

THE
THERESIAN
STORY:

WOMEN IN SUPPORT
OF WOMEN

To the question, "What do Thesians do?" I have a ready answer. "We don't do, we are!" And to me that is our real identity and our greatest strength. We are. We seek to find within ourselves and through our communities the essence of being.

-Patsy Martin, National President 1989-1990

I believe the gift of wisdom enables us to understand that the Lord is continually calling forth different gifts at different times to build His Kingdom. Thesians called for my gifts and I am grateful .

-Mary Ann Hines, National President, 1992-1993

I believe Thesians stands with a very bright future as it continues to offer ample opportunities for its membership to truly identify, release and unify their gifts with others.

- Robin Marine, National President 1994-1995

THERESIAN PUBLICATIONS

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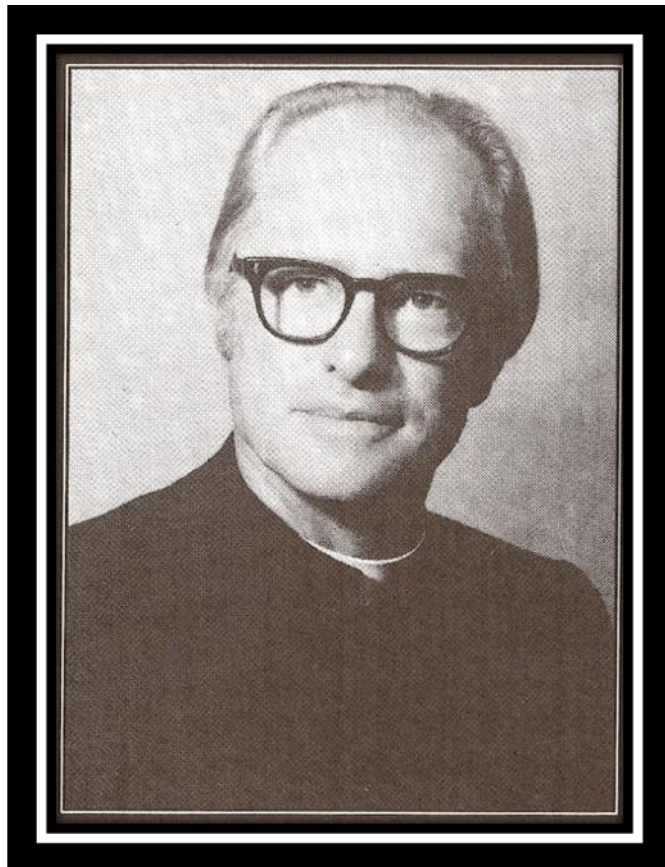
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Rose Ann Barmann, OSB
Executive Director

Dedication

Thesians around the world dedicate our thirty-fifth anniversary edition of THE THERESIAN STORY to our beloved friend and founder.



MSGR. ELWOOD C. VOSS

October 17, 1925 – January 15, 1992
Phoenix, Arizona

On January 15th, 1992, Msgr. Elwood (Woody) C. Voss celebrated his first day of eternal life. Born in Watkins, Iowa, to Gertrude and Henry Voss, he attended Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, and entered St. Thomas Seminary in Denver in 1945. He was ordained to the priesthood for the Diocese of Pueblo, Colorado, on May 26, 1949.

He served as principal of Pueblo Catholic high schools for twenty years. In 1961, Msgr. Voss founded Thesians of the United States and in 1970 The Thesian World Ministry, which has grown to include membership among women on five continents. A gentle, caring, prayerful and affirming man who valued simplicity of life and the specialness of each person he met, Woody leaves a world with a kaleidoscope of people whom he has touched.



Patricia Mullen

Director of Continuous Renewal Program
and Publication Editor

1968 – 1981

Executive Director, Theresians of the United States
and Volunteer International Director

1981 – 1990



Rose Ann Barmann, OSB

Executive Director, Theresians of the United States
1990 –
Director of Theresian World Ministry
1995 –

Preface

This 35th Anniversary edition of *The Theresian Story* is written FOR you and ABOUT you. It is the story of every woman who has been or will become a Theresian. We dedicate this book to Msgr. Elwood C. Voss, our beloved founder, a man of vision and wisdom who saw and felt the need for an organization like Theresians for women over 35 years ago this October, 1996.

The first edition of *The Theresian Story* was authored by Msgr. Voss and Patricia Mullen in 1986. Some revisions and corrections have been made in Chapters One through Nine. Chapter Eight of the 1986 edition has been partially rewritten to give a more comprehensive background of Theresian World Ministry (TWM) as well as to update TWM history. The 1986 Chapter Eight has been merged with the recent notes (46 pages) written by Msgr. Voss within a year before his death along with the TWM Board minutes and filed travel reports of Patricia Mullen.

At the October 1995 Board meeting in Burbank, California, Sr. Rose Ann proposed that the Theresians publish a second edition of *The Theresian Story* to record the past ten years of the Theresian history. The Board endorsed this proposal and asked that the National Presidents of 1986 – 1995 years record their experiences of Theresians during their time of leadership.

Chapter Ten:	President Bernie Carpenter, 1987 – 1988
Chapter Eleven:	President Patsy Martin, 1988 – 1990
Chapter Twelve:	President Barbara Williams, 1990 – 1991 (prepared by Sr. Rose Ann)
Chapter Thirteen:	President Mary Ann Hines, 1991 – 1993
Chapter Fourteen:	President Robin Marine, 1993 – 1995

Chapters Ten through Fourteen reflect what touched these women as they served the national community of Theresians. The preceding 25 years of living the Theresian lifestyle prepared their hearts and souls to serve you as their leader. Their story and your stories merge as over the past 35 years you have developed, nurtured, led and guided the Theresians through times of hope, of sadness, of fear, of renewal and of great rejoicing.

Colorado Springs, Colorado
August 1, 1996

Introduction

Women in the New Testament must have had many stories to tell. Their male counterparts (e.g. the evangelists) recorded some women's stories; however, they were written from men's viewpoints.

Today there are historians and Scripture scholars who read these same stories against the full background of what they know about the entire milieu that surrounded Jesus, his companions and followers.

Through use of this research methodology, it is easier to gain a deep awareness of the importance of the recorded actions and words of the New Testament personalities. Both women and men take on new life when read within the context of the events and traditions of their times. Women's stories of past generations, with historical and sociological research and some imagination, become not only inspirational, but also provide opportunities for identification, for discovering models, so to speak.

Women in the New Testament traveled the known world, just as the men did, for the purpose of carrying Jesus' message to those who had not yet heard the Good News of the Gospels. One can read of these women in letters written by their male counterparts. For example, St. Paul writes about the "diakonos Phoebe," and "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church," about his "co-worker Prisca" and "brother/sister Apphia" as well as "apostle Junia" (Romans 16: 1,3,7.) In Colossians (3: 15,16) Paul says, "Please give my greetings . . .to Nympha and the church which meets in her house."

Those women had stories to tell. If they did indeed record the events of their lives and their ministries, their writings were not passed on to future generations.

As each century entered and exited, women's recorded stories were few, and usually, if told at all, were told by men. Again, little history filtered down to descendants through the pens of women.

Research is uncovering writings by women, about women and about the world around them. These more recently studied documents confirm the fact that if history were told from a woman's point of view, or if the stories of women's roles in history were given due attention, students' history books would read differently today. As it is, most recorded history is the story of men and their accomplishments and these generally relate to some form of warfare or struggle for power. Their stories were recorded by men themselves, a fact that is not surprising, since formal education was generally reserved for the males in each family. Until recent decades most women were not (and even today, some women are not) in a position to write history at all.

For women's stories to be passed on to their progeny, these stories must be told. They must be written by women. They must be published.

This book is such a story although it is written by both women and a man. It is the story of women of faith who developed, nurtured and shared what they created from an idea, a dream. This story can serve as a model for other women. It is a testament to women who found ways to survive creatively during the turbulent 1960s and the uncertain 1970s and 1980s, and look forward in hope to the third millennium. These women created an organization that is theirs. They looked to themselves and often to their counterparts outside their organization for leadership and inspiration. This is their story.

Colorado Springs, Colorado

August 1, 1996

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Beginnings

This story begins in 1961. 1961. The year the United States Peace Corps was founded. The year the United States Space Program was launched. The year that Theresians embarked upon a journey that would lead them, in 1969, to be the first after Vatican Council II to redefine publicly the vocation ministry as it applies to the essence of each person's vocation through Baptism. Theresian communities, as of 1969, became forerunners or models for the bonding of women from among every lifestyle.

Pueblo, Colorado, a peaceful and unpretentious city of 100,000 people, is the setting for the origins of this story. A steel mill and an arsenal provided the sustenance for most people in Pueblo in 1961. The Catholic Church there was typical of the church anywhere else in the United States prior to Vatican Council II. But, there was a difference, too.

A priest with some eleven years of experience in administration in the diocese, realized that there was little contemporary inspiration for women in the Catholic Church. He observed that the purpose of women's church organizations was generally the support of others. That is to say, that although all of these organizations had admirable goals, there were few organizations, if any, that existed FOR the women themselves. Women were very accustomed to giving of themselves in church and society, but were not often provided with in-depth opportunities for self-enrichment leading to personal growth. The solution? An organization named Theresians that would provide an opportunity for women to enrich their own lives through spiritual development, ongoing education, affirmation and encouragement in their vocations, and a deep community experience. (Later, these four aims, plus ministry to others, become known as The Five Dimensions.) Women would certainly be encouraged to continue to be involved in apostolic activities in their parishes. Also, their common apostolic activity would be, for seven years, as will be explained later, that of providing support to Catholic Sisters.

Why the name Theresians? Therese of Lisieux was chosen Theresian patron saint because she saw through the complicated spirituality of her own day. She worked out her own unique approach to God, apparently without entrenching herself in the more complex and sometimes stifling forms of spirituality and theology developed by some theologians and spiritual directors over the centuries. St. Therese knew how to communicate with God and love the people in her midst at any given moment. More recently, studies of the spiritual practices of her time, with maudlin piety and florid imagery, and of Therese's own spiritual straightforwardness, indicate her almost radical approach toward spiritual development. She sought a "means of going to heaven by a little way, a way that. . . (was) very straight, very short and totally new."¹

Bishop Joseph C. Willging, first Bishop of Pueblo, supported the concept of Theresians as presented to him by would-be founder, priest Elwood C. Voss. Because of other professional commitments, the founder laid aside his blueprint for this unprecedented women's organization for two years. However, he was convinced that it would be met with enthusiasm.

After two years he needed to act. He drew up a tentative proposal that could possibly make his dream a reality and discussed his strategy with the new Bishop of Pueblo, Charles A. Buswell. The latter offered sincere encouragement. A letter was sent by the founder to Bertha Grosso, a Pueblo woman whom he recognized as a leader and someone with whom women would readily identify. He asked her to meet with him to give her observations of his plan. She did so. She caught the vision and committed herself to help establish the very first Theresian community. Together they invited thirty more Pueblo lay women to a Theresian information meeting.

Their responses to the proposal for a new organization for women were both helpful and enthusiastic. The plan was accepted with keen interest as was the challenge to give it a try. The first Theresian community met on October 3, 1961. There were thirty-two members.

Just one month following the first Theresian meeting, a gathering of fourteen women and men from around the United States convened in Pueblo. These were lay leaders, church administrators, educators, missionaries and religious community leaders. They travelled to Pueblo at the invitation of the founder who sought their opinions about the possibilities of sharing the goals and structure of this fledgling organization with women around the United States. Each person invited was asked to pay for her/his own transportation and other travel expenses. No small request.

All fourteen persons invited accepted the invitation to Pueblo. This meeting was so successful that the idea for an ongoing national and, ultimately, international board of consultants emerged. Although certain board memberships change from year to year, the Board of Consultants has met annually for twenty-five years. And, yes, members still pay their own meeting-related expenses.

No group has contributed more to the development of the five-dimension program of Theresians than has the national Board of Consultants. They are the idea people. They are creative people. These women (some are non-members,) and occasionally men, do not determine policy, but often suggest policy changes to the national Executive Board. Consultants have contributed much towards keeping the Theresian organization contemporary and progressive.

One more body crucial to the success of the organization came into being in 1961. Women from the first Theresian community formed the original policy-making board, or Executive Board. For two years these women met once each month to guide the youthful organization through its first growth period. By 1963, Theresians and their leaders were caught up with the excitement and wonderment of Vatican Council II and were anxious to make its influence felt within Theresian communities.

In 1962, Virginia Siegle (O'Donnell,) a high school junior, was employed by the organization to coordinate Theresian leaders through the United States. She worked energetically for seven years, balancing Theresian involvement with her own family responsibilities. In 1968, she was named honorary co-founder of Theresians.

At this time, a young, vivacious, charismatic president, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, led the country. A space program triggered the imagination of young and old. A church made a full circle back to the spirit of the early Christian communities. Finally, a humanitarian program carried the youthful, energetic, caring spirit of the United States to people struggling for their very existences against the threat of disease, ignorance, starvation and oppression – the Peace Corps. What a perfect time for Catholic women to launch out in a new direction.

Like the leaders of those other “programs of vision” in the 1960s, early Theresian leaders were courageous and possessed great faith when they scheduled a national conference in Pueblo, Colorado, in 1962. The organization was just one year old and had only four communities. This was a conference, not a convention. Hence, everyone was welcome to attend. Under the leadership of Neta Sackman and Pauline Tezak, the conference attendance soared to 1,500 women from around the United States. It was the largest gathering of people in the history of the city of Pueblo.

By way of historical reference, on the first day of the conference, the President of the United States led a motorcade through downtown Pueblo. Few conference attendees knew beforehand about his trip to Pueblo and were stunned, yet delighted, with the appearance of John F. Kennedy. He had actually gone there to sign a water diversion bill.

Many conference attendees were Sisters who represented congregations of women religious about to burst upon the world scene as prophetic leaders of renewal for the whole church at the close of Vatican Council II. They were highly sensitive to the stirrings of anything that might be resourceful or supportive of them as they continued to press onward with their renewal goals.

It is appropriate to present in this book some background for Sisters' efforts toward renewal because their influences on the church and in many areas of society have been impressive, especially in recent years. What prepared them for impacting church and society as they did? Renewal in religious congregations began approximately fifteen years before Vatican Council II. This renewal was prompted by the requests of Popes Pius XII, John XXIII and Paul VI. They asked Sisters to update themselves educationally, philosophically, psychologically, spiritually and theologically. In 1950, during the First International Congress of Religious in Rome, leaders of Sisters' congregations were told that the Sacred Congregation of Religious "would look favorably upon requests for any changes in constitution, rule, custom and ascetical practices that would modernize the spirit and works of the individual Community."²

1954 marked the foundation of the national Sister Formation Conference which greatly changed the education and total formation program for young Sisters. Their training included spiritual and intellectual preparation for the present and the future. Theresians were well informed about Sisters' progress in these years; two leaders of the Sister Formation Conference served on the national Board of Consultants of Theresians and the Theresian founder served on the SFC Board.

In 1956, the leaders of the majority of religious communities of women formed the conference of Major Superiors of Women (known today as the Leadership Conference of Women Religious – LCWR.) This was a colossal step forward for congregations of women. These leaders pooled their expertise and that of their members in areas relevant to the personal, spiritual and educational growth of their communities' members. Other important issues affecting their congregations were shared, discussed and acted upon.

LCWR members were determined to provide more opportunities for better higher education for Sisters. Thus, thousands of women pursued their educations together on hundreds of campuses around the United States. As the barriers that separated congregation from congregation slowly dissolved and these women shared their visions as well as their frustrations, a community much larger than any of their own individual communities took form.

In the early 1960s, a number of books made an impact on a majority of Sisters: *Sisters for the 21st Century*³ by Sr. Bertrand Meyers, D.D., *The Nun in the World*⁴ by Leo Cardinal Suenens of Belgium and *The Changing Sister*,⁵ ed. Sister M. Charles Borromeo Muckenhirn, C.S.C., were among them. The reading of these and similar books, and the intermingling of Sisters of all ages from numerous congregations in universities across the nation, marked a change in their sense of the future for the Catholic Sister. Sisters knew that their own lives would never be the same. The combination of advanced education; the prophetic vision of a number of their own congregations' leaders; the founding of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious; books written by women about women, and a church in the midst of making new history, helped to bring about a great change of vision and spirit among Sisters throughout the land. At the same time, Theresian communities were establishing their own identities!

By the early 1960s, most Sisters had caught the visions of prophets in their midst and of their congregations' foundresses. The apparent disruption that all of this introspection and discernment brought to religious life in the 1960s and 1970s was deeply painful, yet challenging for Sisters, laity and clergy. However, the vision had to be followed; impelling internal and external forces urged these women and men to go forward.

There was a long-felt and deep awareness among numerous Sisters that they had sacrificed the spirit and vision of those women, and in some instances men, who established their congregations decades and even centuries earlier. By the 1960s, those same founders would have been in the forefront of renewal in religious life and in the church and would have been leading with that same vision that called them earlier to respond to the spiritual and human needs peculiar to their own day. Those women were the prophets of their own times, and gathered together women who would minister to those for whom most people had neither time nor the desire to serve – the marginalized. Numerous Sisters since the 1960s recognized the importance and the need for more among them to follow again the Spirit's call to minister to the powerless, to the oppressed, to those with little reason for hope in church and in society. For this reason, it seemed logical for Sisters to join a small group of lay women in Pueblo for the first Theresian conference, to explore their futures together.

Each year, from 1962 through 1969, Theresians saw an increase in their membership with new communities springing up throughout the country. They continued to sponsor annual national conferences. Sisters and lay women from around the nation continued to attend and to share their expertise in matters relating especially to women and to church. Chapter Four will highlight several of these conference speakers.

Two other events added to the turbulence of the 1960s: the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan⁶ in 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. These two events affected Catholics as much as anyone else, although at the time of their appearance, most people did not realize their impact on the future of society in this country, nor did many see the connection between the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Movement.

Both movements called for respect for the dignity of all persons. It was a reminder of: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Jesus,) or "All baptized in Christ, you have all clothed yourselves in Christ and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but you are one in Christ Jesus" – Galatians 3:27-28.

In essence, the Women's Movement is similar to the Civil Rights Movement in that each asks for respect, freedom and justice for all. The essence of the Women's Movement was not and is not control of the man's world. Women want fair and equal opportunities to express opinions and make decisions about the directions of society, their churches and their lives. For example, in a culture where the value of a person's accomplishments is rewarded monetarily, women are asking to be on the same remuneration scale as men whether their own accomplishments are in the home, in church, or in the marketplace. In the early years of the re-incarnation of the Women's Movement, it appeared to many people that some women went too far, so to speak. However, many others recognized that throughout history, there have been those intense few who have, indeed, engaged in what appears to be unorthodox actions in order to draw to the attention of the more somnolent among us, the injustices around us. Leaving one's comfort zone is usually unpleasant, so naturally the prophets who call others to awareness are very threatening. Prophets have always risked criticism and even ostracism from family and communities, especially when moving people to respond to social sins. Prophets have often been noisy and rejected.

At first, many Catholic women alienated themselves from the Women's Movement. Some feared it; some were unprepared for it; many wanted it but were unable for various reasons to take the spirit of the Gospels into the movement with serenity and confidence. The obvious question put to Catholics was, "What are some Catholics afraid of? Surely not that their Gospel values are wrong or inappropriate for the Women's Movement."

It must be said, however, that there was a sizable group of Catholic women, lay and Sisters, who were already in the forefront of the Women's Movement. These were women who were serious students and teachers of history, theology, spirituality, political science, sociology, social justice, and the phenomenon of

global interdependencies. These were extremely caring women who long ago learned the importance of preparing themselves for leadership roles in church and society. These women welcomed the movement and joined other women of faith within it.

