



SHARING IN THE CHARISM OF THE

Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

of Wichita

May 27, 2016

From California to Kansas

Last evening Sister Mary Ann spoke of our foundation in Spain, the foundational charism given to Father Masmitja through his devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows. His aims were high: he wanted his Sisters to transform society through prayer and education. He also formed them as **daughters of the Church**, so when the need was presented by Bishop Amat of southern California for teaching Sisters, Fr. Masmitja and the Sisters recognized God's call. Ten Sisters were prepared and sailed to California in 1871. As in Spain, the community – and the community's charism – flourished in California and they began teaching and receiving postulants within the first year. This continued for **nine decades**. By the late 1950's the community had grown from the 10 Spanish Sisters to over 600. That is a percentage increase of 6,000%!

Throughout CA their reputation for excellence in the field of education was surpassed by none. Their charitable works, especially for other religious communities – like providing free college education – was more than noteworthy, it was extraordinary.

During this time of extraordinary growth three Sisters in particular need to be mentioned: Mother M. Joanne Brummel, Sister M. Eileen MacDonald, and Sister M. Giovanni Oliveri. Without them our community and its charism – a gift to one for the universal Church – would not exist.

I would like to say a few words about each of these three women of faith, our three foundresses. The three were of quite different personalities and backgrounds, and providentially so. For their individual gifts and personalities would all be put to use in Wichita in the service of our charism. Their areas of specialization were all needed in our fledgling community.

Mother Joanne was the second and last child and only daughter of her parents. Her father was a man deeply devoted to the Blessed Virgin and had prayed for a daughter. While he awaited the birth of his second child, he offered her to the Mother of God and promised her that this child would be hers in every way, even for religious

life, if that be God's will. She attended Immaculate Heart High School as a boarder and there she recognized her vocation to religious life, fostering it by daily Mass, frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament and the daily rosary, praying that Jesus would want her for His Spouse. After graduation from high school in 1930 she entered the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Los Angeles. After her initial formation in the novitiate she earned her BA and MA from the Immaculate Heart College. She also studied at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of Southern California. She taught for many years and served as principal and as local superior in many parish convents.

She was also somewhat of a financial wizard. After being elected as the General Treasurer of the Institute she initiated and developed a unified system of accounting for all the entities of the Institute which included the General Administration, Immaculate Heart College, Immaculate Heart High School, Immaculate Heart Novitiate, Immaculate Heart Retreat House, Queen of the Valley Hospital, Saint Mary Desert Valley Hospital and Immaculate Heart Hospital. Later she would also serve the community as the novice mistress.

After coming to Wichita she concentrated her efforts on the formation of the young Sisters. As this solidified, she extended her help and expertise to the laity by directing Days of Prayer. She served as the General Superior from her arrival in Wichita until her death.

Mother Joanne was often thought austere and unapproachable, but this was due simply to poor hearing. 30 or 40 years ago technology was not as it is today and her hearing aids were not very helpful. At home, however, with her Sisters, within the quiet confines of the convent, she could hear very well. She was kind, gentle but firm, sympathetic, and very, very prayerful. She was filled with the Scriptures and the documents of the Church; she was filled so as to be formed by them. Her leadership skills, her study of the Church's teaching on Religious Life and her grasp of spiritual theology prepared her to make this establishment, write our Constitutions and form us in the life of prayer and virtue, in our charism, and in a profound love for the Church.

Sister Eileen's background differed greatly from Mother Joanne, who lived in Southern California until moving to Wichita. Sister Eileen was born in Mexico in 1903 to an Irish father and an American mother. Her father owned and operated silver mines in the mountains of Mexico. Very wealthy, she was under the care of a nanny until her teen-age years. When the Mexican Revolution intensified her whole family fled the country by way of railroad cattle cars. Once established in California, she discerned her vocation and decided to become a missionary and go to China. She wanted to join the Maryknoll Sisters. Informing her confessor of her decision, he promptly replied, "No, you must join the IHMs;" and so she did. Her family was in opposition to this and did not give her any assistance. In fact, at the time it was customary for young women entering the novitiate to wear a wedding gown.

Her family would not supply one until the novice mistress contacted the mother and told her that Eileen would be the only one in a used dress. She was immediately fitted with an elegant gown for her reception.

