winter 2021

ihmpact

sisters, servants of the immaculate heart of mary

Daughters of Theresa

... charting a path forward

By Jane Herb, IHM, and Pat McCluskey, IHM

On Nov. 10, 2020, the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary celebrated our 175th anniversary. As all of us know, this time finds us with many challenges and changes in our lives. We did not have the 175th celebration as planned. Nonetheless, we took time to reflect on our founding and the mission of the congregation as it continues to unfold, meeting the challenges of our current reality. We celebrate our founding and we celebrate that we are spiritual daughters of Theresa Maxis, a woman of color and a co-founder. Theresa came to Monroe, Mich., from the Oblate Sisters of Providence, one of the first Black congregations in the United States.

The 2018 Chapter Direction of the IHM congregation invites us to enter more deeply into the liberating mission of Jesus Christ as we come to understand it through the mystery of the Sacred Universe. COVID-19 made us acutely conscious that we are all one, sharing one common home, as emphasized in *Laudato Si'*. As we recognize our oneness, we are reminded that we belong to an inclusive community that embraces all people.

The events of the past year made us deeply aware of the injustices experienced by our brothers and sisters of color. Witnessing the brutal death of George Floyd awakened an awareness of the prevalence of racism in our society. We were challenged to look at our white privilege and the issue of systemic racism.

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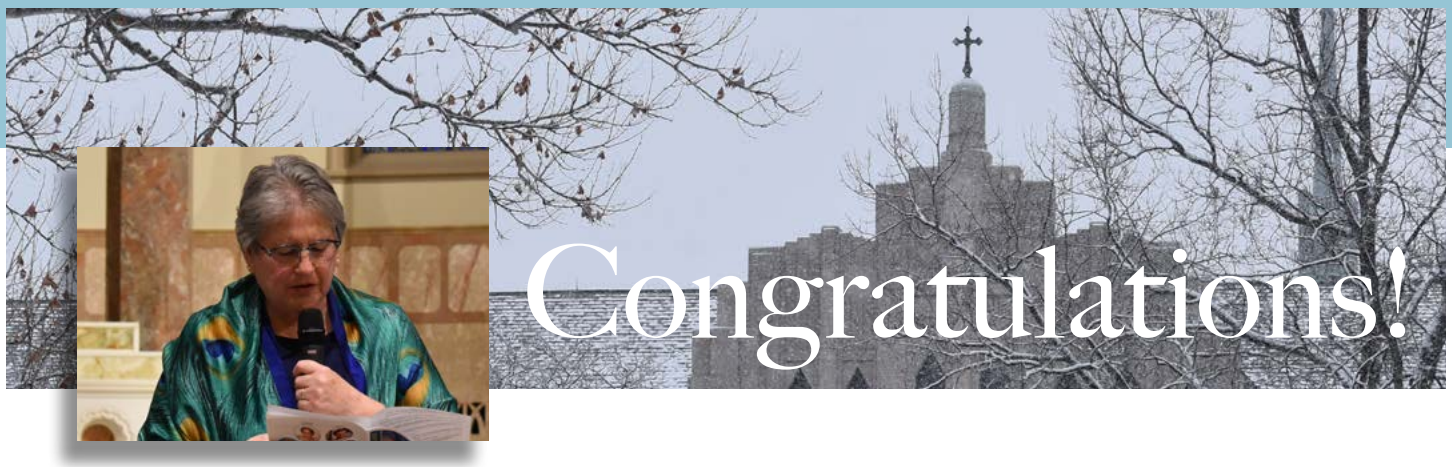
By Margaret Alandt, IHM

25 years since "Reconnecting the Journey"

In 1995, our 150th anniversary brought the three IHM congregations (Monroe, Mich.; Scranton and Immaculata, Pa.) and the Oblate Sisters of Providence (Baltimore) together. The first-time presence of the Oblate Sisters was a reminder that racism had kept us apart for 150 years. Following that gathering, a committee of the four congregations began reflecting on this reality. Confronting our history of racism was critical in moving forward.

