

Providence College

DigitalCommons@Providence

---

History Undergraduate Theses

History

---

12-15-2014

## Nuns in the Newsroom: The Sisters of Marillac College and U.S. Sisters' Involvement in Social Justice Reform

Elizabeth D. Nako

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/history\\_undergrad\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/history_undergrad_theses)



Part of the [History of Religion Commons](#)

---

**Nuns in the Newsroom: The Sisters of Marillac College and U.S. Sisters' Involvement in  
Social Justice Reform**

**By  
Elizabeth D. Nako  
HIS 490 History Honors Thesis**

**Department of History  
Providence College  
Fall 2014**



## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1. SISTERS' NEW FOCUS ON EDUCATION AND INFLUENCES ON SISTERS' INTEREST IN SOCIAL JUSTICE	
Background on Sister Bertrande Meyers, D.C., and Her Impact on Marillac College.....	11
The Sister Formation Movement and the Everett Workshop.....	13
The Daughters of Charity and Marillac College.....	15
Marillac College's Goals.....	19
Archbishop Ritter's Influence on the Sisters.....	22
The Sister Students' Influences.....	24
CHAPTER 2. MARILLAC COLLEGE STUDENTS: THEIR DISCUSSION AND AWARENESS OF CURRENT EVENTS	
<i>The Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960</i> and the <i>Marillac College Forum</i> .....	26
<i>Forum</i> Articles on the Civil Rights Movement.....	30
<i>Forum</i> articles on the Vietnam War.....	37
<i>Forum</i> Articles on "Intellectualism".....	44
CHAPTER 3. U.S. SISTERS ON THE FRONTLINES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE	
The Sisters' Shift from Teaching to Action.....	47
Interview with Sister Julie Cutter, D.C., Marillac College Alumnae .....	50
American Sisters Serving the Underserved Populations.....	54
CONCLUSION.....	70
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	72

## INTRODUCTION

During the years 1962-1965, the work of the Second Vatican Council, called together by Pope John XXIII, set into place changes that “reached into every area of Catholic life.”<sup>1</sup> The Second Vatican Council issued sixteen documents. One of the documents, *Gaudium et Spes (Joy and Hope)*, was to have a profound effect on the lives of American sisters.<sup>2</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965, was one of the four apostolic constitutions, the highest level of decree issued by the pope. The Second Vatican Council not only addressed the Catholic population, but all of humanity. The Council wanted to “explain to everyone how it conceives of the presence and activity of the Church in the world of today.”<sup>3</sup> This constitution, divided into five chapters, stated in its preface:

United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for

---

<sup>1</sup> Carole G. Rogers, *Habits of Change: An Oral History of American Nuns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), xiv.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The Second Vatican Council, “Gaudium et Spes,” December 7, 1965, *Vatican Archives*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.<sup>4</sup>

Avery Cardinal Dulles, Society of Jesus (S.J.), an American Catholic theologian and a professor at Fordham University, compiled a list of the ten basic teachings of the Second Vatican Council. Dulles considered these ten themes to be “obvious to anyone seeking an unprejudiced interpretation of the council.”<sup>5</sup> These ten themes are: *aggiornamento*, reformability of the Church, renewed attention to the Word of God, collegiality, religious freedom, active role of the laity, regional and local variety, ecumenism, dialogue with other religions, and social mission of the Church. The last theme, social mission of the Church, was important to the American sisters’ role in social justice. “With Vatican II, the apostolate of peace and social justice began to appear as part of the church’s mission to carry on the work of Christ himself.”<sup>6</sup>

Two months before *Gaudium et Spes*, on October 28, 1965, another major Second Vatican Council decree, *Perfectae Caritatis*, the “Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life,” was written directly to religious orders and was very important to all sisters. This ninth major decree stated:

The sacred synod has already shown in the constitution on the Church that the pursuit of perfect charity through the evangelical counsels draws its origin from the doctrine and example of the Divine Master and reveals itself as a splendid sign of the heavenly kingdom. Now it intends to treat of the life and discipline of those institutes whose members make profession of chastity, poverty and obedience and to provide for their needs in our time.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> The Second Vatican Council, “Gaudium et Spes,” December 7, 1965, *Vatican Archives*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

<sup>5</sup> Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J., *The Reshaping of Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 19-33.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> The Second Vatican Council, “Perfectae Caritatis,” October 28, 1965, *Vatican Archives*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_perfectae-caritatis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html).

The U.S. sisters interpreted “needs of the times” to mean not only charity, but also work for structural changes toward economic and social justice.<sup>8</sup> Both Paragraph 32 and Paragraph 90 from *Gaudium et Spes* helped shape their interpretation. Paragraph 32 of this document reflected on the specific message of the sisters using their “different gifts” to “render mutual service”:

As the firstborn of many brethren and by the giving of His Spirit, He founded after His death and resurrection a new brotherly community composed of all those who receive Him in faith and in love. This He did through His Body, which is the Church. There everyone, as members one of the other, would render mutual service according to the different gifts bestowed on each.<sup>9</sup>

Paragraph 90 discussed the Church’s role in social justice:

The council, considering the immensity of the hardships which still afflict the greater part of mankind today, regards it as most opportune that an organism of the universal Church be set up in order that both the justice and love of Christ toward the poor might be developed everywhere. The role of such an organism would be to stimulate the Catholic community to promote progress in needy regions and international social justice.<sup>10</sup>

These passages influenced U.S. sisters to expand their ministry from performing works of mercy to advocating for legal, economic, and social justice in addition to their charitable endeavors.

*Gaudium et Spes* is most often associated with the Second Vatican Council term *aggiornamento*, or “a bringing up to date” of the Church. *Aggiornamento* was the name first given to Pope John XXIII’s pontifical program that he discussed on January 25, 1959. “I want to

---

<sup>8</sup> Darra Mulderry, *What Human Goodness Entails: An Intellectual History of U.S. Catholic Sisters, 1935-1980* (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2006), 3.

<sup>9</sup> The Second Vatican Council, “Gaudium et Spes,” December 7, 1965, *Vatican Archives*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

throw open the windows of the Church so that we can see out and the people can see in."<sup>11</sup> When the Second Vatican Council was called, it was one of the words frequently used, meaning a spirit of open-mindedness and change. The American sisters were influenced by this Second Vatican Council document and the spirit of *aggiornamento* where they started to look beyond individual acts of charity. Now the U.S. orders of sisters expanded their idea of service to include not only charitable aid to the poor and dispossessed, but in addition, advocacy and public action for systemic change, or "social justice." Many U.S. sisters remained in the classroom to teach social justice, while other sisters carved out new avenues of ministry such as battered women's shelters, housing corporations, and immigrants' human rights to name a few.<sup>12</sup> There is no doubt that the growing political activism that started with Vatican II reinforced changes within religious communities. However, even before Vatican II convened, some religious sisters had already begun criticizing unjust systems and speaking about the need for social and economic justice.

Why and how did U.S. sisters interpret the Second Vatican Council documents the way that they did? In particular, why did they decidedly review their approach to ministry in relation to a broad-based commitment to social justice, not only charity? Part of the reason was due to the Everett Curriculum.<sup>13</sup> In 1954, the Sister Formation Conference was founded by sisters in the National Catholic Education Association in response to concerns about the inadequate education of U.S. women religious. In 1956, they organized the Everett Workshop. This

---

<sup>11</sup> Pope John XXIII, "Pope John's Announcement of an Ecumenical Council," January 25, 1959, *Vatican II—Voice of the Church*, <http://www.vatican2voice.org/91docs/announcement.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> Carole G. Rogers, *Habits of Change: An Oral History of American Nuns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Darra Mulderry, *What Human Goodness Entails: An Intellectual History of U.S. Catholic Sisters, 1935-1980* (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2006), 1-7.



workshop was a three-month long gathering of eighteen sister Ph.D.'s in Everett, Washington “for the purpose of planning the educational future of the American women religious” by creating and distributing a “model” curriculum designed specifically for sisters.<sup>14</sup> The Everett Curriculum was more than a standard liberal arts education; it was one that interwove several themes that allowed for a distinctive education. These themes were an “integration of Catholic social thought into the liberal arts and development of a social consciousness and global awareness along with an effective approach toward effecting structural changes in society.”<sup>15</sup> One of the colleges for sisters that adopted the Everett Curriculum was Marillac College. This thesis will highlight the sister students of Marillac College.

In 1955, Marillac College was founded by the Daughters of Charity outside of St. Louis. The college was dedicated to the education of future sisters. Marillac College was the largest of the three colleges of the Sister Formation that met accreditation.<sup>16</sup> However, Marillac stood apart from the other two Sister Formation colleges because it was not only open to the Daughters of Charity sisters, but it was open free of charge to all religious orders across the country, a phenomenon never seen before.<sup>17</sup> Also, what made Marillac College unique among the scores of sisters’ colleges in the U.S. was that it served young sisters from over twenty-five orders rather than just one or two orders—though all of them were from the Midwest. Marillac College

---

<sup>14</sup> Marjorie Noterman Beane, Ph. D., *From Framework to Freedom: A History of the Sister Formation Conference* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc., 1993), 61.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>16</sup> Sister Bertrande Meyers, D.C., *Sisters for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 138. The other two sister formation colleges were Providence Heights, Issaquah, Washington, which was regionally accredited through its affiliation with Seattle University, and Notre Dame, St. Louis, which was independently accredited by North Central Association. Marillac College, the first and largest of the Sister Formation Colleges, was accredited by both the National League for Nursing (and boasted its nursing program as one of the five best in the country) and the North Central Association.

<sup>17</sup> Daughters of Charity, Province of St. Louise Archives. <https://dcarchives.wordpress.com/>.

educated sisters from: the Daughters of Charity (DC), Sisters of the Third Order of Saint Francis (OSF), School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND), Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (CSSR), Society of the Holy Cross (SSC), and Sisters of Christian Charity (SCC). The sisters would take the ideas on equality, discrimination, and communism that they learned at the college back to their orders. As a result, there was a spread of these new ideas from the sisters to their respective orders.

One way to explore how young sisters in pre-Vatican II conceived of ministry in light of the Everett Curriculum is to examine sister-students' writings at Marillac between 1959 and 1967. Their writings offer the historian an opportunity to examine influences, behaviors, and trends among the young sisters exposed to the social-justice emphasis in the Everett Curriculum. Most importantly the sisters at Marillac College generated a student newspaper, the *Marillac College Forum*. The *Forum* was a four-page paper that came out monthly and covered numerous events and lectures that took place on campus. Studying the articles shows the growth of the Midwestern American sisters' focus on advocacy for social justice in addition to their charitable work. Also, the newspaper demonstrates how some of the American sisters were turning to advocacy for legal and economic change before Vatican II first convened in 1962. The newspaper articles specifically reflect the sisters' involvement in learning about, and responding to, the civil rights movement and the crisis in Vietnam in the form of student sponsored lectures and discussions. The sisters at Marillac College were educated in an environment where they started to think independently and form their own opinions on American society's attitudes. This fostered independent thought regarding African Americans and the spread of communism after World War II that they deemed unjust. The goal of my research is to answer the question of how the sister students' writings shed light on an expansion beyond charitable work to advocacy for

systemic change during the pre-Vatican II years. What common themes and trends were brought up repeatedly in the sister students' articles?

In order to put in context the Marillac students' writings in the pre-Vatican II years, I will look at other influences on the sisters in the St. Louis diocese who founded and taught at Marillac College. Cardinal Joseph Ritter, archbishop of St. Louis from 1946 until his death in 1967; Sister Bertrande Meyers, D.C., the first dean of Marillac College; and the liberal arts curriculum at Marillac College will be studied in further detail. Ritter created an environment for sisters participating in systemic change and influenced orders of sisters in the U.S. to begin to advocate for changes in American law and practice, such as in civil rights for African Americans. Another influential figure was Sister Bertrande Meyers, a Daughter of Charity. She studied a survey which was sent out to major superiors of many religious communities concerning the formation and education of young sisters. Her dissertation, *Education of Sisters*, showed the need for improved sister education and ministry preparation. As a result of her research, the Sister Formation Movement, 1954-1971, was founded in response to what was believed to be the inadequate education of the sisters. Many orders established special college programs for their members as a result of the Sister Formation Movement. Finally, the liberal arts curriculum at Marillac College, as proposed by the Everett Workshop, would be yet another influence which inspired the sister students to advocate for systemic change.

Prior to Vatican II, the *Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960*, which served as the school's handbook, highlighted its four goals and outcomes for its future sister students which included an "apostolic formation" that was discussed as an important part of the curriculum.<sup>18</sup> This "apostolic formation" would allow sister graduates to go out into the world and serve as

---

<sup>18</sup> *Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960*, 23-26.

Christian leaders by actively responding to the needs of the Catholic Church and humanity “in order to create a world of justice and love.”<sup>19</sup> The sister students were influenced by both the goals of the student handbook and the times they were living in to learn and respond to the injustice that was happening in the nation. During the 1960’s, the sisters at Marillac were aware of discrimination of African Americans resulting in the civil rights movement and the involvement of the U.S. in the Vietnam War to prevent a communist takeover of South Vietnam.

The sisters at Marillac College were educated in a diocese that turned their consciousness toward particular injustices—mainly involving race—faced by some Americans, especially in the St. Louis and Chicago areas. The sister students’ writings shed light on an expansion beyond charitable work to advocacy for systemic change before Vatican II came to a close in 1965. While many secondary sources and oral histories (which will be looked at in Chapter Three) only highlight sisters’ involvement during and after Vatican II, the sister students at Marillac College, were in retrospect, ahead of the times in their engagement with racial injustice, immigrants’ rights, and education, rehabilitation, and housing services for homeless populations.

