

OF SAINTS AND EXILES

Proposal for a Feature Documentary Film

On the Hawaiian island of Moloka'i lies Kalaupapa, a remote natural prison that was once the world's most notorious leprosy colony. From this place of exile emerged two Catholic saints and a legacy of radical compassion. With only three Hansen's disease patients remaining, two Sisters of St. Francis now carry out the final chapter of a 150-year ministry, serving with quiet dignity until the last patient passes. Filmed over more than a decade, *Of Saints and Exiles* captures the end of a living community shaped by suffering, faith, and grace.

Presented by Madisonfilm, Inc.

www.ofsaintsandexiles.com

TRAILER & EXCERPTS



Teaser Trailer

3 minute trailer for the film
Of Saints and Exiles

<https://vimeo.com/1143600948>



"The Reunion"

1:23 minute excerpt of a reunion
46 years in the making.

<https://vimeo.com/132556006>



"Hula at the Vatican"

1:47 minute excerpt from Vatican City
on the eve of the canonization.

<https://vimeo.com/132556008>



"The Land of Long Goodbys"

6:12 minute excerpt from a reflection
about the end of the settlement

<https://vimeo.com/185685346>

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THE FILM

Of Saints and Exiles is an intimate, character-driven film set in one of the most spiritually charged and historically significant places in America. With only three Hansen's disease patients remaining, and just two Franciscan sisters left to care for them, the film captures the end of a remarkable community shaped by exile, suffering, resilience, and grace.

For more than a century, Kalaupapa existed as both a site of profound suffering and an unlikely home, shaped by resilience, faith, and communal care in the face of abandonment and stigma. Early acts of service by figures such as Father Damien, followed by the sustained ministry of Mother Marianne Cope and the Sisters of St. Francis, helped transform a place defined by fear into one marked by dignity. Over time, this small and exiled community produced two Catholic saints and sustained thousands of lives that society had chosen to forget.

Today, two Sisters of St. Francis remain at Kalaupapa. They are not caretakers passing through, but the final stewards of a 150-year ministry. They are the central characters of the film: they maintain the daily rhythms of care, hold the community's institutional memory, and have committed to remain until the last patient dies. When they leave, Kalaupapa will no longer exist as a lived place.



When suspected of having leprosy, Hawaiians were arrested and inspected at Kalihi hospital in Honolulu.



Saint Marianne Cope (in wheelchair) shortly before her death in 1918 at Kalaupapa

The filmmakers have returned to this remote peninsula multiple times since 2009, building trust and access that cannot be replicated. The project draws on more than seventeen years of interviews and observational footage, including conversations with patients and clergy who have since passed away. The filmmakers accompanied nine patients on a pilgrimage tour to Rome in 2012 for the canonization of St. Marianne Cope.

The film examines themes of exile, legacy, and historical trauma, with particular attention to Native Hawaiian experiences shaped by colonialism and public-health policy. Through the voices of the sisters, the film explores faith expressed through humble service and the dignity of the human person at the end of life.

Of Saints and Exiles is not a retrospective film about what once

was. It is a present-tense act of witnessing. The events unfolding at Kalaupapa cannot be recreated or restaged; they are happening now, for the last time. By documenting this final chapter as it unfolds, the film preserves a human record of compassion and presence before it is irretrievably lost.

The film acknowledges an unavoidable uncertainty that no one knows when the final patient will die or when the Sisters will leave Kalaupapa. That uncertainty is not a narrative weakness, but the film's organizing principle. When the final patient passes, Kalaupapa will cease to exist as a living community. In its final movement, *Of Saints and Exiles* bears witness to this transition, preserving voices that would otherwise be lost.

This is their home. They grew up here. They would like to spend the rest of their lives here on this peninsula and to be taken care of until the last patient dies.

The Sisters of St. Francis have made a commitment to be here to the very end.

Sister Alicia Damien Lau
Sister of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities
at Kalaupapa





Boys at Kalaupapa showing the effects of leprosy.



One of the many graveyards in the Kalaupapa settlement.