The committee developed summer retreats called "Reconnecting the Journey;" 10 members from each community were invited to envision our deep desire. Activities included a pilgrimage to historical sites in Baltimore; a dramatic reading of Connie Supan, IHM's (Monroe), play about Theresa Maxis; presentations by historians Margaret Gannon, IHM (Scranton), and Dr. Diane Batts Morrow; and honest conversations to delve into our histories in ways that touched the heart as well as the mind.

Gatherings in Immaculata in 2005 and in Scranton in 2015 were evidence of building personal relationships. We have shared speakers and resources to continue our individual and congregational work. At our most recent summer retreat (2019), Anita Baird, DHM, led us in "Claiming our Racial Narrative," challenging us to look at what it means an to be anti-racist religious congregation, and in fall 2020, the Scranton IHMs invited us all to an online presentation by Sharon Dunham to explore the history and impact of white privilege.



Lynne Moldenhauer, IHM, professed final vows on Dec. 6, 2020. She has long history rooted in the IHM Sisters that started at Holy Cross Catholic Church and Schools in Marine City, Mich. She currently serves as the coordinator for the IHM Maxis Spirituality Center in Riverview, Mich.; serves on the board of Marian High School; on the IHM Coordinating Council; on the committee for the Margaret Brennan IHM Institute for Spirituality, Church and Culture; and on the IHM Spirituality committee. Sister Lynne offers this reflection of Thomas Merton from *Sign of Jonas*: "The more I think of my vows the happier I am. For there is only one thing left to live for: the love of God. There is only one unhappiness: not to love God."

By Shannen Dee Williams

What a forgotten black nun can teach us about racism and Covid-19*

In 1832, a cholera epidemic swept across Europe and North America, killing more than 100,000 people. When Archbishop James Whitfield of Baltimore fell ill, a member of his staff immediately sought the assistance of a local nun. Archbishop Whitfield's subordinate did not call on the favored and all-white Sisters of Charity, who had a formal nursing ministry in the city. Instead, the assistant requested the care of Sister Mary Anthony Duchemin, an early member of the all-black Oblate Sisters of Providence who had worked as a private nurse for one of Baltimore's wealthiest families before entering religious life.

Sister Mary Anthony Duchemin is best known today as the mother of Sister Theresa Maxis Duchemin, one of the four original members of the Oblate Sisters of Providence and the long unacknowledged African-American foundress of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

At the beginning of the outbreak, Sister Duchemin volunteered her services to the poorest and most vulnerable Baltimore residents at the city's almshouse. She spent two weeks nursing the archbishop back to health and then returned to her duties at the almshouse. Sister Duchemin herself succumbed to the disease. Church leaders and all but one city official systematically erased the Oblates and their courageous service from local memory, only citing and championing the Sisters of Charity.

The coronavirus pandemic has not only magnified longstanding racial inequities in access to health care, housing, food security, income and jobs but also exposed a truth that many scholars, health care professionals and activists of color have forcefully professed in the face of strident denial for decades: Racism literally kills people.

If the Catholic Church is truly invested in the flourishing of the entire human family, then it must finally make racial justice a leading priority. It must also begin to understand the violence of white supremacy is never exclusively reserved for black people but always imperils all. If this is not understood, history has already made clear that we will be here again or somewhere much worse.