The areas of ministry changed after 1965; this is illustrated in an interview with Sister Julie Cutter, D.C., alumnae of Marillac College, and also several of the oral histories in Carole Rogers’ book, *Habits of Change: An Oral History of American Nuns*. Many of these sisters were teachers in parochial schools before 1965, but the spirit of *aggiornamento* of the Second Vatican Council inspired them to turn towards working in social justice related fields. Their work for systemic change and mutual service lay in their area of interest and according to their different gifts bestowed on them. Volunteering with Guatemalan refugees and listening to their stories, working with a philanthropic housing corporation to provide homes for low-income families, starting a community education program for both Hmong and African refugee women to take

---

<sup>19</sup> *Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960, 23-26.*

classes in both English and industrial sewing—these are just some of the many examples of how the U.S. sisters attempted to make an impact on an issue near and dear to their heart using the gifts that God gave them. The sisters’ accounts show the dedication and commitment they advocated for to bring systemic change to economic and social structures and laws that they deemed as unjust. These testimonies reveal that while the sisters advocated for legal, economic, and social justice reform, they continued to take part in their charitable endeavors of helping to make the world a better place.

The first chapter of this thesis, “Sisters’ New Focus on Education and Influences on Sisters’ Interest in Social Justice,” will look at Ritter, Sister Bertrande, and the Marillac curriculum influences in close detail. The main primary sources used in this chapter are: the college’s student handbook, the *Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960*, the “Marillac College Student Rosters, 1955-1974,” and unpublished databases of compiled information on the sisters from the St. Louis Province at the Daughters of Charity, Province of St. Louis Archives which is located in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Chapter Two, “Marillac College Students: Their Discussion and Awareness of Current Issues,” will specifically address the articles that the sister students wrote in the *Marillac College Forum* and how their articles give insight into what the Midwestern sister students were thinking about and discussing with their peers both before and during the time the Second Vatican Council convened.

Finally, the third chapter, “U.S. Sisters on the Frontlines of Social Justice,” will study the oral histories from Rogers’ book, and how the spirit of *aggiornamento* motivated the U.S. sisters to continue to use their special gifts to help the underserved populations. Also, this chapter will include an oral history from an interview with Marillac College alumnae Sister Julie Cutter,

D.C., and how the environment at Marillac College and her interest in helping Guatemalan refugees inspired her to leave the classroom and take part in social justice action.

This thesis will highlight the sister students of Marillac College allowing the reader to gain a better understanding of the reform in the sisters' education during the mid-twentieth century. It will further illustrate how the Marillac curriculum helped to expose them to the outside world. The *Forum* student newspaper gives insight into what problems the Midwestern sister students were thinking about and discussing with their peers. Also, the newspaper shows which issues the students were engaged in prior to Vatican II. The influences of Cardinal Ritter and Sister Bertrande intensified their eagerness to start thinking about and taking part in social justice action and to advocate for changes for the betterment of society. Finally, the oral histories offered in the third and final chapter showcase the new ministries of U.S. sisters using their special gifts to help underserved populations. Finally, the reader will conclude that the sisters were capable of advocating for social and economic change in addition to performing charity work and teaching in a classroom setting.

## CHAPTER ONE

### SISTERS' NEW FOCUS ON EDUCATION AND INFLUENCES ON SISTERS' INTEREST IN SOCIAL JUSTICE

#### **Background on Sister Bertrande Meyers, D.C., and Her Impact on Marillac College**

Irene Genevieve Meyers, Sister Bertrande's given baptismal name, was born on December 1, 1898 in Chicago. She entered the community of the Daughters of Charity on October 25, 1915 at the age of seventeen.<sup>20</sup> She then was given the community name Sister Bertrande.<sup>21</sup> Sister Bertrande Meyers, of the Daughters of Charity (D.C.), was one of the principal sisters involved with the Sister Formation Movement and the Everett Curriculum. Sister Bertrande received her M.A. (1927) and her Ph.D. (1940) degrees from St. Louis University.<sup>22</sup> She worked in a variety of ministries prior to her time at Marillac College primarily in education, but she also did some service in social work as well. Soon after Sister Bertrande took her religious vows in 1915, she served as a teacher at St. Vincent School in Donaldsonville, Louisiana (1916-1923), and later at St. Vincent School in Perryville, Missouri (1923-1936). After she received her Ph.D. in 1940, Sister Bertrande was the Provincial Supervisor of Schools (1940-1946). From 1946-1952, Sister Bertrande took a break from education ministries and served as the director of Marillac House in Chicago which was a social

---

<sup>20</sup> It was common to enter the Community so young back then although this would never happen now.

<sup>21</sup> Unpublished database of Sisters from the St. Louise Province, record for Sister Bertrande Meyers. Daughters of Charity, Province of St. Louise Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

<sup>22</sup> Records of Marillac College. Record Group 11-1, Box 8, Folder 2A. Daughters of Charity, Province of St. Louise Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

center that provides services for child care (and still exists today). In 1952-1954, she went back to the Marillac Provincial House where she served as the Vocation Director/ Secretary of the Works.<sup>23</sup> Sister Bertrande's superiors then appointed her as the first dean at the new Marillac College. Her leadership in education and her heavy involvement in the Sister Formation Conference led Sister Bertrande's superiors to appoint her Dean of Marillac College from 1955-1960, and then president from 1960-1965. Her service as dean corresponded to the initial years when Marillac College was a two-year junior college under the auspices of St. Louis University. In 1960, when Marillac expanded to four years and became independent of SLU, Sr. Bertrande became its first president. As president of Marillac, she was able to meet with distinguished U.S. political leaders such as President Lyndon B. Johnson. In 1965, Sister Bertrande stepped down from her position as president. She passed away on March 16, 1974 at the Marillac Provincial House in St. Louis at 75 years of age and 58 years of vocation.<sup>24</sup> She was buried at Marillac Cemetery in St. Louis.

Sister Bertrande was a firm believer in the education of all sisters. In *Sisters for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, her history of the Sister Formation Movement, she said that "superiors weigh the beliefs of some educators that, since the young Sister is to live and work surrounded by lay people in her apostolate, it is important that she learn as early as possible how lay people think, and what values they hold important."<sup>25</sup> Sister Bertrande had been seen as an esteemed figure in educational circles and in the Sister Formation Movement. When looking at Sr. Bertrande, it is

---

<sup>23</sup> Unpublished database of Sisters from the St. Louis Province, record for Sister Bertrande Meyers. Daughters of Charity, Province of St. Louise Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

<sup>24</sup> Records of Marillac College. Record Group 11-1, Box 8, Folder 2A. Daughters of Charity, Province of St. Louise Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

<sup>25</sup> Sister Bertrande Meyers, *Sisters for the 21st Century* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 136.



hard to separate Marillac from the Sister Formation Movement. Marillac was, in many ways, the embodiment of all her ideas about Sister Formation.

### **The Sister Formation Movement and the Everett Workshop**

In April 1952, the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) met to consider “the need for improved sister education and ministry preparation” highlighted in Sister Bertrande Meyers, DC, dissertation.<sup>26</sup> The basis for Sister Bertrande’s dissertation was a survey sent out to major superiors of many religious communities concerning the formation and education of young sisters. Her research published in 1941 “exposed the serious need for improved sister education and ministry preparation, but little changed.”<sup>27</sup> Not until the 1950’s was the education of sisters addressed. The NCEA meeting that took place in Kansas City placed emphasis on the preparation of sisters for the teaching apostolate and on the pronouncements of Pope Pius XII (1876-1958), who stressed the best possible training for all religious (including religious sisters). The conclusion of this meeting “prompted a resolution to make a new survey [by the sisters] of current practices and policies in this matter.”<sup>28</sup> The survey included an assessment of sisters’ attitudes as well as the discovery of “what obstacles (lack of finances, unavailability of educational opportunities because of location, etc.) stood in the way of adequate preparation of teaching sisters.”<sup>29</sup> Meyers wrote that the results of the survey indicated that, while the attitude of superiors was mostly positive, “relatively few communities were complying with the requirement of most states...that every teacher have a bachelor’s degree before she was given a

---

<sup>26</sup> Sister Bertrande Meyers, D.C., *Education of Sisters* (PhD diss., St. Louis University, 1941), 7.

<sup>27</sup> Sister Bertrande Meyers, D.C., *Sisters for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 105.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

teaching assignment.”<sup>30</sup> Sister Bertrande argued in her book *Sisters for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* that the “sisters were not only lacking professional preparation, but also were without a firm rooting in the religious life, a theological understanding of a religious vocation, and the serenity that derives from competency in the duty assigned.”<sup>31</sup> The sisters who conducted the survey thought that the remedy for this problem had to be a radical one and so radical that no community working alone could accomplish it. There needed to be “a common medium of communication for those who shared the responsibility for sisters spiritually, intellectually, and professionally.”<sup>32</sup> Thus in 1954, the survey committee provided for a new organization called the Sister Formation Conference (1954-1964).

A group of sisters from a variety of American Catholic women’s religious orders founded this conference in response to what they believed was the inadequate academic education received by the 90,000 sisters who comprised the majority of the teachers in U.S. Catholic schools. The Sister Formation Conference was the first national organization of women religious. At the Sister Formation Conference, Sister Mary Emil Penet, Servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (I.H.M.), President of Marygrove College, Detroit, Michigan, and the first National Executive Secretary of the Sister Formation stated:

This rather unfamiliar expression [Sister Formation] was chosen to stand not only for the education of Sisters in a formal and informal sense, but for all the influences, pre-service and in-service, which go to make a better religious and a better professional person.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Meyers, *Sisters*, 107.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

The Sister Formation Conference was a section of the NCEA and a Commission of the Conference of Major Superiors of the United States.<sup>34</sup> The first conference actually took place in St. Louis. Sister Formation strived to improve formation programs for the young sisters by holding regional conferences at which they encouraged bishops, pastors, and the superiors of America's hundreds of women's orders to commit resources to pre-service education for sisters—"a formation that would include the spiritual, the intellectual, the social, and professional-apostolic with these facets of the Sister's life so integrated that the aim would be to produce the holy and effective religious."<sup>35</sup> Additionally, in 1956, the Sister Formation organized the Everett Workshop. The driving force behind the Everett Workshop, Sister Mary Emil Penet, I.H.M., guided the curriculum writers to generate a course of study that she hoped would educate all sisters to train the laity to work for social and economic justice. Also, the Everett Curriculum recommended that the sisters study world issues and current events. The sister students at Marillac College would take full advantage of the "cultural opportunities" in the forms of lectures and discussions to expose them to some of the social problems that were occurring on the national and the international front.<sup>36</sup>

### **The Daughters of Charity and Marillac College**

The Daughters of Charity (D.C.) was co-founded by St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac in France in 1633. Their primary focus was to "consecrate their lives to God and to

---

<sup>34</sup> Meyers, *Sisters*, 105.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>36</sup> Marillac College is a Sister Formation College that implemented the Everett Curriculum.

live in community in order to dedicate themselves to the service of the poor.”<sup>37</sup> Thus their mission statement remains to this day, “The charity of Jesus crucified impels us.”<sup>38</sup> Charity and serving others played a key role in the Daughters of Charity’s religious lives, which is a philosophy they continued in founding Marillac College.

Marillac College was the first, and also the most successful, Sister Formation college. The college opened its doors to students in January 1955 educating thousands of sisters before it closed in 1974.<sup>39</sup> The Daughters of Charity community had been sending its members to outside colleges since 1916, but their superiors were not entirely satisfied with the educational outcomes in their degreed members. The community of the Daughters of Charity appealed to the Vincentian Fathers for a more integrated program of better correlated course sequences that could be achieved with a planned curriculum of its own sponsored by De Paul University of Chicago.<sup>40</sup>

The *Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960*, cited the school’s primary purpose: “to offer each sister a liberal education in which theology acts as a unifying principle in the formation of the total person.”<sup>41</sup> The 165 acre campus was located in the rolling hills of Normandy, Missouri,

---

<sup>37</sup> Daughters of Charity, “Sister Formation Movement and Marillac College, St. Louis” June 12, 2014, *Provincial Archives*, <https://dcarchives.wordpress.com/category/formation/>.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Meyers, *Sisters*, 119. Marillac’s peak enrollment was 729 sister students in the summer of 1961. Before it closed following the spring semester of 1974, there were 84 sister students and 198 lay students from DePaul Hospital School of Nursing (DePaul Hospital students were considered extension students and received their nursing degrees from DePaul School of Nursing, not Marillac College). Collected from the “Marillac College Student Rosters, 1955-1974.” Marillac College Records. Record Group 11-1, Box 9, Folders 14-16. Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

<sup>40</sup> The Vincentian Fathers or the Vincentian Family “is made up of organizations that are inspired by the life and work of St. Vincent de Paul [who] share a belief that God is present among us, particularly in the persons who are poor and abandoned” (<http://daughtersofcharity.org/vincentian-family>.) Since St. Vincent de Paul was one of the co-founders of the Daughters of Charity order, it made sense that the community appealed to its Vincentian affiliates for an approved curriculum to educate the sisters.

<sup>41</sup> *Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960*, 23-26.

a suburb of St. Louis. The college was owned and operated by the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul of the St. Louis province. Its mission history entitled *Marillac College: A City of Sisterhoods* by Sister Bertrande states: “Marillac College is a liberal arts institution of higher learning, where it takes five years to earn a four-year baccalaureate degree.”<sup>42</sup> The school was unique “in that its clientele was restricted exclusively to sisters.”<sup>43</sup> As previously mentioned, the college came into existence in 1955 “in obedience to a directive from Pope Pius XII concerning the establishment of a juniorate [the period of between three and nine years that starts with the taking of simple vows, and continues until the profession of solemn vows] in all communities.”<sup>44</sup> The sisters at Marillac College received two types of formation at the same time: spiritual formation through the Daughters of Charity and academic training through the college. The spiritual formation included both the *postulancy* (the one-year transitional year from secular to religious life) and the *novitiate* (a time of discernment and development rooted in daily prayer and the Eucharist) happening at the same time.<sup>45</sup> The sister started college courses once she entered the postulancy, and continued with college courses once she entered the novitiate. The academic training included the *juniorate* (the formation after the sisters profess their first vows).

