

2870: *To Bishop Alexander Csajághy*
Temesvár

Munich
March 26, 1859

J! M!

Most Reverend Bishop! Your Excellency!¹

Oh, what unexpected, sad news your letter of March 18 brought us! The strong and kindhearted Sister Ludmilla left her post so quickly, left all of us, and finished her earthly course!² I could not sleep the entire night that she died. I felt that one of the sisters was summoning me to a patient who was seriously ill. It was the good Ludmilla!

What a loss for the new institute in Temesvár! What a loss for our entire order! When we opened the death announcement, all the sisters of the motherhouse stood there with tears in their eyes, wringing their hands. Everyone loved Sister Ludmilla because of her innocence and affability. She was so devoted to the order, so open and attached to her superiors, so motherly to others! When I sent the sisters to Temesvár, it was a consolation to have this sister to lead them. She knew how to teach and train the children well. Although she was very plain exteriorly, she had a very holy and powerful influence over souls. The Lord of life and death has done this, however. God gave her to us and then took her away. Blessed be the name of God forever!³

She has left us only in body; she is still in our midst. Since the harvest is great and the laborers so few, Ludmilla will plead at the throne of God that other good workers will be sent into the vineyard.

I am convinced that Ludmilla conscientiously fulfilled the duties of her vocation, just as the other sisters did, but I also believe that with the unforeseen throng of so many children, the work required too great an effort. Ludmilla and the other sick sisters may have also stayed up too long, worked themselves to exhaustion, sacrificed too much, and given too much of themselves.

In the beginning, we only counted on two classes, for which I made adequate provision. The boarding school was to develop later. The entire institute increased and multiplied so rapidly, however, that the work doubled, placing heavy

demands on the strength of the sisters. Since I seriously warned them against this and never expected them to carry such a burden, it hurts me even more.

What you said about too much secrecy is very unclear to me. Ludmilla was never like that. She was always open, but as they used to say, she was not careful about little omissions. Being in charge, she probably should have been even more attentive to those things. It could be that she considered the rash, which you wrote about, as something insignificant and passing and did not want to make an immediate fuss about it.⁴

You consider it necessary for me to impress upon the rest of the sisters the obligation to exercise moderation in mortifications! I intend to do this as my duty requires and I will do it. Please do not take it amiss, however, if I venture to say that it is a general principle in our motherhouse and religious institute not to practice strict, physical mortifications. Even when fasting, we only do the ordinary fast prescribed by the Church and nothing extraordinary, because teaching is classified as heavy work. We look more toward interior mortification and this is what we try to promote.

As superior, Ludmilla must have taken this upon herself voluntarily. I do not know, but I would not have approved of it. Moreover, our present generation does not have the kind of physical stamina that can be treated with such severity. At least, that is what I observe in our country. Nevertheless, one or other soul is driven to mortification of every kind as, for example, Abundantia [Litschgi] and Wunibalda [Forster], but they were always kept in check and often given the penance to eat and drink more instead of fasting. If they are now doing something else, it is definitely not my will and I will not neglect to direct my special attention toward this.

Thank you very much for graciously putting Sister M. Gabriela [Pfaffenzeller] in charge of the sisters for the time being. That was what I was also thinking. God helped Ludmilla. May God help Gabriela as well!

You may have been taken aback by the number of persons that I sent at first (instead of three, eight came). However, according to your letter, eight are not enough for Temesvár and more are needed. Since we have been afflicted with so much similar suffering this year that I do not know what God has in mind, it will be extremely difficult to send more sisters. It is

precisely for this reason that I cannot help you as much as I would like to and should. Although we have over 90 candidates again this year, only about 20 will take the teaching examination. It takes a very long time before they are trained in asceticism and pedagogy and become sufficiently knowledgeable in all the subjects to be sent to the missions.

I turned to several of our houses to find candidates who could be prepared for reception in Temesvár, which, by the grace of God, could take place this fall if you agree to it.

If only it were possible for me to find one sister soon whom I could accompany to Temesvár! Then I could discuss various matters with you, especially those regarding the building. If I could absent myself from here for a time, how gladly I would fill a need there!

You have our letters regarding the building project now. We await your comments so that we can have the plan worked out in detail. I forgot to say that if the school for girls would be on the new building site, a suitable motherhouse could not be built there. May God help us through the intercession of Mary!

For my part, I agree that the school for girls should stay where it is now and that the old, adjoining building where our sisters are living should be renovated for educational purposes that will increase over time. Then the actual institute building could be put up on the new site. Of course, the two buildings could be connected—God will also see to that.

In closing, I implore you to continue to be the sisters' protector and patron. Please do not allow laywomen to be sent to the institute so that they can be trained as teachers and do their practice teaching at the school for girls. The sisters recently told me that this has happened. Ever since we began, we avoided having laywomen in any of our houses on the principle that if a kingdom is not united, it will destroy itself. I have had sad experience of this. We also avoid it because the sisters' time and energy, which are needed for the one thing necessary, become fragmented. They should be serving everyone but end up serving no one instead.

How can I thank you for all you did in your charity and self-sacrifice for our dear departed M. Ludmilla and for the sisters left behind? I know of no other way than to pray, "May God reward you a thousandfold, now and in eternity!"

Respectfully yours,

The Poor School Sister,
M. Theresa of Jesus

Letters of Mary Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger, translation and notes by
Mary Ann Kuttner, SSND, vol. 12, *Mission to Hungary* (Elm Grove,
Wisconsin, 2008), 32-35.

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1. From 1851 until 1860, Alexander Csajághy (1810-60) was the bishop of Csanád in Temesvár, Hungary (now Timișoara in Romania). A learned theology professor, Bishop Csajághy contributed to the renewal of Catholic life in his diocese through the formation of priests, the education of girls, parish missions, and devotion to Mary. He called the School Sisters of Notre Dame to Hungary, and the first sisters arrived in Temesvár in October 1858.
 2. Sister M. Ludmilla Schenk died in Temesvár at the age of 33 on March 18, 1859.
 3. See *Job* 1:21.
 4. A rash was one of the first symptoms of the illness that caused Sister M. Ludmilla's death.