Sister Eileen enjoyed a distinguished academic career: a BA from Immaculate Heart College, MA from UCLA and a PhD from the University of Southern California. After receiving her doctorate, she studied at the University of Paris. Returning to the States, she taught in several diocesan schools and at the College. After teaching in the college for some years she was appointed Academic Dean and served in that capacity for over 20 years.

Upon arrival in Wichita, Sister Eileen, with her impressive academic background, directed the education of the Sisters and established the program of study we continue and develop today. By the time our novices profess their vows they have all the prerequisites for a Master's Degree in Theology.

The youngest of the three foundresses, Sister Giovanni was born in San Pedro, CA, in 1913 to Italian immigrants. Her father died when she was nine months old in a fishing accident, subsequently she became the favorite of the family. Her two brothers, Steve (lovingly called "Red") and Jimmy, and her two sisters, Cecilia and Louise, along with their mother, doted on her. Growing up she was quite accomplished in sports, especially basketball and tennis. Later as a Sister she would coach these same sports, as well as volleyball. Her family directly and strongly opposed her entrance into religious life, but she remained strong in her resolve to do so. Anxiously awaiting her 21st birthday, she secretly made her preparations. The evening of her birthday, after the family had eaten her 7-layer coconut cake, she heard her mother whisper to her siblings, "She must have decided not to go!" The next day, the darling of the family left for the convent, with no one supporting her. In fact, shortly thereafter her brothers arrived, guns in hand, demanding their younger sister. The Sisters remained calm, encouraged the hot-blooded young men to reconsider and Sister Giovanni was allowed to remain. Her family, however, did not communicate with her for several years after her entrance into religious life. Sister's profession day was July 4 and she often referred to herself as "God's firecracker!"

Sister, too, had a successful academic career. She had a BA in history and an MA in School Administration.

Sister Giovanni was our Public Relations department! Teaching full time until she was 84 years old, she was out among the people much more than Mother Joanne and Sister Eileen. Always smiling, always enthusiastic, always approachable to her thousands of students and to the faculty and staff with whom she worked, she was always displaying the good news of religious life and of IHM in particular. Her great love for her students and for teaching was only exceeded by her love for Jesus, his Blessed Mother, her vocation and her community. All of this overflowed in generosity and a joyful spirit of prayer, sacrifice and suffering.

These three women of faith left their beloved families to enter the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary at a great personal cost: Mother Joanne's doting father, Sister Eileen's family so attached to her they refused her any assistance, Sister Giovanni's family even trying to remove her forcefully from the convent. While still loving their families, they joined another family, a religious family, a new family they loved and defended. Mother Joanne would often comment on the great charity of the Institute and wonder how such awful things could happen to such a generous Institute. There is no other way to say it, they loved their community and its charism and they were unfailingly loyal to it.

So, ***why did*** these three Sisters leave California and come to Kansas, again leave their families and their religious family and come to the unknown land of the Wichita diocese?

I need to mention one other Sister to answer this question. Anita Marie Caspary was born Nov. 4, 1915, in Herrick, S.D., the third of eight children of Jacob and Marie Caspary. The family moved to Los Angeles, where she received her bachelor's degree in English at Immaculate Heart College in 1936. She entered the convent the same year, and taught high school English while studying toward a master's degree at the University of Southern California. She received her Ph.D. in 1948 from Stanford. She was president of Immaculate Heart College from 1958 to 1963. (Anita Caspary's obituary found on-line.)

Given the religious name Sr. Humiliata, she eventually was elected the Superior General of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in California. Under her leadership, the largest ever membership of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, was led astray. Using the Second Vatican Council as a scapegoat, Mother Humiliata introduced and encouraged practices and activities that were not in line with the charism of the community and eventually, even with the teachings of the Church. Non-Christian spiritualities were also permitted.

The one most notable deviation was allowing Dr. Carl Rogers and his assistant Bill Coulson and their team to conduct "a 'pilot study' of a new emerging therapy" referred to as TFN, that is, "therapy for normals". Basically the psychologists inundated the Sisters with a humanistic psychology and directed them in "non-directive self-exploration." In essence what is this?