The decade became one of uncertainty within church and society. The life of the energetic young President of the United States was destroyed by the bullet of a lone assassin in 1963; the documents of Vatican Council II were enthusiastically accepted by many, but certainly scorned by enough church members to make the following ten years a most difficult period for Council supporters and rejecters alike. Uppermost on the minds of U.S. citizens was a war on the other side of the world in Vietnam, a war which daily dragged on, killing more civilians than military. A new kind of revolution was in the air. It was felt in universities, in churches, in board rooms, in convents, in homes and in government – everywhere.

Evidence of this revolution could be seen and heard every night on television news. One could hardly hide from the strongly-felt responsibility to take a stand on each and every issue.

As the decade of the 1960s closed, prompted by transformations within church and society, lay women and Sisters re-assessed their purposes, goals and visions. A whole new relationship between Sisters and lay women continued to emerge. As each group prayed and pondered over the direction their lives would take, they strove with courage and determination toward the 21st century.

By 1969, Thesians had bonded in friendship with Sisters living in the same cities as themselves. Through their national conferences and local monthly meetings, Thesians were often those who gave the Sisters a platform for the expression of their suggested goals, both for themselves and the entire church. It seemed only logical that in 1969, the national Executive Board of the Thesians of the United States opened its membership to Sisters and, at the same time, to women of other Christian denominations.

The statement of purpose was broadened to read: “The Thesians of the United States is a Catholic organization of women who are dedicated to a deeper appreciation of the vocation of the Christian woman.” It is a “Catholic organization,” yes, but membership is open to “Christian women.” As of 1986 both Sisters and Protestant women together number approximately twelve per cent of Thesian membership.

The new organization of some 1,200 women had survived well the vicissitudes of life in the 1960s, although barely nine-years old at decade’s end. Within the Thesian organization, there was an aura of excitement and an abundance of hope in the future as women of all lifestyles bonded together in small Thesian communities to share the oneness of their Baptismal call, the diversity of their lifestyles, and their hopes for the future of church and society.

Moving Forward

On the eve of the 1970s, the future for Thesians looked encouraging, although growing pains were evident. While the members had developed a nationwide network of communities that offered opportunities for inspiration, growth and hope, new communities continued to be established. However, a few of the large, original groups disbanded early in the decade because, admittedly, they could not accept the restatement or broadening of the purpose of Thesians. During the 1970s, other sizable and original communities rejected the raise in national dues. This long-overdue 100-percent raise in dues was a decision of the national Executive Board. It was considered crucial to the continuation of service to each community and to the support of new Thesian communities. The increase was made, too, out of a sense that justice demanded adequate working conditions, livable income and, hopefully, insurance and retirement benefits for future employees of the organization.

The leadership was determined to continue the policy of not involving the membership in fund-raising efforts on the organization's behalf. Most members already belonged to charitable groups and church organizations that called them to do fund-raising for others. It was hoped that in Thesians, a woman would recognize the benefits afforded her as a member of a Thesian community: personal growth, loving support, spiritual and intellectual challenges, affirmation and so much more. It was also hoped that in Thesians each community would recognize the benefits afforded it as a member of a national organization: a multitude of creative ideas for implementing the five-dimension program, ideas funneled from each community to every other through national office personnel; membership in a community of women that extends across the entire nation; a national newsletter; a leadership manual, and biennial national and regional conferences; community leadership support, and more. All of these if taken advantage of offered opportunities for exploring new concepts for growth in each dimension of Thesians.

What they gained from Thesian membership, most Thesians realized, positively affected multiple phases of their lives. By the raise of dues, members were challenged to acknowledge their sense of self worth by paying their own way in Thesians, thus not being dependent upon outside fund-raising activities to cover Thesian expenses. Members were challenged, too, to consider early Christian community models as they devised strategies whereby dues assessments could be met by every member, including those on fixed incomes and women of minimal means.

A few members feared that a substantial raise of dues might cause Thesians to become an organization solely for the financially elite because, they suggested, only the elite could pay \$21 per year in national dues plus established local dues, the amount of which is decided upon by each community and is used to cover local community expenses. This latter amount varies from community to community. In actuality, the few communities which withdrew at the time of the raised dues were those which possessed two common characteristics: 1) most of their members had never truly accepted the 1969 re-statement of purpose, and 2) all of the members were affluent. The raised dues hastened the review of their commitments as Thesians. Did they wish to pay \$21 to continue membership in an organization whose purpose and vision were not comfortable for them?

The withdrawal of the large groups mentioned above was not a surprise to other members of the organization, and certainly not to the organization's leaders, because the women in the disbanded communities had again, admittedly, struggled with most if not all changes in the church and certainly changes in society.

Some acknowledged looking to Thesians to give them affirmation in their desire to remain untouched by forces of change in those two institutions.

Core members of these communities briefly made efforts to reverse the direction of Thesians, or at least to slow down its progress, before formally withdrawing membership in the national organization. Although these communities were large, and thus their potential financial support of the organization through the raised dues was substantial, national leaders of the 1970s knew that to compromise the forward-moving flow of the entire organization would limit not only its influence, but more importantly its appeal to future members. These latter are women of all ages who are continuously drawn to Thesians because of its five-dimension program of personal and communal growth. Therefore, the spirit and direction of Thesians, nationally, was not compromised.

Thus, contrary to early critical opinion of some, Thesians is by no means an organization of affluent women. Yes, of course, there are affluent women in Thesians, but these are women with the same commitment to growth through the five dimensions and with the same goal of living Gospel-valued lives as are other members.

Thesians, as an organization born in the early 1960s, had developed in the very beginning an openness to the workings of the Spirit, and to date has not mired itself in trivial traditions, nor have its leaders' ears been closed to the prophets in their midst. It is this openness that has made Thesians so appealing to both young and old, to women of all lifestyles and economic backgrounds, to any woman who is open to the future.

The 1970s eventually brought maturity to the organization and the national leadership came into its own with confidence, enthusiasm and vision. The personal growth of these leaders paralleled that of the most vibrant, futuristic women in church and society. New and creative approaches were devised to further develop the five dimensions (spirituality, education, community, vocation and ministry) of the Thesian commitment. Creative and knowledgeable women emerged among Thesians, women who could be found exercising their leadership and carrying their values into parishes, into diocesan and national boards, into the business world, into the political arena and certainly into their homes.

Two phenomena occurred in the 1970s which affected Thesians: church-alienated young mothers and the sudden increase of single women in this society. Many young women, especially those who had grown up in the 1960s and left organized religion, married and suddenly faced responsibility for their own children. According to a significant number of these women, they wondered what life would be like for their children if they, the parents, offered no religious experience or religious heritage to their children. These young mothers realized how much they did not know about all the positive changes and progress in their renewing church. The external changes were obvious and they wanted to know the reasons for them. They wanted to know what values organized religion, particularly the religion of their Baptism, had to offer them now. These were young mothers who, while growing up, had questioned or shed many of the traditional values of the adults around them. What could religion do for them today? How did they fit in? What were the religious values they wanted to pass on to their children?

These young women expressed a need for a place to talk about their concerns, a space where they could be themselves with their fears, their hopes and their visions. Most importantly they wanted a place where they could grow in faith and maturity. Some of these needs could, of course, be met at home and in parishes. Understandably, however, parish personnel are sometimes overwhelmed with just meeting the general spiritual needs of thousands of parishioners. Thesians provide for many young mothers what they do not always find elsewhere. In Thesians they find a trusting, honest atmosphere for growth and sisterhood.

It is the generations of the over-forty women who can be faith models for these women. If religion is to be relevant to the young, they have to see that those who have been a part of religion are striving to make it relevant for themselves and women of all ages.

The story of these young Theresians does not stop with their own discoveries about Theresians, but it reveals the depth of their sense of ministry to one another. These same young women have proven to be enthusiastic bearers of the good news of Theresians to other women of their age group. They are prime movers in assisting new communities to come into being.

The second phenomenon that grew out of the 1960s was the decrease in the numbers of women marrying and entering religious life. Young women of the 1960s and 1970s realized more often than was true in previous generations that the choice to remain single was more acceptable by society than ever before. We are often told by single women, however, that just because one is single does not necessarily mean she is single by choice. The fact is since the single lifestyle is undeniably more prevalent today there indeed are women who are not drawn to marriage or to the religious life.

The fact remains that more and more women today are single in this country than at any other time in its history. They, too, seek a deeper commitment to personal growth and to their commitment as baptized Christians. Many of these single women can be found in Theresian communities.

Single women continue to search for an authentic spirituality. Their needs are unique. They observe that their needs are not among the priorities of many parish communities. They realize that families are and will continue to be the major concern of any parish staff or any homilist. Single women know that they must be creative in providing for their own and one another's spiritual needs. Theresians provides a community to meet those needs.

Although not a reality of phenomenal proportions, it is true that young Sisters, too have found that membership in Theresian communities of young married and single women meets some of their own needs, needs which are not always met in a religious congregation. Some young Sisters have told us that because Sisters their own ages are few in number in most congregations, there is a need for periodic dialogue with and companionship among women their own ages. Although very happy in their own congregations, these young Sisters say that their own growth is enhanced and their lives deeply enriched through their bonding with single and married women in a community environment in Theresians.

Each year a few Theresian communities discontinue and more come into being. About one-half of the communities founded in this decade are comprised of women in their twenties and thirties. This continuing trend toward new communities of young women is reflected also in the Theresian national leadership in the U.S. in this decade. In recent years, national presidents' ages have ranged from 28 to 39.

Another event of significance for Theresians nationally in the 1970s was the move of the national office from Pueblo, Colorado, to Phoenix, Arizona, on February 2, 1971. There was a brief three-year stay, from 1968 – 1971 in Colorado City, Colorado.

The reasons for this move were threefold: 1) the office needed to be in a larger metropolitan area with adequate resources and transportation opportunities; 2) Phoenix, like Pueblo, is in the Southwest, the birthplace of the organization; 3) Phoenix is the hub of the Southwest, the fastest growing section of the United States and a city very hospitable to visitors year round. The present national office (Theresian Center) is owned by the organization and approximately 500 Theresians have visited this center since 1971.

As the 1980s unfold, the Theresian story continues to reveal itself within the context of the story of church and of society. It seems appropriate at this point, lest we make the same error in story telling that has often been made in the past, only in reverse order, to give due credit to the men who made their own impact on Theresian history. A good place to begin is with husbands, other male relatives and friends, whose friendships and moral support of Theresians give frequent evidence of a sincere and sensitive affirmation of women's expressed desire for some space of their own within their Theresian communities. These supportive men occasionally attend Theresian national conferences and, from time to time, lend their expertise or general talents, when requested to do so, to conference and national leaders. Also, there are those husbands who openly admit their gratitude for the consciousness-raising that their wives bring to them and to their families, especially when related to justice issues and women's concerns in church and society. On occasions, Theresians and their spouses and/or other male family members or friends gather together to celebrate a social event in their small community or a landmark in a member's life. Deep individual friendships and, in the case of married couples, couple-to-couple friendships have resulted from these periodic events. Men can serve occasionally on the Theresian National Board of Consultants when their experience or knowledge are sought by Board members or national office personnel.

Many among the clergy have supported Theresians. Whenever Theresians is introduced into an area for the first time, the new Theresian leaders make their presence known to the local bishop. Without exception, every bishop has welcomed Theresians. None has ever entered into the decisions of local communities or of the national leadership. There has been and continues to be an honest and open dialogue between Theresians and hierarchy whenever circumstances have brought about opportunities for such.

In the 1960s, priest chaplains were appointed to most Catholic organizations, including religious congregations. Theresians was no exception. Most chaplains celebrated Eucharist each month and conducted occasional prayer days. Many priests have referred women parishioners to Theresian communities and a number of priests have asked that Theresians be initiated in their areas of a city. We observe an increasing number of clergy who are sensitive to women's needs in the church and in society today

After the Theresian purpose statement was broadened in 1969 and Sisters joined Theresians, many Sisters were asked to serve as "chaplains" and/or spiritual consultants to most communities of Theresians. They led para-liturgical prayer meetings and were, at that time, able to pass on to their lay sisters what they had learned in religious communities about preparing special Eucharistic liturgies, prayer services and various methods of leading prayer sessions. By the mid-70s, spiritual leaders emerged from among every lifestyle; women no longer felt the need to depend on Sisters as prayer leaders. This was one way for women to begin to experience the joy of spiritual ministry to others.

As this story is written in the summer of 1986, and as Theresians look to the next century, there are a myriad of events in the cycle of joys and sorrows in the life of a nation and a people which are synonymous with the cycles of joys and sorrows in the life of an individual. These events impact everyone in some way. They will provide, many years hence, part of the explanation of who we are in the 1980s and how we responded as people of faith to our own environment.

When our story is read 25 years from now, people will know us more clearly by the events that surrounded our lives:

Terrorism ranks high on the list of overwhelming sorrow as does the apparent expected abandonment of the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT.) Sorrow was also experienced with the murder of four women missionaries in El Salvador in 1981 and is again felt today with the struggle of the refugees from Central America as they seek acceptance in a nation that celebrates the anniversary of the arrival to its shores, 100 years ago, of the great statue of a woman named Liberty.

The homeless and hungry in this nation and in many countries of the world are visible signs that the people of the world are interdependent upon one another and in need of a creative world order that assures each person of his/her rights through birth to share in the goods of the earth. The homeless and hungry are a challenge to our sense of compassion, justice and love of neighbor.

Too, the decades of the 80s carries a sadness for those women who are believed by others and by themselves to be called by God and by their faith communities to the fullness of ministry within their church, but who simply because they are women are told that tradition prevents their responding to this call.

And finally, in this decade, the tragedy of the Challenger lingers in our memories. The pain of loss to the nation was and is still likened to the sense of loss upon the assassination of its President in 1963.

The decade, to date, has been marked with occasions of profound joy for Americans, in general, and for women, in particular. Events which brought smiles, moments of pride of happiness, and of gratitude to people for a variety of reasons, were:

- The return of the Iranian hostages in 1981 after 444 days in captivity.
- The launching of the space shuttle Columbia in 1981.
- The appointment of Sandra Day O'Connor of Arizona as the first woman Justice of the Supreme Court.
- The selection of the first woman United States vice-presidential candidate, Geraldine Ferraro, in 1984
- The Catholic Bishops' pastoral on peace and their forthcoming economic pastoral.
- The decision of these same bishops not to write a pastoral "on women," but about women's concerns.
- The gradual appointments of more women to decision-making positions in the church. (This action is certainly long overdue and its acceleration encouraged.)

These are all signs of an emerging sense of justice and equality among church leaders. The leadership of women and men theologians in the fields of economic and political justice, marriage and women's issues has been a cause of hope.

As the Theresian story evolves within the context of national and global events, Theresians seek strength of spirit, mind and body to prepare them to accept the daily call to live creatively active lives which are open to the workings of the Spirit within them.

The Theresian story of the 1980s has brought out the growing global character of Theresians. This was evidenced at the 1984 international conference in Honolulu. Members from Canada, England, Ghana, West Africa, Australia, The Philippines, Thailand and The United States attended this conference and impacted greatly upon it. (Global directions of Theresians are discussed in Chapter Eight.)

In this decade, the women's movement continues to impact our lives. Alongside of it is a growing consciousness of the world's need for a new, creative and visionary approach toward making peace, harmony and justice for all an integral part of our lives worldwide. Women and men of all faiths are realizing the connections between the essences of the Women's Movement, the Gospels and this global sensitivity. Theresians will be a part of this global movement and will continue to bring their own values and expertise to it.

Women of Faith

Spiritual Dimension

The story of Thesians and their spiritual journey parallels women's awareness of their own unique spiritual needs and expressions. With or without knowing it, Thesians are a part of the developing reality of a feminine spirituality, a spirituality that evolves out of women's experiences just as most of traditional spirituality evolved out of men's experiences.

Other than one's personal relationship with God, spirituality 25 years ago, for most U.S. Catholics, consisted of weekly Mass and Communion, an occasional mission, and an even less occasional retreat. Then, too, being a good Catholic in the United States meant serious adherence to the Baltimore Catechism. Mass in Latin, with the celebrant facing the congregation only during the Gospel, sermon and Communion, was the order of the day.

Unless one belonged to an adult discussion group, was a student of theology or of Sacred Scripture, or lived in a religious congregation, one was not often exposed to talk about growth in faith, spirituality and theology. In religious congregations, the theology and Christian ethics of past "masters" were studied and discussed. And although spiritual development was nurtured in the novitiate, albeit through rather medieval practices and theories, it was unusual for Sisters, too, to discuss openly their personal prayer lives and spirituality with one another.

Who among Sisters, Priests and Brothers could forget the bible of their early years in religious life: *The Spiritual Life: A Treatise on Ascetical and Mystical Theology*⁷ by Rev. A. Tanqueray? The road to perfection could be traversed successfully if one adhered closely to the theology and spirituality described therein. The author's listed resources, it might be noted, not only cover nearly every century since the first, but, also, out of the over 300 people he quotes, only nineteen are women. One would be led to believe that women, most of whom have been mothers, have had little, if any influence on the spiritual development of the world. The book was actually intended to be used in seminaries, but, nevertheless, was used in nearly every novitiate of women's congregations. The spiritual models provided in Tanqueray were difficult for young American women to imitate.

Along came Vatican Council II. A multitude of externals to the faith were eliminated or reversed. The Priest faced the congregation. Catholics prayed in their own languages, stood for Communion and became lectors, ministers of the Eucharist, directors of religious education, liturgists, members of parish councils, heads of social justice committees, members of diocesan boards and more.

The Council told Catholics they are, one and all, regardless of lifestyle, "called by the Lord to perfect holiness."⁸ Following the Council, members of religious congregations of women led the way toward spiritual renewal. For example, leaders of religious congregations of women appointed from among their own community members spiritual directors for young Sisters. Periodic spiritual renewal retreats, often lasting one to three months, were inaugurated for young, middle aged and senior Sisters.

Sisters began to experiment with more creative forms of prayer and with houses of prayer. The significance of all of this is that even into the mid-1960s much of the spiritual education for most congregations did not come from within the community, but from clergy. The hidden assumption being, it is supposed, that

they were better educated in spiritual matters and, therefore, better spiritual authorities and possibly even holier people.

It must be noted, however, that already in the 1950s and 1960s there were women of all lifestyles, although few in number, who realized that women needed to begin to take responsibility for their own spiritual growth. These were the women who became retreat leaders, “chaplains,” and serious students of theology and spirituality. Slowly lay women and Sisters shared their same visions for a feminine spirituality and began leading prayer groups, home retreats for women, bible study classes for adults and other spiritually oriented groups.

In Thesians and in some parishes, lay women and Sisters drew from each other and their experiences. The depth of faith that Sisters learned from lay women influenced their study and reflections of their own vowed commitments. Sisters who listened to and worked with women who lived other lifestyles discovered women naturally adept at contemplation and certainly at living faith-filled lives.

In the immediate post-Vatican II era the more energetic Catholics leapt into the whole renewal process with tremendous vigor while the cautious and skeptical and the generally uninterested chose to sit back and wait to see where all this flurry of activity would take them.

All the while evidence abounded that women’s spiritual thirst increased. Larger numbers than ever before enrolled, en masse, in spiritually-related degree programs, spiritual institutes, etc. They began in the 1970s to realize that women’s spirituality had not been developed to be compatible with the feminine side of themselves. The images and symbols meant to enrich their spiritual lives left many devoid of inspiration.

Although both feminine and masculine images are plentiful in statues and stained glass windows, the language of Scripture, of liturgical prayer and of most religious songs is masculine. Women who are gifted speakers and knowledgeable Scripture scholars are not permitted to preach from the pulpit, so neither women, men, nor children ever hear publicly anything about Scripture, faith, spirituality, or about Gospel values from a woman’s point of view. Today in personal correspondence, in articles, and in an increasing number of gatherings of Catholic women, the question is so often asked: “With whom and with what are women to identify today in the Catholic Church?”