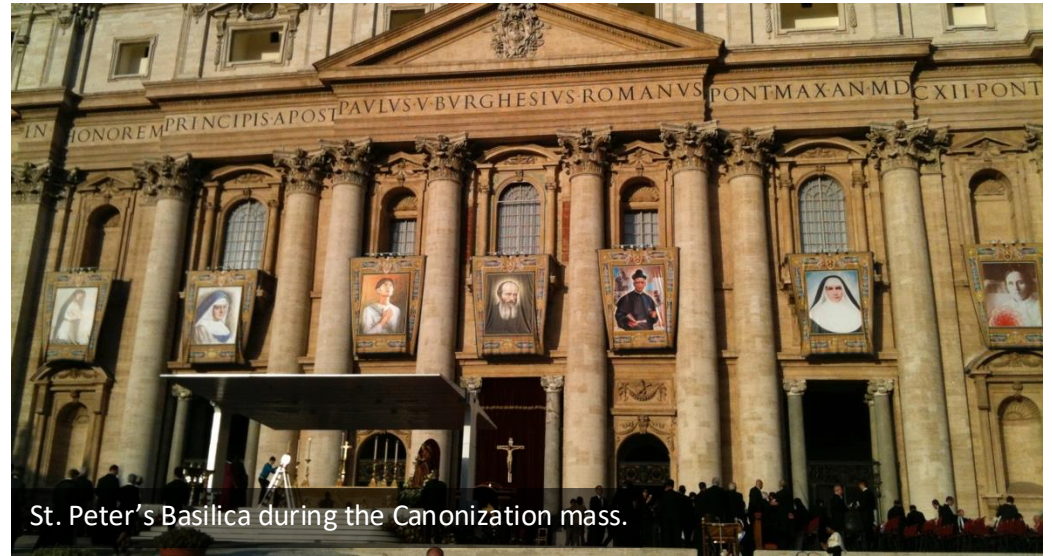
WHY THIS STORY, WHY NOW

Kalaupapa is nearing the end of its life as a living community. When the last patient dies, an extraordinary chapter of American, Native Hawaiian, and Catholic history will close forever. The remaining Sisters of St. Francis—direct spiritual descendants of Saint Marianne Cope—are the last to carry forward a ministry that brought dignity where there was once fear and abandonment.

The combination of vanishing time, unprecedented access, and a 17-year record of filming makes this moment singular. The world will never again see Kalaupapa as a lived village, and the Sisters' ministry will soon pass into history. Leaving this sacred place in the hands of the National Park Service.



Pope Benedict XVI blesses the crowd in St. Peter's Square.



St. Peter's Basilica during the Canonization mass.



Hula at the Basilica of St. Francis, Assisi, Italy

STORY THEMES

- The dignity of the human person at the end of life
- Faith expressed through humble, unglamorous service
- Native Hawaiian experiences of historical trauma
- Legacy, calling, and the emotional weight of being "the last"

CHARACTERS

The Sisters of St. Francis

Sr Alicia Damien Lau & Sr Barbara Jean Wajda

Elderly, humble, and deeply devoted, these two women represent the final generation of Franciscan service at Kalaupapa. Their routines, quiet humor, grace, and steadfast presence form the emotional heart of the film.

The Last Patients

Their memories, humor, trauma, and reflections provide insight into the lived experience of exile and community.

The Land

The towering cliffs, roaring seas, empty homes, and thousands of unmarked graves shape Kalaupapa as a character—an Eden transformed by suffering and redemption.