At the center and the heart of the campus was the St. Catherine Laboure chapel which connected the library, residence hall, auditorium, and administrative buildings. The residence hall contained 200 single rooms for students, several guest rooms, and thirty small suites

---

<sup>42</sup> Unpublished database of Sisters from the St. Louise Province, record for Sister Bertrande Meyers. Daughters of Charity, Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

<sup>43</sup> *Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960, 23-26.*

<sup>44</sup> Unpublished database of Sisters from the St. Louise Province, record for Sister Bertrande Meyers. Daughters of Charity, Province of St. Louise Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

<sup>45</sup> Since Marillac College took in many different communities, the spiritual formation at the college was much more general—courses in theology would be relevant in any community. However, the sisters still went

(combination office-bedroom) for faculty. One of the most beautiful buildings on campus was the Elizabeth Ann Seton library, where a separate glassed-in building connected by a wide corridor to the chapel and the administration building. Marillac College boasted a very aesthetically pleasing and functional campus.<sup>46</sup>

Marillac offered “a carefully planned liberal arts curriculum,” which was very important to the college’s distinctive education.<sup>47</sup> “The four-year baccalaureate program included a fifth year of professional (apostolic education) in the fields of teaching, nursing, or social work.”<sup>48</sup> Nursing required a sixth year to produce holy and effective sisters for this apostolate. Majors were offered in a variety of fields: biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, English, history, languages, sociology, and psychology. Also, the social and behavioral sciences were built upon a solid basis of philosophy and theology. Finally, regardless of a student’s chosen apostolate, all students were required to take an eighteen-hour humanities course. It was interdisciplinary and included material in world cultures, history, literature, art, music, and the main ideas that had influenced each age. The humanities course was “designed to make the student know and love her Eastern, as well as Western neighbor.”<sup>49</sup> Marillac believed:

The greatest sacrifice is demanded in point of time for it takes a minimum of five full years (from postulant through third year Junior Sister) to give an integrated formation—spiritual, social, intellectual, and professional—to produce, at least in

---

through spiritual formation that was specific their individual communities, and did so through the traditional community channels.

<sup>46</sup> After the college closed in 1974, the campus was acquired by the University of Missouri-St. Louis in 1976.

<sup>47</sup> *Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960, 23.*

<sup>48</sup> Unpublished database of Sisters from the St. Louis Province, record for Sister Bertrande Meyers. Daughters of Charity, Province of St. Louis Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

embryo, the holy and effective religious. But these sacrifices will return rich dividends.<sup>50</sup>

The college and its faculty were proud of their curriculum that they provided for their students in the spirit of Sister Formation.

The college possessed an intercommunity faculty: two thirds comprised of Daughters of Charity and one third from other orders. “During the 1959-60 school year, there were 34 teachers, representing 15 different religious communities. Of these, 15 held doctorate degrees, 16 Master's degrees, and three A.B's (applied baccalaureate degree) in the fields of music, art, and physical education.”<sup>51</sup> During this specific school year, there was only one lay teacher, the public health instructor. The faculty met every two weeks for book discussions and with students for seminars in their pursuit of intellectual perfection. Sister Bertrande noted, “If the curriculum is the soul of the college, the library its heart, then the faculty forms its personality. These dedicated women, each a scholar and distinguished in her own field...create an *elan vital* which suffuses the entire academic community and is readily sensed by visitors.”<sup>52</sup>

### **Marillac College's Goals**

Marillac College's four goals (spiritual formation, intellectual formation, social formation, and apostolic formation) listed in its school handbook interwove the Everett Curriculum's goals. One goal was spiritual formation where the college wanted the sisters to

---

<sup>50</sup> Unpublished database of Sisters from the St. Louise Province, record for Sister Bertrande Meyers. Daughters of Charity, Province of St. Louise Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

have a well-defined intellectual grasp of the spiritual life based upon understanding and conviction.<sup>53</sup> Next was intellectual formation, which provided each sister with the opportunity of enriching her intellectual life through a selection of strong courses consciously correlated to develop the virtue of wisdom which enabled her from day to day to see more clearly relationships and interrelationships, causes and effects.<sup>54</sup> The third goal was social formation which involved the sister being religiously formed and intellectually prepared and using her mind, her talents, and her heart to make society a better place for the underprivileged and the poor.<sup>55</sup> The sister student needed to learn to live and work within a group; to develop high principles and skilled practice in human relations. The final goal of Marillac College's students was apostolic formation with the objective of developing in the sisters the heart of an apostle; a heart both responsive and sensitive to the emotional, physical, and spiritual needs of others.<sup>56</sup>

As previously stated, the college curriculum's fifth year of study involved an additional year of professional (apostolic formation) in teaching, nursing, or social work that all required for careful intellectual and professional planning. However, it was believed that the sister student must first be educated before she could effectively perform any of these three careers. Sister Bertrande had spoken to the National Catholic Council on Home Economics emphasizing the need of a liberal arts education for sister teachers.<sup>57</sup> Before the Sister Formation Conference, sisters had been serving as teachers in schools without first earning a college degree. In addition

---

<sup>53</sup> *Marillac College Bulletin*, 24-26.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> "College Shows Concern in Economic Issues," *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), June 29, 1963.



to the sisters taking classes that would help them in their desired professional field (teaching, nursing, social work), as well as in courses in their major and the required humanities course, the sister students were able to take classes from a wide array of disciplines to help them become well-rounded individuals. The Everett Curriculum benefited the Marillac students beyond the classroom. Not only did the curriculum prepare them for their intended careers, but the curriculum also opened their eyes and ears to the world around them. The curriculum pushed the sister students to go above and beyond the Sister Formation Conference and take what they learned out into the world. This awareness contributed to their faculty-student discussions, their guest speaker lectures, and the events they chose to write about in their student-run college newspaper.

Marillac College opened during the post-WWII era when both the Catholic and the American identity were inseparable. In the first half of the twentieth century, both the world and America experienced dramatic changes.<sup>58</sup> The outbreak and the conclusion of World War I and World War II brushed away large threatening empires. There were new innovative inventions in transport, such as the automobile and the plane. The population of the U.S. increased, nearly doubling. The U.S. transformed from predominantly rural to predominantly urban.<sup>59</sup> The city of Saint Louis, Missouri, located in the eastern part of the state and a major port along the western edge of the Mississippi River, and where Marillac College was located, held a prominent and leading role during this booming period of dynamic changes. Cardinal Joseph Elmer Ritter, who served as the archbishop of the diocese of St. Louis in 1946 until his death in 1967, had a

---

<sup>58</sup> William Barnaby Faherty, *Dream By the River: Two Centuries of Saint Louis Catholicism 1766-1967* (St. Louis, Missouri: Piraeus Publishers, 1973), 183.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

profound effect on the city of Saint Louis through his leadership and assistance to those less fortunate. He also had an impact on the sister students who were studying at Marillac College.

### **Archbishop Ritter's Influence on the Sisters**

Joseph Elmer Ritter was born on July 20, 1892 in New Albany, Indiana.<sup>60</sup> On May 30, 1917, at the age of twenty-four, he was ordained a priest by Bishop Joseph Chartrand.<sup>61</sup> For his first assignment as a priest, he was sent to Indianapolis. On December 11, 1934, Ritter became the first archbishop of Indianapolis and the head of the new ecclesiastical province of Indiana.<sup>62</sup> During his time as bishop and archbishop of Indianapolis, he helped to bring great changes in the area of civil rights. Part of the reason why Ritter was involved in civil rights was because of his strong interest in the field of social justice. When Ritter was archbishop of Indianapolis, he promoted the African American apostolate and integrated the Catholic schools; he “built a church for them [African Americans], established a cultural center and five summer schools for catechetics, and quickly integrated the parochial schools.”<sup>63</sup> By 1943, Archbishop Ritter had integrated the Catholic parochial high schools in Indianapolis and this policy was still in place when he left the archdiocese in 1946.

On July 20, 1946, the day of Ritter's birthday, he received a letter containing the seal of the apostolic delegation in Washington D.C. announcing that Pope Pius XII had selected Ritter to

---

<sup>60</sup> Faherty, 186.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Nicholas A. Schneider and Justin Rigali, *Joseph Elmer Cardinal Ritter: His Life and Times* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 2008), 13.

succeed Cardinal Glennon as archbishop of St. Louis.<sup>64</sup> Ritter's ultimate goal when he arrived in St. Louis was "to integrate all parishes and schools of the archdiocese."<sup>65</sup> He achieved this near impossible task of integrating the Catholic schools within a year of his arrival in St. Louis. He "instructed all pastors to end segregation in the schools at the opening of the 1947 school term."<sup>66</sup> In addition, Archbishop Ritter worked to integrate the Catholic churches in the St. Louis area. The *St. Louis Argus*, a local African American oriented weekly newspaper, published an article on December 15, 1950, about Archbishop Ritter's decision to close St. Elizabeth's Parish, an African American church. Ritter's reason for this decision was "his desire to abolish any 'colored' church as such in the diocese."<sup>67</sup> Archbishop Ritter proved to be a strong advocate during the civil rights era by demanding equal education and place of worship in his archdiocese no matter one's skin color. Archbishop Ritter fought on the front lines in Saint Louis for civil rights with the hopes of making the lives of African Americans better. After a three-day Pastoral Institute on Human Rights in 1963, Archbishop Ritter stated to a news conference: "Racial injustice is a sin, and it is a serious violation of charity, which is the essence of Christianity."<sup>68</sup> Ritter influenced other dioceses to become more interested in what was happening in Saint Louis in the area of achieving human rights. Ritter was not silent on the race question and he spoke in a non-threatening manner to help bring great change to his archdiocese.

In addition to civil rights, Ritter possessed a heart for those who were disadvantaged and poverty-stricken and wanted to help make sure that their needs were addressed. In 1956, he

---

<sup>64</sup> Schneider, 63.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Faherty, 187.

<sup>67</sup> Schneider, 38.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 23.

purchased the DeSoto Hotel in Saint Louis to accommodate five hundred homeless men and women without any regard to religion or race. Ritter hoped “the accessibility to all kinds of recreational, social, and kindred facilities will make the residence attractive to a great many people.”<sup>69</sup> Ritter’s interest in helping those living in poverty goes along with his interest and commitment to social justice. The U.S. sisters who were interested in social justice would be influenced by Ritter to start their own facilities that included beneficial programs to help those less fortunate get their lives back on track.<sup>70</sup>

With Archbishop Ritter’s long list of accomplishments, it was not a surprise to many, when on December 14, 1960 Archbishop Ritter received a letter from Pope John XXIII notifying him that he had been selected to be a cardinal. During those fourteen years that he served in St. Louis, he certainly influenced Catholics, both lay and religious to participate in social justice reform for human and civil rights. The sisters at Marillac College were aware of Ritter’s role in reform and the civil rights movement.

### **The Sister Students’ Influences**

The sisters’ college curriculum played a critical role in raising awareness of social justice issues in the U.S., such as the unfair treatment of African Americans, and in their commitment in helping to make the world a better place. The sister students’ courses in not only theology, philosophy, and the required courses for their major, but also courses in secular subjects such as English, history, sociology, and American studies, helped to create the awareness of what was occurring outside the boundaries of their college campus. Also, the guest lecturers the college

---

<sup>69</sup> Schneider, 71.

<sup>70</sup> Specific U.S. Sisters involvement in social justice will be discussed more in depth in Chapter III.

brought in and the faculty and student sponsored discussions further encouraged conversation and action taken by the sister students to be in touch with the reality of what was happening to humanity in the world. Cardinal Ritter further created an environment for sisters participating in systemic change and influenced orders of U.S. sisters to advocate for changes in American law and practice such as in civil rights for African Americans and other fields of social justice that suited an individual sister's interest. In addition to Ritter, Sister Bertrande would serve as a role model, bringing needed change to the sister students' thinking and reasoning about society and humanity. Cardinal Ritter recognized Sister Bertrande Meyers as "an esteemed figure in educational circles."<sup>71</sup> Ritter said she was the "guiding spirit behind Marillac College."<sup>72</sup> She played an important role in introducing new cultural opportunities into the sisters' curriculum.<sup>73</sup> She lived the spirit of *aggiornamento* and suggested remedies and reforms to encourage a spirit of open-mindedness and change among the sisters and their apostolates. Ritter, quoting Pope Pius XII stated, "The apostolate of the Church is almost inconceivable without the help of religious women."<sup>74</sup> The sisters would be vital in their influential roles of going out into the world and helping others.

---

<sup>71</sup> Meyers, *Sisters*, x.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> These "cultural opportunities" will be discussed in Chapter II.

<sup>74</sup> Meyers, *Sisters*, xi.

**CHAPTER TWO**

**MARILLAC COLLEGE STUDENTS: THEIR DISCUSSION AND AWARENESS OF  
CURRENT EVENTS**

**The Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960 and the Marillac College Forum**

As previously stated in Chapter One, the *Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960*, functioned as the main student handbook. This manual itself was divided into several sections, with the most important highlighted in bold print: “Student Life,” “Apostolic Objectives,” “Student Organizations,” and “Cultural Opportunities.” These four sections would prove to be vital to the Marillac College sister students’ discussions of and participation in social justice movements across the U.S. nation and the world.

It is evident after reading the *Marillac College Bulletin* that Marillac College possessed an active student life in addition to its academics. Under the heading “Student Life,” the *Bulletin* declared:

Marillac College in pursuing its basic objective of forming the holy and effective religious, makes a particular effort to promote the welfare of the student, both as a thoroughly integrated individual, and as a well-adjusted member of society.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> *Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960, 37.*

Marillac College encouraged students to be involved in student clubs and organizations in order to help the sisters to become well-rounded individuals. “Student Life” focused its attention on meeting two goals. The first was “strengthening the intimate, personal life of the student in its fundamental spiritual, cultural, social, and apostolic aspects.”<sup>76</sup> The second was “affording the student ample opportunity to widen her horizons and to develop desirable group relations through participation in student organizations and government and in carefully planned co-curricular activities.”<sup>77</sup> Activities provided a way for the sisters to meet and interact with other sister students at the college. Finally, it was a way to help open them up to new ideas and gain new experiences.

