

# **INSTITUTE HISTORY WORKSHEET**

**TOPIC: Sister Mary Linscott (1969-1978)**

## **Places:**

**Peru 1970**

**New England (Ipswich/Boston divided 1973)**

**Southern Africa (separation of Zimbabwe and South Africa) 1975**

## **People & Relationships between them:**

- Sister Mary of the Holy Angels (Mary, baptized Margaret) Linscott (British Province)
- General Councilors during first term, 1969 – 1975: Sister Louise Mark Bankes (British Province), Sister Joan Bland (Maryland Province); Sister Edith Ryan (Ohio Province); Sister Marie Chantal Schweitzer (S. Belgium Province)
- General Councilors during second term, 1975-1978: Sister Barbara Farrell (Connecticut Province); Sister Patricia Mary Flanagan (Ohio Province); Sister Marie d' Assise Simons (S. Belgium)

## **Dates & Events:**

**1969: June 7** – Mary Linscott elected Superior General (2 days shy of 50 years of age)

**1969: June 22** – Canonization of St. Julie

**1969:** Chapter Acts speak of Associates for 1<sup>st</sup> time

**1969:** Provinces begin the mandated Assessment of Apostolic Life and begin experimenting with different forms of Government (Provincial and Team for most)

**1970:** Mary elected President of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG)

**1970 – 1974:** International Provincial meetings held at Ipswich

**1970:** Mary publishes the 1<sup>st</sup> “Evaluation of Executive Action” report to the Congregation

**1970:** The ARC program (Apostolic Religious Congregations) begins at the Casa – an inter-congregational program to facilitate renewal of religious women – it runs until 1996

**1972:** proposed Chapter that does not happen – too soon

**1973:** Massachusetts Province divided into Ipswich and Boston

**1975:** Southern Africa separated into (Rhodesia) Zimbabwe and South Africa

**1975:** Chapter Acts are a reflection of the work of the Assessment of Apostolic Life – moving towards what will become the Constitutions

**1977:** 1<sup>st</sup> Julie Conference - Amersfoort and Coesfeld Sisters of Notre Dame participate along with SNDdeN

### **Impact of War/Political Unrest:**

- The United States: VietNam War, racial tension, Women's movement, Space Race
- Zimbabwe gains independence in 1980
- Vatican II – the more renewal takes hold, the more vocations drop

### **Relationship with Hierarchy & Clergy:**

- Good with exceptions depending on how invested clergy is in renewal process
- Fidelity to the call to renewal, the call to serve

### **Primitive Spirit:**

- Mary Linscott gets Julie's letters translated and into the hands of the Sisters
- She writes on charism: To Heaven on Foot, The Fourth Essential – she will continue to write on charism and Julie her whole life
- Her courage and liberty of spirit
- Unity: it begins to be challenged in new ways – international reality is 7 languages are operative in the Congregation by 1978
- Community: begins to take new forms, faces new challenges as Sisters do not have the skills for interpersonal conflict solving,
- Commitment to the poor and the most abandoned: re-rooted in it with ministries expanding outside of formal education, choices of which schools to continue staffing guided by it, new outreach to areas we haven't been
- Sisters embrace ministry of religious education – creating new programs to help with renewal, 1<sup>st</sup> DREs, etc.

## **Spirituality underpinning everything:**

- Hallmark: confident faith
- Devotion to Mary & the rosary
- Devotion to the Trinity
- Devotion to the cross as 'mark of Notre Dame' – we are Sisters of Mary, standing with her at the foot of the cross
- Sense of Consecration – tried to keep us rooted in what is our call within a call (religious life within baptismal)
- Devotion to the Church

## **What touched your heart?**

- Mary's simplicity
- Her great love of Notre Dame: student of congregational history, Julie, her spirituality and her work in education.
- Loretto Julia named the moment in 1969 as a crisis: opportunity and danger. Who better to guide us through it than someone so rooted in the primitive spirit, trained in more recent theology, with amazing abilities to synthesize and articulate issues, and someone who was not into power in the traditional forms it had taken in the congregation