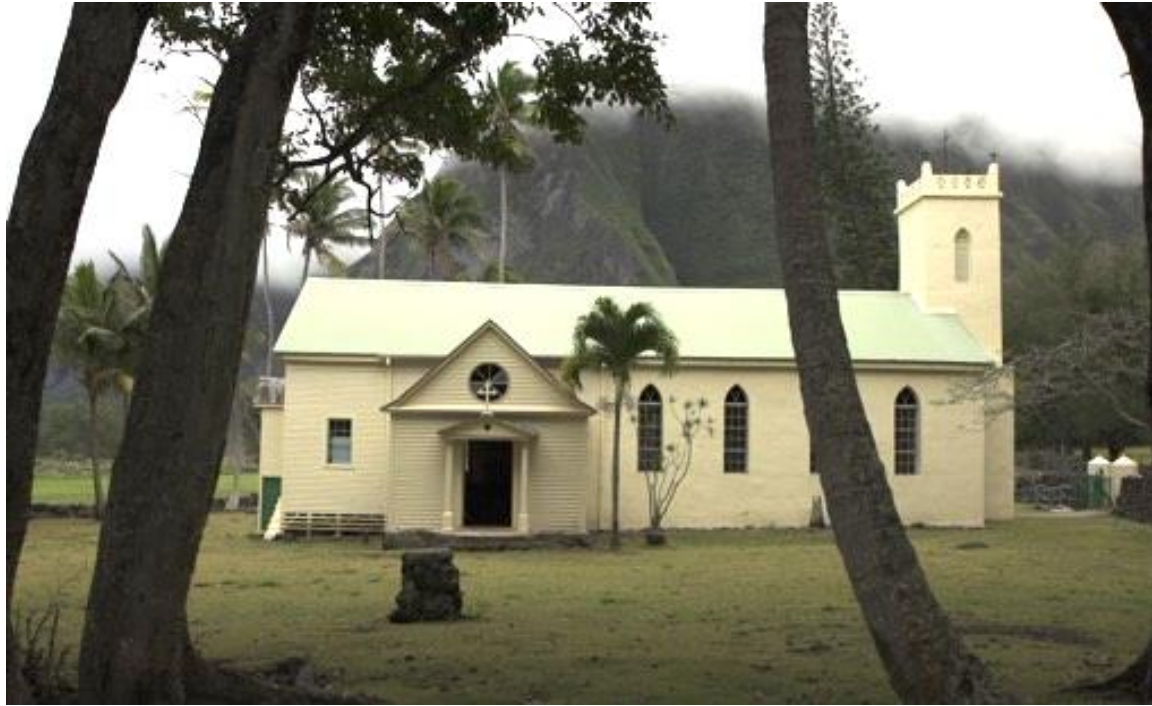
Sr Alicia Damien Lau with patient Pauline Chow at Mother Marianne's grave in 2012



Sr Barbara Jean Wajda looks out toward the field of unmarked graves next to St. Philomena Church



Patient Meli Watanuki at St. Philomena Church



Left: Father Damien's St. Philomena Church. Right: Father Damien with boys from the settlement, 1889

STORY SEGMENTS

Our longitudinal approach to this film dictates that the story will reveal itself over the next few years of Kalaupapa's transition from being the home of the remaining patients to an historical site. However, we can identify several key story segments of the film now, based on research and our 2009-2013 production efforts:

"In this place there is no law"

Historical background of Kalaupapa

Great Love over Fear

The history of Father Damien and Mother Marianne at Kalaupapa

Pilgrims of Moloka'i

Syracuse, Rome and Mother Marianne's Canonization

Ka 'Ohana 'O Kalaupapa

The family of Kalaupapa

The Land of Long Goodbyes

The Last Patient & the End of a Profound Ministry

HIGHLIGHT: “THE REUNION”

Capturing a moment 46 years in the making

“I don’t think I’ve ever had a patient visit us before.” We’re at the Sisters of St. Francis Motherhouse in Syracuse, New York. Sister Mary Christopher Dixon is giving a tour of their modest museum dedicated to Mother Marianne when she stops to talk about their visitors. “One of them was named Boogie...and he was a villain,” she says with a twinkle in her eye. “It was good for us. We got so used to caring for older people.” She caresses a beautiful wooden display box containing a crucifix made from the ironwood trees planted by Mother Marianne to protect the convent on Kalaupapa from the fierce winds. “Many of the sisters took him under their wing because he was young. It’s going to be good to see you Boogie.”

We’re traveling with nine of the elderly Hansen’s patients as they make their pilgrimage, some leaning on canes or riding in wheelchairs, from their remote Hawai’ian peninsula to celebrate the canonization of Mother Marianne Cope at the Vatican in Rome, Italy.

On the way the pilgrims stop in Syracuse, New York to visit Mother Marianne’s reliquary at her home convent, where she was reinterred from her original grave in Kalaupapa. There, the patients and the Franciscan nuns who cared for them share an emotional reunion. Sister Christopher first encountered Boogie when he was about sixteen years old. We are there at the moment when she tearfully meets Boogie again for the first time in over forty years.