The theory has evolved that women need something men have always had: images, symbols and language that include them, speak to them. They do not suggest that male images, symbol and language be eliminated. The masculine side of women needs these, too, but even more, the feminine side of women and men needs to be addressed. Women are leading the way in this ongoing spiritual evolution.

In essence, many Catholics have become responsible participants and spiritual leaders in the church and have taken their spiritual growth very seriously. Thesians has provided, throughout the time period of its own story, opportunities for women to explore together at most meetings their own spirituality.

An example of the searching for an authentic spirituality by a single woman is included here with her permission. This letter received recently by one of these writers exemplifies the absolute seriousness with which the single woman is seeking a theology of single life, the nourishment of her faith and her own personal growth.

There is a lot happening in my inner life lately and I am finding it difficult to just BE in the process. I want to hurry through it. I set a goal and I want to put all my energy into achieving it. I’ve discovered this is very admirable, but in doing so I’m leaving behind a very important balance to my spiritual life which is the Spirit.

I've been reading many books lately to help me along the way. One of them is Addition to Perfection,⁹ by Marion Woodman. In this book she relates the feminine to the Spirit or Being. In reading her book I began to realize that I, like many women, have learned to reach my goals, but in so doing I've left my natural instinct to be hidden. I feel as if I'm awaking from sleep to recognize the feminine God. I find her aching to be part of my life. She is what gives my life meaning and values. I've known these things intellectually, but I'm so out of touch with the Spirit that I've hidden Her from view. I know that Wisdom and Spirit have been associated with the feminine but do we honor Her in our inner life?

I've always been told it is better to give than receive but I've come to realize that I was giving myself away before I consciously received the gifts of the Spirit. Actually, I don't know how to receive. I am taking the time now to BE, and in prayer, centering on receiving.

Now you may wonder why I'm writing all of this – well Theresians has been a part of this process for me. Even though I know each woman has her unique path to follow on her journey, I feel it is vital to receive support from her inner self along with support from other women along the way.

We 'liberated' women have said that men are not 'in touch' with their feelings. Well, I think it's becoming apparent that men and women are not 'in touch' with the Spirit, the feminine God. I realize that this is where I am on my journey and I pray that the process leads to an inner balance of the feminine and masculine God so that there is a natural flow from feminine to masculine and vice versa. It's when the pendulum swings too far to one side that I begin to suffer without growing.

In reading the writings of St. Therese of Lisieux and St. Teresa of Avila I always cringed at their desire to suffer. I always related this to being a victim or martyr. Now I'm wondering if what they are referring to is recognizing the feminine Spirit in their lives. This Spirit gives meaning so that suffering is lived, transformed rather than left to stagnate in bitter resentment. In their lives suffering takes on another meaning other than the one I thought.

I see the suffering today in myself and others which seems to be God crying out to be uncovered and no longer hidden. When we let go and actually feel the pain in our bodies and souls, the process of healing the split can begin. Our bodies and souls can actually receive the gifts of the Spirit. –Judy Neilly

Judy is a young single woman. She is a business consultant, lives alone and is pursuing an advanced degree in psychology.

Theresians has also provided a place where women can experiment with prayer forms suitable to them, as women and as communities. As an organization, there are few "rules" in Theresians, but one rule about prayer does exist. Community prayer is a requirement at a monthly Theresian meeting. That prayer, it is suggested, ought usually to be a form of liturgical prayer. This would include liturgies of the Eucharist, liturgies of the Word and community prayer services which are scripturally and liturgically inspired with opportunities in each prayer form for shared prayer.

There are four reasons for which these are the prayer forms found at Theresian meetings rather than devotional prayers or solely shared prayer: 1) to stress salvation history in the spirit of Vatican II; 2) because "every liturgical celebration . . . is a sacred action surpassing all others,"¹⁰ 3) because "all the faithful (are to) be led to full conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. . . Such participation by the Christian people . . . is their right and duty by reason of their Baptism,"¹¹ 4) to be prepared for the future.

This last reason comes out of a conviction that it is not being an alarmist to say, a full 20 years after numbers of ordained clergy slowly and steadily declined in this part of the world, that in another 20 years participation in Eucharistic liturgies will be as rare an event in the lives of U.S. Catholics as it is for Catholics in many countries right now. There is little indication at the moment that the problem's solutions, as suggested and called for by an increasing number of Catholics each year, are integrated in any way into the plans for the future of today's church leadership.

Therefore, since today's children are the future, and since the values of Jesus and the Eucharist that He left to His followers are as important to women as they are to the clergy, more and more women are seriously exploring the spiritual choices before them as they discern how they might pass their Eucharist-centered faith to the next generation with or without ordained male clergy.

Many Thesians are prepared to lead an assembly in prayer, to plan special Eucharist/para-liturgical celebrations, and to share their own stories and insights into their personal spiritual development.

As an example of the above, in one large U.S. city a group of Thesians was invited by a community of Sisters who direct a house of prayer/retreat center to take their training courses to prepare to conduct home retreats for women and to become spiritual directors for women. The Thesians accepted these challenges and are actively engaged in these programs of spirituality.

Most Thesian communities have members who expend great effort to participate in the planning of their prayer celebrations for their monthly meetings. The smaller communities achieve the personalism and intimacy that one might imagine was evident at that first celebration of Eucharist some 2000 years ago in an upper room in Jerusalem and of those small communities of Christians scattered throughout the known world when St. Paul, Junias and Phoebe were still visiting them.

The early Christians met in homes, prayed and celebrated Eucharist there together. (2 Col. 3: 15, 16 and 1 Cor. 19) Thesian communities make the effort to pray together in their own homes today.

Our experiences in recent years around the U.S. have demonstrated that there is a pitfall in the pursuit of holiness that needs to be given consideration in this chapter because, from time to time, its influence has been and is felt in Thesians. This pitfall is the total internalization of religion or spirituality. There are large and very visible movements both with Protestant and Catholic circles today that legitimate a new kind of spiritual elitism. The old elitism, at least in Catholic circles, was the assumption that ordained priesthood and religious life were the highest vocations. The new elitism exists among people who, for all practical purposes, do not hesitate to express a certain sorrow for everyone else who is not as "spiritually gifted" as they. That God works only through them is the frequent message relayed to the "ungifted" by this new elite.

Our experiences to date in the milieu have prompted questions to surface in us, questions that ultimately ask where the total Gospel message is found in this form of spirituality. To avoid seeming harshly judgmental, suffice it to say that it is very difficult to connect this mode of spirituality with, for example, the act of sustaining membership in a club which prohibits membership from among minorities or women. It is occasional exposure to this type of spiritual elitism which reminds most of us to look periodically to our own visible expressions of our faith lives.

Throughout the Thesian story, there have been some communities who have periodically explored the connections between their sense of Gospel values and their own lifestyles. For example, they have utilized during community meetings values clarification exercises through which the women have honestly asked themselves, among many more such questions, the following: *Did one earn the ability to be generous because she/he has amassed wealth at the expense of the dignity of others? Or while paying appalling salaries and*

minimal benefits to employees and household help? Or by charging exorbitant fees for human services rendered? Considering the rest of the present world, and those who are not yet born, does one believe she is using a fair share of the earth's resources? If Jesus had been born a 20th century American, how would his life compare to one's own?

Through out the time covered by the Theresian story, most communities and nearly all national conferences have engaged speakers who challenge members to make the connections between Gospel values and their own values. Members recognize that spirituality modeled after Jesus calls for making these connections and for each person to give witness to her belief in the dignity of every person.

The Theresian purpose and structure call members out of their spiritual comfort zones. They call forth the giftedness of each person and provide a place where these gifts are affirmed. The monthly programs continue to clarify the relationship between a healthy prayer life and a person's integration with all of God's creation.

Theresians and members of other contemporary Christian organizations are becoming new models of faith for younger generations because they are eager to continue connecting Gospel values with their own values. This concept might be aptly described in the words of a 1976 Theresian Conference speaker: *"However, I might warn you that when you become a woman of prayer, all great women of prayer have of necessity become women of action because once you get touched by Jesus, you are touched by his Gospel."* – Helen Flaherty, S.C. All of this ties in so well with the evolving theology of ministry toward which Theresians have been working through their ministry dimension. This is discussed in a later chapter.

The spiritual challenges to Theresians and other women today are essentially two in number: 1) to assess prayerfully and frequently their call from God at each period of their lives and how that call related to their sense of values and the dignity with which all people are treated; 2) to share their spiritual journeys with one another in an effort to develop an authentic Gospel valued spirituality for women. The real challenge will be to integrate feminine and masculine spiritualities in such a way that they will be imitable in part or in totality by everyone, woman or man, who is seeking a deep contemporary spirituality.

Prophets in Our Midst

Education Dimension

There is a quotation from an ancient Ghanaian philosopher that is sometimes credited to the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah. The quotation is heard often on the lips of African women and it appears on a variety of African tourist mementos. It reads: “Educate a man and you educate an individual. Educate a woman and you educate a nation.”

This may sound unfair or even sexist at first. It is not intended to be so. However, when one thinks of the number of women in the world who are not only mothers and/or teachers, but single heads of households, the philosopher’s words cannot be argued.

Education is a vital component of the Theresian story. The objective of the Theresian education dimension is the challenge to provide informative and creative life-enriching programs for monthly meetings. This dimension calls for a spirit of openness so that members are willing to look at all sides of issues, thus avoiding the pitfalls that result from tunnel vision and closed minds.

In 1961, other than returning to school or attending the annual mission, Catholic adults had few opportunities for continuing education in areas that related to them as persons of faith who often craved more, much more than that which was available to them. There were few opportunities on the parish level for education beyond the Sunday homily. Although some liturgical leaders encouraged homilists to use this time well for the purpose of education, this was an impossible dream. One can hardly meet the intellectual and spiritual needs of hundreds of persons from all lifestyles, educational backgrounds, ages, ethnic origins, etc., during one 10–15 minute homily. Either one segment of the congregation can be addressed in a mite of depth or the entire community can be addressed in a very general way by most homilists. In addition, people expect inspiration (not necessarily education in the literal sense) from a homily.

Education has consistently been a paramount concern for Theresians. Since many of their programs in the early 1960s related to the lives and ministries of Sisters, the lay women soon realized that their program themes needed to be broadened so that they could explore in greater depth the ideas shared with them by Sisters, their most frequent guest speakers in the first seven years of the Theresian story. Members understood that they needed to be willing to spend energy and time planning program themes and speakers. If they wanted to be well-informed women, they knew the need to work industriously for their continuing education. No one else could do this for them. Local Theresian communities broadened their scope and by the time the documents of Vatican II were published, Theresians were anxious to study those documents and other issues relating to their lives as women first and as Christians second.

Post-Vatican II theologians as well as contemporary educators, lecturers, authors, health experts and others were anxious to share their knowledge, research and insights. They were bursting with theories, hypotheses, and experiences, and they welcomed opportunities to speak. As a result, this has been and continues to be a great quarter of a century for Theresian program chairpersons who have at their fingertips a variety of resources for speakers and topics.

The organization's 1969 broadened statement of purpose opened up an entire new realm of possibilities for educational programs for monthly meetings. Members soon came to grips with the fact that much, if not most, of what was going on in the world around them affected them, their families and their working colleagues. If their influence as women of faith was to be effective in society and church, they needed to know the issues at hand, to be willing to look at them from all sides, to be always trying to make the connections between their own conclusions and their Gospel values.

Being able to question speakers and one another, to dialog and to struggle in the presence of the community for insight and understanding, brings about a greater sense of realization of the need for contemporary ways to live out one's faith. It becomes apparent that if one cannot accomplish this, she can be forever in a state of anger and/or anxiety about the changes taking place around her in church and in society. Living in such a state could only bring divisiveness at home, especially with teenage children and young adults, as well as with one's relationships within that same church and society.

In some areas of the country where accessibility to speakers of worth is limited, Theresian leaders often go to great expense and expend much effort in order to provide the community with exceptional speakers for their monthly programs. The community in Muskogee, Oklahoma, is a good example of this. The closest metropolitan area, Tulsa, is about forty miles from Muskogee. Not one month has passed in 19 years that the Muskogee community has not had a speaker.

Hosting annual regional, national and international conferences open to any woman of faith is another method by which members provide education for themselves. Without exception, Theresian leaders engage speakers for every conference from a diversity of disciplines and experiences. A number of these speakers have been prophetic as well as controversial. Theresian conference leaders provide inspirational, spiritual, psychological and sociological programs. They did not shy away from controversial issues of the day in all 25 years of conference history.

In 1980 during the national conference in Houston, Texas, a slide presentation entitled "Prophetic Giftedness from Our Past" brought before the attendees, through sights and sound, highlights of the words of prophecy delivered during various past conferences. Some of those prophetic statements are included here to bring to the reader an awareness of the kinds of talks and discussions that have consistently taken place in Theresian national conferences. Tremendously knowledgeable and articulate speakers of vision have been many at Theresian conferences. However, space prevents inclusion of selected quotations from all. The evolvement from the original purpose of Theresians in 1961 through the 1969 re-statement of purpose and up to the present time is evident in these quotations.

1962: Despite . . . concern for a stepped-up program to better social conditions in their homelands, Christian leaders and Christian people in Latin America clearly understand that in great areas their nations and their church are in deep trouble. They recognize that actions, not words, are the order of the day. – John Considine, M.M.

1963: In 1962 I visited the poor in El Salvador – the unbelievable, wretchedly poor – the older generation of mothers eagerly brought their pot-bellied babies to us. . . but the ten-year-olds, the bright young potential revolutionary leaders came up. In their eyes 'Sister' was a key to social progress . . . The 'Sister' needs to know a lot about economics, and social revolution, and the concrete needs of people, because Christians have not been seen often enough among the poor. –Rita Mary Bradley, CHM

1965: Sisters are not abandoning the works of apostolic humanism, but they are also looking toward the works of direct evangelization . . . active religious should involve themselves in movements that work

toward the betterment of human existence . . . promotion of human good is a presupposition of Christianity. This perhaps is a place where we have not gone forward as we might have.

– Mary Luke Tobin, S.L.

1967: The Sister of the future will be a leader in many interlocking communities. Neighborhoods, parishes, city, state, national and international organizations will profit from her presence, but she will live in danger, risk, uncertainty, and perhaps work under a cloud of suspicion. It may well be that the Sister of the future will experience not adulation or indifference as she does today, but open hostility and opposition. Christ promised something like this. – John McCall, S.J.

1968: A healthy and real association of women in the two vocations is essential to the Theresian purpose. In the past you have travelled your own way alone too often. There are many avenues wherein you can walk side by side. – Father Elwood C. Voss, Theresian Founder

1969: The complementarity of sexes demands that each needs the other for fullness of life and growth. Men cannot be men unless they recognize and live by this principle. Nor can we be women. However, women must first of all become aware of their second-class citizenship before there can be any effort toward improvement. – Margaret Ellen Traxler, SSND, 1967

1969: It should not be surprising that today's tensions would be felt in the convents of our country. Among the most courageous and out-spoken of our leaders of the new church in America are its Sisters. What is vital is that Sisters continue to lead us in our renewal. –Theresian Mary Ann Kerwin

1970: Woman's liberation may well dominate the social revolutions of the 1970s. Government and church stand in radical need of both strength and compassion, of both vigor and tenderness, of both calculation and intuition. The presence of women in decision-making positions in all our institutions will dramatize the necessity to motivate the whole human family to work for solutions to the grave issues which confront us. –Mary Ellen Frankenberg, OSU

1971: We all have to learn to be comfortable with great diversity in our church. I have to be comfortable with a Father Berrigan. He is working for peace as I am. His way may not be my way, but he is doing what is best to him. –Theresian Rita Strubbe

1972: As women we realize we can no longer hide behind homes, husbands, convents, churches and we must also realize that we can emerge with a legacy of authenticity, courage and determination. –Theresian Rita Metyko

1974: To allow this variety of ministries to have its full scope we have to break away from the simple division of the church into clergy and laity. We have to go back and re-affirm our common dignity as baptized Christians. –Bishop James Hayes (Canada)

1974: It has become abundantly clear in the last decades that oppression of women cannot endure. The fight for equality and justice for women is not over yet. Discover and pursue new and creative endeavors in the church and the world for the good of all humankind. –George Cardinal Flahiff (Canada)

1976: Should we then assume that these critical times have been sent to test and challenge us? Could we start with a personal assessment of our witnessing? Are we so pre-occupied with imponderables that we lose sight of our immediate responsibilities for social and spiritual order? –Theresian Dorothea Parke

1976: The centuries-long twilight of a male-dominated church has almost ended and that sun is rapidly setting. The full participation of women in the Christian mission is now dawning and the signs of brightness are on the horizon. –Father Elwood C. Voss, Theresian Founder

1978: Today we sense that an individualistic and exclusively interior Christian life is not really being faithful to the mission of Jesus . . . loving one's neighbor is measured by our service to one another, by our determined good will to our neighbor, a deliberate decision of conscience that can make terrible demands upon us, our time, our security, yes, even our lives. –Clare Dunn, CSJ

1980: We do ourselves and the world a terrible injustice if we look on the feminine movement as bad and thus absent ourselves from it. The time of woman is here and it is good. We can make it better when we participate in it by bringing all we are as Christian women into it. We must be creative and diligent in the task of exploring and evaluating the power we have as women. We must look for new solutions to problems, new visions for the future. –Theresian Mary Clare Albrecht

1980: What I would like to share with you is the challenge to take up a ministry that I believe we have not considered with enough seriousness or concern. It is the human challenge that we have before us to build the earth, to help shape a new world order where all persons are guaranteed a share in the world's goods, where all persons can live together in peace and harmony, where the gifts of all persons are enabled and called forth. –Margaret Brennan, IHM

1982: I challenge you to sponsor a future conference which would provide an attempt of dialog among American women of the Western Hemisphere. For such a conference I suggest these themes: 1) Explore various cultural manifestations, 2) Examine raw materials being sacrificed by the consuming society, 3) Study the presence of multinational corporations and determine if their existence is incompatible with the development of the whole person and all persons, 4) Establish an objective comparison between the position of the U.S.A. in Central America and the position of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and in Poland, 5) Determine how to increase the conviction of the North American people that the biggest madness of our century is the arms race, 6) Attempt to solve the problem of the 'illegals,' remembering the wonderful pilgrims who escaped to liberty, but did not have official documents to show the North American Natives. –Dom Helder Camara, Recife, Brazil

1984: Our spiritual journey – our search in life for God – must be worked out now in a global context, in the midst of global crises and global community. Our spirituality must be a global spirituality. –Patricia Mische, Global Education Associates, New Jersey

In 1986, the national conference theme was “Women of Faith: Making a Difference.” Speakers reached back into Scripture and history to review women's faith responses in their own milieu and times. They explored connections between the Gospels and faith responses of women today. They looked to the future and urged their audiences to make known their presence and their values as contemporary women of faith.

Other sessions explored such subjects as life transitions, leadership styles and techniques for women, ministry discernment for individuals and communities; approaches to feminine personal, communal and liturgical prayer forms; single women looking at their roles in church and society, today's professional woman (homemaker and/or career women) exploring areas of impact; how to do theological reflections on one's life and community; creative problem solving and the women's movement.

Occasionally, through the years, small numbers of conference attendees experienced difficulty accepting messages they were not prepared to hear, let alone with which they disagreed. Built-in opportunities to share their apprehensions during discussion periods were designed to allow all sides of issues to be discussed so that a

discernment process toward discovering and owning truth could be found. A certain openness of spirit that precedes seeking truth by giving attention to all sides of an issue has consistently been encouraged at Theresian conferences. This kind of dialog helps create great respect for the thinking and opinions of others regardless of personal viewpoints and convictions.