## **New insights?**

- Led Congregation during tumultuous post-Vatican changes – Loretto Julia had let the horses out of the barn. Mary Linscott did her best to let them run, but guided us in directions that were in line with our charism
- Loss of many members of Congregation during her term due to 3 factors:
  - Older Sisters dying
  - Women leaving because of disappointment with renewal (going too far, not far enough, lack of patience with the process); realize they can minister without being a religious; the life they entered is no more

- Fewer vocations (numbers begin to dry up in the North and formation programs in the South are just getting started)
- She never served as a superior or in province leadership before being elected, but she was fluent in French, and knew the entire congregation because of her work on Quiet Revolution (published in 1966)
- Amazing mind and tremendous energy, a very able administrator in terms of being able to track all the changes and guide us in a safe direction
- Acts of 1975: heavily influenced by Liberation Theology from Latin America & gives us a theology of Mission (ministry?)
- Acts of 1975 do not address the vows – acknowledges the need for a deeper study of the vows in the Congregation
- Acts of 1978: increased awareness of internationality (use of languages on cover and 1<sup>st</sup> page)
  - 6 pages on Government
  - 3 on Mission
  - 2 on membership
- As President of USIG, she was able to reinforce the sense of internationality among the sisters. Thanks to her, the Congregation developed a closer relationship with the universal Church and with religious life in the world

**Sister Mary of the Holy Angels Linscott:** Margaret Patricia Linscott (1919-1999)

- Educated by the SNDdeN at Blackburn (H.S.)
- Trained professionally with the SNDdeN at the Mt. Pleasant; taught for three years at Battersea before entering; 2<sup>nd</sup> year novitiate spent at Jumet
- Entered: October 25, 1945 First Vows: April 8, 1948
- Final Vows: August 12, 1953 Superior General: 1969-1978
- 1948-1953: Taught at Mt. Pleasant 1953-1956: Headmistress at NDHS, Leeds
- 1956: returned as lecturer to Mt. Pleasant until her election as superior general in 1969

- MA in Modern Languages (French) & Ph.D. in Education from University of Liverpool
- British Hierarchy Diploma in Theology and an MA/PH.D. in Religious Education from Catholic University – Quiet Revolution was her dissertation
- Chaired Theology Department at Liverpool's College of Mt. Pleasant and was president of the SNDdeN Teacher Training College in Liverpool
- Since she did not have any previous experience as superior, councilor or provincial, her knowledge of the Congregation (through her research) and her education in theology and language proved to be strong assets for her leadership in the years following Vatican II.
- 1<sup>st</sup> public act as Superior General – Canonization of Julie
- Responsible for implementing the Acts of 1969 – “an experimental modification of the Constitutions, which introduced adaptation and new principles into religious life.” It was the responsibility of the Superior General with her Council to move forward the implementation while ensuring the unity of the Congregation and the deepening of values in religious life. Through personal and written communication, Sr. Mary carried forward the direction of the Chapter Acts while reinforcing the personal work of the Sisters and the place of the Congregation in the Universal Church.
- The Work within the Congregation focused on canonical visits to all provinces, the formation of a new unit in Peru, the separation of Zimbabwe and South Africa, the decentralization and shift of authority structures, the establishment of an extended council of general level with provincial and regional superiors, the fostering of internationality through meetings and various programs, and an extended collaboration with the Coesfeld and Amersfoort Sisters.”
- December 1, 1993 – becomes ill; dialysis required; March 12, 1994 joined community at Woolton
- Died: June 14, 1999
- President of International Union of Superiors General 1971-78 (1 of 4 women at 1971 Synod)

- Joined Curia in 1978 – retired in 1990 but asked to continue as a consultant
- Given title “capo officio” (office head) at Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes by John Paul II in 1985 – highest ranking woman in Curia
- Said “God wrote with crooked lines” in her life. Later said, “If the Lord’s lines were crooked, his writing was straight.”

### **Beginning of 1949 Constitutions:**

#### **The End and the Spirit of the Congregation**

The end of the Congregation of the Sisters of Notre Dame is to promote the greater glory of God by the consecrated life of its members, through the practice of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and the observance of the Constitutions. The special end of the Congregation is the Christian and apostolic education of youth, and all works connected with this. In missionary countries, all the spiritual and corporal works of mercy judged necessary by the Ordinary of the Diocese may be added.