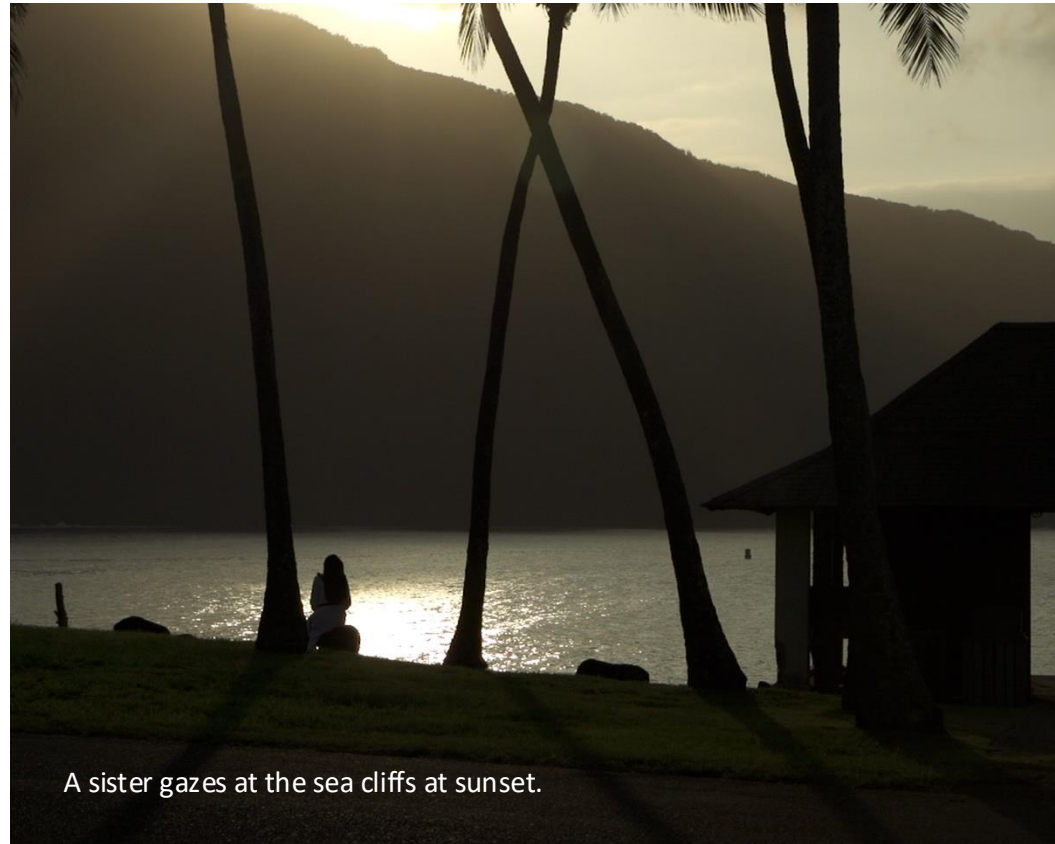
Top: Sister Christopher Dixon met Boogie when he was sixteen years old.
Bottom: Boogie and Sister Christopher meet in 2012.

IMPACT

This film preserves voices and stories that would otherwise vanish. It offers a model of compassion for modern audiences and contributes to national conversations about public health, dignity, caregiving, Native Hawaiian history, and the unsung labor of Catholic sisters who serve far from public recognition.

VISUAL APPROACH

The film blends cinematic vérité, intimate portraiture, and lyrical landscape cinematography. Archival photographs—many showing children and families torn apart by disease—contrast with present-day serenity, revealing how beauty and suffering coexist on this sacred peninsula. Footage from 2009–2013, including the pilgrimage to Rome for Mother Marianne’s canonization, provides a rare temporal bridge connecting past, present, and the approaching end.



A sister gazes at the sea cliffs at sunset.



Of the eight thousand souls who have perished at Kalaupapa, only about one thousand are in marked graves



The team sets up a steadicam shot at Mother Marianne Cope's gravesite with Sister Alicia Damien Lau and Kalaupapa patient, Pauline Chow.

STATUS & ACCESS

Madisonfilm has long-standing relationships with Kalaupapa, the Franciscan Sisters, and surviving patients. We have previously filmed there with permission on multiple occasions. We have approval from the Franciscan Sisters to return multiple times over the next year and a half to finish this story. We are engaged in a longitudinal project capturing this final chapter with unprecedented access and cultural sensitivity.

PRODUCTION TEAM

Our team of skilled filmmakers has been working together on a variety of nonfiction projects for over 20 years. The primary crew from the Kalaupapa shoots in 2009 and 2013 has been documenting public health issues across the country for the National Institutes of Health from 2007-2025.

