

SCHOOL SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME

Via della Stazione Aurelia, 95

March 31, 2001

Dear Sisters,

The prologue of our constitution reads:

Our charism continues to develop in the living community,
which, enriched by the past,
enables the congregation
to unfold in the present and
to be challenged by the future.

In Romania, our charism has been developing in the living community for 143 years: through expansion and diminishment, through joys and sorrows, and through incredible courageous fidelity. With this letter, we share with you a very small segment of the history of SSND presence in Romania and the new reality that is unfolding in the present. The complete history, of course, is written only in the hearts of the sisters who have faithfully lived their vowed commitment in this country over the years.

In May 1858, Mother Theresa made the long journey from Munich to Temesvar, the capital of the Banat, which at that time was Hungarian territory, in response to a call from the bishop for sisters to teach girls and young women in the diocese of Csanad. Convinced of the great need there, she sent the first six sisters to Temesvar where they opened an elementary school for girls on October 11, 1858. During the next two decades, Mother Theresa sent many more sisters and candidates from various countries of Europe until there were sufficient vocations from the area to maintain the growing number of schools. A beautiful new motherhouse for the Hungarian province was built in Temesvar in 1880-81. Forty years later, there were more than 600 sisters in the province.

After World War I, the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire was divided into separate national states, and these sisters found themselves on opposite sides of new national boundaries, either in Hungary or in Romania. By 1923, it became necessary to form a new province, the Romanian province, which included the motherhouse in Temesvar and the 19 missions located in Romania. Across the border, the mission in Szeged became the motherhouse of the Hungarian province with ten missions in Hungary. Three more missions to the west were in what is now Yugoslavia.

During the following decades marked by political and economic upheavals, the sisters were called to an ever greater trust in God's providence. While the schools in Romania began to flourish during the 1930s, this was not to last. The subsequent horrors of World War II were followed by the nationalization of the schools in 1948 and the confiscation of property in 1949. The motherhouse in

Timisoara (formerly known as Temesvar) and all the missions were forced to close. The sisters were scattered throughout the country and forbidden to receive any new members. Contact with the “outside,” including the Generalate, was strictly prohibited. In 1971, however, Mother Georgianne was able, as a “tourist” to visit the sisters in Romania for the first time; and to assure the sisters that they had not been forgotten. At this time, three women who were candidates in 1949 and had continued to live as “School Sisters” were secretly professed.

The sisters held to the words of Mother Theresa, “We are in the hand of God...in God we trust,” and after 40 years, what no one dared to hope for really happened. The sisters were once again allowed to live in community and minister as women religious. In 1992, a provincial council was appointed by the general council with Sister M. Relindisz Karpát from Hungary as provincial leader, and Sisters M. Margit Donhauser from Bavaria and M. Donata Haubenreich from Romania as councilors. A year later, the association, *Ordinul Surorilor de Notre Dame*, once again became a juridical person in Romania. Since the sisters had not been able to function as a province for many years, they asked the general council to help them create a provincial directory and prepare for an election assembly. In 1994, a new provincial council was elected, with Sister M. Margit Donhauser from Bavaria as provincial leader and Sister M. Relindisz Karpát from Hungary and Sisters M. Kunigunde Urban and M. Bernadette Schwartz from the already existing Romanian province as councilors.

During this time, three sisters from the Porto Alegre province helped the sisters of Romanian province in their apostolic services for five years. Sister Margaret Mattare from Baltimore assisted in the area of health care, integrating the sisters in the national health care system.

Although young women showed interest in religious life, and one was even professed as a School Sister of Notre Dame, it became increasingly clear that a change in the status of the province was necessary. The initial steps in a process toward the integration of the Romanian province into the Bavarian province were described in a Circular dated November 17, 1999. At that time, however, the “how” and “when” had not yet been determined.

The concept of a change in their status originated with the provincial council and the sisters of Romania. The sisters of both the Romanian and the Bavarian provinces were asked to make a statement regarding this possibility. These statements and the consensus decisions of their provincial assemblies gave evidence of overall acceptance. The necessary documents were then drawn up by the two provincial councils in consultation with experts in canon law and in civil law.

On February 26, 2001, the Romanian province made an official request for acceptance into the Bavarian province. Each of the 34 sisters of the Romanian province signed her name to this request. On March 2, Sister M. Brunhild Teufel, provincial leader of the Bavarian province, and Sister M. Margit Donhauser, provincial leader of the Romanian province, asked for the general council’s approval of the integration of the Romanian province into the Bavarian province.

In a prayer ritual and in accordance with *You Are Sent*, C 71, this request was approved by Sister Rosemary Howarth and the general councilors on March 27, 2001, to take effect sometime before August 26, 2002.

While five regions have been integrated into the province of origin since 1975, this is the first time in the history of our congregation that a province will be integrated into another province. We wish to commend the efforts of the provincial councils and the sisters of the Bavarian and the Romanian provinces for their mutual sensitivity and for their thorough discernment process. Because of the geographical distance between the two provinces, as well as differences in citizenship, ethnicity, and historical development, a special agreement will grant the group of sisters living in Romania a certain independence to the extent possible. We believe that the agreements that have been reached will also allow the sisters in Romania to preserve their cultural identity within this structural change and peacefully continue to respond to God's action in them as faithful daughters of Blessed Theresa. We hope that new life will come out of this structural change and give a future to our congregation in Romania.

We will send out an official announcement of the date on which the integration will be effective. This may be an appropriate time to pray for our sisters in Romania and in Bavaria, and to share with each other the stories about the sisters in Romania that have inspired and challenged many of us over the years.

In gratitude and in loving solidarity in Notre Dame,

Your Sisters of the General Council,

Sister Rosemary Howarth,
General Superior

Sister M. Adelgarda Riess

Sister Patricia Frost

Sister M. Pietra Hagenberger

Sister Darija Krhin

Sister Libera Mezzari

Sister Francine Perez

Sister Laura Jean Spaeth