### **Beginning of 1969 Acts:**

#### **THE END AND SPIRIT OF THE SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME**

The end of the Congregation of Notre Dame is one with that of the Church in her saving role in the evolving world. As members of an apostolic community of consecrated women united in a life of worship and service, we share in the mission of Jesus Christ to bring all men to the Father through the Spirit. We are called and we are sent to contribute to the Christian transformation of the world by means of an educational apostolate broadly conceived, with a preference for the poor, especially in the most neglected places. Our life should be marked by Saint Julie Billiart’s spirit of simplicity, which is rooted in faith in the goodness of God and is expressed in total consecration to Him, and joyous service of others. With trust and love we look to Mary, image of the Church, as our inspiration in the fulfillment of our consecration and mission.

**Excerpt from One: JUNE 7, 1969, ROME**

The election took exactly eight minutes. Punctually at seven o'clock, Archbishop Pancrazio (1) came into the chapter room, invoked the Holy Spirit, and invited us to cast our first ballots to elect the fourteenth Superior General of the Sisters of Notre Dame of Namur. The votes were collected and counted, the names read aloud, and the result announced. There was no need to go any further. We had our Superior General in eight minutes flat.

Up to that point, the process was predictable. The chapter members had evidently done their reflecting beforehand and knew what they wanted even if I was only aware of the possibilities a couple of days before the election. On the Thursday evening, Sister Agnes Fasy, the provincial of Ohio, met me as she was coming out of chapel and asked whether I would accept an election if the chapter members voted for me. I was not thinking in that direction and so did not take it too seriously. I think I said that, in the unlikely event of a majority vote, I would take it as being what the Lord wanted. However, I lost no sleep that night. The next day was different. When my own provincial, Sister Mary Consuela, took me for a walk round the garden and informed me, first, that several Sisters would like me to serve and, second, that in the event of an election I could count on her prayer and support in the new responsibility, things suddenly became much more serious. I hardly knew what to think: just pray, stay quiet, and welcome whatever the good God sent. All I asked him was to make things very clear. He did.

At that point, however, the guidelines stopped. Previously the entire procedure had been provided for; the announcement, the acceptance, the blessing, the greeting by the Sisters and the Te Deum in chapel (2). This was dropped by the chapter then in session and nothing replaced it. The chapter assumed that mature and educated women religious would know spontaneously what to do in the circumstances. Actually, we did not. There was an uncertain minute or so and then Sister Loretto Julia, the outgoing Superior General, who was sitting across the hall from me, made a sudden sign that we should both go to the Archbishop for his blessing. He gave me the medal of St. Julie Billiart, our foundress, and said a few words to us. Then he left. The Sisters of the generalate community and those serving in the chapter secretariats came into the hall and there was a general buzz of movement and conversation during which most of the Sisters came to greet me in their own way. In the excitement, I do not think that there was any formal acceptance, except perhaps to the archbishop. There was certainly no procession to chapel and no Te Deum. We improvised, as requested.

A group of Sisters even slipped away upstairs without much attention being given to the fact.

When I finally got to my room after all the good wishes, it was full of the scent of two huge and very lovely sheaves of red roses standing near the window. Their sheer beauty was a joy and my heart leaped at the sight of them. Then I remember thinking quite clearly: "Keep your feet on the ground. The provincials who gave these must have had them ready for whoever was elected. It just happens to be you!" I think that the common sense of my Lancastrian forebears was in that. At any rate, I enjoyed the roses with my eyes open.

A little later, the group that had slipped away during the post-election bustle came out of the room where it had been meeting, which was on the same corridor as mine, and had a word of greeting.

We went down to supper and, for me, to the start of a completely new way of living and serving. How it would develop and what I was in for I had no idea. Twenty five years later I can see strands of the future in the packed experience of those few minutes on June 7, 1969: the firm tradition in some aspects of it, and the assumption of complete liberty of action in others; the unexpectedness and the newness; the divergent ideas which needed to be balanced if they could not easily be reconciled; the warmth of the great majority of the sisters in the gesture of the roses; my own instinctive reaching towards clarity; the fact that we all finished together at supper. At the time, none of this made any significant impression. I had no prophetic foresight and had everything to learn. It was a crucial moment for religious life in the Church and mine was to be a service of increasing complexity and ever-deepening search, but in those first few minutes all I knew was that God is good and that I was as green as a spring lettuce.