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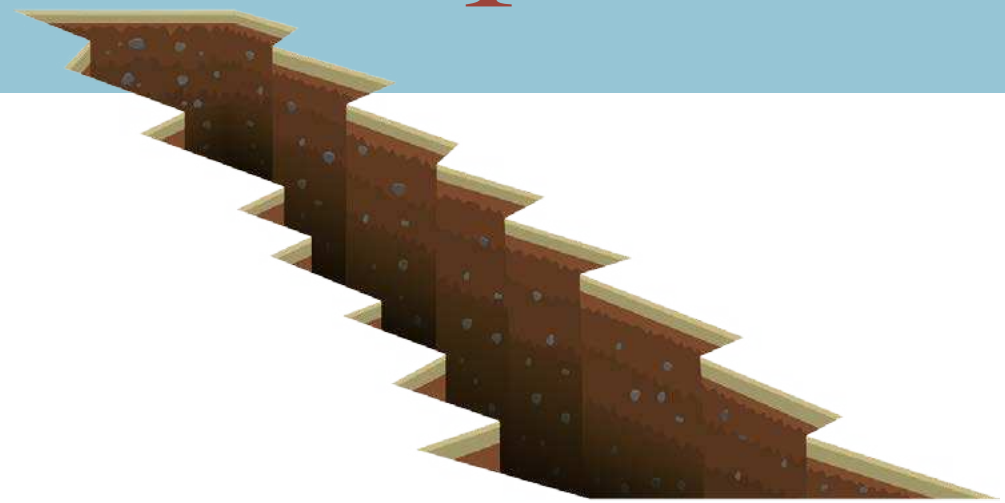
The pain of racism:

By Rita Michelle Proctor, OSP
Superior General,
Oblate Sisters of Providence

As we grapple with COVID-19, the sin and pain of racism and an unhealthy political climate, the question Dr. Martin Luther King used as the title of his book, *Where do we go from here: Chaos or community?* comes to my mind.

Mother Mary Lange, born in Cuba, came to Baltimore in the early 1800s with four strikes against her: she was a Black person living in a slaveholding state; she was female in a patriarchal society; she was Catholic at a time of virulent anti-Catholicism; and she was an immigrant in an English-speaking environment. She had a strong desire to teach "children of color" about God, but first she knew she had to teach them to read. She, along with three other women, decided to open a school in her home. That school, St. Frances Academy, which opened in 1828, continues. Mother Lange may then have asked herself, "Where do we go from here?"

Her desire to dedicate her life completely to God motivated her, with the support of a Sulpician priest, Rev. James Hector Nicholas Joubert, to establish the first Catholic religious community of women of African descent in the Catholic Church. In 1829, four women, Sister Mary (Elizabeth Clarisse Lange), Sister Frances (Marie Magdelaine Balas), Sister Rose (Rosine Boegue) and Sister Theresa (Almaide Duchemin) made their vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, becoming the first Oblate Sisters of Providence. Sister Mary was elected the first Superior General and was known as Mother Mary Lange.



The pain of racial hatred Mother Lange and the sisters endured did not hinder them from fulfilling their religious commitment. Long before Malcom X stated, "Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today," she was motivated to educate. Long before the phrase "Black Lives Matter," Mother Lange understood that reality! When the color of her skin became an obstacle to others, she remained faithful to her commitment to God and God's people.

where do we go from here?

Where do we go from here?

Dr. King says, "As long as the mind is enslaved, the body can never be free." As long as we are enslaved by power, materialism, drugs, alcohol, racism, sexism and other negatives forces that constantly eat at the spirit of who God is calling us to be, we will never be free! We must commit ourselves to living Jesus Christ's liberating mission; find intentional ways to care for each other and Earth; identify and eradicate the causes of injustice and racism; provide for the poor and marginalized; and foster peace and nonviolence.

We must continue to find ways to be voices for the voiceless and beacons of hope for those who are losing hope. We must find ways to dismantle racism by understanding what it is and why it exists, be willing to acknowledge that systemic racism benefits white people: until there is a willingness to own and eliminate white privilege, our efforts to bring about justice and racial healing will be in vain.

Recently, I overheard two white males in their mid-teens talking. One said to the other, "Don't worry about that; we have white privilege." It shook me to the core that they had already learned how to use "white privilege" to their advantage. They represented the generation that I expected would make Dr. King's dream a reality! However, my hope has been enlivened by the rallies and demonstrations that have taken place across the United States.