The college also stressed “Apostolic Objectives.”<sup>78</sup> Marillac College looked “to familiarize the student with all the works of the Apostolate, and to prepare her to make a wise decision in keeping with her aptitudes and inclinations, when the time arrives for choosing her apostolic profession.”<sup>79</sup> Sister Bertrande believed that “through the apostolic features of the college curriculum—that is, implementing the teachings of the papal social encyclicals with actual and concrete involvement in the needs and crises of disadvantaged neighborhoods—the student is kept in close touch with the mainstream of society.”<sup>80</sup> These apostolic objectives were clearly defined:

Since the sister student at MC engages in religious, intellectual, cultural, and social pursuits in the light of her life’s work of ministering to the poor, the

---

<sup>76</sup> *Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960, 37.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Meyers, *Sisters*, 145.

underprivileged, the suffering, and the friendless, she is given the opportunity during her formative years, for actual contact with the society she is preparing to serve.<sup>81</sup>

Thus the apostolic objectives tied in with the sister students' commitment to, and interest in, the era's social justice issues. The college wanted the sister students to be aware of and involved with these objectives as early as possible in their college career. The handbook, for instance, discussed how during orientation the students would become acquainted with different environments and would also be given early contact with places where they could do service work. The three optional venues available to students were classroom situations, hospital problems, or social agencies and community organization work.<sup>82</sup> Hence the sister students' apostolic experiences were fundamental in teaching them the value of "going about doing good" in the world, such as an initiative of the sister students to write letters to the American soldiers in Vietnam.<sup>83</sup>

In addition to emphasizing participation of students taking part in "Apostolic Objectives," the college stressed its sisters' involvement in "Student Organizations." The corresponding section in the handbook discussed the ways by which students could be encouraged to participate in student government and other co-curricular activities, stating that "through this program the students are afforded opportunity to develop initiative, self-reliance, and leadership."<sup>84</sup> All of the sister student organizations were under the supervision of assigned teacher moderators. And since the college wanted to make sure that the sisters were whole-heartedly committed to the

---

<sup>81</sup> Meyers, *Sisters*, 145.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>84</sup> *Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960*, 39.



clubs in which they were enrolled, no student was allowed membership in more than two student organizations. The handbook then listed some of the major clubs on the Marillac College campus. In addition to student government, the Cecilian String Ensemble, The Marillac Choral Club, Le Cercle Francais, The German Club, Three Star Literary Club, and The Court and Diamond Club (a club that afforded its members opportunities to engage in wholesome physical and recreational activities according to the interests of the group) remained some of the most popular choices. The school also had an official newspaper, the *Marillac College Forum* “wherein faculty and students [would] exchange ideas, report college events, and keep contact with alumnae and friends.”<sup>85</sup> The newspaper, which was published monthly except in July and August, served as a valuable sounding-board for the students’ insights, showcasing their discussions of lectures pertaining to social justice and current events before the Second Vatican Council assembled in 1962. Consequently the students were opened up to an influx of ideas due to the influence of the student organizations.

Marillac College proudly maintained that its “Cultural Opportunities” could “provide a special enrichment program in the form of student assemblies, periodic recitals, concerts, plays, and lectures.”<sup>86</sup> The *Bulletin* noted that throughout the academic year “various campus organizations [would] sponsor activities which afford opportunities for self-expression, relaxation, and aesthetic development.”<sup>87</sup> These activities were seen to be beneficial for the sisters’ exposure to the issues occurring outside the boundaries of their college. As the school administrators believed, “By acting as host to distinguished guest speakers and artists, authorities

---

<sup>85</sup> *Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960*, 34.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

in the fields of religion, art, music, literature, world affairs, science, and industry, the college endeavors to widen the intellectual and cultural horizons of its student body.”<sup>88</sup> The *Forum* indicates that the emphasis on cultural opportunities was an important one, since the school believed the sisters should be aware of current events and that this awareness would stimulate a discussion of the events affecting the global state. Indeed, some of the *Forum* staff members wrote articles about just such events. The two most pressing issues the sister students focused on were the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War, and many of the discussions, plays, guest speakers, and gatherings that took place at Marillac College revolved around these significant and turbulent events in American history.

### **Forum Articles on the Civil Rights Movement**

In 1963, the same year in which Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his “I Had a Dream” speech, there was an influx of articles written on the topic of the civil rights movement. The first article published in the college newspaper pertaining to civil rights was entitled “Talk Traces Negro’s Role.”<sup>89</sup> This article reported on a lecture that was held on February 28, 1963. The lecturer, Mrs. Helen Taylor, a librarian at Marillac College, traced the African American’s contribution to American culture and reminded her audience of African Americans’ roles in defense of their country from Bunker Hill to Pearl Harbor. Taylor also talked about the acclaim which African Americans had won for the U.S. in the Olympic Games. The college’s staff sponsored such lectures to educate the sister students about the history of African Americans, and with February designated as “Black History Month,” the timing for this lecture was all the

---

<sup>88</sup> *Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960*, 38.

<sup>89</sup> “Talk Traces Negro’s Role,” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), March 19, 1963, 3.

more suitable.<sup>90</sup> Another motive for the lectures was the college's desire that the sisters be made aware of the issues of segregation occurring in the U.S. American Catholics, like Cardinal Ritter, had been taking a stance to fight for African Americans and help them attain their civil rights, and the college wanted the sister students to be aware of the fight against the injustices experienced by the African Americans living in the U.S. Moreover, Taylor's lecture contributed to the Marillac students' continuing discussion of the fight for civil rights. Indeed, this newspaper article that followed the lecture was published months before the first Second Vatican Council document—*Sacrosanctum Concilium (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)*, which was promulgated by the Council on October 4, 1963.<sup>91</sup> The goals of the Marillac College handbook resulted in the sisters starting to consider the “race question” outside of the classroom through faculty-sponsored lectures even before the Second Vatican Council met and published *Gaudium et Spes* which impacted the sister's role in social justice reform.

In the spirit of the academic year's new focus on current events, Marillac College brought in guest speakers from outside the school as well to give lectures on the race question and other issues affecting the country. The *Forum* then recounted some of these events to keep students apprised of developments on campus. The newspaper staff chose to cover events that they saw as important to the ongoing yearlong discussion of current events. The newspaper staff particularly wanted to encourage students to attend upcoming lectures dealing with civil rights. A 1963 edition of the *Forum* released an article titled “Author to Relate Role as ‘Negro.’”<sup>92</sup> This

---

<sup>90</sup> Black History Month was first observed in 1926.

<sup>91</sup> The Second Vatican Council, “*Sacrosanctum Concilium*,” October 4, 1963, *Vatican Archives*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19631204\\_sacrosanctum-concilium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html).

<sup>92</sup> “Author to Relate Role as ‘Negro,’” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), Sep. 30, 1963, 1.

article announced that Mr. John H. Griffin, a novelist who ranked highly among new writers for his talent and craftsmanship, would address Marillac faculty and students. The article further described how “he has lately come into the public eye with his magazine articles describing the treatment he received while disguised as a Negro [as] he traveled through several states.”<sup>93</sup> Griffin’s latest work, *Black Like Me*, a book-length compilation of his previous articles, had achieved international notice. The following month, on September 30, 1963, the *Forum* reported on his rousing lecture to Marillac College in an article titled “Expert Speaks on Prejudice.”<sup>94</sup> Griffin, known for painting his skin a dark color in order to live a day as an African American, spoke of the discrimination he experienced while in disguise in what was described as a “quiet, persuasive manner.”<sup>95</sup> The article quoted Griffin’s reaction when the treatment for darkening his skin was finished and he walked out the door: “I felt a horrible moment of aloneness, knowing all the dead were shut to a past I had grown up in.”<sup>96</sup> The *Forum* article then recounted several personal stories. When Griffin was in New Orleans, Louisiana, he had entered a hotel and requested accommodation in a luxury suite, but instead was brought to a clean, but small, tawdry room. Griffin assured the audience that “it wasn’t a question of money, it was because I was a Negro.”<sup>97</sup> Also, he detailed his numerous attempts to apply for work. Griffin said he was never refused a job over the phone—“but when I went in for the interview and they saw I was a Negro, I was always turned down, no matter what my qualifications.”<sup>98</sup> Griffin pointed out that the

---

<sup>93</sup> “Author to Relate Role as ‘Negro,’” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), Sep. 30, 1963, 1.

<sup>94</sup> “Expert Speaks on Prejudice,” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), Oct. 31, 1963, 1.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

greatest damage to African American people living in the U.S. was psychological damage. He then cited several examples of how the white American men had killed the spirit within their African American countrymen, making it impossible for them to keep their sense of personal worth. Griffins' lecture emphasized to the Marillac College students the unjust racial discrimination that he faced in America. Hearing Griffins' story about racial discrimination contributed to the sisters' understanding of cultural opportunities that was emphasized in their handbook.

A second article detailing a different lecture on race relations appeared in the December 1963 issue of the *Forum* and was titled "Negro Probes Race Question."<sup>99</sup> The lecture featured an African American guest speaker to the college, Dr. Ellsworth J. Evans, a Catholic and principal of Cupples Elementary School in St. Louis. Evans talked about the demonstrations for civil rights that were occurring in St. Louis and elsewhere throughout the country at the time, saying that despite many counter-indicative observations, much good benefitted from these demonstrations. In a question-and-answer session, Dr. Evans was asked what Catholics might be able to do in order to stimulate race relations. In his reply he noted that Cardinal Ritter was taking great strides in this direction, and said that the training and education being given at Marillac College was sufficient to make its recipients generous and open minded in regard to this social dilemma. That this lecture was extensively covered by the college newspaper shows that the sister students at Marillac received consistent exposure to the social justice movements that were occurring locally. This lecture was eye-opening for the students—exposing the sisters to the some of the injustices against African Americans. Also, interestingly the sister students were being exposed to both black and white experts on the topic of racial discrimination.

---

<sup>99</sup> "Negro Probes Race Question," *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), Dec. 30, 1963, 1.

Cardinal Ritter's name was brought up again in an article titled "To Risk Not Turning Back" by Sister M. Charitas, of the Sisters of Christian Charity (S.C.C.). She wrote how individuals who respond to risks, not impulsively but with foresight, are the builders of a just world and true disciples of Christianity.<sup>100</sup> She pointed to Cardinal Ritter as an example of such a person. Sister M. Charitas interviewed Morris B. Abram, president of the American Jewish Conference, who said, "Gentile in manner, he [Ritter] was firm in his determination to overcome radical and religious bigotry and to assure human rights for all men."<sup>101</sup> Although Ritter was not interviewed or quoted in her short piece, Sister M. Charitas wanted to highlight how Cardinal Ritter was an example of a leader whose efforts to improve society were to be highly regarded, not only by Christians or African Americans, but also by other religious leaders. It is little surprise, then, that Ritter's work received such great praise within the writings of the Marillac students.

In addition to lectures and discussions featuring guest speakers from outside of the college, clubs at Marillac sponsored events to encourage greater understanding of civil rights issues. One such activity was reported on an article from the January-February 1964 issue titled "MC'ers View Discrimination Through 'Raisin in the Sun.'"<sup>102</sup> *Raisin in the Sun*, a play by Lorraine Hansberry based upon an African American family's experiences in Chicago's Woodlawn neighborhood, was subsequently made into a movie. The showing of this movie took place at Marillac and was viewed by a very large audience, including not only sister-students of

---

<sup>100</sup> Sister M. Charitas, S.C.C., "To Risk Not Turning Back," *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), July 28, 1967, 4.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> "MC'ers View Discrimination Through 'Raisin in the Sun,'" *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), Jan-Feb. 1964, 5.

the college, but also many sisters from other houses in the St. Louis area. This movie showing was sponsored by the sociology and psychology departments with the hopes of encouraging further discussion among the sister students of the injustices of racial equality occurring in the U.S.

Apart from the steady discussion of civil rights in the newspaper, there was also talk of other current issues occurring in in the U.S. For example, a 1963 piece titled “College Shows Concern in Economic Issues” examined the nation’s fiscal troubles.<sup>103</sup> This article combined civil rights and economic issues to show the intertwined relationship between the two. Sister Bertrande Meyers, D.C. was invited by Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson to participate in a meeting of President John F. Kennedy’s committee on Equal Employment Opportunity in St. Louis on June 26, 1963. The goal of this regional meeting, which was attended by 750 educators and industrialists of five Midwestern states, was to promote equal job opportunities for all. At this meeting, Johnson encouraged cooperation on a local level in assigning jobs on the basis of ability and merit only, regardless of race or color. The speakers at this meeting, including Johnson and Sister Bertrande, both stressed the significant role of educators in teaching a climate of open-mindedness and democratic attitudes that would be necessary for equality of opportunity and employment. The resulting *Forum* article claimed that it was an honor for Sister Bertrande to be invited to attend this prestigious meeting. Previously Sr. Bertrande had spoken to the National Catholic Council on Home Economics held in Washington D.C. emphasizing the need for a liberal arts education for sister teachers.<sup>104</sup> This article thus conveyed the sisters’ activity in

---

<sup>103</sup> “College Shows Concern in Economic Issues,” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), June 29, 1963, 1.

<sup>104</sup> “College Shows Concern in Economic Issues,” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), June 29, 1963, 1.

social and economic problems affecting the U.S. and also their desire to brainstorm methods for putting an end to the negative impacts of such problems as unequal employment. Finally, Sister Bertrande's role in attending these committee meetings made a name for Marillac College in the country's capital and accordingly showed that the sisters were acutely interested in combating social injustices affecting the nation.