John Harrington

Producer/Director

John Harrington is a veteran producer of broadcast and interactive media, and a successful media technology entrepreneur. John's work has appeared on all major networks and his interactive media clients include the Smithsonian, NASA, PBS, the Department of Defense, Colonial Williamsburg, and the National Institutes of Health. He produced and directed the documentary film *The Cultivated Life: Thomas Jefferson & Wine*, which aired nationally on PBS and was recognized with two Emmy® awards.

From 2007–2014, John produced the NIH's Native Voices exhibition, featuring more than 200 interviews with Native American, Native Hawaiian, and Alaska Native healers, physicians, and tribal leaders. The exhibition toured 104 sites nationwide and was recognized by Congress for its impact.

John is a graduate of the USC School of Cinema-Television.

Chris Mosio

Cinematographer

In addition to commercial and music videos, Chris has worked on over two-dozen feature films. His range of experience covers both the micro-budgeted independent film and the Hollywood studio production.

His documentary work has taken him around the globe from the jungles of Brazil to flooded villages in Bangladesh, to devastated areas of Haiti. "The Cultivated Life: Thomas Jefferson & Wine" garnered him an Emmy® Award, a Telly® Award, and an Aurora Award for cinematography. Chris is a graduate of the USC School of Cinema-Television.



John Harrington and Chris Mosio



Loreto Di Cesare, Griff Partington and Chris Mosio in Assisi, Italy in 2012.

Griff Partington

Producer

Griff is an experienced Producer, Camera Operator, licensed FAA drone pilot, Production Sound Mixer, and Editor, with more than a thousand B2B and B2C marketing videos to his credit. His client roster includes major brands such as Microsoft, Honda, Discover, Walt Disney World®, and Carnival Cruises, as well as award-winning work for public agencies including Caltrans, NJ TRANSIT, and multiple regional transit authorities.

Griff has served as post-production supervisor on more than 40 Lifetime Movie Network feature films, ensuring projects stayed on schedule, on budget, and broadcast-ready. He earned an Emmy® nomination for directing *Hope Has a Home*. He holds a degree in Telecommunications and Creative Writing from Ball State University.

Loreto Di Cesare

Producer

Loreto Di Cesare is a Los Angeles-based filmmaker with over 30 years of international experience spanning documentary, commercial, and narrative cinema. His career is distinguished by a 14-year tenure at the Vatican Television Center, where he captured historic events under the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

As a Producer and former co-founder of the Italian production house AppetitoFilm, Loreto balances the artistic demands of a Cinematographer with the logistical expertise of a producer, ensuring that every project is as efficient as it is visually compelling. Loreto's work is grounded in the philosophy of Vittorio Storaro: "Light is knowledge."

FUNDING REQUIRED

Phase I: While patients still live at Kalaupapa

Madisonfilm is seeking \$500,000 in funding to make several small-scale production trips to Kalaupapa in 2026-2027.

Phase 2: After the patients are gone

Future funding in the amount of \$785,000 will be required to complete the film once principal photography is complete.

PRODUCTION PLAN

Principal photography completed

- February 2009 (Molokai)
- October 2012 (Canonization pilgrimage)
- January 2013 (Molokai)
- March 2013 (Molokai)

Longitudinal production 2026 - 2027

Travel to Kalaupapa several times per year to record informal interviews and day-in-the-life activities in the settlement. Crew will generally be limited to 2-3 people with a small camera, sound package and drone. The purpose is to “talk story” so that we capture as much oral history as possible.

Add a researcher to the team to scour various photo archives and secure usage rights from the following archives: Hawai’ian Historical Society, Hawai’i State Archives, IDEA Archives, SS.CC. United States Province, SOSF of the Neumann Communities archive.

After the Patients are gone

- Scriptwriting, record voice over with the Sisters
- 12 weeks editorial
- Compose and record original music score
- Online edit, color correction, captioning, screeners, etc.



Kalaupapa patient Meli Watanuki, holding the crew’s boom microphone in 2013.

Meli is one of the three remaining patients.



It's time for us to let the public know how we feel, you know before it was taboo for anybody to bring it up...I'll tell you the story, its better this way. People want to know. You tell them the truth.

Clarence "Boogie" Kahilihiwa (d. 2021)
Kalaupapa Patient

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Presented by
Madisonfilm, Inc.

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