Theresian communities have served through the years as sources for continuing education. Members know the importance of being familiar with contemporary issues, and with finding alternate solutions to problems of their own and of society. They know the joy of intense discussion with one another because it is therein that each comes to respect the views of another.

Call to Holiness

Vocation Dimension

In the introduction to the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, the lay state is described as a vocation. “The layman’s [sic] apostolate derives from his [sic] Christian vocation . . . For by its very nature the Christian vocation is also a vocation to the ‘Apostolate.’ A similar statement appears in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. “All . . . are called by the Lord to perfect holiness.” These were historic and long overdue statement. Their implications for the future have already been far-reaching.

One implication of the Vatican Council’s statements about the role of the laity in the church is the gradual waning of clerical elitism. Another is the call to fuller participation of the laity in the mission of the church.

A visit today to many diocesan centers and parish committee meetings will reveal the presence of even more lay persons than of Sisters, Brothers, or Priests. The laity are reclaiming their responsibility for the mission of their church and often at great sacrifice to themselves and their families. They have taken *The Constitution on the Laity* seriously and to the benefit of everyone.

In essence, the church called all to return to the origins of spirituality, the life and teachings of Jesus, modeled by the early Christian communities. In vocation terms that simply meant recognizing the fundamental vocation of all Christians’ holiness. “Now, this holiness of the church is . . . expressed in multiple ways by those individuals who, in their walk of life, strive for the perfection of charity, and thereby help others to grow.”¹³

Thesians was probably the first organization to take that concept of vocation seriously. Their leaders captured the spirit of the renewing church which affirmed all of its members as each is called by the Council to holiness in her/his life. No one sensed the importance of this perception of vocation more than one of the Priest members of the Theresian Consultant Board. He convinced the consultants to call Thesians to move in this direction. The Consultant Board’s recommendation to broaden the Theresian statement of purpose so that it would reflect an all-encompassing interpretation of vocation was accepted unanimously by the National Executive Board during its meeting on October 3, 1969, in Colorado Springs.

In order to model their own belief in what they had done, Thesians immediately opened up their membership to Sisters, heretofore, the only group of Catholic women not invited to join Theresian communities.

The fact that early in the 1960s Thesians was considered a lay organization whose primary “apostolate” was that of “fostering vocations to the sisterhood” showed how separated women had allowed themselves to become in the name of religion. Sisters are laywomen. As lay women, they lead a lifestyle that differs in specific areas from their single and married sisters. However, it needs to be pointed out that the Thesians’ primary vocation thrust from the beginning of their story was to bring the three lifestyles together and in close communication.

Over the centuries, U.S. Catholics certainly lost the concept and charism of the early Christian community with all of its called-forth gifts and with its spirit of building one another up in the Body of Christ. This, we believe, was caused in part by the marked division in the church between clergy and laity, and within

the hierarchical structure of the church. Vatican II and the revolution of the 1960s changed all that. So did the fact that many of the laity had become as well educated or more so than Priests, Sisters and Brothers.

But there is more. Many lay persons, including Sisters, added to their repertoire of knowledge advanced degrees in the study of Sacred Scripture, in theology, and eventually in pastoral ministry. In more recent years many of these same people are or were enrolled in seminaries earning Masters of Arts degrees in Divinity, an area of study once reserved for those studying for the priesthood.

The above activities give credence to the fact that increasingly, church members are becoming conscious that the church belongs to each member and that together, as one body, all can discern its direction and the intensity of its presence in the world. However, much baggage has been collected along the way. This is baggage that Jesus did not speak of, probably because He never dreamed people could ever build such a grandiose, hierarchical structure out of the simplicity of what He began. For this reason, it is most difficult for the church to reach into its past, back to the spirit of the early Christian communities, in order to emulate this spirit. It is our hope that the bonding that is taking place among women in the church will be the force that continually calls the church back to its Founder's charisma and ministry, much as Sisters' communities have already done.

Theresians know that women of faith need contemporary models. They know, too, that for these models to be more visible, more women with appropriate gifts must be encouraged by their peers to apply for leadership and decision-making roles in church and in society. Historically and culturally, most women over 40 years of age today were not brought up to think in terms of developing skills for professional arbitration or policy-making. Development of leadership skills was usually encouraged among a few well-educated, elite women. This is not to say many, many women did not develop these skills on their own. They did. They used them in the home, in schools, in hospitals, as social workers, almost always in those few professions open to women until recently. The fact is that too few women were truly encouraged to apply their skills in decision-making leadership roles.

Women and men need to call forth one another to take seriously the responsibility of leadership in every area of society and church. In Theresians there are tremendous opportunities for women to encourage and affirm one another and other women as well. As increasing numbers of women become more visible and vocal in their efforts to secure equal opportunities for the most powerless, i.e., women, children, minorities, or anyone who is faced with injustice, women and men of conscience must support these women.

Research on another project brought before us a statement or two from the Documents of Vatican II which prompted us to look into the potential ramifications thereof.

The first chapter of part one of the *Pastoral Constitution in the Modern World* [Gaudium et Spes] is entitled: "The Dignity of the Human Person." The title of the second chapter is "The Community of Mankind." In this latter chapter, the Council members address, among numerous other topics, "The Essential Equality of Men; and Social Justice."

People all over the world are becoming more conscious of the Catholic Church's increasingly admirable positions in a multitude of areas of social justice. In many parts of the world this sensitivity and the proclamation of justice on the part of church leaders and church members are in themselves a source of inspiration to members of all faiths, not to mention a source of great pride to Catholics.

But one wonders about the first part of the topic for the above-mentioned section of Gaudium et Spes: "The Essential Equality of Men." This section says:

True, all men (Remember, “men” means women, too, throughout the documents.) are not alike from the point of view of varying physical power and the diversity of intellectual and moral resources. Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language, or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God’s intent. For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are not yet being universally honored. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right and freedom to choose a husband, to embrace a state of life, or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men.¹⁴

To date, the church has not modeled its belief that a woman is entitled “to embrace a state of life” to which she and others believe her to be called. Many Theresians have had in their possession since 1976 a small pamphlet written by Bishop L. R. Morrow of West Bengal, India. He writes:

In our day, the greatest handicap for evangelization is the lack of Priests. Sisters and lay women are greatly obstructed in their village apostolate by inability to offer Mass in the absence of a Priest. So many activities could be assigned to professional personnel, leaving ordained women free for purely pastoral work of evangelization.¹⁵

For many church members, the modeling of women called by God and the community of faith to the fullness of participation in the church, i.e., sacramental ministers, is crucial to the very core of the future of membership of women in the Catholic Church. Increasing numbers of women are looking outside their parish and church for spiritual enrichment and personal growth.

Much of what is expressed in this chapter is often the subject of discussions at Theresians’ local meetings and at their various conferences. Some members do not think the emphasis on Christian vocation should propel Theresians into the forefront with others who propose that women be appointed to decision-making positions in the church or that they be called to ordained ministry. However, the majority of members demonstrate their deep convictions about the need for women of faith who love their church to hold its leaders accountable to their own words: “Such is the case. . .” **(See p. 78)**

The members who embrace this mode of thought are those who see Theresians as being a gentle leaven of influence in church and society. Members for whom such thinking is erroneous are appreciated because they give reasons for continuing self-examination – a call to discernment of the Spirit, so to speak, on the part of members who are asking more from their church leaders. This is an example of the fact that in Theresians there are no public policy statements made in the name of all the membership. However, it needs to be said, that in an open organization such as Theresians there is definite disagreement about certain issues. Of this fact Theresians are proud because their structure and spirit call them to respect the thinking of one another. This kind of openness to the positions and opinions of one another is in the spirit of Theresians around the globe.

Lifestyle

It is under the category of LIFESTYLES that it seems appropriate to say that although this book refers often to Sisters and their lifestyles, this is only because of the more visible leadership role Sisters have played in the past few centuries in the church and in society in this country. Their very lifestyles and opportunities allowed their influence to be visible. Citing them frequently is not intended to slight or ignore any of the other lifestyles of women.

Surely marriage and motherhood are the lifestyles chosen by most women who want to live out faithfulness to their baptismal commitment and to the call of the Vatican Council II to holiness of life as family. Their influence, power, opportunities for growth and example are overwhelming and incalculable.

By far, the greatest number of Theresians are married, and most of the married members are mothers. In reality, since they are the majority of Theresian membership, this entire book with the obvious exceptions is about them.

Chapter Two already discusses young women of the last decade or two who choose to remain single or who find no opportunity for marriage; the same chapter describes how many single women are searching for their own paths to whole lives through their call to holiness.

Two single lifestyles not mentioned so far in this book are those lived by widowed and divorced Theresians. Women have joined Theresians at all ages and stages of their lives. Thus, most, if they fulfill the statistics which say that women outlive men, will indeed be widows one day. Throughout the years, it has been our observation that widowed Theresians find support, peace and challenges for the future within their Theresian communities. They, too, bring to others in their Theresian communities an understanding of the inevitable calls to life's transitions.

Widows and divorced women have much in common. Women from each group once chose marriage as their lifestyle. Both groups faced death – one, the death of a person; the other, the death of a marriage. Women from both groups usually have to learn to live alone and/or to be single parents. These are conditions and responsibilities that were not necessarily expected on their wedding days.

The differences between these two lifestyles are many, too. The pain, the sense of abandonment, the grappling with the future, are faced out of very different experiences and thus recovery from each trauma requires different approaches to wholeness. This topic in itself would be material for an entire book.

Theresian women experiencing the pains of divorce – and those who have been single for a number of years by divorce – tell the members of their own Theresian communities what their presence, faithfulness, love and the good times together have meant in their lives. Women who are single, women who are married, and women who are Sisters all in one Theresian community, give testimony to the fact that each is working out her path to holiness of life through the Gospels. All are doing this together in hope, in pain, in love, in joy, and so often with laughter or tears, because Theresians is a community of women bonded by a strong belief in a loving and just God and a strong belief in one another.

As women of faith, Theresians continue to support and affirm one another in their lifestyles, calling forth the giftedness of one another and calling one another to growth.

The Christian Community

The Community Dimension

Although the majority of the earth's people now live in large metropolises, it has not been long since most people in the U.S. lived in rural areas or in small towns where everyone seemed to know everyone else. As a result, people shared many of one another's joys and sorrows such as weddings, births, anniversaries, abundant harvests and deaths. They did not need to build community. Community was a part of life. That was due for the most part to the interdependence of small groups of people.

Today, mobility is the name of the game. With so many people moving to the city, or moving from city to city and from neighborhood to neighborhood within a city, many are uprooted from primary resources and support persons in their lives.

In dense urban areas, if people want community today they must create it. In church a few large parishes try to do this by subdividing into smaller community groups, but it is a struggle to do so. At present, obviously because of the decreasing numbers of Priests, there seems to be no actual trend toward smaller Catholic parishes in the U.S. However, in South America and more recently in parts of Asia, there is a well-established trend toward small Christian communities (Comunidades de bases.) These are basic Christian communities where members pray together and discern their personal, communal and political futures as a community.

There was a time in the United States when people and groups were prone to judge success by bigness. The litany of ways by which this was expressed could almost be as long as the Litany of the Saints. It could read something like this:

Big farms. Congratulate us.
Big homes. Congratulate us.
Big bank accounts. Congratulate us.
Big army. Congratulate us.
And for all the other bigness in our lives, congratulate us.

Since Churches are understandably caught up in societal trends, their judgments often went this way:

Big parishes. God bless us.
Big schools. God bless us.
Big classes. God bless us.
Big churches. God bless us.
Big Theresian communities and for all the other bigness, God bless us.

Of course, big is not all bad. Sometimes efficiency demands bigness. The problems arise when the individual, the person, suffers because of it. People do become less important than numbers from time to time. When this happens, suffering ensues.

Catholic women's organizations in the early 1960s were as anxious to boast of large memberships as anyone else. In numbers there was strength, yes, but not the kind of strength that comes from interpersonal

communication and commitment to co-sharing responsibility for the group. Such a commitment is one quality of community.

This was still the era when adults did not share life's problems with anyone outside the family. That is, "Do not hang your dirty wash out for everyone else to see" or "Keep a stiff upper lip" regardless of your problems.

The same was true in congregations of Sisters. Each congregation was an entity of its own. Leaders of one congregation would not think of admitting their problems to leaders of another. In fact, a certain rivalry existed among congregations. It smacked of competition among businesses or among schools' rivaling sports teams.

Because Sisters influenced the community dimension in early years of the Theresian story, we include a brief description of the evolvement of community in congregations of women religious. Within congregations, *community* was a word not defined as it is today. In fact, the concept of community as we know it today with its dynamics of sharing, affirming, supporting, discerning, bonding, challenging, living, etc. was unknown in most strata of religious congregations even in the early 60s. It would be unfair to say that the above characteristics of community were not present. They were, but only because the more imaginative members worked hard to create community in spite of those rules and customs which were not conducive to building community until the late 1960s. A practical example might be: How could true community exist when members' rules called for no more than an hour of talking per day? Although Sisters made great strides in their professional preparations beginning in the 50s, their rules of life did not lend themselves to the building of true community. One wondered if the rules of monasticism and rules for active religious life did indeed readily mix.

With the closing of Vatican II, religious congregations experienced a phenomenal period of interiorization, a time of intense self-reflection. Sisters were well prepared for Vatican II's documents, but with the restructuring of the framework of their lives they had to ask both the right and the very difficult questions of themselves. The answers to some of their questions might have dissolved their very lifestyle. What gave them a purpose? Did Sisters still have a place in the church and if so, where?

In 1968, a small but powerful book was published, *Experiences in Community – Should Religious Life Survive?*¹⁷ It was written by a religious Sister and Brother team, Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran. As members of religious congregations themselves, they asked the poignant questions. Harris and Moran examined religious life in detail. To them the conditions for community included "time, trust, love, shared experience, common interests and mutual concerns."

Sisters worked hard to overcome the restraining traditions of the past that had prevented the conditions described by Harris and Moran from being realized. Some carried these and similar conditions for community into other groups of people with whom they slowly involved themselves. Many discovered their own gifts for being community builders. These gifts might not have been recognized had Sisters not been forced to get to the very core of their existence as a credible lifestyle within the church.

With some exceptions Sisters today have emerged as women who have not only carried their sense of community into other organizations, but even into the marketplace. They have been able to do this with conviction and deep joy because they have come to their own vision of contemporary community after a deep evaluation of themselves, their lifestyle and their very purpose for existence.

It is our opinion that today's expressed need for small communities evolved out of religious need as well as out of the social environment.

In our social environment, the post-World War II high technology era gave evidence to people's need for human touch and human companionship, musts for healthy people. John Nesbitt in *Megatrends*¹⁸ refers to this as "hi-tech/hi touch." His thesis, the more technological we become the more human nature demands in terms of touch. It was in and because of this hi-tech society that the first self-help groups were organized.

The post-1960 era with its attention to the individual, to understanding of self, to the evaluation of lifestyles, brought new measures of value and re-established priorities to certain areas of people's lives. Many values have changed society and church. Among these changes is the move toward small groups of people who recognize their own needs for affirmation, for acceptance of themselves as they are with their good qualities and their shadow sides, their need for an atmosphere where they are encouraged and sometimes pushed to grow, their need for friends with whom they can celebrate life, their need for a place where they can demonstrate and receive concern and compassion.

There is an enduring trend on the part of individuals to seek out groups where they can be recognized, where they will be heard, where they can be more than a number, and where they can find strength. Self-help groups have emerged rapidly throughout the nation in the past 20 years. Small neighborhood groups have formed to combat crime. Neighbors have formed food co-operatives, thereby stretching their incomes. Groups of concerned citizens, wanting to have more input about decisions affecting their lives and believing more in the effectiveness of public demonstration than in the power of their elected officials, gather for marches, rallies, petition campaigns, etc. Although these kinds of groups have materialized in the U.S. for generations, there are many more of them now and they are more diversified in purposes. They are usually small, but well-organized with group members having a deep sense of commitment toward their political/social responsibilities to one another.

More and more people are coming together to share prayer, to share common experiences, to share grief, etc. Whether attending an Al-Anon meeting, a generation's group for adult children of aging parents, a compassionate friends' group for parents of deceased children, a group for widows, a group for cancer patients, or a group trying to lose or maintain weight, a participant finds that all groups such as these have something in common. They are usually made up of small numbers of people who share similar life experiences and who are open to the experiences, concerns and sincerity of others.

Through the past 25 years, Theresian communities have reflected all of the above trends in relation to their own faith communities.

In the beginning, Theresians, too, invited large numbers of women into their membership. In fact, in the 1960s one community tried to limit its number to 60 members!

The word *community* as a description of a Theresian unit was first expressed by a young Theresian who, in a public talk, described her experience in Theresians as that of belonging to a community. Her "unit" meant community to her and, hence the word community which now describes a group of Theresians.

The efforts toward building communities of greater depth have become more pronounced in most Theresian communities in the past 15 years. With this emphasis has come the decision by nearly all communities to remain relatively small in number, e.g. 12 – 20 members.

Although Theresians is often described as a support group for women, it is really more than that. It is actually a form of peer ministry. Recently a Bishop told us that the Bishops in his area of the country come together every six weeks for what they term "peer ministry." These Bishops share in one another's journeys over the preceding six weeks and look together to the future. The Bishop's description of the need for and the living out of this peer ministry concept is right in line with what happens in a Theresian community.

The kinds of support a Theresian finds in her community makes all of her other ministries easier to address. Most new Theresian communities in the past ten years have formed because women want to belong to a small group where each can be known and appreciated for her gifts and concerns, and can be affirmed, can be challenged to grow through the Five Dimension Program of Theresians. It ought to be noted that five of the Theresian communities that date back to the early 1960s have opted to maintain their large membership. Most of these communities have worked hard to develop and maintain a community spirit among members.

Of course, in a small community a woman can only experience support and affirmation if the community members themselves are willing to commit to that kind of peer ministry. There develops a sense of confidentiality, of trust within a community.

It is this commitment to her community that brings a Theresian to her monthly meeting. It is her commitment to her community and the commitment of everyone else in the community that causes a member to realize that if she is missing, a very important part of the community itself is missing. And so she makes every effort to be present to the rest of the community each month.

The fact that Theresians meet monthly may cause one to question the authenticity or even the possibility of achieving community in this time frame. Each community develops its own approach to community-building. For example, there is attentiveness to members' needs for support during times of crises such as death, divorce, illness, financial crises, etc. Most communities have telephone committees which relay messages of need. Many communities have a prayer partner program with partners changing periodically so that members have an opportunity to know one another at a deeper level. Some Theresian communities have a monthly prayer meeting separate from the regular monthly meeting. Members from around the country share numerous other community-building ideas with one another through their nationally published Leadership Manual. In other words, Theresians know they have to work diligently to make the community dimension work.

It is her commitment to her community that causes a member to accept responsibility for leadership within the community when she is called upon to do so.

Theresians are very active women. Many have multiple communities in their lives: families (primary communities,) neighborhoods, professional colleagues, communities of women religious, special groups of friends, other church groups, etc. Each of these community types brings with it a particular enrichment to an individual. A Theresian community provides an opportunity for building trusting mutual relationships that call one another to personal and spiritual growth. Not that other kinds of communities cannot or do not do this, but community itself is not necessarily a primary goal of these other organizations. It is in Theresians.

It is our observation that the community dimension of Theresians is the dimension most in need of frequent evaluation by the members. It could be the most fragile of the dimensions if a community does not give attention to it in between monthly meetings. Members must feel comfortable and free about saying whether or not this dimension is affecting them in a positive way or not at all. Because each woman is a member by choice, that is she chooses freely to be a Theresian, she can just as freely move out of the organization. If she maintains her membership then she wants to get everything she can out of her community experience. She and the community leaders must make this possible.