Dr. Rogers based his non-directive therapy on the premise that all are innately good with no tendency to sin and no influence of evil. Our own personal experience blatantly contradicts this premise. C.S. Lewis once said that if we don't know anything else, we do know that there is something wrong with man. It doesn't take any kind of faith to know that. But according to his erroneous premise, since there was no sin, no evil, there was **no need for a moral authority**. All we needed to do, said Rogers, was to refer to the source of authority within ourselves.

We can immediately see that this would lead the average person into inner turmoil. Having once learned of a right and wrong, now all was well and good as long as it felt good. There was no one to help make moral decisions, no one to guide and no one to pass judgment. Dr. Coulson said, “We overcame their traditions; we overcame their faith.” The team of psychologist had a grant for a three-year study which they terminated after two because they were alarmed at the results.

Dr. Coulson later admitted, I quote, “The IHM's had some 60 schools when we started; at the end, they had one. There were some 615 nuns when we began [1966]. Within a year after our first interventions, 300 of them were petitioning Rome to get out of their vows. They did not want to be under anyone's authority, except the authority of their imperial inner selves.” Sadly, Dr. Coulson admitted, “We destroyed them.” (Information gathered from two articles “The Perverting of Catholic Religious (Part 1 and 2) from the website *Catholic Psychology*) Dr. Coulson’s numbers don’t agree with other sources. Most say 200 left at this point.

Mother Anita (Mother Humiliata had returned to the use of her baptismal name) and her team were removing all the rules, all the boundaries, all of the customs and traditions of religious life. She went far beyond the directives of Vatican II to renew religious life.

The cardinal of Los Angeles, James Cardinal McIntyre, recognized this and knew that things had gone awry. Accused of interfering with their internal affairs, Cardinal McIntyre merely required four basic practices of religious life if the Sisters were to continue teaching in his parochial schools – something he had every right to do, for the apostolic work of the Sisters was (and is) subject to the hierarchy. The bishop has to protect the teachings of the Catholic Church in his diocese.

His four “unconditionals” were that the Sisters must

1. have some prayer in common every day, even if it is only the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
2. retain their apostolic commitment to Catholic education
3. collaborate with the bishop in their apostolic work
4. wear a uniform habit

Cardinal McIntyre called in assistance from the Vatican. Even then the leadership refused to accept the Cardinal’s directives; the Cardinal forbade them to teach in the diocesan schools. The leadership and those that blindly followed were blatantly disobeying all Church authority. How could the Cardinal do otherwise?

During the chaos and havoc of the late 60’s and early 70’s, Sister Eileen, Sister Joanne and Sister Giovanni and a few others like them suffered to see the gradual destruction of their beloved Institute due to secularization, the misinterpretation of the Second Vatican Council’s documents, the misdirected and the misdirecting leadership

and the misuse and abuse of psychiatry. They saw a huge cancer growing and so did the Holy See. The charism was being destroyed.

As I was preparing for this evening, I was reminded of a story of our founder, Father Masmitja. He was hearing confessions and his confessional began shaking. A guttural voice said to him, "You will never succeed in California; I am legion and I was there before you." Father Masmitja calmly responded, "The Blessed Virgin is one and she is more powerful than you." Even though in the 60's and 70's it appeared as if the devil would be victorious, that was not the end of the story. Mary's Immaculate Heart will triumph.

Under the guidance of Rome and in hopes to protect the charism and works of the Community, the Institute was divided between those who desired to follow the leadership of Sister Anita Caspary and those who, under the leadership of Sister Eileen, appointed by Rome, wished to remain faithful to the Church, to their vows, and to their Institute's charisms. How did the membership divide? After the 200 Sisters were dispensed from their vows during the tenure of Dr. Rogers, 315 followed Sr. Anita, about 40 left all together, and a Biblical remnant of the California community, about 60, remained faith to the Church. Overnight the 60 schools in which the IHMs taught were left with no one prepared to take their place – this was the beginning of poor education in the faith... something else which is often blamed on Vatican II.

