

## **A BOAT, A STORM, A PRESENCE**

**By Diane McCormack, IHM**

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This Gospel is about a boat, a storm and a presence. It is a fitting description of our beginning. When the disciples were frightened that the boat would sink, they asked Jesus to save them. He rebukes the wind and the sea and He brings calm. Our history is laden with storms: the Separation of the community, Bishop Lefebvre's direct involvement into the affairs of the community, the departure of the Redemptorists from Monroe, the appointment of Fr. Joos as Director and Superior of the community for 43 years and the devastating banishment of Mother Teresa for remaining faithful to what she believed was a God-given directive to help found a new religious community in Monroe, MI. Indeed, these were heartrending days for both Mother Teresa and us. This Gospel exhorts us to remember that experiencing hardships and adversities are never out of God's sight, God's reach, God's care. Whatever our trials or circumstances, things get better when we intentionally welcome God into the situation.

As we celebrate our Founding, there are several threads that weave throughout our history. Today I will share three of these threads. **FIRST THREAD: OUR FAITH AND PRAYER HAVE BOUND US TOGETHER.** The Chapters of 1966 and 1969 called for spiritual renewal of the Congregation and the formation of a House of Prayer. Emphasis was placed on deepening our prayer life, fostering creative forms of communal prayer and choosing the mode and place of our annual retreat. Sisters were encouraged to make a directed retreat and to participate in the summer Houses of Prayer. More recently we created four Centers of Spirituality. Our Motherhouse Prayer Board fills with appeals for prayers daily.

When I think of my own prayer life, I remember attending Sunday mass as a family. In that Setting, I learned about religion and church teaching, but I didn't meet God. With the guidance of a spiritual director, I grew into a personal relationship with God. Now, each day is an invitation to meet the face of God in people and in the beauty of God's creation. **God was there.** *All down the years, O Lord, with love unending, guiding, protecting Thou hast been our stay... blessing us anew from day to day.*

### **SECOND THREAD: WE MINISTER IN RESPONSE TO NEEDS**

Through the 19<sup>th</sup> century we were educating over half of the children attending parochial schools. We also sent two sisters to Buffalo to learn sign language and we gave instructions in Christian doctrine to deal children at the School for the Deaf in Detroit. Teaching CCD students, preparing youth for the reception of the sacraments and the work we are doing today in faith formation of persons of all ages is a long tradition in our community. Two of our Sisters founded Pius 12 Center for the enhancement of those working in faith formation.

Moving beyond the Archdiocese of Detroit, Mother Teresa McGivney opened the first overseas mission, sending four Sisters to Puerto Rico. After Vatican II, IHM sent missionaries to Brazil, Uganda, Grenada, Honduras, Ghana, Zimbabwe, S. Africa Kenya and Mexico. IHM also sponsored refugee families from 19 countries to live on the Motherhouse campus. Some stayed in the Chaplain's quarters at the Hall; some stayed in refurbished classes in the Academy building. The refugees stayed on campus anywhere from few days to five weeks. **God was there.** *All down the years, O Lord, with love unending, guiding, protecting Thou hast been our*

*stay...blessing us anew from day to day.*

### **THIRD THREAD: ACTING ON BEHALF OF JUSTICE**

Two of the earliest examples of our concern for the poor was our care for the orphan girls, the children of the House. We also cared for young boys during the years we had charge of St. Anthony Orphan Asylum in Detroit (1867-1877).

Our direct involvement in political action began with a 1919 proposed an amendment to the MI State constitution requiring students 5-16 to attend public schools. Urged by Bishop Gallagher, all the Sisters registered to vote and in October they and their students participated in a mass rally to protest the proposal. In November the voters defeated the plan.

Acting on behalf of justice, we established a Social Justice Committee and appointed a Social Justice Director. One of our actions was to support the Farm Workers by boycotting the purchase of lettuce, grapes, Campbell Soups and Nestle products. We also joined thousands of people to march for the end of the Vietnam War, for civil rights, for women's rights and for the killing of black people. We were eco-justice innovators by going GREEN. During the time period 2001-2006, we initiated the River Raisin Institute that works in partnership with communities that seek to develop and vitalize or preserve sustainable systems of living. I am at a point in my life where I am physically unable to march in protest to what is happening in our country and world, but what is happening is my world is getting bigger and the issues today hurt my heart; however my new role will be to join my IHM Armchair Activists. **God was there.** *All down the years, O Lord, with love unfailing, guiding, protecting Thou hast been our stay... blessing us anew from day to day.*

### **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

When the world feels like its crashing down, our history teaches us the meaning of resilience, hope and faith. Today we are called to move **together** in uncharted waters...so let's go back to the boat. It will be bigger and there will be many more people in it. The most significant Presence is our Faithful God right in the middle of the muddle, the upheaval, the chaos, the confusion, the disorder, the bewilderment of it all...and we need not fear – the boat will not sink. We are together and God is here.