This point can be clarified by example. During the first two meetings of a potential new Theresian community, several women seeking membership were asked, "What do you want from Theresians?" The guests revealed that, although they were active in parish organizations, committees, etc., the relationships they developed in these groups usually ended once the organizations grew very large or the committees completed their tasks. They were short-lived relationships. Each of these women, though, with her husband, has belonged

to a marriage support group for many years. Although this is a very important influence for good in their lives, these women want something in addition for themselves, as women, and a community that will be there for years to come.

The Theresian brochure provides a comprehensive definition of community for a Theresian. It reads: "A Theresian strives to build Christian community wherever she is. In each community, members are able to share mutually their talents, their love, their faith, their concerns, their support. In this milieu of faith a member can thus be challenged and be called forth to be more uniquely herself. Furthermore, the dynamics of community can help the Theresian create a loving community wherever she lives and works, prays and plays."

Reaching Out With Gospel Values

Mission Dimension

Ministry: The call to make the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus, visible in the world in which one lives NOW.

Jesus ministered when He taught, proclaimed the Good News of the Kingdom of God, healed, confronted the unjust, chastised the purveyors of greed, and said, "Love your neighbors as yourself."

In church circles the word MINISTRY is spoken and read everywhere. Countless articles and entire books and conferences are devoted to this subject. Although we have read numerous such publications, our immediate preparation for writing this chapter was the re-reading of the "original" book on ministry, the *New Testament*, the very reason for which we all embrace Christianity and ministry in the first place. Only this time it was read solely from the point of view of ministry. Jesus knew well the political, social and religious structures of His time. He understood the economic structure as well as the ethnic and religious traditions. He did not try to destroy any of them; however, much of His activity and preaching contradicted some of their values. Jesus made the connections between the values He preached and the conditions and traditions of the people to whom He spoke. He took the world as it was THEN. He responded and interacted with it as it WAS in relation to His own mission which was to share the Good News of a caring, loving God and to call us to follow Him in such a way as to manifest God's love to all. That is how he modeled Christianity and ministry for us.

Just as religious communities in recent years have turned to their founders for inspiration and charisms, so, too, as a church, a people of God, we need continuously to go back to our Founder. Christians need to be willing to risk walking into any arena – political, social, religious, or other – and call attention to their primary function; to be servants of humanity allowing for every person's right to dignity as a creation of God.

Where life's spirit, hopes and dreams are expunged from an individual, a whole segment of a nation, or an entire country, it is a Christian's call to find the root causes for such paralysis. The courses of action must be such that the will and the ability to live the fullness of life are restored. For the people of God to entrust these responsibilities unquestioningly and solely to the members of the social, political, and church hierarchical structures is to abandon their own claim as Christians.

Jesus called His followers to join Him in preaching the Good News. In calling for justice (Luke: 11, 42) His followers, likewise, are called to do the same. To ignore justice, compassion and other ways of loving our neighbor is to reject the Gospel and thus reject Christianity, not to mention Catholicism or any other Christian sect.

Ministry is that activity which is a response, in faith and out of compassion, to the world around us and to the person next to us. Authentic ministry makes God's love visible. It shows God's power, not our own, to make changes. It is through us that God makes just changes. When we Christians lose sight of this fact, we easily fall into becoming "activists" for the sake of the activity, acting out of all kinds of motives and with industrious busyness, rather than becoming activists for the sake of manifesting Christ's compassion and love in each ministry situation. The danger of the former attitude is that those whose needs are met may never experience God's love and compassion through the person ministering. Sometimes ministry takes the form of looking for the root negative causes whereby some needs exist in the first place, then exposing them and demanding

alternate solutions which not only solve problems and meet needs but also reveal God's unending love for those who benefit.

Jesus, the Christ, and therefore the source of Christianity, did these things. All of them. Christians are all called through Baptism to do the same. Ministry flows out of faith and prayer. Out of faith, Jesus prayed. He told us to pray, teaching us to communicate often with our Creator. Together, His prayer and His action formed His spirituality. He acted out of this intense love for and gratitude to the Creator and all of the Creator's works. He was and is the model for ministry.

Like everyone else, Jesus needed moments of re-vitalization. Socializing, dining with friends, retreating to the desert for 40 days, boating and fishing energized him. All of these needs for community, for friendship, for bonding, for contemplation and reflection, Jesus had just as we do. When so nourished, He moved on to the work He knew must be done, the work we are to continue.

Today, a sign of the ever-changing ministries is dramatically evident in the lives of Catholic women. For example, not many years ago, Sisters were found mostly in schools, hospitals and orphanages and in some other social services. Today they are found serving people in countless ways. This diversification in ministries has its own story.

In the early decades of the United States, Sisters came here to meet the spiritual, health and education needs of immigrants. Generally, the immigrants settled in small mining towns, factory cities or in rural America. Today these people might be called the marginalized of society. Where they went, Sisters usually went.

In the late 1960s, American Sisters realized and talked often about the fact that they (especially their predecessors) had long since accomplished what they had set out to do decades earlier in many areas of their congregations' ministries. Very few were ministering to the marginalized any more. Most found themselves ministering to the children of middle and upper class educated parents, who, if they chose or were called to do so, were well prepared to work side by side with those Sisters whose ministries were in education and health care. However, numerous Sisters felt called to re-capture that spirit of ministry out of which their congregations began, ministering to the marginalized of society: the new immigrants, the powerless. Today, these Sisters are not alone. Numerous lay people and clergy walk with them.

Married and single women pursued ministries in areas where 20 years ago very few of them would have been found. Like Sisters, today these women are theologians, professors of religion, diocesan department directors, missionaries, parish team leaders, attorneys for the poor, etc. These women recognize the fact that regardless of personal responsibilities peculiar to their lifestyles, they must take as much responsibility as is possible for leadership and stewardship within the mission of their church and world.

The Documents of Vatican II confirmed the role of the laity and Sisters in the "apostolate." Study of the Documents reveals the seriousness and urgency of the call to all baptized Christians to respond to the needs of others:

Wherever there are people in need of food and drink, clothing, housing, medicine, employment, education; wherever persons lack the facilities necessary for living a truly human life or are tormented by hardships or poor health or suffer exile or imprisonment, there Christian charity should seek them out and find them, console them with eager care and relieve them with the gift of help. This obligation is imposed above all upon every prosperous person and nation.¹⁹

Theresian communities describe ministry as that activity which flows out of their first four dimensions: prayer, education, Christian commitment and community. The more Theresians enrich their lives through these

four dimensions, the better prepared they will be to reach out to others with God's love and compassion – and their own.

Historically, the dimension of ministry was always emphasized in Thesians. In the early 1960s members were involved in their own individual ministries and came back to their Thesian communities each month as though they were going to a well, the waters of which nourished them spiritually, educationally and supportively in community.

In 1973 the U.S. National Executive Board members, during their Toronto, Ontario, meeting, voted to encourage the option for common ministry, that is, all members of one community involved in one ministry. This may seem strange to readers familiar with Sisters' diversification in ministries. Why, one might ask, would Thesians not accept the ministry variations, as in Sisters' congregations, as a credible model for them today? The answer lies in the fact that some Thesian leaders believe that there is a need for visibility of a community of people bonded together by faith to meet a particular need in society. Together they give a communal witness to ministry.

The first Thesian community founded to meet a particular need to society was actualized by the organization's world volunteer Director of Extension in Houston, Texas. Members minister to many of the city's recovering mentally ill.

Although a few communities were indeed founded to share in a common ministry, others which existed prior to 1973 opted also to engage in a common ministry. These communities generally utilized a discernment process where members found they needed to take time to recognize their own gifts and how those gifts related to the needs in their areas. This kind of discernment opportunity has been made available at local Thesian meetings, regional and national conferences.

At this writing about half of the Thesian communities have a common ministry. Members are found ministering in detention centers, soup kitchens, homes for abused women, homes for abused children and in many other areas where people need love, attention and material assistance. Mention must be made of the fact that the majority of Thesians who minister in the above situations are women who have families and/or who work part time or full time outside the home.

While half of Thesians have common ministries, the other half are involved in individual ministries or in community ministries with other groups such as are found in parishes, for example. They teach religious education, house victims of domestic violence, visit the homebound elderly, minister in hospitals, etc. By the very nature of their employment, some minister many hours each week (nurses, doctors, teacher, etc.)

Then, too, not all ministry takes place outside the home. For periods of time in women's lives, sometimes very long periods, they are called to minister to those immediately present to them in their own homes. Again, it is the motive for meeting the needs of another that determines actions as ministry.

One ministry common to all Thesian members everywhere is the ministry to other women. This commitment is shared in every Thesian community and is constant; hence, the Thesian logo reads: "Women in Support of Women."

The members then again reach out to the larger community with their international, national and regional conferences. They share the opportunities for growth through the respective talks, panels, discussion groups, etc. with one another and with all non-members wishing to participate.

The Theresian story of ministry also includes the local, national and global effort to seek out women who are in need of a Christian community such as that developed by Theresians over the years. Theresians for the most part are very generous with time, energy and prayerful support when it comes to helping women initiate new communities.

Having come to realize their own call to ministry, Theresians are at a point in their development when they are ready to join with other women of faith to do all they can to make the connections between Gospel values and all that is happening around them in church and society.

Around the Globe

Christianity moved from East to West. So did philosophies, art, literature, governments and all else that was a part of the cultures of people. Christianity was brought to this continent by its early settlers and religious leaders from Europe. However, almost a century ago Christian missionaries of various denominations journeyed from North American to South American, Asia and Africa. They do so today.

The airplane changed our world into a global village. Regardless of where we live on this earth, we can travel to just about any other place – however remote – within a 24-hour period. Jet travel, the student exchange programs, corporation family transfers, business travel, television and satellite communication have put earth's people in greater touch with one another than in any time in the history of the world.

The exchange of ideas among people throughout the world – over and above communications among business, church and political leaders – is actually in the very early stages of development. Theresian women participate in this exchange because women in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe and North America have welcomed, accepted and developed the Theresian way of life.

The first book about Theresians, *THE THERESIAN STORY*, by Sister Kathleen McNamara, OSB, chronicled the beginnings of Theresian communities in Canada, Nigeria and Hong Kong, 1963, 1965 and 1966 respectively. However, the Nigerian community ceased to exist during the Nigerian Civil War between 1966 and 1970, and the original community in Hong Kong later disbanded.

During the 1967 Theresian conference in Hartford, Connecticut, Theresian Founder Elwood C. Voss announced the founding of the Theresian Diplomatic Corps (women who travelled and maintained contacts in countries outside the United States and who were invited to join the TDC and make Theresians known among their women contacts.) The decision to establish a world organization with a separate board of directors occurred in 1969.

On a welcomed sunny, spring day, an intense conversation about the future of Theresians took place between Elwood C. Voss, TUS founder, and Patricia Mullen, C.P.P.S., who was communications/public relations coordinator for TUS. "If we are to share Theresians with the world," they reasoned, "we must establish an administrative board separate from the U.S. Board so that, in time, the International Board would be truly representative of our future international membership." They outlined a plan calling for the International Board to be of service to all national boards and to be a communication liaison among leaders in all Theresian countries. On the same occasion, the two global enthusiasts made a decision to begin immediately to seek out more women who had personal contacts in other countries and invite them into the Theresian Diplomatic Corps. (Thus far, only one woman, Regina Schmalz of Delta, Colorado, was a TDC member.) Within a few months the TDC membership grew to nine young professional women, most of whom had lived in countries outside the U.S. and maintained contacts in those countries.

The TDC met several times in Pueblo and in Denver as well as in Ouray, Colorado in 1969 with Msgr. Voss and Patricia Mullen.

Late in 1969 and very early in 1970, the first Theresian World Apostolate Board of Directors was created. A bulletin mailed to these new Board members on July 27, 1970, announced the first formal Board meeting of

TWA scheduled after the close of the National Conference in Houston, Texas. The time was: Sunday, October 11, 4 to 7 p.m. and Monday, October 12, 9:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. Also established by July 1970 was a TWA Consultants Board. Members were invited but not required to attend the Board of Directors meeting. The primary purpose of the first directors' meeting was to study the proposed adaptation of the TUS Constitution and write the International Constitution.

Members of the first Board of Directors for Theresian World Ministry were: Katherine Clark (Diplomatic Corps member;) Mrs. Gus Opperman (first name not on file) of Galveston, Texas; Mary Clare Albrecht of Houston, Texas; Marion Clauss of Scranton, Pennsylvania; Jeannette Morris of Dallas, Texas. Consultants were: Sister Jeannete, SCMM of Bombay, India; Sister Diane Traffas, OP of Wichita, Kansas, a former missionary to Biafra (later Nigeria); James Clauss of Scranton, Pennsylvania; Mary Ann Kerwin of Denver, Colorado; and Dr. Cissy Yeung of Kowloon, Hong Kong. Father Voss was listed as Executive Director and Patricia Mullen as Associate Director.

That same July bulletin announced the establishment of the TWA office in San Luis Rey, California, on the property of San Luis Rey Academy owned and operated by the Sisters of the Precious Blood, the congregation in which Patricia Mullen was a member at that time. "After the Diplomatic Corps weekend in Ouray, Colorado, July 25 – 27, Patricia Mullen, Miss Marilyn Torborg (Corps member,) Blanche Hope (Scranton,) Mary Garret (Dallas) and I will be going to San Luis Rey, California, to establish the TWA headquarters. We will remain there for three weeks. This will be an historical time in the development of our international organization," wrote Fr. Elwood Voss.

A bulletin following the 1970 Board of Directors meeting indicates the decision to invite into Board membership: Victoria DeMarco of Toronto, Ontario; Annadel Robbert of New Orleans, Louisiana, and Neta K. Sackman of Pueblo, Colorado. By the 1971 Board meeting, in addition to the above, new Board members were: Martha Park of Houston, Texas, and Mrs. Timothy Curran of Hartford, Connecticut.

NOTE: In 1978, Theresian World Apostolate was renamed: Theresian World Ministry.

Global Expansion

CANADA

Of the Theresian countries outside the U.S. (boasting Theresian communities in the 1960s, Canada, Hong Kong and Biafra,) only the Canadians were vibrantly in existence and moving forward by the time of the first TWA Board meeting in 1970.

The first meeting of Theresians in Canada took place in Toronto, Ontario, on November 27, 1963, and the community was chartered on September 17, 1964. Helen Conlin served as President and Dorothea Parke was named District Coordinator in October of the same year. Since then, five communities developed in Ontario and one in the Province of Quebec. Canadians have consistently been active members of the Theresian World Ministry Boards. Their own Executive Board was established in 1969 with Irene O'Keefe elected to serve as chair. Canadian Theresians have been served by three volunteer Executive Directors: Irene O'Keefe, June Mallon and Grace Homuth. June Mallon is a present member of the TWM Board.

It is significant to mention here that in 1973 Sister Michaelanne Kasper, RSM, Ph.D., moved the TWA office from San Luis Rey to San Diego where she served as TWA Executive Director for three years. Sister Michaelanne corresponded frequently with Theresian leaders in new communities in Asia, Australia and England as well as with TWA Board members during this time. In 1976, Patricia Mullen was named International Director

(a volunteer position) and the international office was moved to the U.S. Theresian office where it remains today.

Elected to the TWA Board of Directors in 1974, Rita Metyko of Houston, Texas, received a letter sent by Msgr. Elwood C. Voss and Patricia Mullen on April 5, 1976, appointing her Director of Extension for the Theresian World Apostolate. The letter stated this was a “one-year term and renewable if you wish to continue serving in this capacity. . . May your journeys be as successful as were those of St. Paul in the early days of Christianity. . . Sister Michaelanne will include your name and title on the new letterhead.” By this time, Rita Metyko had completed a term as President of the TWA Board of Directors having served on the Board since 1973. A file letter dated December 13, 1979, thanks Rita for serving her second consecutive term on the Board of Directors. During the year before her appointment as Director of Extension, Rita expended great energy and talent in her efforts to carry the Theresian message and mission during her travels to many countries.

THE PACIFIC RIM

In many ways, Asia is the most religious of all continents. Three influential religions were born there – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. So were Hinduism, Shintoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. (It would be of interest to some readers to know that historians point out that Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, as well as Christianity, have all established laws and symbolisms that marginalize women and that all have male dominated leadership structures.) Christianity is the religion of only a small percentage of Asians. Yet, there are more Catholic Christians in just Southeast Asia alone than there are in all of North America.

Already, 56% of the world’s population lives in Asia. By 1990 that figure will rise to 60%. More and more the seaways, highways and airways lead to this vast continent. The Asian influence on the global village will continue to increase if the world of Walbert Buhlmann, O.F.M., in his book *The Coming of the Third church*,²⁰ comes to pass: Already all the indications are that the Pacific has become the world’s most important ocean, and the 21st century will be. . . the Pacific century, and that the political and economic center of gravity of the world has moved from West to East.

HONG KONG

Although Theresians existed in Hong Kong through a personal contact of Msgr. Voss, the original community disbanded and the same priest contact, Fr. Joseph Carra, a missionary from Italy to Hong Kong, along with several Sisters from St. Paul’s Convent Secondary School, formed a community among the teachers of the school. Teresa Fung Poon was the first President. Rita and Frank Metyko also knew Fr. Carra, and while in Hong Kong in 1976 Rita met, affirmed and encouraged the new community.

These women – all educators – bonded together as a faith community. Theresian leaders often speak of the need for Christian women to be models for younger women. Theresians of Hong Kong took these words seriously and invited young women who were secondary students to form a Theresian community of their own.

THE PHILIPPINES

The 7,000-plus island nation of the Philippines claims one Theresian community in Quezon City, the second in Southeast Asia.

The Theresians of Fairview, a suburb of Quezon City, was initiated by Sr. Dorothy Guilbault, O.Carm., Theresian of New Orleans, who as President of her congregation occasionally visited members of her congregation in the Philippines. During one of these visits Sr. Dorothy carried the Theresian experience with her and helped form the small community which has sent members to nearly every Theresian international conference and even some national conferences in the United States.

As District Coordinator for promotion and expansion, Imelda Isodoro was called to serve in that capacity by community members. The Filipinas have worked hard to keep their community together and to maintain a close liaison with international office personnel.

THAILAND

The third country to accept the Theresian organization in Asia is Thailand where there are few Christians. Those who profess Christianity are enthusiastic about their faith.

Some months before leaving the U.S. in 1982 with Theresian of Phoenix and TUS Board member Patsy Borgesen, Patricia Mullen wrote to the Archbishop of Bangkok to give him a background about Theresians. She explained that Patsy's and her flight was destined for a two-day layover in Bangkok. Might the Archbishop consider gathering together a group of interested women to learn about Theresians? He accepted the challenge, and to their amazement Patsy and Patricia were greeted by well over 60 women, most of whom spoke Thai only. Patsy and Patricia spoke English only. The skilled translator made the experience both a joy and a success. A group of women interested in membership in a Theresian community signed up and about ten days later, Rita Metyko, on a trip through Asia, stopped in Bangkok and met with the new community, giving them additional assistance and encouragement.

Women of Thailand eagerly received the Theresian concept. There are over 30 members in this community and they envision new communities evolving from their own outside of Bangkok.

A significant fact about Theresians in these three countries is that with very few exceptions, five or six at the most, all of these Asian members are employed full time outside the home. The reasons for and ramifications of this fact are too numerous to discuss here. Suffice it to say, membership in a Theresian community is a source of inspiration, support and affirmation for these women whose homes and careers are always in a state of delicate balance.

EUROPE

The majority of U.S. citizens have their roots in the continent of Europe. In a sense, most are descendants of refugees fleeing one kind of political, religious or social oppression. Newcomers to the U.S. from Europe are here for such reasons as living closer to relatives, and/or for business, education, etc. United States ties to Europe are strong and they have continued to be so throughout this century. European missionaries followed their emigrants to North America to serve the spiritual, health and educational needs of these pioneers.

