in the field of alcohol and drug dependency. Patients come from all socio-economic classifi-

cations and are referred from a myriad of resources including Catholic Charities, local courts, probation officers, and social service agencies. Plans for an adolescent residential chemical dependency program are being developed.

"The collaboration between Catholic Charities and St. Vincent Charity Hospital is positive and something of which I am very proud", Prendergast said. "It's really an exciting and hopeful partnership."

### LaLeiscia's story

LaLeiscia, the mother of three, said she began using drugs and alcohol when she was 13. At age 15 she had her first exposure to a recovery program. She spent the next 16 years in and out of different treatment centers as her addictions spiraled her deeper into despondency.

LaLeiscia found herself incapable of mothering her children and sold much of what her family had to support her addictions. For 10 years, starting in 1988, LaLeiscia was a patient at Rosary Hall four different times, twice as an inpatient and twice in the outpatient program. The fourth time she came to the facility, something was different for her.

"I had run out of answers," she recalled. "I finally let the people at Rosary Hall tell me what to do. I became like a child again, ready to learn. God works through people. He'll put someone in your path to guide you."

She found structure and tough love from the Rosary Hall staff. She was encouraged to pray, meditate, become involved in a recovery program and work with a sponsor.

"I was told to do those things every day, one day at a time", LaLeiscia explained. "That helped me get started."



PHOTO BY WILLIAM RIETER

LaLeiscia found structure in her life through the Rosary Hall staff while being encouraged to pray, meditate, become involved in a recovery program and work with a sponsor.

She discovered sobriety to be just "the door we step through into a whole world of things to recover from." She said she eventually had to deal with family issues, post-traumatic stress disorder, and rape crisis repercussions through psychological counseling.

As LaLeiscia grew in her recovery, she went back to school, got a job and rebuilt her relationships with her children. Today she is engaged and is planning to be married in April. She works at an eastside suburban country club and she also is an avid volunteer at Rosary Hall.

"I'm at Rosary Hall as much as possible", she said. "Giving back makes my foundation stronger. I usually help the

new patients in detox by sharing my experience, strength and hope."

Fittingly, "Take hope all ye who leave here" is the motto coined by Sister Gavin that adorns the walls of Rosary Hall. Both LaLeiscia and Prendergast have addendums to this inspirational statement.

"Never give up on yourself", stresses LaLeiscia.

Prendergast adds, "No failure is final until you quit trying." ■

More information about Rosary Hall's treatment programs for drug and alcohol addiction, which are covered by most insurance programs, can be obtained 24 hours a day by calling 216-363-2580.