

A REFLECTION ON INDEPENDENCE, HERITAGE, AND HOPE

BY TRISH GATHERS,
President and CEO, The Carmelite
System Inc.

As we approach Independence Day a time for both celebration and contemplation I find myself reflecting not only on our nation's founding ideals but also on my personal lineage that connects me to them. I am a direct descendant of John Ross and George Ross, both signers of the Declaration of Independence. John Ross, my thirteenth great-grandfather, served as Vice President of Pennsylvania and was a close associate of Benjamin Franklin. I often wonder if he had a hand; however small - in those revolutionary experiments with electricity that changed the course of history.

This ancestral connection inspires more than pride; it stirs a deep sense of responsibility. It evokes a sense of duty. The values set forth in the Declaration; liberty, justice, and the pursuit of happiness are not static relics. They are living principles that must be protected, lived out, and passed on.

At The Carmelite System Inc., a Catholic healthcare ministry sponsored by the Carmelite Sisters for the Aged and Infirm, we strive to do just that. Our mission is inspired by Venerable Mary Angeline Teresa and grounded in the belief that every person, especially the aged and infirm, deserves to be treated with dignity, love, and respect. These values mirror

the moral framework envisioned by our founding father, a vision of a just society that upholds the worth of every life.

Mother Mary Rose, Prioress General of the Carmelite Sisters of the Aged and Infirm, recently said, *"True independence begins when we recognize our dependence on God and our responsibility to care for one another. That is the soul of our mission, to be the beacon of hope and a light of mercy in a world longing for compassion."*

In this light, we understand that independence is not just about personal freedom. It is also about community. The right to life, liberty, and happiness cannot flourish in isolation. They grow in the soil of mutual respect and shared responsibility.

Tyranny, as our founders saw it, was not just political—it was the denial of dignity and voice. Today, the struggle continues in new forms: social neglect, indifference to suffering, and systems that overlook the vulnerable. Whether providing memory care for those living with Alzheimer's or standing by families in their final moments, The Carmelite System actively challenges these injustices. Every act of care becomes a declaration that every person matters, and that love must lead.

Carith Ministries, also sponsored by the Carmelite Sisters, extends this mission even further by preserving and protecting Catholic healthcare spaces, advocating for those who are



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underserved, and building bridges of hope where systems have failed. Together, The Carmelite System and Carith Ministries are united in restoring dignity and extending mercy where it is needed most.

This Independence Day, I invite us to pause and remember the rights that shape our national identity, and the responsibilities that sustain them:

1. The Right to Life – Honoring the sacred value of every human being.
2. The Right to Liberty – Defending freedom of conscience, thought, and belief.

3. The Pursuit of Happiness – Making space for healing, purpose, and joy.

4. The Right to Dissent – Protecting the courage to speak against injustice.

5. The Right to Assemble – Uniting communities in shared purpose and strength.

6. The Right to Petition – Lifting the unheard and advocating for change.

7. The Right to a Fair Trial – Ensuring justice is blind but never indifferent.

8. The Right to Privacy – Safeguarding personal dignity and choice.

These rights are not just political. They are profoundly moral. Though originally extended to a narrow few, they now call us to work for a more inclusive and compassionate society. The Carmelite System and Carith Ministries stand in that long and unfinished work, honoring the legacy of those who came before us by serving those who are often forgotten.

As we raise our flags this July Fourth, let us also raise our standards—for how we care, how we include, how we love. Let freedom ring not just in our celebrations, but in our daily commitment to mercy, justice, and human dignity.

For me, the Ross family legacy is a reminder that freedom is not static, it must be nurtured. It must be lived. I am deeply grateful to my ancestors for their role in building this nation, just as I am honored to walk alongside the Sisters and staff of The Carmelite System and Carith Ministries, working to ensure that our founding ideals are realized in acts of mercy, care, and justice every single day. Let us never take these blessings for granted.

This difference love.



Trish Gathers and Mother Mary Rose, Prioress General of the Carmelite Sisters of the Aged and Infirm.

Carith Ministries is sponsored by the Carmelite Sisters for the Aged and Infirm. Just like their sister ministries; the Carmelite System Inc., a Catholic not-for-profit health system that provides the platform that involve increasing the availability of geriatric care.

Located in New York, Massachusetts, Florida, Iowa, Ohio, Kentucky, and Illinois.

With over 3,500 employees and 120 Sisters who continue to serve throughout our communities, which are located in seven states and Ireland.

Ready to learn more or get involved?

Visit or Call:

<https://www.carmelitesystem.org/>

<http://www.carithministries.org/>

518-728-5234, 518-527-5055

We'd love to connect with you!