European Theresian communities took root in Manchester, England.

ENGLAND

Rita Metyko, in 1975 and again in 1978, carried her personal Theresian message to Manchester, England, through her acquaintance and soon to become friend Anne Docherty. Anne gathered together women whom she believed might be interested in belonging to Theresians and Rita spoke with them. In 1991 Msgr. Voss wrote: "Rita Metyko made the first Theresian contact in England. That information meeting was followed up in 1979 by Patricia Mullen and Elwood C. Voss. While conducting a tour to Europe and the Holy Land, they went by train to meet with Bishop Holland in Manchester and were hosted by Anne and Jim Docherty. This was the first meeting of a Theresian community in Europe. It happened on the very same day Margaret Thatcher was elected the first woman national leader in the western world. So Theresian history was linked with this historic event."

AFRICA

Most visitors to the continent of Africa return with their own stories of hunger, war and oppression. But they also talk of African song and dance, of hopefulness, of faith, of art, of gentleness, of cheerfulness, of

creativity, determination, spontaneity and generous hospitality. Some modern writers believe that Catholic Africans are bringing new life to the liturgy with their more expressive art and revival of the sacred dance. Nowhere else on earth are there so many converts to Catholic Christianity at this time than in Africa.

GHANA

As Director of Extension, Rita Metyko traveled with husband Frank to Ghana in 1975 and spoke with two groups of women in Kumasi – the cathedral and the university – and one group in Accra, the capitol city of Ghana. One of the original groups which called itself Theresians took the organization in a direction other than that for which it was founded. Re-grouping took place, and although many women resigned membership, the remaining corps re-built a strong community. From that time, word of Theresians spread throughout Ghana.

Today there are six vibrant Theresian communities in Ghana, West Africa. Formerly called the Gold Coast, Ghana, like Kenya, was once a British Colony. The Theresian communities are in Accra (the capitol,) in Kumasi and in Wenchi. The Bishop of Kumasi, Bishop Peter Sarpong, is the present Episcopal Advisor to the Theresian World Ministry. Catherine Mensah of Accra was appointed Theresian Coordinator for West Africa.

NIGERIA

Although a Theresian community was founded in Nigeria by Sr. Diana Traffas the community was forced to disband during the Civil War in Nigeria (1966 to 1970.) In the mid-1980s Sr. Rose Mary Hayes of the Sisters of the Holy Child wrote to the TWM office to Inquire about Theresians. Her letter of request was mailed to Rita Metyko who began to correspond regularly with Sr. Rose Mary. In collaboration with members of her congregation ministering in Nigeria, Sr. Rose Mary, before leaving Nigeria for her ministry in Ghana, witnessed the development of two Theresian communities in Nigeria: Calabar and Ikom.

Connecting Theresian Communities

All of the world's communication means have been utilized by Theresians internationally for the purpose of staying in touch, sharing the best of creative ideas and most practical processes, and for assuring a sense of belonging to a world community of women with faith and vision. However, the best communication is always personal communicators. Although a number of Theresians throughout the years have visited Theresians in Asia, Australia, Africa and England, four North American Theresians travelled to Theresian countries for the sole purpose of communicating personally with Theresian communities. Although their journals would provide material for another book, their travels are ever so briefly outlined below.

In 1979 Rita Metyko and Patricia Mullen travelled to meet personally with Theresians in Melbourne, Australia, Hong Kong and the Philippines. These two women were kept intensely occupied facilitating planning meetings, delivering talks, and sharing the best of helpful ideas from one community to another, from one nation to another.

By 1980 it had been five years since Manchester, England, had been visited by anyone from TWM. Patricia Mullen was engaged in TUS travel throughout the United States, and after spending time with Theresians on the East Coast she flew from New York to Manchester and spent five days with Theresians in two communities there.

In 1982 Phoenix, Arizona, Theresian Patsy Borgesen who had served as president of TUS teamed with Patricia Mullen to visit again communities in Australia, the Philippines and Hong Kong. However, they discovered a very reasonable around-the-world fare which would allow them to include a visit with Theresians in

Manchester, England, as well. They made the effort to form a Theresian community in one of the required airline lay-over cities en route to England in their three-and-one-half week journey around the world.

By the time of this trip in 1982, Australia boasted two Theresian communities, each with many fine members and leaders all of whom had a vision toward future expansion in Australia.

Although the number of communities had not increased in the Philippines, the community had grown stronger. The country continued to be ruled by then President Marcos, but martial law had been lifted.

Patsy Borgesen and Patricia Mullen found the Theresians of Hong Kong sincere in their efforts to make their unique community effective for themselves as individual women who were staff members and teachers of young women.

Upon her return to the U.S., Patsy was nominated to the TWM Board of Directors and served two years as the Board's president.

Participating in the United Nations Non-Governmental Forum in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1985 to mark the closing of the U.N. Decade of Women, and spending time with Theresians in Ghana seemed to be a vision worth pursuing by Patricia Mullen and TWM Board member Maesel Yelenick of Denver, Colorado. With the vision defined, the plans were made. Patricia and Maesel were joined by Maesel's daughter Mary, a former member of the Theresian Board of Consultants and by now a young New York attorney. The trio spent a week meeting and praying and celebrating with Theresians in Accra and Kumasi before flying to Nairobi, Kenya, for the women's conference. Their flight on Ethiopian Airlines was filled to capacity with Ghanaian and Nigerian women also headed for Nairobi.

In the air and on the road again in 1986, spending well-planned quality time with Theresians in Australia and Asia, were Maesel Yelenick, her daughter Ann and Patricia Mullen. On this visit the Australian Theresians were encouraged to establish their own national executive board. The challenge was accepted and by 1988 the executive board was established as well as a third community in Melbourne.

From Australia, the trio flew to Thailand where they were warmly welcomed by Theresians. The Thai community was strong in spite of overcoming constant transportation obstacles in their efforts to attend meetings. Thai Theresians have attended two international conferences in the past twelve years.

One goal of the TWM Board of Directors for Patricia and Maesel on this same journey was that they speak with the Hong Kong Theresians about hosting the 1988 international conference there. As a community of teachers, fully occupied in their profession in the month of October, the Hong Kong Theresians welcomed the conference, but understandably made it clear that they were not in a position to sponsor, plan, or direct the conference. Their welcoming spirit, however, encourage the visitors to report back to the TWM Board members the good news: Hong Kong in '88!

Maesel and Patricia found the Philippine community healthy and active. The women had much to share with their visitors about the recent revolution and the roles some of the members played in that historic event. Theresians hosted a retreat during this visit and invited friends and relatives to attend. Patricia and Maesel were the speakers. However, the stories shared by some of the women in attendance about the soul searching decisions and struggles they faced immediately before and during the revolution provided the most significant event of the retreat.

By 1989 the Theresians of Ghana indicated preparedness to establish a national executive board and requested assistance in processing this step. Rita Metyko and Patricia Mullen responded and spent three weeks

in Ghana. Although spending considerable time with existing communities, they were also taken to Wenchi to meet members of a new community there and to the city of Ho for the purpose of familiarizing women there with Thesians. However, the exhilarating moment came during the day-long meeting of representatives from Kumasi and Accra who gathered in Accra for a discernment meeting regarding the establishment of an executive board. The day was a prayerful and reflective experience culminating three weeks of prayer and discussions. The decision was made to create the board, and Victoria Akuffo was chosen president. For Rita and Patricia it was an inspiring event, and they knew the Thesians of Ghana would impact the lives of women in Ghana as well as in all of Sub Sahara, Africa.

On this same journey, Rita and Patricia travelled to Nigeria where two communities had been established several years earlier by Sr. Rosemary of the Sisters of the Holy Child. They spent a week in Calabar and in Ikom before returning to Lagos for two days and back to the States.

International Conferences

Canada hosted the first international conference in 1972. Although all speakers were inspiring and challenging, George Cardinal Flahiff of Winnipeg offered the greatest affirmation and challenges: "It has become abundantly clear in the last decades that oppression of women cannot endure. The fight for equality and justice for women is not over yet. Discover and pursue new and creative endeavors in the church and the world for the good of all humankind."

This was the first Thesian conference during which the homily was delivered by a member, Helen Slattery. Actually, the priest intending to deliver the homily became ill just hours before the conference closing liturgy, and he with conference leaders discerned that it was in the best interest of all assembled if Helen, a recognized Canadian Thesian leader, deliver the homily. This unusual event was not only well received, there were no negative utterances about the occasion ever recorded.

In the fall of 1980, Thesians of the U.S. hosted the international conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The theme of "World Women and Ministry: Building on Our Past, Exploring Our Present, Striding Creatively Toward Our Future" was addressed by speakers Sr. Margaret Brennan, IHM and Sr. Juliann Casey, IHM. Imelda Isodoro, District Coordinator of Philippine Thesians, was present with her husband and addressed the assembly.

The TWM Board of Directors scheduled the 1984 international conference for Rome, Italy. Since terrorism was rampant in parts of Europe at that time, the venue was changed to Honolulu, Hawaii, because the greatest Thesian growth was occurring in Asia and Australia. It was hoped that since Honolulu was midpoint between the East Coast of the U.S. and Hong Kong, members from Pacific Rim countries would travel to Honolulu for the conference. They did! Thesians from Thailand, the Philippines and Australia travelled to Honolulu, and three Thesians from Ghana attended also. Patricia Mische of Global Education Associates was the primary speaker addressing issues relating to the conference theme: "Thinking Globally and Acting Locally."

In October 1988, Thesians from Australia, Canada, Ghana, the Philippines and the United States joined Thesians of St. Paul's Convent School for the 1988 international conference in Hong Kong. Long before the conference, Thesians in nine countries were polled regarding their suggestions for conference sessions and speakers. The TWM Board and International Director Patricia Mullen designed a program which responded to those requests. TWM Board members June Mallon and Orell Fritz from Canada, and Maesel Yelenick and Patricia Mullen from the U.S. travelled three weeks earlier to Hong Kong to make final conference arrangements. Thesians were the speakers addressing those issues on which they possessed expertise.

“Women of Faith, Light for the Future” was the 1992 international conference theme which drew women from Canada, Ghana, the Philippines and the United States to Melbourne, Australia. This was the first truly international conference which was totally planned and financed by the host country. It was a grand success and left its mark on the global Theresian story.

As this book goes to press, Ghana, West African Theresians are eagerly preparing for the October 1996 Theresian International Conference to take place in the GIMPA Center in Accra, Ghana’s capitol city. Conference theme: “Challenges Facing Women of Faith in the Family and in the Church.”

Transitions

1990 marked a major transition in Theresians and in the lives of Fr. Elwood Voss and Patricia Mullen. Patricia had informed both the TUS and TWM Executive Boards in 1984 of her intention to “retire” in 1986 from TUS. She urged the TUS Board to continue to research ways by which the organization might become more fiscally solvent in order that a successor to her might be hired for a competitive salary, and to begin the process for initiating a search for a new executive director. By 1986, Fr. Voss indicated his own intention to retire in the near future. However, financial circumstances were such that it would not yet be possible to find a woman to succeed the two of them and offer her a motivating wage. The goal was set for 1990 and fortunately, under the able leadership of Patsy Martin of Houston and her Executive Board, very positive steps were taken toward realizing both the financial goals as well as the search committee goals. In late 1989, Sr. Rose Ann Barmann, OSB, accepted the position of Executive Director of TUS as of August 1, 1990. Patricia Mullen was to remain as part time International Director of TWM. Until now she had been a volunteer International Director. In the future she would be salaried. Fr. Voss would continue to raise funds to support TWM and would do some public relations work for TUS.

Board of Directors

It would take an entire book to tell the splendid story of the TWM Board of Directors. Since 1970 several hundred women have travelled to and from board meeting sites at their own expense to keep the Theresian world vision alive. One day that book will be written and it will be a book about valiant women, women of courage, creative women, women of deep faith.

Since 1970 the TWM Board of Directors met annually. Most members continued to come from Canada and the United States. However, beginning in 1984 in Honolulu the face of the Board began to change dramatically. The hope had been to have international board members present for meetings every other year. So far, this has occurred.

The TWM Board at its meeting in Melbourne, Australia, in October 1992 created an innovative leadership model for the TWM organization. The Board considered this model of shared leadership a viable direction for TWM as commitment and ownership of the organization is vital for our future since Patricia Mullen announced she would not be able to continue as the part-time International Director. With great discernment and consensus the Board developed a two-year pilot plan for a volunteer International Leadership Team to assume the responsibilities of the paid International Director. The International Board would continue with one representative from each non-North American country plus the leadership team with members from the United States and Canada. The plan called for a team of seven members, included the titles and responsibilities of the team members, affirmed the TWM mission, purpose and goals, suggested names of potential team members and set the date and site for the initial formation meeting.

In January of 1993 TWM Board members and members of the International Leadership Team met in Phoenix, Arizona, to dialog about the development of the new TWM organizational model. The Theresian International Leadership Team members were Agnes L. Pino, Facilitator; June Mallon, Public Relations; Barbara Williams, Communications Development; Liz Rareshide, Treasurer; Rose Marie Gilb, Financial Development; Patricia Mullen, Editor; Rita Metyko, Archivist; and Maesel Yelenick, Sister Community Coordinator. The team clarified its objectives, designed the structure, and created a detailed time-line and a well defined role for each of the seven new team members. It was an exciting and empowering gathering for all the women present. Each woman departed with a commitment and challenge to lead and serve TWM for this two-year trial period.

Agnes Pino assumed leadership for the International Leadership Team and led members through a most challenging year. They kept the TWM vision before them and encouraged all team members to do the same. They raised \$5,000 to bring Ghana Theresians to the Chicago National Conference. Agnes sought approval from the Board to hire Carol Goebel of Colorado Springs part time to assist the Team, to do all communications with Ghana, and to prepare for TWM representation at the Chicago Conference. In 1995 the Board named TUS Executive Director Rose Ann Barmann, OSB, Director of Theresian World Ministry. At that same meeting, Agnes Pino's own daughter Michelle Elosta of Denver, also a Board member, was chosen to serve as president of the TWM Board.

Members of the 1993, 1994 and 1995 International Leadership Team have been visionary and heroic in their efforts to fulfill the vision for TWM.

Sheltered by the physical isolation of their continent and the lack of mastery for most people of more than one language, North American Theresians realize that unless they move outward beyond their confining boundaries, they will be left out of the ever-recurring dynamics of change throughout the global village. Therefore, excellent communications is vital as are opportunities for dialog during international conferences. It is on these occasions that Theresians share ideas for development of the Theresian five dimensions, for program topics, for public relations, for promotion and expansion, and for spiritual enrichment and growth.

National customs will be evidenced in these exchanges and, more important, will be the insights gained regarding the leadership and status of women in each country. The kinds of concerns which members express through these international relationships which are formed internationally will always aid those preparing for future international conferences, as well as those serving in international Theresian leadership roles.

Whatever the level of exchange, the very fact that exchange is taking place is one more small step toward creating a global village where people respect one another's views and values, and work together to make the world (God's creation) a better and safer home for future generations – today's children and grandchildren.

Openness to the Future

We ask ourselves often about the future of Thesians. Each year the vision and the hopes crystallize. One of those hopes is that after reading this book members share their own visions for Thesians with one another. This chapter is a consensus of our visions and is grounded in our past and present Thesian experiences, as well as in our own observations about women, church and society.

We believe that our projections are an outgrowth of all that describes Thesians as an organization in 1986. If each description moves along a continuum toward ultimate fulfillment of goals, we think that what we project in this chapter could be the realization of those goals.

It is out of experiences with Thesians that we dare look ahead to the next 25 years. We are convinced that the one spirit that has threaded its way through the tapestry of events in the Thesian story these 25 years is that of openness.

Thesians will continue to commit themselves to a spirit of openness, the result of being open to the Spirit. They have given evidence of these characteristics throughout this story. It is openness which makes this organization for women, ever evolving, as a sign of God's presence in the world. It is this openness that will continue to move Thesians to listen to and to respect the other, whether that other is a Thesian of opposing viewpoints, a religious leader whose thinking seems too liberal or too conservative for one's own tastes, or a speaker whose expertise leads her/him toward a conclusion unlike one's own. In our vision, Thesians will continue to be models of openness.

Because Thesians accept into membership every woman committed to personal growth, women who join Thesians will continue to be found at all points along the continuum from liberal to conservative.

The advantage to this varied membership is that a sensitivity develops that makes an individual less judgmental of those of different philosophies and opinions. Ultimately, it is this spirit that allows one to be more readily open to other cultures in the global village. Then, too, each person knowingly or not is helping another to grow simply because each is in an environment where she is free to be herself, to speak her opinions and not be judged. Thesian communities will continue to provide such environments.

Thesians will continue to have that dynamic spirit of being open to life, to those around them at each moment, to those people and events which come into their lives unsolicited and to the inevitable adaptations in life. It is this spirit that allows Thesians to be non-threatened by change. It affords them the luxury of possessing the ability to move gracefully and prayerfully into the future, and forward, within life's periods of transitions.

It is this open spirit and the respect given one another that will continue to allow Thesians to make their presence known and felt when they believe that change is in order because Christian values or principles have been denied in their own communities, in church, or in society.

Thesians will continue to be a progressive organization although not all of its members are progressive. It has been and continues to be progressive because those with more progressive attitudes are not restrained by members less inclined to blaze trails or to follow uncharted paths. The latter are women open to

the fact that there are those who are or feel called to follow their own visions and those of others a bit sooner, possibly, than everyone else. What is important in Thesians is that the more progressive woman knows she can explore, probe and articulate her vision because her Thesian sisters who, even if they do not agree with her, will respect her. Accordingly, the Thesian who is more inclined toward cautiousness knows she can express her doubts because her Thesian sisters will likewise respect her.

Thesians will continue to call one another to an awareness of Christian justice. The virtue of justice is evident in the actions of one with an open spirit. There are areas of justice about which people do not often speak, but in which women have a tremendous amount of power. For example, during the 1978 Thesian National Conference, we saw and heard members spontaneously call one another forth to commit themselves to providing just remuneration for services rendered to them in numerous areas of their lives. Examples discussed were: household employees, child care providers, minority “free-lance” workers and many more. That made us aware that the prophets for justice and those who spoke of the connections between Gospel and daily life were indeed being heard around the land. Their calls to justice were not falling on deaf ears. Again this is another example of the spirit of openness among Thesians, and the honest and forthrightness of spirit that calls them to speak for justice and to listen. This spirit will continue to prevail.

We see more and more women in Thesians who recognize that this is an organization well worthy of being shared with women everywhere. And because it is so worthwhile it will be considered worthy of being among one’s highest priorities in terms of charitable contributions because Thesians is a very special form of ministry by and for women. When a woman respects and loves herself, holds herself in high esteem as a very special creation of God, her powers for influence within family, neighborhood, church, nation and world are immeasurable. Many women indeed have this sense of self when they become Thesians; others do not. But in a Thesian community the potential for affirmation, growth and influence is overwhelming; therefore, it is natural to want to share these benefits with other women and help them initiate communities of their own. A Thesian will more frequently place her dues and her contributions to Thesians and other women’s organizations high on her budget priority list. Her generosity will be rewarded by knowing 1) she is ministering to women she many never meet by helping them have the same opportunity someone else once provided for her – Thesians. 2) She will join other members in providing just wages and benefits to her organization’s employees, those same benefits she expects for herself and/or her spouse. In this same vein, we see married Thesians who long ago recognized their work, either in the home or away from it, as entitling them to have equal decision-making rights with respect to their families’ charitable contributions, continuing to model this decision-making role for those women not yet accustomed to assuming such power in the home. 3) She will seek out charitable organizations which contribute to the material support of women of poverty because she knows that statistics reveal that by the year 2000, 90 percent of U.S. citizens living below the poverty level will be women and children.

