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## ENVISIONING CATHOLICISM: POPULAR PRACTICE OF A TRADITIONAL FAITH IN THE POST-WWII US

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Digital Object Identifier: <https://doi.org/10.13023/etd.2020.497>

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ENVISIONING CATHOLICISM: POPULAR PRACTICE OF A TRADITIONAL  
FAITH IN THE POST-WWII US

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By  
Christy Ann Bohl  
Lexington, Kentucky  
Director: Dr. Kathi L. Kern, Professor of History  
Lexington, Kentucky  
2020

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### ENVISIONING CATHOLICISM: POPULAR PRACTICE OF A TRADITIONAL FAITH IN THE POST-WWII US

Marian apparitions in the United States have occurred in ever-increasing numbers since World War Two, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. These apparitions occupy a unique space in religious life, as they provide opportunities for Catholics to practice their faith outside of the Church hierarchy while still maintaining their status as faithful Catholics, often placing women in prominent positions. Although apparitions are an important part of faith for thousands of American Catholics, most Americans and Catholics are unaware of how widespread this movement is. This dissertation takes a comparative approach to examine a selection of apparition events, illuminating the pilgrimage experience in connection to historic events, such as the Cold War and Vatican II, as well as issues of race, gender, class, and consumerism.

Chapter One focuses on the apparition events at Necedah, Wisconsin which began in 1949 and continued until the visionary's death in 1984. Chapter Two offers an explanation of Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church council in the 1960s that changed the way Catholics worshiped, but also the relationship between members and Church authorities, and the way many Catholics perceived their identity. Chapter Three addresses apparition events at a variety of sites in Ohio and Kentucky through most of the pertinent time period, with a particular emphasis on the pilgrimage experience and parachurch organizations. Chapter Four discusses apparition events at Conyers, Georgia in the 1980s and 1990s, especially the economic effects that resulted. Chapter Five examines apparition events in Phoenix and Scottsdale, Arizona, and Emmitsburg, Maryland, which demonstrate the appeal of these events across race and class. In addition to secondary sources by historians, religious scholars, anthropologists, and sociologists, the dissertation uses newspaper accounts, publications by visionaries and their associated organizations, diocesan archival material, and interviews conducted by the author with religious leaders, believers, journalists, city officials, and neighbors to explore how apparition events have attracted thousands of believers despite the lack of official approval by the Roman Catholic Church and how the areas where these events take place have been affected.

KEYWORDS: Marian Apparitions, Virgin Mary, Roman Catholicism, US Religious History, Pilgrimage, Lived Religion

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11/19/2020

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ENVISIONING CATHOLICISM: POPULAR PRACTICE OF A TRADITIONAL  
FAITH IN THE POST-WWII US

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DEDICATION

To my mother.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While the following dissertation is my individual work, several people contributed beneficial insights while it was in process. First, my Dissertation Chair, Kathi Kern, offered instructive comments, guidance, and encouragement throughout the project. Next, I wish to thank the complete Dissertation Committee, and outside reader, respectively: James Albisetti, Tracy Campbell, Richard Schein, and Mark Kightlinger. Each of them provided questions and insights that substantially improved the finished product. Any errors that may remain are mine alone.

This project started in a graduate seminar led by Tracy Campbell. My classmates encouraged me to research this project in its earliest stage. I am grateful for their enthusiasm, interest, and perceptive comments, which continued even after the conclusion of the seminar.

One of the benefits of researching religious history is the number of people who prayed for my project and for me. I thank all of the people who were willing to grant me interviews. Several of them insisted on buying me a meal, which was much appreciated at the time, and I hope to have the opportunity to pay it forward.

Financially, several organizations provided grants that enabled me to travel as part of my research. In addition to three fellowships for dissertation research from the University of Kentucky History Department, I received a project grant from the Kentucky Oral History Commission, as well as a Constant H. Jacquet Research Award from the Religious Research Association. I thank each of these groups for helping to subsidize my research trips.



Parts of this project were presented at academic conferences. I would like to thank the audiences who asked questions at the 2006 Ohio Valley History Conference at East Tennessee State University and the 2013 American Catholic Historical Association Annual Meeting in New Orleans. Additionally, I would like to thank Karen Park, who organized the panel for the ACHA meeting, and Kathleen Sprows Cummings, who shared insights in her role as moderator. Doug Herman was the moderator for the OVHC panel, and I thank him for his comments.

In addition to the assistance described above, I received equally important assistance from family and friends. My friend Anne Becker used her skills as a librarian to help me early in the project. She and Carissa Sloan have been sources of emotional support for decades. Rachelle Green hosted me for a research trip when she lived in Pennsylvania and has offered consistent encouragement. Dan and Tricia Gregory set a high standard for hospitality when I stayed at their home in Maryland. I hope to be able to return the favor one day. Joanna Lile invited me to present portions of my research as a guest lecturer in her classes on American Religious History at the University of Kentucky and Transylvania University. Jim Kulwicki asked thought-provoking questions and provided on-going support throughout the dissertation process. My grandmother, Evelyn Hasselbusch, and her eldest sister, Esther Ferris, were tremendously proud about the prospect of my earning a doctorate, and I am sorry that they passed away before they could see me achieve it. Finally, my mother, Jill Pepple, was remarkably patient and supportive. This dissertation is dedicated to her.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iii
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 2. MISSILES TO HEAVEN: NECEDAH, WISCONSIN AND THE COLD WAR.....	13
CHAPTER 3. “SIGNS OF THE TIMES”: US CATHOLICISM AFTER WWII, THE IMPORTANCE OF VATICAN II, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PARACHURCH ORGANIZATIONS.....	49
CHAPTER 4. “OHIO: THE HEART OF IT ALL” .....	80
Our Lady of America .....	83
Greater Cleveland .....	87
Greater Cincinnati.....	98
CHAPTER 5. “EAT, DRINK, AND SEE MARY”: CONYERS, GEORGIA AND THE BUSINESS OF APPARITIONS.....	133
CHAPTER 6. “OUR LADY HAS BEEN SENT HERE TO THE DESERT”: PHOENIX/SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA AND EMMITSBURG, MARYLAND.....	167
The Scottsdale Nine .....	170
Our Lady of Emmitsburg .....	188
Our Lady of the Americas.....	197
CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION.....	215
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	223
VITA.....	259

