

Centers for Spiritual Development, *You Are Sent*, p. 163.

Letter from Judith Best, SSND to Sisters of North America, January 3, 1971.

Mother Georgianne's letter explains my new position regarding the work I will be doing inter-provincially in spiritual renewal. Now I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself and tell you a little about my "life" since receiving this new appointment.

Last May I remember reading the General Chapter Communications that Sisters should receive training in Post-Conciliar Spirituality. The Spirit was really working and I was so pleased that spiritual renewal seemed to be the focus of our 1970 General Chapter. When the Chapter ended I was teaching Religion at Rosati-Kain High School in St. Louis, and it seemed that Chapter News, prom, exams, graduation, and new appointments came all at once. My new mission - that of giving interprovincial assistance in establishing a center of spiritual development came in June. Months prior to receiving this new assignment I had made arrangements to participate in a summer house of prayer with I.H.M. Sisters of Monroe, Michigan. This experience was an excellent opportunity to ponder Scripture prayerfully in order to offer my high school students a greater depth in religion classes and share new ideas on prayer with my community. But God and my Provincial seemed to have other plans. And so I found myself in a house of prayer in Fenton, Michigan grateful for the time and experience, knowing I would not be teaching this year, but preparing for my new mission of working in spiritual renewal.

In September I came to Rome happy for the opportunity of meeting our Sisters in the Generalate and then moving to Mondo Migliore to participate in Father Lombardi's course for Post-Conciliar Spirituality. Living with eight-six priests, brothers, sisters, laywomen and one bishop, representing twenty-seven countries gave me a world vision. Many participants were missionaries in the third World and their dedication, simplicity of life, and genuine love for Christ impressed me so much. Father Lombardi, S.J. is really a prophet of our time and took great interest in the nine SSND's in the course. Once he took me to his office and showed me a worn diary. He opened to March 17, 1970, and pointed to words he had written in Italian: "I have given my life for this community." I remember having heard our General Chapter delegates tell about his inspirational talk emphasizing the need for spiritual renewal and then his physical collapse in the afternoon. He had almost given his life our SSND community. Father Lombardi stressed the need to renew our community according to the spirit of Mother Theresa; thus we must know the history of our Congregation in order to be faithful to her charism.

At the conclusion of our course eight of us went to visit our Sisters in Germany hoping to understand a little better that intangible reality called "spirit." It is so hard to introduce you to our German Sisters by letter; how I wished for a video tape as we sang "Stille Nacht" in the sewing room at Giesing where some of retired Sisters serve the community. Or how much fun we had enjoying delicious sauerkraut and wieners and

good German beer with our sisters who were so pleased to see Americans who enjoyed their Bavarian food so much. But the highlight of our visit was sharing ideas with Sisters on how Notre Dame could serve the Church and the world in the seventies; praying spontaneously and hearing Jesus speak in so many different languages united our hopes in Christ. Visiting Mother Theresa's home on the Danube, praying at her tomb, or seeing children in schools that she established told us so much of her vision. She must have been such a wonderful woman, who was both prayerful and real. And we saw her spirit living in our Sisters of Berlin. Seeing the Wall, going through border check to enter East Berlin, and realizing that we were surrounded by an Iron Curtain made us aware of the adaptability we must all be prepared to show in our lives. Visiting our Sisters living on either side of the Wall gave me a new vision of the wealth and vitality of our international community. I can understand now why Mother Theresa fought so hard to retain the unity of our international community and what a daring idea this was in nineteenth century Germany.

In visiting the historic beginnings of our Congregation I realized how important it is to know the past in order to build for the future. And now I am so eager to return to North America to share and listen and begin to work with you in establishing a center or centers of spirituality. The purpose of such a center will certainly evolve as Sisters share hopes and dreams, but it must be in accord with Mother Theresa's spirit.

And may I share a little of my dream with you, trying to remember both Mother Theresa's spirit and the latest trends in Post-Conciliar Spirituality?

So often St. Luke's account of the disciples on their way to Emmaus seems to epitomize a possible role of a center of spiritual development in serving the sisters of North America.

1. 'Their hearts burned within them as He explained the Scriptures to them.'

In a center I would hope that Sisters could share insights on Scripture with one another and receive some guidance on a method of praying Scripture and discovering the wealth within the Old and New Testament.

2. 'And they recognized him in the breaking of the bread.'

As Father Lombardi so often said, "We should have as much respect for the bread of truth as the bread of the Eucharist." And so I see a two-fold thrust in a center of spiritual development; namely, meaningful liturgy and genuine dialogue.

3. 'They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem.'

The disciples were going to Emmaus and they had left Jerusalem. Christ had to tell them that they were going the wrong way; they must go back to Jerusalem, the site of both the crucifixion and the resurrection. A center for spiritual development should give renewed hope so that we have the courage to face the risk implied in genuine renewal and act with faith and joy.

Plans are being made so that I will be visiting each Province before May. Please know of my sincere desire to be of service. My prayer for you is St. Paul's: "For I am longing to see you either to strengthen you by sharing a spiritual gift with you, or what is better, to find encouragement among you from our common faith."
(Rom.1:11-12)

Sincerely,

Sister Judith Best, SSND
320 E. Ripa
St. Louis, MO 63125