This painful time was tumultuous. The small group of Sisters under Sister Eileen's leadership was strong and determined. However, within a short time after Sister Eileen's term as Superior, it became increasingly clear that though the Sisters all wanted to remain faithful to the ideals, charism, and the works of the Community they were not united in how to do this, or, even, in their understanding of how to live the essential elements of Religious life according to their unique charism. There were varied opinions on the interpretation of the charism and what was most important.

Again consulting the Holy See for many months, Mother Joanne, Sister Eileen and Sister Giovanni were directed to find another diocese that would welcome them and their charism as expressed through their prayer and work in Catholic education and formation. They began this search, hoping that someday this small beginning would grow into a province of their California Institute.

The Sisters were attracted to Wichita because of its fidelity and orthodoxy. Bishop Maloney was attracted to the Sisters' mission of contemplation of the Word and the spread of the Gospel through works of education. It was a good fit. He invited them and they arrived on June 22, 1976 with only a few possessions and a few dollars to begin their new life. The Sisters of St. Joseph, especially Sister Ephrem and Sister Matthew, helped the newly arrived Sisters, most notably by keeping their refrigerator and pantry stocked until they had a regular income.

Mother Joanne would often muse that they were called from the vineyards of California to the wheat fields of Kansas ... the Eucharistic sacrifice played out in their lives.

Because the California General Administration was not amiable to having the Sisters in Wichita, depriving them of any active voice in the community and withholding certain permissions necessary for growth in Wichita, Rome again was asked to solve the difficulties. The only solution, **the only way to preserve the charism of IHM** and to allow for growth and continuity, was to break all ties with their Institute in California and begin again the process of becoming a religious institute. This meant being dispensed of the vows they professed in California more than 40, 50 years previously and professing private vows with Bishop Maloney as their witness. Since they did not consider letting IHM die, they were left with no choice. Following the Vatican's direction, they sought and received a dispensation from Rome.

This was painful. The Sisters did not want to do this; they did not come into an unknown land to become foundresses of a religious institute. They were just trying to remain faithful to what they professed in California, to live and preserve the IHM charism; the Church told them that to remain true to that profession, they had to be dispensed of their professed vows and begin again. To accept and believe that takes faith.

But there was no other way. Amidst tears, but with a strong resolve to be obedient to the Church, the Sisters signed their dispensations so they could preserve the IHM charism. Our gratitude for their sacrifice is indescribable. Not one of us would be here today, not one of us would be an IHM today, without the sacrifice of these three Sisters, who very unassumingly came to Wichita to live their original and authentic charism.

Our three foundresses have set us firmly on the path; they have instilled within us an undying love for the Church, for God's people, for our apostolate of praying for the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of priests, and for the apostolate of forming and informing the faithful, especially through the works of education.

So what can we learn from this?

When the Mothers came to Wichita they were in there 60's and 70's. They literally picked up, left everything they knew and the land they called home and came to a new land, a land they knew not ... just like Abraham who was promised a blessing and a great nation in his descendants. We hope and pray that our charism, given to Fr. Masmijtja and Mother Joanne may flourish and serve the Church for generations to come.

You know, the proof of their decision is before us, we need only look at the current data, the current state of affairs. To conclude, we'll look briefly at California and Kansas.

California:

First what happened to those who followed Sister Anita? They eventually opted out of canonical status and formed an “inclusive ecumenical community”. On December 6, 1969, Sister Anita asked the Sisters of the IHM community to follow her into uncharted waters, addressing the entire IHM congregation, she invited them to establish a new community outside the jurisdiction of Church authorities, I quote: “I am asking each Sister, therefore, to write to me by December 15 a letter of intent stating whether she chooses to become a member of a dedicated lay group living according to the Decrees [the Chapter decrees of 1967]. It is possible that such a group will have to ask for a dispensation from public vows and then take private vows or promises...Older Sisters need to see their place in such a community as vital for the stability and healthy balance of the group. We need to find out if we are recruiting new members and how this can be done.” (IHC website)

The 1967 Chapter Decrees to which Sister Anita refers, are clearly subversive and disregard the Church’s teachings regarding religious life; “The order’s renewal decrees of 1967 stated, among other things, that sisters could choose whatever work they wanted, dispense with regular community prayer schedules, and wear any style of clothing” (Ann Carey, “Anita Caspary: Dissenter or Pioneer”, National Catholic Registrar, October 24, 2011).

