

## Building on the Past, Creating a Future of Hope

An Interview by Sr. Monique Tarabeh with Kathy Regan, CEO of Vista Maria

Only two months into her role as CEO of Vista Maria, Kathy Regan greeted me with the ease of an old friend. Her face was familiar, and as we began, she smiled and reminded me that I might have seen her in the Gathering last year. That gathering, like so many others at Vista Maria, had been enriched by Mission Effectiveness sessions, times when staff from every corner of the campus came together to reflect on the higher purpose behind their work. Kathy spoke warmly of how these moments create unity, “The work is hard enough, but when you connect it to being called to be a Good Shepherd, it brings people together in a special way. People who may never meet otherwise find each other, share, and remember why we are here. At that time, I was the Chief Financial Officer,” she continued. “I never thought I’d be CEO, but when the time came, I felt called to step in.”

That word seemed to capture her journey. Kathy never chased the role, but when Vista Maria found itself at a turning point, she said “yes.” Her story is not only about leadership, but about carrying forward a legacy that began with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in 1883, and moving with courage, faith, and friendship into the future.

### A Legacy Rooted in Hope

Vista Maria’s roots stretch deep into Detroit’s history. In 1883, five sisters of the Good Shepherd opened the House of the Good Shepherd on Fort Street to care for women and children in need. For fifty years,



The Lost Voices program gives our kids the chance to do something extraordinary: write their own lyrics and create original music, which they perform live in the Chapel, with support from our volunteers.

they welcomed and served hundreds, until their space grew too small.

The sisters prayed for help, and an answer came in the form of Henry and Clara B. Ford, who donated their family farm, 50 acres, for just one dollar. On that farmland, in 1941, the first shovel struck the earth. Today, 16 buildings stand on the campus, each carrying forward the same mission of care, dignity, and new beginnings.

This history is not simply about property. It is about generosity meeting faith, and about a mission strong enough to adapt and endure through generations.





With their teachers from Clara B. Ford Academy, residents visited the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit. They explored artifacts, exhibits, and narratives that encouraged critical thinking and helped them connect history to their own lives.

### Living the Values Every Day

What strikes Kathy most about Vista Maria is how the values of the Good Shepherd are not static words tucked into a handbook or framed on a wall. They are living.

“We do not just hang the values as decoration,” she explained. “We live them every day. Each month, we recognize an employee as ‘The Good Shepherd,’ based on how they embody these values in their work. This has been going on for 13 years, with thousands of nominations. It keeps our mission alive in very practical, human ways.”

In these recognitions, the spirit of the sisters is carried on, not only in programs and services, but in the daily lives of those who serve and those who are served.

### Thread of Leadership

Kathy’s journey at Vista Maria began long before her appointment as CEO. She started with Angela Aufdemberge, a mentor she speaks of with gratitude. Angela modernized systems and built programs for

girls who had survived human trafficking, creating safe and family-centered spaces.

Later came Megan Zambiasi, whose leadership, though brief, brought a hard but necessary honesty about the challenges of residential youth care. Her courage helped the organization confront the reality of ensuring safety under difficult regulations.

“Angela laid the foundation. Megan asked the tough questions,” Kathy reflected. “And now I feel called to lead at another crossroads. Here we are joyfully serious. The work is hard, but we laugh together, cry together, and keep going as friends.”

This thread of friendship weaves through Kathy’s vision of leadership. For her, friendship is not an extra; it is the very heart of community and resilience.

### A Vision for the Future

Vista Maria made the decision in October 2025 to end adolescent residential services. Looking ahead, Kathy dreams of extending Vista Maria’s mission in a bold new way. Her heart is drawn to women coming out of incarceration, a group she sees as deeply underserved.

“I believe women leaving incarceration deserve a reentry program that provides three things: offering mental health support, stable housing, and job training. Most importantly, it would reunite them with their children. We have the capacity here to make this vision a reality.”

Her idea is both practical and prophetic. It builds on Vista Maria’s strengths in therapeutic care, housing, and family-centered programs, while opening a new path for transformation. Although it will require resources and approval, Kathy is clear that this vision aligns with the mission.

### **Standing at a Crossroads**

Kathy recognizes that Vista Maria today faces challenges not unlike those the sisters encountered in 1976, when low enrollment forced them to rethink their programs. “Once again, we are at a crossroads,” she said, “the question is how to move forward in a way that stays true to who we are.”

It is in these moments that Kathy leans on prayer and on the collective strength of the Vista Maria community.

Kathy asks us all to “please pray for the children and families we serve, and for this new vision, that we may one day welcome women coming out of incarceration with dignity and hope.”

### **A Circle of Friendship and Prayer**

Listening to Kathy, it is clear her leadership is not about titles or positions. It is about embodying the Good Shepherd values, carrying forward the foundation Angela laid, honoring Megan’s courage, and weaving her own vision into the fabric of Vista Maria.



Youth in the InSight DREAM program celebrated the end of the school year with a field trip to a zipline! They did some team building exercises and put their bravery to the test as they strapped in and zipped through the trees!

Through the years Vista Maria’s impact has been carried out by a dedicated team of 250 staff members serving about 500 children and families every month through foster care, residential programs, independent living, juvenile justice services, and education. Behind each number is a story of hope, struggle, and transformation.

The story of Vista Maria is about building on the past while looking ahead to the future. It’s a story of continuity, courage, and prayer. And in Kathy’s hands, it’s also a story of friendship, resilience, hope, and new beginnings.

To learn more about Vista Maria and its mission, visit [vistamaria.org](http://vistamaria.org).

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