

Looking at *You Are Sent* as if for the First Time

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{This presentation was given on November 17, 2004 to Associates in the Milwaukee Province. It was addressed to Associates who study the Constitution so that they might become more familiar with the SSND charism and spirituality.}

Why are we looking at *You Are Sent* today? This is the Rule of Life, the Constitution of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. Here we have expressed the ideas and values that motivate us, the ideas we strive to live by.

As Associates you have expressed your desire to continue Christ's mission by striving to extend into your daily life the spirit, values, and ideals of SSND, of Blessed Theresa of Jesus Gerhardinger-whose beatification we commemorate today. (She was beatified by Pope John Paul II in Rome on November 17, 1985.)

How *You Are Sent* Developed

Take a look at the Constitution for a moment. You have in your hand the quintessence of the lived experience of SSNDs from 1833 until now. It has had varied expressions through the years, culminating in the current document. The present Constitution is not something someone just sat down and composed. It began to take shape in the 1960's when we were asked by the Church to look at ourselves anew – in the light of the Gospel, the charism of our founders, and the signs of the times. Look for a moment at the structure of the Constitution. You will see that the individual sections are related by logic and by profound spiritual connection. The divisions are not there by accident.

In her introductory remarks when presenting the first draft, Sister Aquina Tilgner (General Councilor from Berlin) remarked: "We used the text given to us by the Spirit Commission, adapting it to the rest of the constitution. We decided to have an introductory paragraph, situating our community life as SSND in the context of our Christian life. Then we proposed to treat the vows as an expression of our consecration to Christ, the center of our community. We planned to follow this with a treatment of our life in community, apostolate as our extension to witness wherever we were sent, and prayer and conversion of heart as elements which bring our whole religious life into focus. As you read the preliminary draft, you will see how we related the theme of mission to each part."

The final draft of 1970 had fewer indicated divisions than the document you have, the revision of 1982. You may be wondering: "Why the Prologue?" Sister Aquina said, "Our constitution reminds me of a musical composition...the prologue would be placed as a prelude or overture in which a melody is suggested and occurs throughout the work itself." That also explains the difference in style.

Genesis of You Are Sent

I would like to walk with you through the genesis and development of *You Are Sent*. The timeline (found on *You Are Sent* home page) gives an idea of the fidelity of the congregation to live the principles envisioned in various historical periods and then to write a Rule that expressed those ideals.

By 1968 groundwork had been done all over our Notre Dame world—in Europe, South America, Japan and Guam, and in some 22 States and several Canadian provinces. A group of women were elected to an international assembly called a General Chapter. They worked with all the messages and papers sent by the thousands of SSNDs and did studying on their own. After two months they sent back some drafts of chapters for the Sisters to live by for 18 months and then the group re-convened in 1970. The feedback from Sisters and their own prayer and study brought the first draft of *You Are Sent*.

Common Ideas

There was dialogue across the congregation as ideas were gathered regarding the important points for every culture. These responses came to a preparatory commission that prepared them for the General Chapter delegates who discussed the ideas in small international “home communities.” They took up individual topics such as community, mission, prayer, etc. Groups were intercultural, had a general councilor, a provincial, someone with background in theology, someone in formation, and someone in education. The entire assembly struggled with the question of whether or not there would be one integrated document for the entire congregation or whether there would be two, accommodating differences in culture and language. After a nearly unanimous decision for one document, the dialog continued in small groups. These groups then came up with principles on which they had consensus. These were taken up by the whole assembly and in the other small groups and in language groups.

Major Topics

Repetitions that were noted as “pervading ideas” centered around five major topics: Baptism, Community, Authentic Dialogue, Poverty, and Mission. Individual Sisters were invited to express in writing any suggestions, observations or questions.

Team of Writers

The team of writers was to weave the principles into a coherent document, which everyone hoped would also be “inspirational.” The English language writers were Sister Mary Abbott of Japan, Sister Mary Hester Valentine, and I [Mary Luke Baldwin]. We worked paragraph by paragraph with our parallel group in German. Sr. Mary Hester

became quite ill and was in the infirmary. I would compose, Mary would check carefully for the principles, and we'd go to Hester's room and read together. Eventually a first and then a final draft met approval. At the presentation of the final draft S. Hester actually got up from her "sick bed" and read a prayer she had composed prior to voting.

Why is it called *You Are Sent*?

It was suggested "that the theme of the document would be that which we most share, the reason for our being together as School Sisters of Notre Dame...our **mission** spelled out as far as we can see at this point of what we are asked to be and to do in the Church." Implications for this theme of **mission** for formation, government, liturgy, community, apostolate, and other facets of the documents were quickly seen. One person said, "Working together in commissions considering different topics several commissions in both language groups arrived at the same motto, "Whatever he shall say to you, do" and this also points to **mission**." In a subsequent presentation on "Why **Mission**," Sister Mary Margaret Johanning, a young SSND sister observer, made many points about the concept, including this: "We are **missioned** wherever we are or whatever we do because we are Christ, and Christ was **missioned**...Inherent in the word would be the added dimension of 'being sent,' into whatever situation prevails, to do a two-fold task: 1) to draw the People of God to Him by sincere love and willing service—thus making him visible, and 2) to unify by making one the family of humanity so 'that the world will realize that it was you who sent me.'

The Final Draft was unanimously approved on May 1, 1970.

{Listen to this final vote by returning to the *You Are Sent* page and clicking on it.}

Revision Process begins in 1980 – with a view toward the 1982 General Chapter

Ten years after the first version of *You Are Sent* had been lived it was time to revise the Constitution, particularly in view of seeking final approval from the Holy See. Once again, the entire congregation was involved. A first draft of a proposed document was sent to all the provinces for study and feedback.

In 1982, 8000 School Sisters of Notre Dame were involved in sharing their wisdom and desire to live the gospel. Through the revision committee, as we read in S. Mary Margaret's letter there was dialogue, prayer and communication. (found on *You Are Sent* home page.)

During the 1982 session other pervading ideas emerged: Internationality, the mutuality of mission and ministry, justice, new understanding of community, poverty, unity, seeking the will of God, global awareness.

Reading through some of the Minutes of 1982 (found on *You Are Sent* home page) highlights the emotional and intellectual rigor demanded of the delegates and writers as the process came to a blessed conclusion. Living *You Are Sent* will always challenge

School Sisters of Notre Dame and Associates to reverence the depth of spirituality and wholeness contained in it. May we support one another in that all-important mission, the mission of Jesus .