

Facilitator Directions: New York Times Ad

Preparation: The Facilitator will want to read as much of the background material included in *Sturdy Roots II* as she can before the session. Because of the delicate nature of this topic there is the need to focus the discussion on the context of the Catholic Church by studying the 1980 Fact Sheet.* These can be distributed to participants.

It is also important to realize Margaret Ellen was from a medical family and her father encouraged her to speak her mind, challenge and dialogue with others. She is one of five girls, no boys in her family.

The Facilitator welcomes the group and begins by asking them to reflect on where they were in 1980. Do you remember who was president of the United States? (Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush were elected, defeating Jimmy Carter.)

Who was Pope? Pope John Paul II. Can you remember where you were living in 1980? Were you active in a parish, serving on a parish council, teaching in PSR, etc.?

In a few words how would you describe your parish community? Were you proud to be a Catholic? Were you an active participant in your parish? Had anything happened in 1979 that related to women and the Catholic Church?

Consider distributing S. Theresa Kane's presentation to the Pope in 1979 and continuing the discussion. Was there any response to her presentation in 1979?

The Facilitator continues by *distributing copies of the 1980 Fact Sheet and invites participants to choose one idea from the sheet that speaks to them, inviting dialogue. Were there other leaders or events going on in the 1980s that you'd like to mention? Communism made many aware of those who could not practice freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. The Solidarity movement in Poland was beginning and was publicly supported by Pope John Paul II. Opus Dei was gaining strength as a more conservative expression of Catholicism. The Moral Majority that helped elect Ronald Reagan was influencing media, education, and politics. Poverty, militarism, domestic violence against women and children were well-documented in the U.S. and elsewhere.

In some ways the U.S. Catholic church was encouraged by her leaders to move toward adult responsibility, no longer waiting for permission to speak. It was into this context that Geraldine Ferraro, a wife and mother of 3 and Congresswoman from Queens, New York, was the first woman in U. S. history named as a Vice-Presidential candidate by a major political party, the Democratic Party. And she was Catholic.

The Facilitator summarizes some of the background that Geraldine Ferraro shares in her autobiography. What personality traits do you recognize in these few paragraphs? Do you think this 49 year old Catholic wife and mother was also a good politician?

The Facilitator may want to offer background on Margaret Ellen Traxler, SSND, gleaning aspects of her personality and ministry from the various articles in *Sturdy Roots*. It would be helpful to read the entire segment on her and realize how her various ministries with women had given her first hand experience with the poor. Her “theology from below” brought her into conflict with “theology from above.”

Building on this background, The Facilitator may ask: Did anyone know Margaret Ellen Traxler? Could you tell us your impressions of her?

After hearing stories The Facilitator says: What made the Vatican take such a dramatic step as dismissal for all the women religious who signed the ad? Can you imagine a leadership team discussing the letter of Archbishop Hamer at a council meeting? What was at stake in this situation?

The Facilitator may want to share a letter from the SSND leadership with participants. What is the tone of the letter from S. Mary Margaret Johanning, SSND? (caution, fear, anxiety, desire to dialogue with sisters involved as well as hierarchy, etc.)

With the information given on the issues both from Margaret Ellen, Rosemary Radford Ruether, (also a signer), SSND support from 20 sisters, etc. one can choose to share what fits the group. The discussion continues until The Facilitator feels it's time to stop.

The Facilitator concludes by noting that Margaret's heart problems began at this time. She was faithful to the church as a School Sister of Notre Dame and repeatedly stated that she was not promoting abortion. Her desire along with the other signers was to dialogue about the issue, to provide an open forum where the differences of opinion by committed Catholics could be shared. Her fear in 1984, like that of Geraldine Ferraro was that limiting pro-life only to the abortion issue would have perilous consequences for future Catholic candidates for public office.

A hymn, song, or appropriate prayer could end the session.

Or The Facilitator could conclude by inviting participants to stand in a circle, turning to the right, (facing the back of the person next to them) placing hands on their shoulders and saying a silent prayer for the person. If appropriate a hug of peace could end the session.