

Notre Dame Cousins

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Summary of May 18-20, 1985 Meeting

Thirteen members of six different congregations of Sisters of Notre Dame (Cf. Appendix 1) met together at the Generalate of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Rome, Italy, May 18-20, 1985. Sister Stephanie--Marie Boullanger, general superior of the Congregation de Notre-Dame (Cannonesses of St. Augustine) joined the group for some sessions. The purpose of the gathering was to become acquainted with one another and to share together regarding the histories, charisms, heritage, and future directions of the individual congregations.

In addition to common morning and evening prayer, the members of the groups had the opportunity to touch basic congregational and Christian roots by celebrating the Eucharist together at Ostia Antica--where Saints Augustine and Monica spent time together while preparing to return to Africa--and at the tomb of St. Peter in St. Peter's basilica.

During the sessions of the meeting, members considered together aspects of the past, present, and future of each congregation.

Regarding the past, facts regarding the foundation of each congregation—date of foundation or approbation as an independent congregation, the names of the founder(s)/foundress(es) and/or first leaders, and the reason(s) and circumstances for foundation—were shared and discussed. Different understandings regarding the reasons for some historical events are held by some members of the group; after dialogue, all members of the group understood the basic historical facts in a similar way.

Sister Stephanie-Marie shared basic elements of the charism of her congregation, summarizing them as: incarnational spirituality; the rule of St. Augustine, particularly that of charity and freedom; vocation as educators; and response to the needs of the times. Each member of the six congregations present for the meeting concurred that her congregation held as essential elements of the charism of her congregation: education, poverty, unity, and devotion to Mary. Comments regarding these four elements were exchanged. Four of the six congregations hold Eucharist as an essential element of their charism. Other essential elements mentioned by individual congregations were: trust in the providence of God, availability for the church, searching for the will of God, and understanding the needs of the times.

Having touched the histories and charisms of the congregations, the members shared basic facts about their congregations at present: the number of sisters, where they serve, and the basic directions of their ministries. (Cf. Appendix 3 below)

Although members shared with one another some basic directions for the future of their congregations, the topic of the future focused on how the six congregations could stay in contact with one another. Members agreed to exchange circulars and important information about their specific congregations, to visit one another when they were in the vicinity of religious houses of the other congregations, and to meet again in May, 1987, in Rome.

Other topics touched during the meeting were: associate membership, the vow of poverty and how we understand it today, the role of local superiors today, the meaning of “founder” and “foundress,” and the influence of the Jesuit tradition on Peter Fourier and Mother M. Theresa Gerhardinger.

BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE CONGREGATIONS

Appendix 3

SCHOOL SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME Munich, Germany Rome, Italy Founded in 1833	-about 7,500 sisters -in 32 countries in Europe, North and Latin America, Asia, Africa - formal education and pastoral work
SCHOOL SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME Horazdovice, Czechoslovakia and USA Javornik, Czechoslovakia Founded in 1853	-about 700 sisters -in Czechoslovakia, Germany -formal education and pastoral work
POOR SCHOOL SISTERS OF OUR LADY Kalocsa, Hungary Canada, Rome, Italy Founded in 1860	-about 340 sisters -in Hungary, Germany, Australia, Italy - homes for girls, for the elderly, parish work, religious instruction
SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME OF BACKA Subotica, Yugoslavia Approved as an independent Congregation in 1930	-72 sisters -in Yugoslavia - parish work, catechetical work
POOR SCHOOL SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME Zagreb, Yugoslavia Approved as an independent congregation including In 1941 Catholic	-96 sisters -in Yugoslavia, Belgium, Germany -pastoral work, catechetical work training catechists, kindergarten, Press ministry
POOR SCHOOL SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME Bad Niedernau, Germany Approved as an independent congregation health resort, In 1974	-16 sisters -in Germany -pastoral work, work with ill, school

Several of the above foundations were caused by political situations and changes of national borders.