The *Forum's* coverage of these guest speakers, lectures, discussions, and film viewings demonstrated the degree to which the college wanted the sisters to participate firsthand in the campus events that happened at the college, or at the very least to recognize such events' roles in ending the grave social injustices of segregation. A great insight appeared in matters of segregation among the sister students at Marillac College. Both before and during Vatican II, there seemed to be a push for social justice among the Marillac College sister students. From the lectures, discussions, and film viewings that were initiated by both faculty and students, there appeared to be an increased awareness on campus of the racial inequalities occurring in the U.S. As evidenced from the events the sisters chose to cover for the school newspaper, the sister students saw these lectures and discussions as very important to their learning of current events. In an interview with Sister Julie Cutter, D.C., Marillac College alumnae, she admits that while she attended Marillac College there was an increased awareness of civil rights occurring in the country, however, she did not feel that when she studied at Marillac there was any action taken to combat racial inequalities. Nonetheless, the Marillac College students' awareness of the civil rights showed how the sisters were not only well trained in academics, but also in important current events and social injustices that existed in society. Thus the Marillac College students began to think about and discuss ways to bring about systemic change and put a stop to the injustices against African Americans.



### **Forum articles on the Vietnam War**

World events also became the focus of the 1963-1964 academic school year as reported in an article titled “Theme to Take Cosmic Turn.”<sup>105</sup> This article explained the announcement that “the student organization theme, ‘Current Events’ for the 1963-1964 School Year initiated a parallel series of events for MC students.”<sup>106</sup> According to student council officers, Sisters Ellen Marie, D.C. and Sharon Marie, D.C., “The immediate objective for the coming year’s endeavor will be to make the members of the student body more aware of the world events and of the sister’s relations to them.”<sup>107</sup> The officers stated that faculty and student speakers, movies, and debates at student organization meetings would provide stimuli for discussion and the necessary background to understand world happenings. The Marillac College administration was noted explicitly, stating that the college would sponsor more events and lectures to educate the sister students about the pressing global problems. After this article was printed in the paper, there were an even greater number of subsequent articles and talks about current matters which served to increase the sisters’ curiosity and involvement in current events occurring in the world. Besides issues of segregation and civil rights, there were frequent features on the Vietnam War and related conflicts of 1955-1975 as well as the spread of communism.

“Sisters Tackle Communism” was the first article on the topic of the Vietnam War that appeared in a 1965 issue of the *Forum*.<sup>108</sup> The topic of the student-initiated meetings was

---

<sup>105</sup> “Theme to Take Cosmic Turn,” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), Sep. 30, 1963, 1.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> “Sisters Tackle Communism,” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), May 12, 1965, 3.

discussed in this article. Faculty member Sister M. Patrice, Sister of the Most Precious Blood (C.P.P.S.), served as consultant to the sisters and occasionally presented lectures on Marx, Lenin, and other revolutionary communist leaders. The objective of these meetings was that the sisters should acquire a basic knowledge of the communist philosophy. Sister Julianne, D.C., initiator at the discussions, expressed the hope that “the Sisters by their acquaintance with the communistic doctrines will have an intellectual rather than a purely emotional reaction to communism so that they will be better able to cope with it.”<sup>109</sup> Sister Julianne exemplified the type of student who adapted the message of the college’s goal of “cultural opportunities” in the student handbook to “strengthen the students’ cultural awareness” by holding lectures and discussions of current issues occurring beyond the boundaries of Marillac. Sister students who were interested in studying the phenomenon of communism met weekly in small informal groups at the faculty sisters’ convenience. The *Forum* piece included a listing of magazines and pamphlets available in the library for those who might have wanted to learn more about communism. After six weeks of discussion Sister Cabrini, D.C., a student at Marillac College said, “I really have become convinced that before we can possibly fight communism we have to get rid of materialism and secularism which are at the basis of not only the communistic but also of American society.” Sister Cabrini was thus voicing her own critique of American society by arguing that the sisters should also look at other issues before fighting communism. She shows how the sisters were starting to become more self-reliant and take action against ideas that they deemed to be unjust such as communism. Her critique relates back to the handbook under the heading “Student Organizations” where the college wanted the sisters to develop self-reliance in the clubs they were a part of.

---

<sup>109</sup> “Sisters Tackle Communism,” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), May 12, 1965, 3.

In the article “Crisis in Vietnam Precipitates Student Interest, Decision, Action,” a suggestion plan was submitted to the Marillac College administration by two Marillac College students, Sr. Judith Marie and Charles Marie, Sisters of St. Francis (O.S.F.).<sup>110</sup> Their plan, which received support from the administration, included a number of effective but independent steps to be adopted by the student body that would show their endorsement of the U.S. policy of containment in southeastern Asia. The proposal suggested that the college draft a signed petition to President Lyndon B. Johnson that assured him of their patriotic and prayerful support. The sister students who supported the petition felt it should be undertaken as a significant patriotic gesture on the part of the student body. However, some sisters voiced apprehension to the signing the petition.<sup>111</sup> These sisters suggested alternate ways of showing their support, such as writing to American soldiers in Vietnam assuring their prayers. This idea received stronger support with the understanding that the letters would be written on an individual basis, rather than as a general correspondence in the name of the college. The proposal also included inviting a speaker to acquaint students with the reality of what was occurring in Vietnam. The final phase of the petition involved special prayer and sacrifice to be offered for the war, a measure which received unanimous approval by the sister students. The junior class members resolved to give further thought to ways by which they could assume a more effective part in the crisis. A follow-up article to the junior class proposed “Overseas Letter Project Fills Mailbag for Vietnam Men” in 1966.<sup>112</sup> Sister M. Jean, a Sister of Christian Charity (S.C.C.), commented, “Through

---

<sup>110</sup> “Crisis in Vietnam Precipitates Student Interest, Decision, Action,” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), Nov. 30, 1965, 3.

<sup>111</sup> The article did not state a reason why some sisters voiced apprehension to signing the petition.

<sup>112</sup> “Overseas Letter Project Fills Mailbag for Vietnam Men,” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), Dec. 22, 1966, 1.

this project we have seen more clearly our responsibility towards our fellow men, especially for those who sacrifice to win peace for this world.” This follow-up article explained that the purpose of the letter-writing project was to show the soldiers who did not usually receive mail that someone did care about them. Sister Marilita, S.C.C. and Sister M. Jean, S.C.C., touched by the positive response from soldiers and many others, directed a Christmas Project which was soon known as “Letters to Vietnam.” The sisters writing letters to the soldiers in Vietnam is an example of an “apostolic experience” in the student handbook that teaches the sisters the value of “going about doing good” in the world.

“Symposium Probes War Crisis” a discussion that took place at the college on the topic of the Vietnam War.<sup>113</sup> This discussion resulted from a suggestion made to the student council by Sisters Charles and Judith Marie, O.S.F. that the student body should be more positively informed about the war in Vietnam. In a panel on January 26, 1966, faculty member Dr. Thomas Fischer probed the ethics and the history of the war in Vietnam. Fischer asked the audience a “vital yet unasked [question]: would Vietnam under the popular communist supported Viet Minh be better off without our aid than it is right now?”<sup>114</sup> Citing Pope Paul VI’s 1965 Christmas message, Dr. Paul Beuttenmuller, a philosophy instructor, proposed two vital principles for peace which apparently had been overlooked thus far. First, that no one should be forced to take up arms, and secondly that no one should shirk the responsibility of negotiating for a peaceful resolution. Beuttenmuller suggested that “[The] war could be attributed to nationalism characterized by the U.S.’s exaggerated sense of egoism.”<sup>115</sup> Sister Charles Marie, O.S.F.,

---

<sup>113</sup> “Symposium Probes War Crisis,” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), Feb. 28, 1966, 1.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

served as student coordinator of this discussion. The fact that Sister Charles helped to plan this event shows the initiative the students took in sponsoring important discussions and educating the student body on current events. The handbook talked about the importance of the sisters' involvement in "Student Organizations" and encouraged the sisters to "develop initiative, self-reliance, and leadership." Sister Charles' initiative ties in Marillac College's goal for student leadership and student initiative in clubs and organizations on campus.

There would be more articles on the topic of the Vietnam War in the 1967 issues of the *Forum*. In "Pope Paul Calls for World View," Sister Marguerite, D.C., discussed the pope's response to the events currently unfolding in the world.<sup>116</sup> Sister Marguerite started her piece with the observation that men, women, and children were meeting death by starvation both in India and in St. Louis (referring to the civil rights movement). She continued, discussing the torturous nature of war facing civilians and armed troops in Vietnam, and posing the question, "as the daily struggle for every man to realize his humanity goes on, are we aware only of our own personal struggles?" Sister Marguerite also maintained that "the Church shudders at this cry of anguish and calls each one to give a loving response of charity to this brother's cry for help."<sup>117</sup> Finally, she brought in Pope Paul VI's response to her question in the Easter encyclical "Populorum Progressio," which calls for a universal charity: "a global vision of man and of the human race" which requires that human beings abandon their selfish tendencies and enter into the hearts of their fellow men and women with deep concern and true charity.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, the article addresses difficult questions including the depth of human concern and the sincerity of

---

<sup>116</sup> Sister Marguerite, D.C., "Pope Paul Calls for World View," *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), May 12, 1967, 2.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

faith itself. Do women, she wonders, being both of and for the world, cultivate a world view? Sister Marguerite's piece reminded the sisters to be aware of a "worldly view" and a "global vision" of some of the issues at hand, and urged them to take action to help other members of humankind instead of only thinking about their own daily struggles. Her thought-provoking writing prompted the sisters to continue deliberating and prayerfully meditating upon the relationship of their own lives to everything that was occurring around them.

The *Forum* articles continued to stress the connection between the benefit of a "global vision" and the conflict occurring in Vietnam. One article that appeared in late-1967 issued a call for the sisters to increase their involvement with the issues of communism and the Vietnam War.<sup>119</sup> According to "Needed: A Stand on Vietnam," many of the views on the issue, both positive and negative, had never been published and discussed. But with newscasts and periodicals in the library readily available, along with a news bulletin board flashing headlines, the college was hardly isolated from the news media. Moreover, a number of lectures, such as the one delivered on April 24, 1967 by Rev. Francis J. Corley, Society of Jesus (S.J.), author of the pamphlet *Viet-nam Since Geneva* (1958), provided factual background on the situation in Vietnam. Finally, class discussions emphasized the topic of Vietnam as well. However, since there had been no student riots or campus demonstrations on the Marillac campus, the writer of the article wonders about the number of Marillac students who had actually formed an opinion on the Vietnam War by that point. From that author's perspective, those with brothers and friends who are actively involved probably feel strongly one way or another. The sister student writer believes being removed from the situation and exposed to daily news reports of more bombings and the weekly list of casualties, in fact, enables individuals to become numb and

---

<sup>119</sup> "Needed: A Stand on Vietnam," *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), Oct. 27, 1967, 2.

gradually desensitized about this issue. The editorial piece ends with grim assessment that “if this is not apathy, it is dangerously close to it.”<sup>120</sup> This article asks for sisters to possess this greater “world view” and to take a stance in issues occurring around them.

A month later, another piece on the Vietnam War was published titled “Vietnam Evokes Responses.”<sup>121</sup> Mr. Scally, a Roman Catholic guest speaker, articulated his convictions on pacifism to fourteen Marillac College sisters representing five different communities. The article mentions that over the past two years Scally had grown convinced that pacifism should be his response to the Christian law of love. In Scally’s opinion, a person “who by reason of religious training and belief is conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form” may be classified as a pacifist. After the lecture, Sister Jean, an Ursuline Sister of the Roman Order (O.S.U.), a senior at Marillac College, thought Mr. Scally was a person of conviction, opining that “Jim Scally’s concept of Christianity will leave him no other alternative than to literally live the gospel of love and the brotherhood of all mankind.”<sup>122</sup> Even with messages advocating pacifism, speakers like Mr. Scally encouraged the sister students to enhance their awareness of world events and to develop their own stances on them.

These *Forum* articles on the topic of the Vietnam War show the efforts and the actions that some of the sister students were taking in current world issues. The articles were written during a time when there was a widespread sense of patriotism in the U.S. while the deployment of American troops into Vietnam went relatively unchallenged as the war escalated between the communist North and the U.S.-allied South. The newspaper staff’s writing showed how the

---

<sup>120</sup> “Needed: A Stand on Vietnam,” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), Oct. 27, 1967, 2.

<sup>121</sup> “Vietnam Evokes Responses,” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), Nov. 21, 1967, 2.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

school sponsored events and the manner in which students initiated events encouraged their peers to reflect on their religious training, in effect heeding the advice from speakers such as Scally to go out into the world spreading the “gospel of love.” Finally, the sister students realized some of the directives of the student handbook through their student initiated events and letter writing to the American soldiers over in Vietnam. They achieved the handbook’s goals of developing initiatives, self-reliance, and “going about doing good” in the world as a result of their actions on the home front (i.e. learning more about the crisis over in Vietnam and sending support to the American soldiers).

### **Forum Articles on “Intellectualism”**

During the second half of the 1960’s, the primary social justice issues of the time—namely the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War—encouraged a new “intellectualism” across college campuses including Marillac, and consequently received recognition in the student newspaper such as in the 1966 article “Awry Anti-Intellectualism” by Sr. Andre, O.S.F.<sup>123</sup> Sister Andre examined how the influx of new thought, intellectualism, on most American campuses had led once static, but now dynamic and innovative professors to prudently guide students to reevaluate their own attitudes towards and strengthen the fraternal bonds of a true intellectualism.<sup>124</sup> She goes on to say that youth all over the country have lunged forward crying,

---

<sup>123</sup> Sr. Andre, O.S.F., “Awry Anti-Intellectualism,” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), April 30, 1966, 2.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.



“We will make a difference on others.”<sup>125</sup> Sister Andre discussed how American students have appropriately armed themselves with vast reading backgrounds on every contemporary issue with which to ward off “such slanderous implications” or ignorant political views, and hopes that as a result, American college students will become the standard-bearers of the new intellectuality. Sister Andre wrote this article to encourage the sisters to not merely read her words, but to truly remake themselves as the bearers of the intellectual movement when looking at social justice issues.