Throughout the Thesian story, Sisters have been extremely influential. We meet them at Thesian gatherings almost everywhere we go. Sisters founded many Thesian communities personally and often serve as spiritual consultants to individual communities and on the National Board of Consultants. They have been prophetic speakers at national and regional conferences and local community meetings. We see Sisters continuing to reach out and bond in community with women of all lifestyles. We see Thesians going out of their ways to invite sisters into membership in their Thesian communities.

The future impact of church women on church and society will depend greatly on the partnership of women from all lifestyles. Women need to model equality of lifestyles and collegiality of decision-making, thus modeling non-hierarchical structures. It is our observation that women of all lifestyles cannot afford to put themselves solely into elitist circles where their visions, research and concern about women’s needs and their future projections about women in church and society are shared with a few of like mind. Women in these influential networks must communicate with, network with, or especially become leaven within other groups of

women. Otherwise they will have formed, God forbid, an “old girls’ club.” Every woman in the church needs more occasions to dialog with those women having greater opportunities to explore the major issues of the day and how they affect women and how women can affect them. Leaders must have followers and must call forth other leaders.

We challenge the women of vision, of scholarship, of letters, to step out of their intellectual milieu often in order to share their gifts, their visions, their hopes, their spirituality with those already established groups of women such as Thesians, not just as speakers but as members. The future of women in church and society depends greatly on women’s understanding of and respect for one another. This can only happen with open and continuous dialog. The five-dimension program of Thesians will, if developed in the spirit with which it is described throughout this book, assure members of:

- A spirituality that connects with the world around them, provides prayer experiences that explore optional worship and praise forms, opportunities for growth in personal prayer, and occasions for sharing spiritual insights, needs, gratitude, joys and fears with one another.
- A community experience that values each member for who she is with all of her gifts, her authenticity; that gives witness to the positive effects of belonging to a community of women seeking person growth and seeking to make an impact in church and society.
- Educational opportunities that explore values, the human condition, all sides of current issues of interest or concern to women of faith today.
- The support and affirmation, respect and consideration that each person, regardless of her lifestyle, needs to experience if she is to grow to the greatest possible fullness.
- An ownership of the concept of ministry that compels a Thesian to live out her baptismal call through ministering to those others for whom she is called to minister. This will mean, for some, a never-ending discernment process as consciousness levels are raised and individuals or entire Thesian communities are called out of their comfort zones to bring God’s unconditional love to those calling for their gifts and presence.

Within this ministry dimension, we see Thesians collaborating with other organizations of women in providing seminars, workshops, awareness sessions, etc. for women suffering from societal or church marginalization or oppression in minor or more dramatic forms. For example, a Thesian consultant recently suggested that Thesians sponsor such workshops or seminars for women who are trying to discern the appropriateness of working outside the home while ministering to family within the home. Such a discernment process guided and led by more experienced women who faced and successfully resolved the very same dilemma in their own lives would provide models of various life experiences, especially for younger women. Many examples of contemporary themes for such events come to mind. Another example might be the collaboration of local Thesian communities with other groups of women of faith in co-sponsoring a day or an event regarding world peace and its Gospel connection. Thesians, we believe, will provide leadership in such collaborative efforts.

Thesian communities will continue to multiply throughout North America and around the world as women come to realize the importance of community among members and of networking among organizations. With prayer and openness to the Spirit, women’s organizations such as Thesians will make their mark on the continuing and future story of their churches and of society.

The Future is Now

President Bernie Carpenter (1987-1988)

As we moved into the latter part of the eighties the winds of change were making a great impact upon the Theresians. In 1984 at the International Conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, Sr. Patricia Mullen announced that she was going to resign as Executive Director in 1986. With that announcement, the leadership of Theresians knew that given their financial picture much had to be accomplished to assure Sr. Patricia had adequate retirement benefits. The Theresian organization was born on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that moved within Monsignor Voss to create an organization that affirmed and supported the Christian woman in her vocation to womanhood. In 1961 this was truly a visionary purpose for an organization of women. Theresians was founded by the Spirit through the charism of Msgr. Voss. As often happens with visionary founders, the vision grasps the individual; but sometimes the practical side of the organization, namely finances, seem to take a second place in persons being swept up by the vision. This was the historical situation of the Theresians when forthcoming changes were realized and announced.

There has always been an openness to the lead and movement of the Holy Spirit in Theresians. It is the hallmark of the organization and it is this stance of listening to the Spirit by the Theresian administration and leadership that has kept Theresians contemporary and responding to the spiritual and intellectual needs of women in supportive communities of faith.

To honor Sr. Patricia's request the administration and leadership knew that some serious decisions would have to be made regarding the membership taking full responsibility for the fiscal viability of the organization. This would be accomplished through much discussion and discernment at Consultant and Executive Board meetings. It became apparent that the national dues would need to be raised in order to be able to offer a just wage to a new Executive Director. Let it be noted here that Sr. Patricia and Msgr. Voss out of their intense dedication and commitment to the vision of the Theresians ministered for a very little financial remuneration. The dream and vision of the founder carried them over a quarter of a century. The concept of the Development Fund would continue to be promoted in the organization and many communities contributed to it annually, along with the national dues. A finance committee was formed in 1986 by the National Board to assist the national office in accounting and other financial matters.

Vision and love of Theresians was enfolded in the Theresians throughout the United States and around the world. Once the membership became more aware of the needs of the organization, more and more women became involved in the financial leadership with the desire that Theresians have a solid financial future.

During this time, Theresians were also engaged in writing a mission statement like many religious communities, dioceses and corporations were doing. A mission statement is a statement of "who" and "what" of an organization. It is usually written out of the lived experience of the membership. The initial statement of mission and purpose for Theresians was, "Theresians is a Catholic Organization of Women who are dedicated to a deeper appreciation of the vocation of the Christian woman." The five dimensions unfolded over the years as Prayer, Education, Community, Vocation and Ministry. The process of writing a mission statement for Theresians was begun and led by Sr. Rose Ann Barmann at the National Board meeting in October 1987 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The following is a "working draft" mission statement that was created and recorded in the minutes of that meeting:

1987 Board Mission Statement: Recognizing the need for nurturing and affirmation, we challenge women to grow to the fullest of their human potential. We achieve our purpose by a commitment to the Gospel through five dimensions: Prayer, Education, Vocation, Community and Ministry. Theresians are open to all women who seek wholeness and who desire to live out the Theresian Vision.

This mission statement was taken back to each local community and they were asked to reflect on their experiences of Theresians and to express what being a Theresian meant to them. A mission statement was written by each community that flowed from the lived experience of the Theresian membership. Then a compilation of the various statements from the local Theresian communities was submitted to the National Board in November of 1988 at their meeting in Colorado Springs at Benet Hill Center. Again, after much love, prayer, input and discernment, the National Board finalized the Mission Statement for Theresians which read:

“The Theresians are supportive of women. We provide a prayerful environment in which we are nurtured, affirmed and challenged to reach our full potential. Called to gospel holiness we grow in our faith vision by living according to five dimensions: Spirituality, Education, Community, Vocation and Ministry.”

This Mission Statement has become the touchstone upon which Theresians tested the quality of their local Theresian community life. It is used by local, regional, national and international leadership to plan conferences, retreat days and dreaming of the future of Theresians. The five dimensions became the hallmark of the Theresian vocation and lifestyle. The Mission Statement gives verbal clarity to the question, “Who are the Theresians?”

With the national Theresian community committed to the Theresian mission, the Finance Committee working with the national office to strengthen the Theresian financial base and a search committee in place to find a qualified Executive Director, the winds of change turned into a might whirlwind as the decade of the eighties was drawing to a close. The only reality that we are sure of in life is change. Change permeates all of nature and everything we are and do. People change, plans change, organizations change; change is natural, it is normal and essential for life. Yet the resistance to change is just as normal and natural a part of human nature as the acceptance of change. Because Theresians has chosen life, change has been and will continue to be a part of our Theresian story. The challenge of change in many ways convinces this Theresian writer that Monsignor’s dream was meant to survive because it endured the growing pains and stresses of these uncertain times in Theresians.

Benet Hill Center in Colorado Springs was the site for a very memorable Board meeting in 1988. Benet Hill Center is a part of the Benedictine Monastery where Benedictine women and their warmth and hospitality were most appreciated at this meeting. As one Board member gave a primal scream to the Colorado Rockies behind the library during the meeting, Bernie Carpenter, the National President, realized that this would be painful rebirth but not a still birth. The liturgy at the Monastery that Saturday night presided over by one who shared in the inclusive spirit of this Benedictine house inspired the Sisters and gave the National Board the hope-filled energy that propelled the decisions of that following evening and next day.

Challenge and Change

President Patsy Martin (1988-1990)

Challenge and change filled the Thesians years of 1988 – 1990. I attended my first Board meeting as a newly elected member in Colorado Springs in November 1988, and found myself headed home to Houston three days later as National President. It had been an incredibly full and productive three days. From early morning prayers to late night committee meetings, to sharing around the kitchen table into the wee hours, we formed community that would carry us through the difficult times to come. The trust of the Board shown by my call to serve the larger Thesian community was both humbling and empowering. That call started a personal roller coaster ride for the next two years that would take me to community charterings, planning meetings, regional and national conferences and a World Board meeting – from Burbank to Charleston, from New Orleans to Toronto and points in between all over the map: Dallas, San Antonio, Corpus Christi, Albuquerque, Phoenix, Lafayette, New Iberia. . .

As the Board members departed from Colorado Springs to return home and to their communities, they had equal challenges to face and changes to effect. One of the greatest challenges was to provide a secure financial base for the operation of the national office. It had been apparent for several years that in order to provide for continued growth and greater financial stability increased sources of revenue needed to be found. As a way of doing this a new multi-level dues concept had been adopted replacing the former single level dues. It was now up to the Board through the district coordinators and the presidents to encourage the members to take ownership for **Their Organization** by fulfilling their financial obligations. This ultimately developed into the concept of covenant/dues that we have today.

The National Board meeting of 1989 was a bittersweet time of pain and thanksgiving. Msgr. Voss and Sr. Patricia Mullen were resigning from the positions of Public Relations Director and Executive Director that they had filled with dedication and commitment for 30 and 25 years respectively; they agreed to stay until the positions could be filled.

A search committee was charged with the difficult task of finding a new Executive Director. It was vitally important that the new Director be someone who would carry on and advance the mission of Thesians as reflected in the recently adopted mission statement. The committee presented its recommendation to the Board at the meeting in Burbank in October 1989. First the Board accepted the resignations of Msgr. Voss and Sr. Patricia and made provisions for their retirement. The Board then conducted the final interview and made its decision. By unanimous decision, the Board offered the position of Executive Director to Sr. Rose Ann Barmann, O.S.B., a Thesian since 1972 and member of the Board.

It was one thing to offer the position and another to work out the details satisfactorily to all parties concerned. As a Benedictine, Sr. Rose Ann's contract had to be approved by the prioress of her monastery and assurances had to be given that we could meet the financial requirements. There were some very tense days and weeks but finally it all came together. In April of 1990 we were able to announce that on August 1, 1990, a new era of Thesians would begin with the hiring of Sr. Rose Ann. The challenge had been met. The following year would bring many changes.

Our new Executive Director wanted to get to know "lots of Thesians." Houston's communities then comprised almost one-third of the national membership. So Sr. Rose Ann came to Houston. The Day One

Community, the original community from which all others flowed in Houston, was celebrating its 25th anniversary. An afternoon of prayer and celebration that included all Theresians in the district provided an opportunity for the new Executive Director to share her vision and hopes for the future. She was immediately welcomed, accepted and loved.

For eight days, Sr. Rose Ann and I visited communities and planned the agenda for the up-coming Board meeting in Scottsdale. We developed a new budget complete with spread-sheets and pie charts. Each night a different group gathered around the Martin table to break bread and share their vision for Theresians with Sr. Rose Ann: district coordinators, presidents, executive committee officers; new faces but all Theresians, eager to support and affirm our new Director.

The 1990 National Board Meeting took place in Scottsdale just prior to the National Conference. The Board's decisions proved to be critical to the future development of Theresians. An agenda sent out in September had as one of its items:

1:00 pm – **Discussion of Budget** – Rosalie Butler, Treasurer
Uniform collection of dues
Review of Sr. Rose Ann's contract
Other fiscal matters
Adoption of budget for 1991

Through a careful study of the projected budget and an honest appraisal of our financial situation, it became apparent that we could no longer afford to own and maintain the national headquarters in Scottsdale. The property had been purchased years before as an investment, but the funds required for much needed repairs and upkeep were not available to us.

With compassion to all and from all, we reached a consensus. Not until each member around the table could signal consent was the motion even introduced to sell the property. It was the decision of the Board that by investing the proceeds from the sale in a restricted fund and using only the interest we could provide the funds necessary for Theresians to grow. The challenge to spread the Theresian message and to be able to minister to women throughout the United States called us to accept a difficult decision.

As Dick Westley, a noted Catholic writer, said at our Chicago National Conference in 1994, "The Theresian commitment to community is the charism that sets us apart from the myriad of women's organizations in the church." Throughout his years on the Theresian Consultants Board, Msgr. William Steel, founder of Theresians in Houston, had as his goal the broadening of the Theresian mission to emphasize community. It was he who encouraged us to include Sisters, not just as guests or speakers, but as full-fledged members. He taught us how much we all needed each other's support in striving to live out our common vocation, the fullness of Christian womanhood. Community is a cornerstone of Theresians. It is one of the dimensions of our Theresian lifestyle.

How could we not respect Sr. Rose Ann's desire to live in community? As a vowed Benedictine she needed to be with her sister Benedictines for the support and love that so many of us have and depend on through our marriage vows. Prayer and discernment enabled us to reach consensus and the Board decided that the national headquarters be moved. Thus we provided for the return of Theresians to the place of its birth in the mountains of Colorado.

The National Conference of 1990 that followed our Board meeting held many poignant moments for me. At the opening session I introduced our new Executive Director, Sr. Rose Ann Barmann, to the Theresians

gathered from communities across the United States and Canada. It was a very special privilege. We had worked long and hard for this moment.

At the banquet, a beautiful tribute was paid to Msgr. Voss, our founder, and to Sr. Patricia Mullen for their many years of devoted service. They had empowered women to reach out in support of women across the country and the world with a lifestyle rich in Gospel values.

Just before the closing liturgy (with Bishop O'Brien of Phoenix standing in the doorway waiting for the procession) Sr. Patricia came to the podium and began talking about transitions. I suddenly realized she was talking about the journey we had been on together. She thanked me for being the bridge from the old to the new. Sr. Rose Ann touched me deeply when she called me her "companion on the way." It was a proud and a very humbling moment to treasure. The beautiful painting of the Theresian rose by Marian Nesavich, a Theresian in Colorado Springs, hangs in my study today as a visible reminder of those gifted years.

In my first message to the Theresians in the national newsletter in 1989, I wrote about Theresians *being*, not *doing*:

To the question, "What do Theresians do?" I have a ready answer. "We don't do; we are!" And to me that is our real identity and our greatest strength. We **are**. We seek to find within ourselves and through our communities the essence of being.

Yet for two years it seemed we never stopped doing. What do I remember most and treasure of those two years? The Theresians I met on that roller coaster ride: women of wisdom, women of vision, women of action, women who suffered much, and women of laughter and joy. We mourned and cried together; we rejoiced and celebrated together. They continue to be companions with me on my pilgrim journey.

Making Changes

President Barbara Williams (1990 – 1991) *prepared by Sr. Rose Ann Barmann*

Commitment to be a Theresian is likewise a commitment to share your woman gifts when called upon to serve in leadership at the local, regional, national and international levels. The strength of Theresians over the past 35 years has been the untiring dedication of countless women who realize their giftedness for community and are willing to share those gifts with the national Theresian community. As Patsy Martin completed her two years as President of the National Board, Barbara Williams of Denver, Colorado, was called to be the Theresian National President in October 1990. Barbara and her Board were faced with the task of implementing the decisions of the 1990 National Board Meeting, the most monumental of these decisions being to put the Theresian property on the real estate market.

To carry out this task the National Board set up a Properties Committee at the 1990 meeting. The committee was chaired by Margaret Carter of Houston, Texas. Claire Bonfili of Phoenix, Arizona, and Jeanette Weiland of Charleston, South Carolina, were members of the committee. Barbara Williams and Sr. Rose Ann were ex officio members of this committee.

As an historical record of this committee's activities, the following is the report given by Margaret Carter at the October 1991 National Board Meeting that was held at the Theresians' new office site in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Property Committee Report

At our National Board Meeting in Scottsdale last fall, the President appointed our committee to research and take the necessary steps to effect the sale of the property in Scottsdale which housed our national office as well as our National Director.

Through the company with which I am associated, Madeline O'Brien Realtors in Houston, I was able to search out a real estate office in Scottsdale which I believed to be experienced, competent and well versed in the marketing of properties in the area of our location on E. Pershing Avenue.

The firm of Gloria Lennox and Associates was selected, and both Margaret Phillips and Pat Harte of that firm worked together in marketing this property. They prepared an excellent market study for us, and suggested the property be marketed at a price somewhere between \$116,000 and \$124,000.

After consulting with our committee and members of our National Board, the property was listed on November 8th, 1990, and the price of \$124,000 was selected. This was later reduced to \$119,000.

An offer for \$84,000 was received in January which was rejected as unacceptable.

On March 21st, an offer was received for \$110,000 from a prospective buyer who was apparently well qualified to purchase the property under a VA loan. Once again, after

careful consideration by all parties, this offer was accepted. These buyers are a family of four: a husband, wife and two children – a daughter age 16 and a son about 8 years old – who were most anxious to relocate into this neighborhood.

The buyer, his credit, etc., were quickly approved. However, the appraisal of the property came in at \$105,000. Our realtor immediately went to work to overcome this obstacle by providing the appraiser with data on recent sales of like properties which had not been included in his initial studies.

In time, this produced the desired results, and a new appraisal was issued for \$110,000. The last was finally approved, and the sale closed on July 24th, 1991.

In summary, we feel the sale of 5326 East Pershing Avenue was finalized in a timely manner. Given the market conditions and housing activity in this area and at this time, the sale accomplished two important goals: it represented a fair market price for both buyer and seller, and liquefied the largest asset of our Theresian community. This enabled the funds to be invest as planned, and facilitated the moving of the national office to our new and wonderful location in Colorado Springs at Benet Hill Center.

A third significant objective of serious concern to our entire Board was also realized, and that was the opportunity for our National Director to once again be reunited with her community.

Thank you for the privilege of serving the Theresians of the United States in this manner.

Respectfully Submitted,

Margaret Carter
Chair, Property Committee

Claire Bonfili

Jeanette Weiland

October 1991

By October of 1991 Sr. Rose Ann had just completed 14 months as the successor of Msgr. Voss and Patricia Mullen. In that brief period many changes and challenges were met and carried out with Theresian grace and love.

The Covenant/Dues program was gaining credibility, the Development Committee was taking responsibility for the present and future liability of Theresians. The Scottsdale property was sold and the national office was moved back to Colorado. Let it be said here that although it was very difficult for the Phoenix Theresians to see the national office be moved, they were most gracious and worked diligently with Sr. Rose Ann to prepare the property for sale and to hold an “estate sale” to liquidate the furnishings of the Scottsdale property. Thirty boxes of office files and materials were shipped by UPS to the new office site at 2577 North Chelton Road, #207, in Colorado Springs.

To share with our readers the spirit and energy of Sr. Rose Ann the following is her report given at the National Board Meeting in October of 1991.

