

Unity in Diversity

During an Extended General Council meeting in the 1970s School Sisters of Notre Dame shared their experiences living under communism. The topic of "Unity in Diversity" within the congregation was the subject of their faith sharing. They are speaking through a translator. The text given here follows the audio recording of their conversation.

Speaker 1:

I think we have experienced this (unity in diversity) in our own history in the crises after WWI and WWII. For these very crises became the means for unity, for we did not know reasons about things so that we felt with each other, we prayed and suffered with each other. In these difficult years when we had to flee for our own sections, when we were hungry we shared with each other and felt this unity. So that we felt the crisis was a further means to unity.

Speaker 2:

I would like to underline this for the same thought occurred to me. We felt this unity particularly in the times of need. The result of unity was something wonderful for us. Also the unity of the east and the west strengthened us and gave us confidence. The same spirit was said of the small communities.

Speaker 3:

Our difficulty seemed to vanish, each one was concerned about the other and we often talked about this with one another. The unity was always there but it was more manifest in times of crisis.

Speaker 4:

In Vienna we experienced the same thing. During the time of crisis the sisters were very much concerned about the other missions, whether anything had happened to the sisters.
In Guatamala (correcting the translator)

(Ed. note. At this time our sisters in Guatemala were in danger from a civil war and our sisters in Europe, were concerned about them.)

Speaker 5:

I would like to give an example of this time of crisis. In WWII it was impossible to communicate with others. Our former Provincial wrote on a small piece of linen with her blood that we were being loyal to the church and to our congregation. A

woman sewed this piece of linen in her coat and brought it to Mother Ambrosia.
(SSND General Superior 1956 - 1968)

Speaker 6: (Mother Georgianne, General Superior 1968-1977)

I think not only I but the other three American sisters experienced this same strong attachment and unity when we visited our sisters in Romania in 1971. The individual sisters were separated from one another and we visited the sisters in their little houses.

I recall when we visited one sister who was 92 yrs of age. She lived in a parish house with another sister who worked in the parish. She had a little picture of Bishop Wittmann (mentor of Mother Theresa) about so big at the doorway. She said, "I have recently hung this up to remind myself that I still belong to the congregation. I know then who I am."

When we first arrived in Romania and met some of the sisters rather secretly after Mass, one very elderly sister who had been novice mistress for some time said, "Now, O Lord, you may dismiss your servant in peace. I believe now that the congregation knows that we're here and that we do still belong to the congregation." (School Sisters of Notre Dame)