Two months later, an article was published in the *Forum* titled, “Q: ‘Why do we lack initiative to: engage in intellectual discussions on controversial issues; sponsor knowledgeable speakers on relevant topics?’”<sup>126</sup> This article, though short in length, answered the question posed in the headline. Fr. Donald Miller, Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (C.S.S.R.), and Dr. Beuttenmuller had exposed their classes at Marillac College to controversial issues in ethics and theology. Their response was “If this ‘we’ means the students, they do not usually ‘sponsor’ speakers. If it means the administration, the initiative has not been lacking.”<sup>127</sup> The Marillac College staff believed, though, that the sister students should sponsor more lectures and discussions relating to the field of social justice. The administration felt that the students had not gone far enough in taking the necessary action in current events. There would be another article similar to this one encouraging the sister students to be more involved with the current issues in a

---

<sup>125</sup> Sr. Andre, O.S.F., “Awry Anti-Intellectualism,” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), April 30, 1966, 2.

<sup>126</sup> “Q: ‘Why do we lack initiative to: engage in intellectual discussions on controversial issues; sponsor knowledgeable speakers on relevant topics?’” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), June 30, 1966, 4.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

later *Forum* issue titled, “Church’s Challenge,” by Sister M. Ignatius, O.S.F.<sup>128</sup> Sister M. Ignatius wrote, “With the vision the [Second Vatican] Council has given them of the Church and the religious life, sister students are obliged to shape the Church and the world.”<sup>129</sup> She continued, “A woman of vision capitalizes on the involvement of interest, inquiry, evaluation of criticism and suggestion.”<sup>130</sup> Sister M. Ignatius thought that every sister student at Marillac College should be responsible to the Church and the world. The intellectualism school of thought combined with the Second Vatican Council’s call to *aggiornamento* thereby encouraged the actions of the sister students at Marillac College and sisters all over the country to go out into public society and commit themselves to justice.

---

<sup>128</sup> Sister M. Ignatius, O.S.F., “Church’s Challenge,” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), Sept. 29, 1966, 2.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER THREE

### U.S. SISTERS ON THE FRONTLINES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

#### The Sisters' Shift from Teaching to Action

As evident from the Marillac College student newspaper *The Forum*, although there started to be discussion of social justice action in the mid 1950's the sisters seemed to dive into more social action during the 1960's. Cardinal Ritter commenced the social justice movement in the late 1950's, and the sister students at Marillac College started thinking, writing, and discussing important events such as the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War during this tumultuous time period in American history. The sister students were drawn to social justice reform by different factors: their curriculum at Marillac College, the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, and also the events currently occurring in the country. Sisters all over the country responded to social justice movements and as *Gaudium et Spes* states the sisters would "render mutual service according to the different gifts bestowed on each" to make the shift from teaching to action in helping the various underserved populations: the homeless (African American or veterans), women (African American women in particular), prisoners, and immigrants.

In the pre-Vatican II era at the beginning of the twentieth century, a vast number of women entered the religious life, and the majority of the sisters were designated to teach in the

increasing number of parochial schools.<sup>131</sup> The Catholic schools were taught predominantly by sisters since the schools did not have a lot of funding and the nuns could be compensated inexpensively since they took vows of poverty. Also, the presence of the sisters in the parochial schools confirmed the school's "strong Catholic identity."<sup>132</sup> According to professors Rev. Stephen Denig, C.M., a tenured professor at Niagara University's College of Education, and Rev. Anthony Dosen, C.M., a professor at DePaul University's College of Education, the Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the pre-Vatican II era were committed "to catechize the Catholic youth and to preserve them from Protestant proselytizing."<sup>133</sup> They believed the focus of the attention of the ministry present in the Catholic Church was in an "inward direction."<sup>134</sup>

Post-Vatican II, the Church started to turn outward and serve not only Catholics, but also the entire world as well. Vatican II influenced orders of nuns "to rediscover their charism and the vision of their founders and charged them to renew their constitutions."<sup>135</sup> Pope Pius XII, motivated by a concern that the Church must not be irrelevant to modern society, "quietly pressed congregations of religious to reform any outdated rules that impeded sisters from pursuing effective and relevant apostolates."<sup>136</sup> The Second Vatican Council, building on these

---

<sup>131</sup> Michael P. Caruso, SJ., *When the Sisters Said Farewell: The Transition of Leadership in Catholic Elementary Schools* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2012), 9.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>133</sup> Stephen J. Denig, C.M. and Anthony J. Dosen, "The Mission of the Catholic School in the Pre-Vatican II Era (1810-1962) and the Post-Vatican II Era (1965-1995): Insights and Observations for the New Millennium," *The Mission of the Catholic School* 13 (2009): 141.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> Caruso, 38.

<sup>136</sup> Amy L. Koehlinger, *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 9.

foundations, replaced St. Thomas Aquinas's image of the Church as a perfect society with an understanding of the Church as the "People of God."<sup>137</sup> The sisters, like other Catholics during this uncertain and exciting period, "had to negotiate and renegotiate their role within a Catholic theological and ecclesial landscape that was constantly shifting beneath their feet."<sup>138</sup> The national conferences of the Sister Formation Movement and the educational programs such as the curriculum implemented at Marillac College in the 1950s "prepared them [the American sisters] intellectually, professionally, and structurally to respond vigorously and enthusiastically to the thoroughgoing call for transformation that emerged through the Second Vatican Council."<sup>139</sup>

The effects of the Council on the sisters were often felt in areas that related to the religious apostolate. First, the Council loosened the most severe of the twentieth-century regulations that had restricted sisters' activities and movements. The sisters were now allowed greater freedom to experiment with new configurations of community, mission, and lifestyle.<sup>140</sup> More importantly, "the Council provided women religious with an outward-oriented theology that justified and in fact encouraged direct engagement with social problems."<sup>141</sup> The American sisters had already implemented structural and educational changes through the Sister Formation Conference, however, now "the conciliar mandate for Catholicism to engage with the world fully revitalized the apostolate among religious in the United States, moving it from the margins to the

---

<sup>137</sup> Koehlinger, 9.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

very center of religious life.”<sup>142</sup> This led the sisters to immerse themselves in a wide range of different lifestyles and ministries using the special gifts they were blessed with.<sup>143</sup> The women religious who formerly held typical teaching positions in parochial schools now directed their professional skills toward addressing the most pressing social issues of the time—referring to themselves as the “new nuns.”

First this chapter will look at a personal interview with Sister Julie Cutter, D.C., Marillac College alumnae. Next this chapter will delve into Carole Garibaldi Rogers’ book *Habits of Change: An Oral History of American Nuns* which includes the memoirs of sisters from different orders in the U.S. serving the underserved. Rogers interviewed over fifty American sisters, and she records in their own words how the sisters “moved from a life of rigid seclusion to one of responsible freedom.”<sup>144</sup> This chapter will specifically look at some of the sisters who were on the frontlines for social justice.

### **Interview with Sister Julie Cutter, D.C., Marillac College Alumnae**

Sister Julie Cutter, Daughter of Charity, is a “new nun” who moved from teaching to social action and using her “special gifts” to serve Guatemalan refugees. Julia Cutter was born in 1947 in Ames, Iowa. Sister Julie remarked that “becoming a sister has always been a growing kind of interest and awareness.”<sup>145</sup> At the age of four, she moved to Philadelphia where she

---

<sup>142</sup> Koehlinger, 10.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>144</sup> Carole Rogers, *Habits of Change: An Oral History of American Nuns* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 2011), front flap.

<sup>145</sup> Sister Julie Cutter, D.C., telephone interview by author, January 26, 2015.

attended a parochial primary school. Before the beginning of seventh grade, she moved to Dallas where she continued to attend a parochial school. However, she attended a public high school. During her years of parochial schooling in Philadelphia and Dallas, Sister Julie remarked that she was always interested in what the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul sisters, who served as her teachers during her primary school years, were doing. She went to Rice University for a year, but she experienced a sense of restlessness. Sister Julie said that is when she knew that she had to try the religious life. “I always had an interest in serving the most disadvantaged and seeing Christ in people who are poor.”<sup>146</sup>

Once Sister Julie entered the Daughters of Charity community, she became a student at Marillac College which she described as “a very vibrant place.”<sup>147</sup> She was a double major in mathematics and education. “I appreciated meeting people from different parts of the country. All of us got an excellent education. I had terrific professors—most who were sisters.”<sup>148</sup> Interestingly Sister Julie was a writer for the *Marillac College Forum* where her articles focused on activities at the college, celebrations, and ceremonies. Sister Julie attended Marillac College from August 1966 to May 1972. While she admits that she attended Marillac during a very vibrant time, she did not experience any activist groups in the St. Louis area. “I was aware of what was going on and events that were happening in the U.S., but I did not have the attitudes of expressing myself which I have since then. In the Formation program, some of the most active priests and nuns in St. Louis addressed the civil rights movement. They were preparing us for once we graduated but we still were not really independent at that point.”<sup>149</sup> Sister Julie

---

<sup>146</sup> Sister Julie Cutter, D.C., telephone interview by author, January 26, 2015.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

reaffirms the notion that the students at Marillac College were educated in an environment where they started to think about current issues such as the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War, however, she did not feel that she was independent in her thinking until after she graduated. In May 1972, in addition to graduating from Marillac, Sister Julie took her first vows. She taught in Catholic schools in suburban St. Louis and in Keokuk, Iowa for fifteen years. Her favorite subject to teach was algebra. In 1979, she graduated from Loyola University in Chicago with her master's degree in education and returned to St. Louis, teaching at a diocesan high school for African American students. Finally, Sister Julie taught in New Orleans at Seton Academy for five years.

While Sister Julie was in New Orleans, she became involved in Pax Christi New Orleans that was part of the international Catholic peace movement serving as the co-coordinator since they really needed a staff person. Sister Julie was involved with Pax Christi's mission of "prayer, study, action" for peace. "I deepened my understanding of the gospel call for justice and peace by helping bring in monthly speakers and retreats."<sup>150</sup> While in New Orleans, Pax Christi protested the Trident submarine (a nuclear sub) to stop the development of nuclear submarines in Georgia. Sister Julie helped to coordinate all those meetings against the Trident submarine and the development of other nuclear submarines as well as teaching about non-violence. Sister Julie's work with Pax Christi led to her interest in social justice action. In particular she would be interested in the violence in Central American countries.

In 1982, Central America started "blowing up." During the 1980s, Guatemalan refugees fled to refugee camps in Mexico because of the oppression by the government forces of Guatemala against the indigenous Guatemalan refugee population. Sister Julie wanted to deepen

---

<sup>150</sup> Sister Julie Cutter, D.C., telephone interview by author, January 26, 2015.



her understanding of the issue. In 1991, she traveled to Guatemala to start a year of intensive Spanish language study. In the fall of 1992, Sister Julie returned to the U.S. and she looked for a job in Texas where she could continue to speak Spanish. However, the Jesuit Refugee Services requested the presence of “pale-faced” Daughters of Charity in the refugee camps of Mexico and Sister Julie, along with three other Daughters of Charity sisters, served with the Daughters of the Province of Mexico living in the camps. “In January 1993, the first 500 Guatemalan families arranged to return to their homeland under the auspices of the United Nations. We four US Daughters of Charity returned with them to a rural part of northern Quiche.”<sup>151</sup> Sister Julie described how “along with Doctors without Borders, international accompaniers, and development organizations, we were people standing with these people.”<sup>152</sup>

During her time in Guatemala, Sister Julie learned about indigenous self-government. The refugees themselves were very well-prepared.

After ten years of education in Mexico, the young refugee adults began a school for all the children. These teachers preserved the indigenous languages. The catechists coordinated religious education and Sunday services, meeting every Saturday to prepare the liturgy. The returned refugees organized the local government, distribution of land and resources, and projects through multiple committees and meetings.<sup>153</sup>

In 1996-1997, Sister Julie and the other Daughters of Charity participated in the Catholic Church’s effort to “recuperate the historical memory” of the experiences of the people. They listened to the refugees’ stories and documented them. The Church then published the results, including the record of atrocities and violence committed by the Guatemalan army. However, Sister Julie commented, “The truth telling process and the signing of the Peace Accords were

---

<sup>151</sup> Sister Julie Cutter, D.C., telephone interview by author, January 26, 2015.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

significant steps, but sadly did not achieve peace in Guatemala.”<sup>154</sup> Sister Julie and the other American Daughters of Charity sisters returned home in December 1997.

Currently Sister Julie works as an administrator for the Sisters of Charity Federation. Her interest and experience in working with refugees demonstrates how she left the classroom to go out into the world and help to bring systemic change while also continuing to carry out her charitable endeavors helping those who are underserved. Sister Julie helped to defend the Guatemalan refugees and she strove to bring peace to Guatemala. Using her gifts of Spanish speaking skills, interest in human rights, listening to others, and commitment to put a stop to violence, Sister Julie strove to bring a needed peace for the families in Guatemala against the atrocities of their national government.

### **American Sisters Serving the Underserved Populations**

Sister Peg Hynes (1933-2002) of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania, started out in the Catholic school classroom, but then realized she wanted to do more to help underserved people in the country. In her memoir she discussed how she received a good education and how she believed the Sisters of St. Joseph community was “noted for the education it gives its sisters.”<sup>155</sup> Sister Peg reflected on her first experience teaching at St. Athanasius (1976-1980), an inner city school in Philadelphia where she served as the principal and experienced a wonderful eye-opening experience of teaching a mostly minority student body. However, her experience was not always a positive one working with a pastor, who she described as “bigoted and prejudiced.” The pastor gave her a hard time about every little thing

---

<sup>154</sup> Sister Julie Cutter, D.C., telephone interview by author, January 26, 2015.