October 26, 1991

Report to the National Executive Board

By: Sr. Rose Ann Barmann, OSB, Executive Director
For: Theresians of the United States

Visitations

My first year as your Executive Director has been full, exciting and challenging. The highlight of my year has been meeting Theresian women throughout the United States who are serious about living out their Theresian vocation through the five dimensions. In visiting four out of the six regions, I have consistently found Theresians who are committed to the Theresian mission and are dedicated to making a difference in their personal Christian lives and in the lives of those around them. I am encouraged by the way young women are finding spiritual challenge and fulfillment in the Theresians. I am also sensitive to our middle age and older members who have been in Theresians since its inception. They have remained faithful to the organization during its efforts to remain contemporary with the needs of today's Church and society in living Gospel holiness. We have 1370 members in the United States. We have 72 communities and of those, 15 are in formation. Successful efforts are being made to found communities throughout the United States in New Orleans, Florida, Iowa, Houston, Corpus Christi, Austin and San Antonio, Texas. Bellingham, Washington, will be chartered in the Spring of 1992 and I will make a visit there at that time. I also plan to visit Albuquerque November 2 to assist in an expansion meeting. Theresians, you might say, "is an idea/movement whose time has come." Women all over this country are hungry for what Theresians has to offer and I challenge this Board to create ways for expansion of the Theresian mission.

Leadership

Patti Miller will report on the Leadership Meeting later in this meeting. As your Executive Director, I was encouraged and heartened by the response of Theresian leadership that attended the Albuquerque meeting last April. I am also aware of the need to do a Leadership program on a yearly basis and to open this program up to leadership at all levels; District Coordinators, local Boards and national Board members. I would like your suggestions as to where we might hold our 1992 Leadership Program. Phoenix, Arizona, has been suggested to me because that location would make it feasible for persons in the Southwest as well as California and Washington state to attend. Again, I am finding Theresian women responding to my leadership and my guidance in ways to carry out our mission.

Regional Conferences

More will be said later in this meeting about the Regional Conferences. The Corpus Christi and Illinois conferences were excellent and well planned programs. It is great to

see the collaboration between Houston and Corpus Christi and Dubuque, Iowa, and the Chicago Theresians working so well together for the goals of the organization. It means everything to me as your Executive Director to see this kind of cooperation. Accolades to the planning committees for two great Spirit-filled conferences.

Future Conferences

Atlanta will host the Southeast conference February 14, 15, and 16, 1992. Colorado and New Mexico will have a conference in March of 1992. Northern California will host a conference in April of 1992. The International Conference will be in Melbourne, Australia, October 16, 17 and 18, 1992. The theme, "Women of Faith: Light of the World." I ask each of you to support the ministry of the International Conference through publicity and your psychological and spiritual support, and your active participation if it is at all possible.

Goals for 1991

Last year I told you that I would focus my energies on Theresian Leadership, Spirituality and Ministry for my first year as your Executive Director. As I look back, I feel that I have been making efforts in this direction and I see the need to continue in 1992 with the same kind of emphasis. I see the need for continued efforts in financial programs as well as working in Public Relations and Expansion. As we progress through this meeting, I will share reports and comments on the Covenant/Dues, Investments and Development.

I want to thank you for your support and affirmation to me as your Executive Director. Thank you for your dedication to the National Board and all the time, talent and treasury that you expend on this wonderful Theresian organization.

Marketing Our National Image

President Mary Ann Hines (1991 – 1993)

As I prepare my notes for this part of Theresian history, I am convinced that the word “timing” has been a key word in my entire life. The “timing” that says “you are in the right place at the right time!”

In my life there have been two events that best prove this to me. In 1985 I was fortunate, along with six other patients at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, to help form an organization called the Anderson Network. This program allows patients internationally to be matched with an Anderson Network volunteer, having a similar diagnosis and treatment, to dialog with them.

The same is true for Theresians. I was called to serve on the Theresian National Board at a time in its history during a transition period from Monsignor Elwood C. Voss to a new National Executive Director, Sr. Rose Ann Barmann, OSB. This was a time of new beginnings, new inferences, new causes and new goals. There was a definite need to build a solid financial program for Theresians and to develop communications and public relations in order to enhance the expansion and growth of the organization.

When these needs, plans and visions of the Theresians became obvious and clear to many members, I felt the talents and experiences of my past life could be utilized for their vision. There is no great joy in one’s life than to be called to use your gifts and to promote something that means so much in one’s life. After serving as National President for 1992 and 1993, I have come to realize that if you dare to dream and have visions and you want to make these visions real, you must be ready to find ways and means to secure those visions. I also learned that if you pray and ask for inspiration, you must be prepared to act! This is what the Development Committee members, of which I was chairperson while serving as National Vice President in 1991, discovered. We made an important decision for Theresians in the 90s and years to come. Today I praise the insight of those committee members and our Executive Director, Sr. Rose Ann, for accepting the committee’s proposal to change the Development Committee to the Endowment Committee. Its new purpose was to work toward establishing financial capabilities to ensure the continued growth and expansion of Theresians and to explore ways and means to obtain finances through major gifts, grants, investments, wills and estates.

At the 1991 National Board Meeting at Benet Hill Center in Colorado Springs, there was a possibility that I could be asked to serve as President. I went to bed that night before the day of discernment for the officers and became very restless over a decision I would soon have to face. I remember during the night walking around the room and into the hallway. As I passed a large picture window I saw the most beautiful scene of Pikes Peak so majestically covered with snow in the full moon light. It almost took my breath away and I knew that God was trying to say to me “If I can make something beautiful like this, think of what I can do with your life!” I will never forget that moment and recalled it when fear and doubts have pushed clouds and darkness across my eyes.

At this time in Theresian history, it became apparent to our 1992 National Board that the national office had to continue to be available and visible to Theresians if they were to grow and expand. I traveled with our National Director to the Southeast Regional Conference in Atlanta – “Come Journey with Me” was the theme of the conference – and I visited Theresians in Georgia, Alabama, Florida and South Carolina. These Theresians not only shared their beautiful cities with us, but their hearts and homes as well. With all the communities we shared our stories, laughter and feelings of sisterhood. We realized how much alike all of us are with the same needs and thirst for more meaningful and deeper spiritual growth. I was able to meet and talk to many Theresians who were friends of Msgr. Voss and were early benefactors of the Theresians.

While I was on this Southeastern trip, I became more aware of my role as National President, and we began to think of ways the national office could help and maintain vital communities. Believing that education prompts action and action prompts ministry, our attention was immediately turned to updating and redesigning our information brochures, covenant/dues brochures and leadership bulletins. The Theresian Community Formation Guidelines were developed with helps to conduct Theresian information meetings. More videos, new resource materials and new programs were formulated for communities. Modern technology and the use of an 800 number, along with a fax machine, allowed communities across the country to immediately receive information from the national office. This was no longer a dream but a reality. That year (1992) had many “firsts.” Theresians began to wear newly designed gold-plated logo pins. We began to use our Theresian note cards with the Theresian Mission Statement.

It was indeed a sad time for Theresians, January 15, 1992, when Monsignor Elwood C. Voss, our Founder, died. What a man of vision he was and how well he knew what women needed! To celebrate life and in memory of his death, the Endowment Committee set up the Elwood C. Voss Endowment Fund to perpetuate his vision. A brochure was designed and distributed for this purpose.

More women were being attracted to the Theresian’s life style and also to perpetuate Msgr. Voss’ vision. It became apparent to the national office that there was a need to hire a part time Regional Director in each of its six regions to expand new communities and to maintain healthy communities with quality programs. Sr. Rose Ann, our National Director, began to slowly reveal the plans. With the approval of the National Board, a job description was written and the search to find its first Regional Director began.

In December 1992, a Regional Director was hired for the Southwest Region. To accomplish this we needed to secure major gifts and grants from additional major foundations. The Endowment Committee in the Spring of 1993 staged their first benefit in Houston, Texas. The monies realized at this benefit were placed along with other gifts for the E.C. Voss Endowment Fund. The benefit provided a way to market and introduce the Theresian life style to more women. It was at the benefit in Houston that a Christian actress and playwright, who served as honorary chairperson, was presented a magnificent glass sculpture of the Theresian logo. Its beauty and significance gave rise to making this sculpture into “The Woman of Vision” recognition that we use today.

Even though many priorities and goals of these years were targeted to put the Theresians on a solid financial basis, we never lost sight of the real reason and purpose that make women embrace Theresians. It is to develop a better prayer life and to deepen their spirituality. Realizing this, the National Board, at its meeting in Chicago in 1993, named as its goal “Prime Time Prayer.” This goal prompted national to encourage the use of Lectio Divina, the prayerful reading of Holy Scripture, for Theresians and for all communities.

I wish to acknowledge those dedicated Theresians who served with me in 1992 and 1993 on the National Board. Reflecting together, we acknowledged and learned from the past and while listening and responding to the signs of the time, we never lost sight of our Theresian Mission Statement.

As I draw to a close my recollections and reflections, I become aware of another key word in my life – “wisdom.” Not only do I believe that the Lord has given me the gift of “time” but has given me the gift of “wisdom.” There is wisdom to know the time to use your gifts to serve but equally important is the time to let go. I believe this gift of wisdom enables one to understand that the Lord is continually calling forth different gifts at different times to build His kingdom on earth. What you receive in return for using the gifts He has given you for service is a set of priceless memories that are yours to keep and enjoy for your lifetime.

The Call to Serve

President Robin Marine (1993-1995)

I remember the morning after I was called to serve as National President as if it was yesterday. I had been a member of the National Board for two years and had watched with admiration the inner workings of this powerful policy-making team. While I had prayed wholeheartedly to be guided and directed to “use my gifts” as Thesians had taught me, I was totally unprepared for this undertaking and felt tricked by God. I’ve teased Sr. Rose Ann several times since that she must have even begun to distrust the wisdom of the Board! She sat with me that morning guiding me through my tears and taming the maddening thoughts that passed from my mind to my mouth. . . *“But I’m a single mother! What do I, this humble little Thesian from Lafayette, Louisiana, have to contribute to the National Organization? Succeeding Mary Ann Hines is going to be a tough act to follow!”* But I knew in my heart that I did have a few things going for me – a deep love of Thesians, an ache for God, and a willingness to be supported by community.

And so, the very next day I did what all “good Thesians” would do in their hour of need – I called the best support person I could think of. In this case it was Judy Willig, a charter member of my Open Heart community that had since moved to Houston. Judy had always believed in me and had nominated me to the Board two years earlier. She and I had affirmed, loved and challenged each other through thick and thin in our ten years as Thesian sisters. (The nature of our relationship had truly become like sisters!) So it was Judy’s honesty and love I needed on that Monday morning as I was feeling overwhelmed by God’s call. After she giggled and proclaimed her glee, she reminded me of the true nature of Thesians and spoke, “Robin, you must remember what Thesians is about. You need to focus on your gifts, let go of the rest, and just be YOURSELF! And don’t forget about your spirituality and love of God.”

“God Use Me”

Deciding to ground myself more fully in the five dimensions of the Thesian mission, I knew immediately where I needed to start. My prayer life was strong, but definitely not where I wanted it or needed it to be in order to be an effective leader. It quickly occurred to me that the most obvious opportunity was right under my nose. Bishop Harry Flynn of Lafayette was serving Thesians as our National Episcopal Advisor. He loved Thesians and had once made the statement not long after he came to Lafayette that he would never worry about the future of the church with women like Thesians. He was always willing to visit our communities, often teaching us about another dimension of prayer. I immediately contacted his office requesting spiritual direction for myself as well as for the national organization and he very graciously saw me for the first time within a few weeks.

Bishop Flynn (now Archbishop of St. Paul/Minneapolis) is an extraordinarily holy man. I’d felt drawn to him for many years; and on one particularly painful occasion several years earlier when I was facing the end of my marriage, I’d tearfully reached out to him in a church parking lot requesting his prayers.

My first “official visit” with him in his office was quite extraordinary. As I sat where he so lovingly directed me, the tears flowed. I knew they weren’t the tears of fear and pain as they’d once been, but rather a feeling of awe that welled up in me as I resonated with the presence of holiness. I was slightly caught off guard but listened attentively as the Bishop lovingly referred to our earlier encounter. He tenderly spoke these words to me: “It is clear your pain has sanctified you, Robin. Now your prayer must be ‘God use me. You use me, God.’ You must pray that every day.” I struggle to this day with those words.

And then he proceeded to offer his divine wisdom for our beloved organization. . . He always emphasized our call to a deep union with God. He challenged us all out of indifference and into a fuller experience of God’s love. In Flynn’s words, “We must let our Lord come and make his home in us. We must grow in union, be in His presence, allow Him to transform us. And we must not get ‘caught up in the issues,’ but stay focused instead on a deep, deep union with God.”

I received his holy guidance on several occasions over the next few months, always sharing what he taught me in the national newsletters. My last visit was only days before he left for his new post in St. Paul. That was a difficult meeting as emotions were flying. I remember him admitting to me that his threshold for change “is just about nil.” He went on to share that even though leaving the familiar is difficult, it brings him into the arms of God. He said, “Besides, Robin, pain isn’t the worst thing.”

Women of Vision

It was out of this holy space that I truly began my journey as President. I started meeting and participating with Theresian women of a very high caliber. I wasn’t so much surprised but rather awed by the discovery that Theresian women were indeed “God-use-me-women.”

My first official duty was to participate in the hiring of the South Central Regional Director, Sr. Mary Dennison, in the Spring of 1994. The hiring process gave me such an appreciation of the “sharing of wisdom” and consensus process that is at the heart of our discernment when decisions are in order. My greatest delight came with the realization that this wonderful woman of prayer could contribute enormously to our dimension of spirituality. (Sr. Mary Dennison was founder and Director of the Spiritual Direction Institute at the Cenacle in Houston.) It began to dawn on me that our national organization was indeed going in a very profound direction.

I began to witness that even “endowment meetings” could encompass *shared wisdom*. In an effort to build for the future of our Theresian ministry and to insure Msgr. Voss’ vision of expansion, I was determined that we should increase our endowment fund from \$143,000 to \$200,000. Aware that \$57,000 wouldn’t come from “bake sales,” a most exciting and appropriate proposal arose that became known as the “Elwood C. Voss Woman of Vision Recognition.” A free-standing crystal Theresian logo, this recognition, with a donation of \$2500 to the E.C. Voss Endowment Fund, could be presented by families of Theresians, local communities or regions wishing to recognize outstanding leadership of a sister Theresian. Such an appropriate way to vision our future by honoring women with vision!

Perhaps the highlight of my first year took place in August of 1994 around a Houston dining room table. Natalie Saragusa, a true Theresian visionary herself, gathered a rather extraordinary group of forward-thinking women (with a median age of 60 no less!) to explore who we are as Theresians and to engage in the question of our evolution. Such questions arose as: *What are we moving towards? What more is needed from Theresians? How can we as Theresians become more*

alive and aware of what's going on around us, even from an intercultural dimension? How can "I" demonstrate my identity as a Theresian to others?

We discussed the needs and later developed proposals for a more deliberate formation process for new communities. Also discussed was the need that many Theresian women have to satisfy their need for a more contemplative prayer life. (Natalie, in a very recent letter to me, confirmed what both of us have come to believe – that St. Therese herself is calling us Theresians to a higher level of prayer.)

The Theresian Secret

In October 1994 at our National Conference in Schaumburg, Illinois, our “evolutionary” questions began to be answered by guest speaker Dick Westley, Professor of Philosophy from Loyola University, in his address to the convention, “The Theresian Secret: Attending to Faith, Each Other and the World.” In describing the five bare essentials of Church (experience, story, vision, each other and mission) Westley affirmed that “Theresians are not an organization within the church. They ARE Church.” He spoke, “We are a witness of the church that is still aborning and of which most of us can only dream. . . because we witness community, redemptive relationships, and attend to the world.” Westley knew of course that all Theresian communities are not at their best and challenged us to encourage each other to be even better witnesses of the relational and reflective church of the third millennium.

Fr. Hampton Davis of Lafayette, Louisiana, powerfully reminded us in the extraordinary closing liturgy to be great RECEIVERS of God’s love. This was a profound message to all of us women who are great givers and forget to simply take the time to be loved by God.

Throughout my term as President, I had the tremendous privilege of attending four regional conferences in New Orleans, Jacksonville, Houston and Burbank. Contained within these incredible events (as well as the one in Mundelein, Illinois, that I wasn’t able to attend) were dedicated and talented planning committees, inspiring programs, outstanding liturgies, and most importantly, enthusiastic and inspired participants. I was able to personally witness “Church” happening around those conference tables and hallways. I experienced women with hearts open, hungry for closeness and “redemptive intimacy.” In my talk at one of the conferences, I spoke, “Our light is visible – clearly. You can’t walk outside the conference halls without being stopped by some stranger asking ‘What’s going on in there?’” To again quote Dick Westley, “When we’re gathered in mass, people see us, experience our radiance, see light in our eyes, feel the warmth of our presence and take hope. . . They sense that we are different, but they don’t know why. We do – but that’s our little secret, that’s the Theresian Secret.”

Collaborative Leadership

With the 1994 presentation of the revised Leadership Manual, begun in 1991 under the direction of Carol Bayens, Houston, Texas, there was a dawning of a new type of leadership model, language “team,” and based on collaborative leadership or shared giftedness. (The goal of collaboration is to discover ways to identify, release and unify the gifts of the members of a team.)

As I traveled to district and regional leadership meetings with Sr. Rose Ann, I experienced great Theresian leaders. These women were eager, through collaboration, to engage in the struggle of meeting the individual needs of their communities. They were committed to planning quality educational programs and prayer services as well as to the bond of Christian community. I met

“experienced leaders” who had paved the “Theresian way” for many years, but whose enthusiasm never seems to wane. I engaged with emerging leaders who were open, enthused, bright with vision and willing to use their gifts for the betterment of their Theresian communities. I began to appreciate very powerfully the tremendous opportunity that Theresians offers all of its members as it challenges each to realize their unique gifts. It may be in planning a program or prayer service, executing district, regional or national conferences or endowment fundraisers, serving as a local, district, or national team leader, or carrying on the “hospitality efforts” of community. All are equally important ministries with equally important opportunities for a Theresian if she is to be empowered by the very mission of our national organization.

On the national level, our Board meetings certainly encompassed collaborative leadership. Sr. Rose Ann and I carefully planned and executed the meetings so that they would reflect the kind of prayer, sharing of wisdom, bond of Christian community, and empowerment of leadership that we wanted to see on the local level. From 1993-1995, the National Board focused its goals on encouraging the membership to engage in prime-time prayer with an emphasis on *lectio divina*, the development of a curriculum for community formation and renewal of existing communities, the full implementation of the Leadership Manual and the creation of a Program Manual in 1995, the education of our membership towards the importance of the covenant/dues commitment as a “ministry of money,” the implementation of a demographic study for the purpose of expansion, and the development of communities to diversify our membership, especially to incorporate a younger membership.

In my address to the Houston Regional Conference, I defined a Theresian leader as “one who is willing to be loved and used by God.” I am proud of the national, district and local leaders who exemplify our tremendous Theresian mission. I am extremely satisfied that our National Director, Sr. Rose Ann Barmann, is such a capable and dedicated leader and role model with outstanding energy and vision. I believe that Theresians stands with a very bright future as it continues to offer ample opportunities for its membership to truly identify, release and unify their gifts with others.

Some Final Thoughts

I am exploding with enthusiasm that our “Theresian secret” is no longer a kept secret. People want to know about us – who we are, what we’re about, what this electric energy is that fills our conference halls. I think we’re hungrier now more than ever for more in-depth education, spirituality and intimacy. As we move towards the third millennium, and as we Theresian women become more alive spiritually, educationally, communally and vocationally, reaching out to women who could most benefit from our mission will be the most natural response to our call to ministry. In doing so, we will reveal to the world that we truly are “God use me women.”

Notes

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