What is the difference between the demonstrations of the '60s and those today? There appear to be more Black and white people joining together, raising awareness that "Black Lives Matter," "Racism is a Sin" and "No Justice, No Peace!" There is more emphasis placed on the dignity and rights of all human beings and calling on institutions to examine themselves.

I believe Mother Mary Lange's deep faith in her providential God gave her the strength to look within and move forward in her vision of serving God and God's people in spite of racism. I believe she understood the lives of children of color mattered and in order for them them to not only survive, but to thrive, they needed to be educated. I believe she spoke truth to power.

We are called to do the same, even when that truth makes others feel uncomfortable. Just maybe that discomfort will lead to an examination of racial biases and attitudes that will raise the question, "Where do I go from here?"

Before the "I" becomes "we," there is a great deal of unlearning and self-reflection that must take place. We should not falsely think the answer lies only within, but seek truth from many sources, always realizing it is the truth that will set us free! There is no easy or simple response to healing the racial divide, but of this I am certain: we cannot afford to stop calling others to a conversion of heart, to deeper conversation and communication in order to create a more peaceful and just society for all of God's children.

Where do we go from here? The answer lies in our hands!

In memoriam

(Aug. 1, 2020 — Oct. 31, 2020)

Mary Jo Jeppesen, IHM Associate
March 30, 1945 - Oct. 31, 2020

Marie (Raynora) Hopkins, IHM
Aug. 21, 1924 - Oct. 25, 2020

Mary Jo (Ann Martin) Rosenau, IHM
Dec. 14, 1934 - Sept. 17, 2020

Genevieve (Mary Clifford) Sullivan, IHM
Jan. 5, 1922 - Sept. 12, 2020

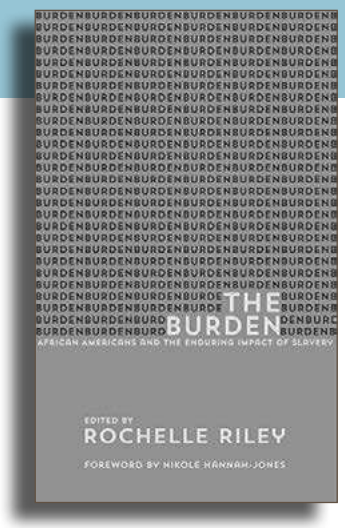
Margaret (Kathleen Marie) Sweeney, IHM
Aug. 9, 1940 - Sept. 11, 2020

Rita (Marie Ambrose) Rennell, IHM
Jan. 11, 1925 - Aug. 22, 2020

Theresa (Bonaventure) Tenbusch, IHM
Oct. 27, 1930 - Aug. 9, 2020

To read about the lives and ministries of our remarkable IHM Sisters and Associates, please visit http://bit.ly/2HWEOs9.

The Burden: African Americans and the Enduring Impact of Slavery



by Rochelle Riley

Reviewed by
Barbara G. Stanbridge, IHM

Rochelle Riley's book on the ongoing impact of slavery is especially timely when racial unrest is once again in the forefront of our national news. Using the quote from James Baldwin, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced," she uses 23 short essays by a variety of African American authors to help all who think "slavery was a long time ago; why can't they just get over it?" face the impact of slavery on those whose ancestors were involved in slavery and those of us who have profited from it.

These essays will shake white defenses against what we have come to find acceptable. And will hopefully, to paraphrase the words of one author, encourage us to interrogate our lived experience. As a white woman working to increase my racial awareness, *The Burden* was spiritual reading. As a citizen who may be asked to vote for reparations, this is a good place to start.