<sup>155</sup> Rogers, “Sister Peg Hynes,” *Habits*, 93.

which then always erupted into a fight between them.<sup>156</sup> After Sister Peg finished her studies, she went to Washington D.C. (1980-1986), where she taught eighth grade at a parochial school “where social justice was important.”<sup>157</sup> Sister Peg described how education was necessary for these minority children if they had any hopes of making things “any better for themselves.”<sup>158</sup> Teaching at this parish school in Washington D.C. was an example of how she applied the sisters’ increased interest in social justice to the educational environment. Sister Peg’s interest in social justice would ultimately lead her out of the classroom and into the world.

Sister Peg discussed how after teaching for thirty-one years and following her battle with cancer, she wanted to pursue a different path. At the time she interviewed for a housing corporation, Heart of Camden, which needed someone to take care of the finances. On her first night at the housing corporation located in Camden, New Jersey (which still exists today) she came across a prostitute on the street and also observed a drug deal. After witnessing this, Sister Peg reminisced how she thought to herself that this was what she was here for—to help these people who need to do this to survive. Heart of Camden started in the 1980s to help low-income (mostly African American) families. This philanthropic housing corporation “buys houses, rehabs them, and sells them to low-income families, families who would never qualify for a mortgage.”<sup>159</sup> Also, there is no interest on the mortgage payments. Sister Peg’s job when she came to the Heart of Camden, besides taking care of the finances, was to manage the houses that would be bought and then rehabbed by the group. Besides the housing project, the group served as a counseling program and also a food distribution center for emergency food supplies. Sister

---

<sup>156</sup> Rogers, 93.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 95.

Peg was responsible for helping to start a medical clinic, and she also was involved in trying to start both a youth center and a family resource center. Sister Peg helping to establish these centers for the betterment of humanity was a way in which she went out to make a difference to those less fortunate and who needed the assistance.

Sister Peg noted that if anyone were to tell her back in 1986 when she took this job that this is what she would be doing, she would have said that she is not qualified for the job.<sup>160</sup> Yet she enjoyed helping other people with such tasks as: figuring out why they fell behind in their payments, why a young child was sent to jail, or why a married couple split up. Sister Peg described her missionary work as “one step forward, and two backward.”<sup>161</sup> She believed that disappointments come (a child sent to jail, falling behind in payments, divorce, death, etc.), but one has to remember “the step forward,” to consider oneself very lucky and live everyday with gratitude, which if not taken would make overcoming these disappointments very difficult. Sister Peg believed if anyone were to ask her if she regretted leaving the schools and going into the housing business, she would reply “No. Because this is missionary work....Sometimes harder. It is not as glamorous as maybe working in Peru....This is tough.”<sup>162</sup> Sister Peg’s embarkation into new ministries other than education, helped to exhibit the Sisters of Saint Joseph’s traditional vow of poverty by helping those people underserved and allowing the sisters to grow closer in their spiritual relationship with God. Sister Peg served according to the Sisters of Saint Joseph mission statement “we live and work so that all people may be united with God and with

---

<sup>160</sup> Rogers, 96.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 97.

one another,” to help those less fortunate become whole and holy again by joining the front lines of work for social justice.<sup>163</sup>

Another sister Rogers interviewed who left the schools to serve the undeserved was Sister Marie Lee, a Dominican from Sinisinawa, Wisconsin.<sup>164</sup> After she attended the University of Wisconsin and took her vows, she taught second grade at a school in Chicago and later taught at a high school in Minnesota for twenty-three years before she was sent to Regina High School in Minneapolis, Minnesota to teach religion. Sister Marie Lee said, “I taught religion for quite a while, and then it seemed like it was time for me to get out of that, because I was getting older and it was harder to teach religion [to teenagers].”<sup>165</sup> Regina High School was in a diverse neighborhood that was half white and half African American, although she noted that the school did not reflect this diversity. “We didn’t have enough black people to reflect the neighborhood situation. And we’d talked about that tons of times in our community: What could we do?”<sup>166</sup> In response the school decided to compile a neighborhood survey to see if community education would appeal to people in the African American neighborhood and if they would come to class. This allowed them to visit the families’ homes of their school community. As a result, they started a community education program called Project Regina, and her job was to run the night classes that involved all different types of activities: dancing, knitting, sewing, crocheting, and typing. She explained that it seemed to work and the classes brought in people from the

---

<sup>163</sup> Sisters of Saint Joseph, *Home Page*, <http://ssjphila.org/new/>.

<sup>164</sup> Rogers, “Sister Marie Lee,” *Habits*, 72. No dates were stated in her oral history, however, Rogers stated in the introduction of the oral history that Sister Marie Lee was currently 75 years old at the time Rogers’ book was published in 1996 then she was born in 1921.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

neighborhoods, which was their goal. Sister Marie Lee wanted to work with the low-income people and in her memoir she recounts a day in 1980 she would never forget.

She was holding one of the first sessions for a basic knitting class and “looked out the window and it was like a page from *National Geographic*.”<sup>167</sup> She observed women coming off the bus, walking single file. The women were all short and had long hair and long dresses. These women then came into the classroom:

When they walked into our room, it was an amazing sight. We could hardly believe what we saw. It seemed like another century had opened up and just poured the culture into our classroom. It was an exciting thing because it was a new adventure, something like a fairy tale coming true. We had worked with low-income people before—that’s what we wanted to do—but this was something entirely new.<sup>168</sup>

These women wanted to sew and they would always arrive early to class. Sister Marie Lee said they did some further research and found out these women were Hmong who originated in China. What these women knew of their ancestry was handed down to them by oral tradition and they did not know how to read or write. But also, they possessed a “real native gift” for sewing and needlework.<sup>169</sup> They heard about Project Regina and just kept coming and coming. Because of all the Hmong women that came, Project Regina turned into a program for refugees, and today serves recent African refugee women.<sup>170</sup> These women began having classes in both

---

<sup>167</sup> Rogers, 76.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>170</sup> Since 1998, Project Regina is now part of the Minnesota African Women’s Association. Their program, African Women’s Sewing Cooperative, is located at the former Project Regina venue in Minneapolis and its goal “is designed to provide recent African refugee women with the opportunity for greater self-sufficiency, job training, and employment in an area of work and with an approach that they have indicated will address the major challenges they face to employment.” Information accessed at [http://mawanet.org/html/sewing\\_cooperative.html](http://mawanet.org/html/sewing_cooperative.html).

English and industrial sewing where they made boys' and girls' underwear. Sister Marie Lee ended her memoir saying:

I think I've learned something about compassion working with them, working side by side, and I think in general I've been able to see the poor or the fringe people through different eyes. Not looking at them, but in a way getting behind and under and looking through their situation with them. Those are things you know in your head. You say, "Oh sure, I know that," but really experiencing it with individual people makes a whole difference in the way you feel."<sup>171</sup>

Sister Marie Lee reflected on her experiences of leaving the classroom and serving those undeserved in the field of social justice. As a result, she learned about compassion and felt gratitude as well from the people she helped. From talking to the individual refugees she was able to learn their story and bond with individuals on a new level that she had previously never experienced. Sister Marie Lee is an example of a sister who took the teachings of Second Vatican Council and went out into the world to spread the good news, and help those less fortunate to help make American society a better place for refugees living in a country and not knowing the language.

Sister Fran Tobin, who entered the Religious of the Sacred Heart Order in 1954, was another sister who became an advocate for social justice during the second half of the twentieth century. During the 1960's, she taught both middle school and high school. In 1973, after graduating from the master of divinity program at Andover Newton Theological School in Boston, she served at St. John's Provincial Seminary near Detroit, Michigan as director of field education (also known as pastoral training). This was the first time a woman held this position in the seminary where all the priests of Michigan were trained. Sister Fran admitted that her first

---

<sup>171</sup> Rogers, 78.

year was a little rocky. The priests there were used to being “priests with collar power” and saw her as inferior, which bothered Sister Fran.<sup>172</sup>

Sister Fran argued that 1973-1980 was a significant time period in the American Church. The sisters in religious life had taken Vatican II very seriously and “we were loving it.”<sup>173</sup> Now her task at the seminary was “to develop placements and supervisors where we could send young men and women to receive training in all kinds of ministry.”<sup>174</sup> However, by 1979 or 1980 Sister Fran was starting to become “very tired” and discouraged.<sup>175</sup> One aspect that really discouraged her was “the institutional Church’s inability to understand that women and men were equal. It didn’t bother me that they were priests and I wasn’t. What bothered me was the Church’s approach to women.”<sup>176</sup> In 1980, Sister Fran took a sabbatical year and she observed so much poverty in Detroit that she wanted to do something about it. Halfway through her sabbatical year she worked with the Team for Justice which is an organization that works for change in the Detroit prison systems and is still in existence today. For two to three years, Sister Fran worked as a counselor to women in jail, which taught her “that women didn’t have the rights I thought they should have.”<sup>177</sup> She was already aware from her time serving at St. John’s Provincial Seminary that women were unequal in the institutional Church. However, after working at the jail, Sister Fran said, “But when I saw it was also true in society, I wanted to do

---

<sup>172</sup> Rogers, “Sister Fran Tobin,” *Habits*, 81.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*



something about it.”<sup>178</sup> Sister Fran did not like the injustice towards women that she observed in American society and she was determined to put an end to it by becoming a lawyer.

A very wise provincial in her congregation told Sister Fran that she should test out the legal field first before she devoted herself to it wholeheartedly. Initially, she did so by working with women in jail for another year. Most were drug addicts and prostitutes, and some did not even speak English.<sup>179</sup> She found herself going to court with some of the women she worked with where she was very creative. For example she might say to a judge, “Judge, I don’t think 30 days is going to cure the problem of prostitution. But I do think if we could get her into a program, and get her off drugs, and get her children cared for, then maybe this person wouldn’t be a prostitute.”<sup>180</sup> One day, a judge called her into his chambers, and said “when are you going to law school? Because you’re doing what a lawyer does every time you come into the courtroom.”<sup>181</sup> She was being an advocate for women—to help them achieve the justice she believed they deserved in American society which still viewed women as inferior.

She eventually attended Antioch Law School in Washington, D.C., which was an institution that trained people to work with the poor. After she took the bar exam, Sister Fran went to Guatemala “because by then I knew I wanted to study Spanish so I could work with Hispanic women.”<sup>182</sup> Her time in Guatemala was an eye-opening experience and soon after she went on to El Salvador and Nicaragua. Following her travels and meeting religious from different orders, she became interested in shifting from representing only women to representing

---

<sup>178</sup> Rogers, 81.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

immigrants (which included immigrant women). Sister Fran first worked at CARCEN (Central America Resource Center), a nonprofit organization that did legal work for Central Americans in Houston, Texas, until she got asthma and her doctor told her she could not live in Houston's humid climate. She then found a job at Catholic Charities in San Diego, California as a staff attorney for immigrant services. Sister Fran believed:

Immigration law for me is representing undocumented people. Most of them [immigrants] are in deportation proceedings, and they are really defending their lives, because if they are deported, it means they must leave the country. I have to prove why they should be there, and that's getting harder and harder to defend, even though many of them left their country for legitimate reasons.<sup>183</sup>

Sister Fran found her passion in immigration law leading her to argue that it is foolish for Americans to profile immigrants. She would be delighted if any of her clients lived next door to her and were legal citizens because immigrants are very generous and are hard workers. Also, legal immigrants need lots of help since they are poor coming from poor countries.

I would encourage the American people to keep helping people, regardless of what our government says. If somebody's starving and needs a job, and you've got something for them to do, let them do it, and pay them for it. As a lawyer I'm not supposed to say that, because that's unauthorized work. But as a human being and a lawyer, I would say I'll err on the side of a human being. I don't apologize for it either.<sup>184</sup>

Sister Fran, possessing a deep concern for immigrant women, believed that she was not trying to change the system, but was injecting some humaneness into it that she believes is highly important. Similar to Sister Marie Lee, Sister Fran also learned about compassion. She admitted that sometimes there was no relief and nothing she could do for one of her clients, although she would still offer the utmost encouragement. As she saw it, "It's part of being a human being—

---

<sup>183</sup> Rogers, 82.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 83.

it's part of being Christian. I think it's very much part of being a woman religious."<sup>185</sup> Sister Fran was an example of a sister who was on the frontlines of social justice committed to go outside of her comfort zone and help those less fortunate than herself. She ended her memoir saying:

What can I do today that is going to make life better for somebody tomorrow? That's a good question to ask. And if it puts me at odds with institutions, with powers—be it a political power, be it a Church power, whatever kind of power—fine. Your energy needs to be for the future, not for the past.<sup>186</sup>

The last line of her memoir is especially important and defines the role of sisters involved in the field of social justice who commit themselves to making changes for the betterment of humanity and the world a better place.

Sister Jeanne Cashman was devoted to the field of social justice during the second half of the twentieth century, leaving teaching to focus her gifts on helping the homeless. Sister Jeanne's memoir began noting that she was a wild and a reckless youth.<sup>187</sup> Her education was not very important to her which explained her low grades at Fordham University. However, she always possessed "a burning sense of justice, particularly when it involved a person or a group of people who were being oppressed."<sup>188</sup> While studying at Fordham, Sister Jeanne was involved in the Catholic Interracial Council. She befriended one of the African American students at Fordham "largely because he stood up in a group and said that he had gone down south and went to Mass on Sunday and had some trouble getting on line for communion, because some man was

---

<sup>185</sup> Rogers, 83.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>187</sup> Carole Rogers, "Sister Jeanne Cashman," *Habits*, 84.

