

Center for Spiritual Development

Soundings, September, 1971

Judith Best, SSND

(The following report was given in Waterdown, Ontario at the 17th annual SSND Educational Conference, August 17 -21, after Mother Georgianne *persuaded* the planners to give 15 minutes to the speaker.)

"I have some good news to share and simply want to praise God for His work in making the Center for Spiritual Development a reality. My thanks go to all who have shared ideas for the Center, but especially to our retired Sisters whose prayer and suffering have brought such blessing on this work.

Beginning on August 29, 1971, nine SSNDs will meet in San Antonio, Texas, for six weeks of Scriptural prayer and reflection under the direction of Father George Montague, S.M. the chairman of the Theology Department of St. Mary's University. The following Sisters will be participants: Sisters Benjamin Murray (BA), Lorraine Pianka, (WI), Delia Calis (CA), Joann Schnitzler (MQ), Margaret Picha, (MK) Rita Marie Schonhoff (SL), Jacqueline Marie Merz (DA) Gilmary Lemberg (DK), Judith Best (SL-Coordinator).

The chief purpose of the Center for Spiritual Development is to train Sisters who would go to the missions to share insights on Post-Conciliar Spirituality. The rationale behind the entire project is based on the proposals in *YOU ARE SENT* (p. 161-163) and the desire of our Sisters for a deeper knowledge of Jesus through Scriptural prayer.

During our first six weeks together in San Antonio, we hope to focus on Jesus by correlating Scripture with our new Rule. After working with Father Montague, we plan to leave for Rome where we will participate in Father Lombardi's three-month course on Post-Conciliar Spirituality. During this international experience we hope to deepen our understanding of the richness of the universal Church and imbibe the whole thrust of Vatican II. Hopefully, we will develop a new understanding of the perceptive world-vision of Mother Theresa.

After February 1, 1972, we want to visit our missions and share a method of Scriptural discussion, Scriptural prayer, etc. Each of us will be available as resource persons from February 1 – May 15 to "be used" as an individual province desires. We would also like to work with Spiritual Development Committees in setting up Summer Houses of Prayer. The financial burden for the project is being borne by the Generalate and the participating provinces.

I hope that the members of the Center for Spiritual Development will be working with Spiritual Development Committees in each province as well as with the respective provincial chapters. With great trust in the Spirit and much interprovincial sharing, I

believe we will really share hope and genuine renewal with one another. We, at the Spiritual Development Center will be eager to hear from our Sisters at large.

Now I'd like to share something that is very deep in my heart. I have listened to the Spirit speaking through so many of our Sisters this year as I visited each of our eight provinces and I'd like to share what many have shared with me. It has impressed me so often that Sisters of all ages are asking for the same thing. Everyone seems to want a deeply spiritual community to come home to, where they can really discuss what is deepest to them, namely, a real desire to live radical discipleship that Jesus has asked of us in the Gospel. I have found Sisters who really desire a simplicity of life, to be poor with splendor, as Christ was poor, and totally open and available to those in need. I've heard Sisters say that they want to have a world-vision; they don't want to spend every table conversation on what Johnny did this morning. And I was very inspired, Mother Georgianne, with what you said this morning about the mission thrust of our Congregation and our Sisters in Romania.

I think the Lord is so present with us today. I felt this yesterday and I felt it even more after Sister Charitas spoke of 'running to catch up with the world-vision of Mother Theresa.' If Mother Theresa were standing here today, I bet she would say to us quite frankly, 'Sisters, I've given you a vision, a new vision, and it is a now view, and it's in the Gospel.' And I think that today we are being asked by the Spirit, by a world that is just hungering for spirituality, but most of all by our own Sisters, to make Spiritual Development our number one priority in the Congregation for the coming year. As Dr. Sweeney said, 'In Japan, there's only one word in their language for doing and saying.' I think we have come to that point. I don't think we can talk about Spiritual Development being our priority unless each province in its Spiritual Development something-or-other really witnesses to the fact by action. I wonder what would happen to our effectiveness in the apostolate if each of our local missions was consciously a faith-community, united in Jesus.

I guess what I'm saying in essence is that I see in this conference a greater chance to think big; to really dream, to really have a new vision, and yet a very old one, as old as the Gospel. And I hope that at future SSNDECs, call them what you will, we can share that which is closest to our hearts, our commitment and our love for Christ through Notre Dame. (Acts 2:14-19) Our 'hour has come' as a Congregation. Praised be Jesus Christ!