

Facilitator's Directions for Being Church 2

The Facilitator prepares by becoming familiar with the following chapters: "A Woman's Place," "Gathering Storm," and "Decrees." She makes copies of Letters #1095 (3 pages) and #1140, (1 page) available under "Gathering Storm."

The Facilitator shares some of the background given in "A Woman's Place," especially the challenges faced by Mary Ward. It is striking that she was imprisoned on the site that eventually became the first motherhouse of the School Sisters of Notre Dame.

The Facilitator welcomes the participants: We'll be discussing the critical issues surrounding the foundation of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. You may recall (if group has followed Facilitator Directions 1) the cultural context of the Bavarian church that was trying to rebuild after the Napoleonic Era. It was Mother Theresa's clerical mentors who had envisioned a congregation led by a woman.

To prepare for this topic let's take a few minutes and reflect on our own experience of women in leadership roles in the church today. Are any of you involved as pastoral administrators or parish life coordinators? (These roles are available to women and men in some dioceses: the administration of the parish is their responsibility. A priest is usually assigned to preside at weddings, baptisms, funerals, and Sunday liturgies. Otherwise the pastoral administrator is responsible for the parish.)

Do you know a woman who is a pastor in another denomination? Have you ever attended liturgy led by a woman? (These questions may spark some controversy. Please allow freedom of expression.) The Facilitator reminds the group: "Remember, we're simply exploring the role of women in leadership roles in the church today. It's important to realize that Mother Theresa was moving into a position of authority unheard of for women."

The Facilitator continues: "In her spirituality, Mother Theresa, like other foundresses, was trying to listen to the Holy Spirit and remain faithful to the hierarchical church. She would have made Jesuit retreats and prayed about her relation to the church. In his *Rules for Thinking with the Church*, St. Ignatius had suggested to retreatants that they "seek to understand (church leaders) rather than to condemn, favor the better interpretation, and to respect and use the proper channels of redress." These attitudes formed the basis of Mother Theresa's relationship with the hierarchical church. Her nightly Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament, and her dialogue with her own sisters deepened and supported her spirituality.

With this in mind let's look at one letter that exemplifies this spirituality. The context of the letter is significant. The congregation was growing (120 houses and 600 sisters by 1858) and by 1852 it was clear that the Rule needed to be approved. Archbishop Reisach of Munich wanted to take over control of the congregation. He had attempted to do this by forcing Mother Theresa to recall the superior of Rottenburg and replace her with S. Rosa Franz. The archbishop had insisted Mother Theresa do this under pain of interdict. (Explained in section "Decrees")

She had originally complied with his demand and later rescinded her agreement.

The Facilitator distributes copies of Letter #1095 (3 pages). We'll read this together. Consider the temperament and personality of Mother Theresa exemplified in this letter. Do you recognize any administrative skills evident in her dealing with the archbishop?

After reading the letter together, The Facilitator asks: "What does this letter tell us about Mother Theresa's personality? (She was direct, willing to dialogue openly about a crisis, shows she understands human nature, unwilling to accept clerical interference in the internal affairs of the community, etc.) Is her complimentary close significant? (She is trying to live out the Rules for Thinking with the Church mentioned above.)

Do you recognize any administrative skills in Mother Theresa? (She was clear and direct in her correspondence, she did not shrink from facing the difficult situation, she had consulted with her sisters, shown in signature, she shared responsibility with them for this decision.)

The Facilitator continues: "If you were a member of her community, what would you have thought of her?" (Possibly frightened of possible consequences, proud of her determination to follow her mentors' desire that a woman be the leader, worried about the anxiety this would produce in their beloved superior, etc.)

Notice the date on this letter. January 15, 1852. A second letter, #1140, was written Mar. 21, 1852. The Facilitator distributes copies of this letter. Let's read it together. What feelings are expressed in Mother Theresa's words? (Sadness, regret, fear, anxiety, etc.) The Facilitator continues: She was a Bavarian, Catholic woman desiring to be faithful to the church. And she was attempting to found a congregation that would have a woman in leadership, different from what the church had known before. Consider silently what she may have been feeling at this moment... pause.

The Facilitator continues: Is there any hint in this second letter as to what her next steps will be? (She shares with the archbishop that she will be appealing to the Pope.) What does this tell you about her?

If you'd like to study this issue in more detail, you can reflect on Being Church "A Woman's Place," "Gathering Storm," and "Decrees." (Sturdy Roots 2)

I'd like to conclude with a hymn that may have been a source of consolation to Mother Theresa.

Listen to a recording of: "Ave Verum," by Mozart, or "Panis Angelicus," or sing "Holy God."