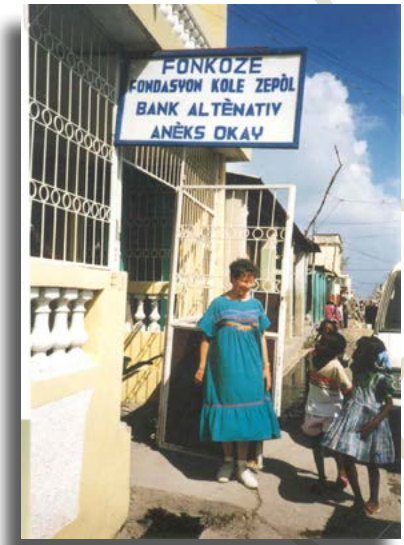
Rochelle Riley was a reporter and much-loved columnist for the Detroit Free Press *for many years. She is actively involved in improving the lives of Detroiters, including the students at Detroit Cristo Rey.*

By Camille Brouillard, IHM

Haiti connections

"Min ansam, che pa loud."
With hands together, the task isn't heavy.

It is good to recall that racism influenced our beginnings as IHMs as well as our connection to Haiti.



In 1995, at our sesquicentennial, we acknowledged Mother Teresa Maxis, who was of Haitian descent, as co-founder. We have committed ourselves to be in solidarity with the people of Haiti, especially through our relationship with the Little Sisters of Ste. Therese and organizations, such as the Fonkoze microbank, serving in Haiti.

We have shared our resources, presence, education, collaboration and advocacy, supporting sustainable projects for clean water, overcoming dire poverty and food production. We and our donors were with the people of Haiti after the 2010 earthquake that killed 300,000 people and through Hurricane Matthew in 2016.

We were to visit the Little Sisters in 2020, but due to the extreme violence and corruption in Haiti and then COVID-19, we have only been able to keep in touch online.

We serve the sisters, elderly, street children, homeless, hungry, those held in slavery, abused women, the ill and orphaned. The most important contribution we make is to enable the Haitian people to help themselves.

They do not want a handout but a hand up, and it is happening.

Save the dates

The IHM Spirituality Ministries welcome retreat leaders Sister Kathleen Duffy, SSJ, PhD, and Rev. Roger Keeler, JCD, in the coming months. Rev. Keeler will lead our Lenten retreat from March 3-7, 2021. He is assistant professor of canon law at the Oblate School of Theology in Texas. Sister Duffy returns to IHM after her well-received Fall 2020 program on emerging spirituality. She will lead our spring retreat from May 9-14, 2021, on the topic "Embracing Struggle: Walking in Hope with Teilhard de Chardin." Sister Duffy is professor of physics at Chestnut Hill College, Pennsylvania.

We hope to offer both retreats in person at the IHM Motherhouse in Monroe, Mich., however, we may offer them as webinars depending on COVID health requirements at the time of the retreats.

The retreats and our other spirituality offerings are an opportunity for you to rest in God and to grow in your life of prayer and service. Please check the IHM calendar at ihmsisters.org/calendar for other spirituality programs. We also offer spiritual direction (in person or by phone or video), quiet spaces for prayer, and overnight accommodations for retreats.

For more information, please contact us at spirituality@ihmsisters.org or 734-240-5494.

Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

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As a congregation, we are committed to action on behalf of justice and to address the sin of racism within our congregation, our Church and our global community.

The issues of *ihmpact* for this year will focus on healing racism. We will unpack this theme looking at our IHM history, our commitment to education, our Church and spirituality, recognizing that the various dimensions intersect. We will look through the lens of IHM beliefs: decisions in light of Gospel values and inclusive community; collaborative partnerships; ecological consciousness; integration of mind, body and spirit and intellectual curiosity; action for justice.

In each issue, we will hear the voices of people of color as they challenge us and support our efforts to address the root causes of systemic racism. As spiritual daughters of Theresa, we have grown in awareness that racism is a core dynamic present since our founding in 1845. We hope our readers will join us on this journey, risking engaging one another so that together, we can make a difference.

ihmpact

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Editor: Molly Hunt
Designer: spotteddogcreative.com
Printer: Metzgers

Urged by the love of God, we choose to work with others to build a culture of peace and right relationship among ourselves, with the Church and with the whole Earth community.

—IHM Mission Statement

MOVING?
Contact us with your ID# (found above your name on the mailing label) at:
734-240-9860 **or** develop@ihmsisters.org.