<sup>188</sup> Rogers, 84.

blocking his way.”<sup>189</sup> Once he did make it to the front, the priest would not give him Communion and told him that “the black church is down the street.”<sup>190</sup> Sister Jeanne could remember being overcome with rage after hearing this story “and knowing that my Church had the nerve to refuse the body of Christ to a person who had every right to it....It turned out I felt more strongly about it than he did, because he laughed it off when we were talking in private.”<sup>191</sup> Nonetheless, her involvement in the Catholic Interracial Council and her anger at how her friend was treated in the past by the Church motivated her to help people who were underserved. However, Sister Jeanne did not enter the religious life, the Ursulines, until she was well out of college. After she joined the Ursulines, she thought, “Well, that’s good, because they care what happens to people and they have the same values I have.”<sup>192</sup>

Both before and after she took her vows she was a teacher and taught every grade in the Bronx (except fifth grade). Sister Jeanne said she loved every minute of teaching. “It’s hard to explain that I didn’t leave teaching. Something else happened, and I segued, rather than moving up or down or away from.”<sup>193</sup> This “something else” was a master’s degree in creation-centered spirituality, which is “an effort to reclaim what was lost by our concentration on original sin.”<sup>194</sup> The master’s program focused on the “trinity” of creativity, justice, and compassion and she enjoyed her third trimester very much as it focused on compassion. “We had to choose an oppressed group of people to work with. I wanted to work with a group of people whom I didn’t

---

<sup>189</sup> Rogers, 85.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

know so much about” and she chose the gay community [in the Bronx].<sup>195</sup> A valuable lesson she learned working with the gay community was that:

Because one of the things that has always been a part of my philosophy in working with “those” people, whoever “those” people are, is that you’re not [there to] make them feel you’re better than you are. Or even different. I think one of the things that helps you succeed in working with people who are different is to do what you can in their context and not be the great *deus ex machine* coming in to save the world. I don’t pretend to be homeless among the homeless, but I guess I don’t want to come off as well housed either.<sup>196</sup>

Sister Jeanne was very passionate about helping the people who she served. In 1982, she took a position to direct the peace and justice efforts in the diocese located in Wilmington, Delaware. She saw this as an opportunity to use what she learned when helping homosexuals and also to move out into the community. When she worked for the diocese, she reflected upon the difference between charity and justice. According to Sister Jeanne, charity is “an easier thing for most people to do” and “It’s something that makes you feel good because you’ve done something good for somebody else.”<sup>197</sup> She believes justice “is realizing that, just by being human persons, people are entitled to certain rights and certain treatment, and that if they can’t fight for themselves, somebody else needs to do that.”<sup>198</sup> Sister Jeanne saw herself as one of these somebodies working for change and a just world—which she saw as much more challenging than simply just offering charity. In order to enforce that needed change, she decided to focus on “the systems that are keeping people oppressed.”<sup>199</sup>

---

<sup>195</sup> Rogers, 87.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Rogers, 89.

Sister Jeanne decided to focus her efforts on helping the homeless. She worked with committees from two churches, the Catholic and the Episcopal, to open a homeless shelter that would provide all of the services that homeless people could use: a drug and alcohol rehabilitation program, a GED (general equivalency program), and DelTech, a community college to provide job training.<sup>200</sup> In 1991, Sister Jeanne and the members of the two committees opened Sojourners' Place in Wilmington, Delaware (which is still in existence today). The origin of the name came from the biblical concept of a sojourner as a person who goes from place to place and is given hospitality and other necessities he or she needs to continue his or her journey.<sup>201</sup> Sojourner House not only provided hospitality to the homeless, but also whatever other services they need to continue in life. Sister Jeanne served the homeless out of her compassion to help get people back on their two feet again and make a better life for themselves and their families. Sister Jeanne is yet another example of an American sister who left the premises of her convent to go out into the world and help those in need—a true fighter for social justice.

The last sister who Carole Rogers interviewed and featured in her section “Serving the Undeserved,” was Sister Mary Rose McGready, a Daughter of Charity sister.<sup>202</sup> Sister Mary Rose said when she was in high school she was attracted to the idea of the Daughters of Charity serving the poor. In September 1946, she left home and entered the community right after WWII ended.<sup>203</sup> She was a postulant for about two months at a children's home in Philadelphia before

---

<sup>200</sup> Rogers, 89.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Sister Mary Rose McGready's memoir does not mention her being educated at Marillac College. Most likely because she already was in college when Marillac was founded and she was not from the Midwest.

<sup>203</sup> Rogers, “Sister Mary Rose McGready,” *Habits*, 97. Sister Mary Rose McGready's oral history does not say where she grew up.

being sent to Boston to teach fifth grade at a children's home. She described the children's home as more like an orphanage, however, she loved it. She finished her bachelor's degree at Emmanuel College, and in 1957, she was missioned to Rhinebeck, New York to start her graduate work at Fordham University and also serve at a psychiatric treatment center for seriously disturbed children. Although the work was tough because the children could be hard to handle, she loved her experience working with children.

Sister Mary Rose was a strong supporter of the change that the Second Vatican Council brought to the Church. In 1963, right after the Vatican Council, the habit changed. "The Daughters of Charity had worn the cornette [an elaborate white linen headdress with large white wings on each side, commonly worn by women, and men, in the fourteenth century]."<sup>204</sup> On September 22, 1963, the Daughters of Charity took off the cornette and instead put on the blue veil. Sister Rose remarked:

And it was okay, because we were in the era of change in the Church and wanting to be more relevant and rid ourselves of any trappings that would prevent us from being relevant to the modern world.... Up until that point you came into the community, and you came into a culture that was very well established. We lived on schedules; we lived on routines—and then all of a sudden *change* became the most important word.<sup>205</sup>

In addition to the vows of chastity, obedience, and works of charity, the Daughters of Charity took a fourth vow of service to the poor and Sister Mary Rose was asked to speak at national meetings of the community usually addressing the topic "What does the service of the poor need to look like now that we're in this modern era?" Sister Mary Rose said that in terms of service, she was the forefront of this new change in the community, and instead of being fearful like some of the other sisters, she embraced this new thinking of delving into social justice action.

---

<sup>204</sup> Rogers, 99.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

The biggest change of her career occurred in 1971. She and four other sisters were asked to come to Brooklyn, New York to start a community-based service in a parish run by the Vincentian Brothers, who are the brother community of the Daughters of Charity. The five moved from a “fairly countrified atmosphere in the suburbs” into Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn where around four hundred thousand people lived in ninety blocks.<sup>206</sup>

We suffer from all the realities that poor people suffer who have to live in poor neighborhoods. We are very aware of the dangers of being broken into and attacked. And we live in the world with a lot of keys and locks and security precautions. But we also have the wonderful experience of knowing what it is to live in a poor neighborhood.<sup>207</sup>

This move, leaving their comfort zone and seeing how people experience poverty on a daily basis, was inspirational for the sisters. This experience gave the sisters more of a connection to those whom they serve. Also, this new location gave the sisters an opportunity to be present and visible to the people.

The interview with Sister Julie and the U.S. sisters’ oral histories Rogers compiled in her book shows how many of the nuns in the years after Vatican II used their “special gifts” discussed in *Gaudium et Spes* to undergo a transformation and move from teaching in the classroom to action on the social justice front. These sisters left behind what they were accustomed to (serving in the classroom), to experiment with new configurations of community, mission, and lifestyle, and both work and live with the people who they served. Sister Julie left the classroom to serve Guatemalan refugees. She helped to compile their stories so that their voices would be heard about the atrocities they faced from their country’s government. Sister Peg worked at Heart of Camden in Camden, New Jersey, a housing corporation, to assist low-

---

<sup>206</sup> Rogers, 100.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.



income families and help them find a home to live in. Sister Marie Lee left the classroom and help founded Project Regina, which is a program that offers English and industrial sewing classes for refugee women. Sister Fran had a career change from teaching middle school and high school to being an attorney. Initially she was interested in representing women and fighting for the injustices towards them that she observed in American society, but then she found her passion in representing immigrants. While Sister Jeanne enjoyed teaching, she left the schools to help open Sojourners' Place in Wilmington, Delaware, a homeless shelter that in addition to hospitality provided a drug rehabilitation program and a job training program among other services offered. Finally, Sister Mary Rose moved out of her environment to help start a community-based service in a parish in the poorer part of Brooklyn, New York. All of these sisters moved out of their comfort zone to serve on the frontlines of social justice and bring change for various underserved groups—those in poverty, immigrants, and African Americans. These testimonies show that while the sisters advocated for legal, economic, and social justice reform, they continued to take part in their charitable endeavors by helping to improve American society and advocate for equal rights for the groups that were underserved.

\* \* \* \* \*

## CONCLUSION

The second half of the twentieth century in the U.S. was a period of tumultuous change for many of its citizens including Catholics. Cardinal Ritter served as an honorific individual and led his archdiocese of St. Louis to the frontlines of social justice. His actions influenced the local sister students at Marillac College to start thinking and writing about these influential movements of change occurring in the country—primarily the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War crisis. The sister students at Marillac College were influenced to participate in social reform by different factors: Sister Bertrande’s research that showed the need for improved sisters’ education, the sister students’ curriculum at Marillac College inspired by the Everett Workshop, the events occurring in the country at the time, and also the teachings of the Second Vatican Council further intensified the sisters’ desire to go out and initiate systemic social and economic change.

Although the sisters started thinking about systemic change before the Second Vatican Council convened, the documents of Second Vatican Council further influenced the sisters to take part in social justice movements. Two of Avery Cardinal Dulles, S.J. ten teachings of the Second Vatican Council, *aggiornamento* and the mission of the Church to work towards a just social order, inspired the sisters to advocate for systemic change in addition to carrying out their charitable deeds. The idea of some of the sisters leaving both the schools they taught at and the boundaries of their communities to enter the outside world and serve the underserved, swept across the entire nation. Both the interview with Sister Julie and some of the oral histories

compiled by Carole Rogers of sisters who recounted their stories of their commitment to serve the underserved show this new trend. The sisters created a legacy during the second half of the twentieth century, leaving behind traditional roles to take advantage of this sweeping change in the U.S. nation and to achieve in helping to make the world a better place.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

#### Books

*Marillac College Bulletin, 1958-1960.*

Rogers, Carole G. *Habits of Change: An Oral History of American Nuns.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

#### Newspaper Articles (In Order as They Appear)

“Talk Traces Negro’s Role.” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), March 19, 1963.

“Author to Relate Role as ‘Negro.’” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), September 30, 1963.

“Expert Speaks on Prejudice.” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), October 31, 1963.

“Negro Probes Race Question.” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), December 30, 1963.

“To Risk Not Turning Back.” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), July 28, 1967.

“MC’ers View Discrimination Through ‘Raisin in the Sun.’” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), January-February 1964.

“College Shows Concern in Economic Issues.” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), June 29, 1963.

“Theme to Take Cosmic Turn.” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), September 30, 1963.

“Sisters Tackle Communism.” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), May 12, 1965.

“Crisis in Vietnam Precipitates Student Interest, Decision, Action.” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), November 30, 1965.

“Overseas Letter Project Fills Mailbag for Vietnam Men.” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), December 22, 1966.

“Symposium Probes War Crisis.” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), February 28, 1966.

“Pope Paul Calls for World View.” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), May 12, 1967.

“Needed: A Stand on Vietnam.” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), October 27, 1967.

“Vietnam Evokes Responses.” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), November 21, 1967.

“Awry Anti-Intellectualism.” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), April 30, 1966.

“Q: ‘Why do we lack initiative to: engage in intellectual discussions on controversial issues; sponsor knowledgeable speakers on relevant topics?’” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), June 30, 1966.

“Church’s Challenge.” *Marillac College Forum* (St. Louis, Missouri), September 29, 1966.

### Oral History Interview

Cutter, Julie, D.C. Telephone Interview by Author. Jan. 26 2015.

### Doctoral Dissertations

Meyers, Bertrande, D.C. *Education for Sisters*. PhD diss., St. Louis University, 1941.

Mulderry, Darra. *What Human Goodness Entails: An Intellectual History of U.S. Catholic Sisters, 1935-1980*. PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2006.

### Other Documents

The Second Vatican Council, “Gaudium et Spes,” Dec. 7 1965. *Vatican Archives*. Accessed December 16, 2014.

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

The Second Vatican Council. “Perfectae Caritatis,” Oct. 28 1965. *Vatican Archives*. Accessed January 20, 2015.

[http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_perfectae-caritatis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_perfectae-caritatis_en.html).

Pope John XXIII. "Pope John's Announcement of an Ecumenical Council," Jan. 25 1959.  
*Vatican II—Voice of the Church*. 25 Jan. 1959.  
<http://www.vatican2voice.org/91docs/announcement.htm>.

## Secondary Sources

### Books

Beane, Marjorie Noterman, Ph. D. *From Framework to Freedom: A History of the Sister Formation Conference*. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc., 1993.

Caruso, Michael P., S.J. *When the Sisters Said Farewell: The Transition of Leadership in Catholic Elementary Schools*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2012.

Dulles, Avery Cardinal, S.J. *The Reshaping of Catholicism*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.

Faherty, William Barnaby. *Dream By the River: Two Centuries of Saint Louis Catholicism 1766-1967*. St. Louis, Missouri: Piraeus Publishers, 1973.

Koehlinger, Amy L. *The New Nuns: Racial Justice and Religious Reform in the 1960s*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Meyers, Sister Bertrande, D.C. *Sisters for the 21st Century*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965.

Schneider, Nicholas A., and Justin Rigali. *Joseph Elmer Cardinal Ritter: His Life and Times*. Liguori, Missouri: Liguori, 2008.

### Journal Article

Denig, Stephen J., C.M., and Anthony J. Dosen, C.M. "The Mission of the Catholic School in the Pre-Vatican II Era (1810-1962) and the Post-Vatican II Era (1965-1995): Insights And Observations for the New Millennium." *The Mission of the Catholic School* 13.2 (2009): 135-156.

### Other Sources

Daughters of Charity. Records of Marillac College, Province of St. Louise Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Daughters of Charity. Unpublished Database of Sisters from the St. Louis Province, Record for Sister Bertrande Meyers. Province of St. Louise Archives, Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Daughters of Charity. "Home Page." Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louis Archives.  
<https://dcarchives.wordpress.com/>.