Three months later in February of 1970, those Sisters who chose to follow Sister Anita sought dispensations, forming a new group “outside the canonical structure of religious life or of other ecclesiastically recognized groups” (ibid).

Secondly, the California Institute of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary – that is the group that stayed in the Church when the others followed Sr. Anita – was officially, canonically, suppressed several years ago. The few remaining Sisters (I think there were 13 at the time they were suppressed) were of an age that the community was not sustainable; even if they would receive any vocations at that point, the members would not be able to form them in the charism of the institute before their own demise.

At present, there are three elderly (late 80’s and 90’s) Sisters living in care homes, not even together, and two others who have been in the national news because of the property battle in which they are engaged with the arch-diocese of Los Angeles.

The charism was not protected, not lived, not developed or grown ... and so it has died in California.

Now Kansas: If the Mothers had not come to Kansas, the charism of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary would no longer exist in the United States. There are, however, some IHM Sisters in the US who belong to the Spanish community.

The Wichita Diocese would look radically different.

- We have been teaching at Bishop Carroll for 39 years and 23 priests were taught by IHMs while attending Bishop Carroll; 21 of them are diocesan and there are also 5 religious brothers (Bishop Carroll Catholic High School website)
- Six IHM Sisters were taught by our Sisters at Bishop Carroll. We also have one Sister from Kapaun-Mt. Carmel who was taught by our Sisters
- One of our diocesan priests was taught by our Sisters at Trinity in Hutchinson (we have been there 19 years)
- In the 1950's and 60's when religious vocations were at an all-time high, there were 300 teaching Sisters in **each** of the diocese of Kansas. **Now ...**
 - Dodge City has none
 - Salina has 1
 - Kansas City has 8
 - Wichita has 15; of those 15, all 15 are IHMs! In other words, if IHM had not come to Wichita, this diocese could have been in the same position as the other dioceses of Kansas.

Looking at the history of our community, we clearly see that our three foundresses knew the IHM charism to be worth dying for – they died to themselves to preserve it – and therefore, it is definitely worth living. We look forward to sharing it more and more with the lay faithful of the diocese that we may become close collaborators in the building up of the Kingdom of God in the Spirit and charism of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Again, what can we learn from this? How does this apply to our lives?

Mother Joanne, Sister Eileen and Sister Giovanni were three very different personalities – but they were each needed to bring the IHM charism to Wichita. We need each individual personality with their own distinct gifts to safeguard, grow, develop and fully live our foundational charism. Your part, too, will fit in the whole like a piece in the puzzle or the one of many colored threads that makes a beautiful tapestry.

The Mothers were faithful daughters of the Church. Willing to leave everything else behind, to cut all ties with the community they loved and leave – again – their families and friends. To be faithful, to do what you know is right and needs to be done, despite its popularity, requires a holy tenacity, fortitude. Our founding Sisters in Wichita suffered through the decision to come to Kansas, to give up hope on their own community, to be dispensed from their vows of 40, 50 years – without any assurance that they would be able to profess again in

a religious institute – required a profound dying to self in obedience to the Church. This surety that they shared of the relevance and essential nature of the IHM charism led them through a suffering they never chose to speak about. Only time and our growing understanding of their sacrifices have deepened our gratitude and appreciation of their determination and sacrificial decisions.

They were willing to suffer for the Church, to support and defend her decisions and objective truth, no matter the personal costs. Truly they are heroes worthy of imitation. Every day through our actions and words we are asked to defend the Church and her teachings on faith and morals. We have before us three models whose joyful sacrifice to bring the IHM charism to Wichita can inspire us to be faith-filled, loyal, joyful witnesses of the Church.

In the 12th chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus says, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit." (Jn 12:24) We see in the Mothers the seed that was buried and then bore much fruit. This fruit is before our eyes. From the three original members of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Wichita, we know have 25. (That is an 833% increase in 40 years.) We have three applicants for the fall. The Mothers' sacrifice has not been in vain. Neither will ours nor yours be. Whatever sacrifice we are asked to make for what is right, true and good will be blessed by the Lord and the reward will be a hundred-fold.

Our charism is growing in the fertile land of Kansas ... and we welcome you to be a part of it.