



Meet the President, Donna Wieand, Founder and President of Branches Christian Rest and Renewal Centers, Inc.

Describe Your Business

Branches Christian Rest and Renewal Centers, Inc. is a 501c3 nonprofit religious organization. We are a Roman Catholic ministry that welcomes all who love Christ. The mission of Branches is to bring people closer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Communion of Saints, so we may share Christ's love with others. At Branches our mission is accomplished by providing retreats to individuals or small groups at our beautiful Seneca Lake waterfront property. People join us for individual, family, corporate/organization, or open to all retreats. Branches is located on 2.3 acres of waterfront property in Lodi, NY. Currently, our property offers a Rosary garden and two hermitages (one room cabins). Our future goals include an outdoor altar, Branches' Center, two larger hermitages and a dock. Photos of our property and future goals are available at branchescenter.org

Tell us your story:

The call to create Branches came from God. Through this stewardship prayer, God planted, in my soul, a tiny seed of inspiration that grew into the creation of Branches.

Stewardship: A Faith Journey

Dear Lord

I pray that You give me the wisdom to guide me on this faith journey of stewardship.

Help me to understand that everything I have is a gift from You.

Open up my heart and my mind so that I may use these marvelous gifts to give back to You here on earth.

I pray Lord that You welcome me into Your kingdom at the end of my life and that You are pleased with what I have done with all Your gifts.

Amen

As I would frequently paddle my kayak to a private cove on Seneca Lake, this small seed of inspiration grew and grew over a four-year period. There I spent much time in contemplative prayer. Through prayer, God clarified that our beautiful piece of waterfront property was a gift from Him. This property belongs to Him and we are only stewards of it for a short period of time. We have been given this gift for the purpose of bringing others closer to Him. Our purpose of living on earth is to share God's love with others. This understanding became anchored in my heart after reading "Pope John Paul II and The New Evangelization". By now the desire to create Branches was deeply rooted, but how can this ministry become a reality? My husband and I had so many concerns. On Divine Mercy Sunday, 2011 the weather was unseasonably warm and the lake was as smooth as glass. I was most excited to be able to go for a paddle so early in the season. I carried my kayak to the same shoreline location that I typically launch at. As usual before I launch, I scan the area looking for interesting shells and driftwood. Nothing of interest to be had, so I hopped in my kayak and began my happy travel. As I paddled to my favorite cove I began to share with God my concerns about building the retreat center. For almost every concern, the phrase "Be not afraid." echoed in my mind. While paddling in my return to my usual entry and exit location, I found myself singing the hymn, "Be not afraid. I go before you always..." When I was about 10' off from shore, my breath was taken away at what I saw. There leaning against the shoreline rocks was a worn piece of lattice in the shape of a cross. I was in awe! With excitement, I ran to get my husband and my camera. I told my

husband that I did not see the cross when launching the kayak and there it was upon my return. He was astonished too. My husband and I interpreted the finding of this cross and a sign that we need to start the ministry. We looked to our pastor, Fr. Ulrich, for direction. He suggested that we speak to Sr. Donna Marie Paolini, founder and President of Center of Solitude; Fr. Dan Riley, founder and President of Mount Irenaeus; and Ms. Susan Fowler founder of Our Lady of Grace Guest House. These individuals had similar callings and Fr. Ulrich felt we could learn from them. He was right. Sr. Donna Marie, Fr. Dan and Sue have been most generous with their time as they shared with us their encouragement and guidance. Their mentorship is greatly appreciated. As 2011 progressed, Branches Christian Rest and Renewal Centers established the Board of Directors, wrote the by-laws, incorporated, and held our first retreat. In 2012 we developed our business plan and website, received the IRS 501c3 non-profit status and continued to conduct retreats at Seneca Lake. Today, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we continue to conduct retreats and progress forward with our goals. We are truly grateful for all who support this mission and we welcome individuals who want to learn more and join our joyful journey of stewardship.



What has helped you succeed and gain experience?

What has helped us succeed the most is prayer and trust. It is through the prayers of many; faithful volunteers, generous benefactors, and the intercessions of the Saints in Heaven that God has and will continue to provide. We believe that Branches is within the will of God and we trust in His guidance and provision. We continue to learn through our ever-growing network of mentors and professionals who offer their talents in the spirit of stewardship.

What inspires you?

My inspiration comes from the deep appreciation of Jesus Christ's divine merciful love and for the graces that our Blessed Mother bestows upon us.

What keeps you up at night? What are your challenges?

The lack of time and funding are our biggest challenges. We are in need of volunteers; people to pray, grant seekers and writers, contractors (builders, septic system, well and dock installers), engineers (septic system design), nonprofit attorneys, surveyor, and youth groups for spring clean-up.

What is your favorite local activity?

My favorite local activity is kayaking. It is therapy for me to peacefully paddle along the shoreline and appreciate God's beautiful gift of nature.

Is there anything else we should know about you?

Branches' Board of Directors, our volunteers, myself and all of Heaven are deeply grateful for the stewardship of others. Whether their gifts of talents and treasure are large or small, all is truly appreciated! If you feel the desire to learn more about Branches, please feel free to contact me.

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