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Scholar of religious studies Ann Taves explains, “Experiences in which people sense unseen presences, see apparitions, hear voices, or feel themselves and the world suddenly transformed, are more common than we suppose. Some people dismiss them. Some find them distressing, sometimes to the point of seeking clinical help. Still others find inspiration in them. In some cases, such experiences lead to personal transformations and occasionally to the emergence of new spiritual paths and religious movements...If we assume that the meaning of such experiences is subject to interpretation and, thus, a matter of discernment, we can ask how people decide what has occurred and why, in some cases, groups form around their claims.”<sup>1</sup> This dissertation focuses on examples of people who find meaning in the religious experience of apparitions in the United States since World War Two. Although none of these apparition claims has been approved by the Catholic Church, thousands of people read messages by these alleged visionaries, travel to the apparition sites, and fill a religious need. By studying apparition events in Wisconsin, Arizona, Maryland, Ohio, Kentucky, and Georgia, it is possible to see the development of religious movements within Catholicism, individual believers determining which visions are worthy of their time and travel outside of the authority of the Catholic Church, and important roles for women, both as visionaries and pilgrims. While some of the sites have declined in popularity with the death of the associated visionary or condemnation by church officials, others continue to this day.

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Taves, *Revelatory Events: Three Case Studies of the Emergence of New Spiritual Paths* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), xi.

Marian apparitions in the United States have occurred in ever-increasing numbers since WWII, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. These apparitions occupy a unique space in religious life, as they provide opportunities for Catholics to practice their faith outside of the Church hierarchy while still maintaining their status as faithful Catholics, often placing women in prominent positions. Although apparitions are an important part of faith for thousands of American Catholics, most Americans and Catholics are unaware of how widespread this movement is. This dissertation takes a comparative approach to examine a selection of apparition events, illuminating the pilgrimage experience in connection to historic events, such as the Cold War and Vatican II, as well as issues of race, gender, class, and consumerism.

The Catholic Church has approved some apparitions over time throughout the world. In order for an apparition to be approved, the bishop of the area where it is alleged to have taken place must begin an investigation. Most of those investigations end in decisions that the apparitions are not supernatural, but a few are determined to be worthy of belief. Faithful Catholics are not required to believe in apparitions, even the approved ones. Bishops generally prefer to wait until apparitions have stopped before investigating so that continuing messages would not force them to revisit their decision. Most apparition claims are never investigated at all.

Most of the visionaries in these apparition claims are middle-aged, married women. Many of them suffered marital problems or even divorce after they started to claim to hear from the Virgin Mary. These modern visionaries differ from earlier ones, who were often children or young, unmarried women. Many of the visionaries were not particularly devout before the apparitions started, but became faithful, churchgoing

Catholics afterward. They believe they were chosen specifically because they were skeptics, to encourage others to religious conversion. Women are particularly important for these events, as both visionaries and believers. The church's ambivalent position on private revelations allows believers to carve out a space to practice their faith outside of the traditional church, often placing women in prominent positions, while simultaneously calling for a return to a perceived past orthodoxy. Most adherents of Marian devotion are conservative Catholics who hope to preserve a distinct Catholic identity and defend their Catholic faith.<sup>2</sup>

The messages these visionaries received were often similar. Most of them received messages encouraging prayer, especially the rosary, participation in the sacraments, and closer relationships with God, warning that the country was on a bad path. They emphasized family values, sacrifice, and a rejection of materialism. Others challenged the hierarchy, with a theme of the need for better priests, and giving agency to the laity in that they are credited with the ability to get better priests not by appealing to the bishops for change, but by helping a parachurch organization and praying.

The apparition events in the United States in some ways followed the pattern of approved apparition sites, particularly Lourdes and Fatima. However, the growth of apparition claims after the Second World War, which continued even after the Second Vatican Council discouraged Marian devotion, demonstrates that a significant portion of believers sought a supernatural connection. Historian Lisa Bitel reports, "The percentage of all apparitions, reported worldwide, occurring in the United States increased from 10

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<sup>2</sup> Kristy Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio: Marian Apparitions, Catholic Evangelizing, and Mexican American Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 94, 96-97.

percent just after World War II to more than 50 percent at the end of the end of the second millennium.”<sup>3</sup> This means that the time period covered by this dissertation directly applies to the time that apparition claims were skyrocketing in the United States, even though Marian apparitions and Marian devotion have existed for centuries. Part of this is related to technology, as Americans have access to the latest technology, which allows them to learn of apparition claims faster than might be possible in less-developed countries or at earlier times in history.

Pilgrimage offers believers a variety of benefits. Although believers do not see the apparitions as visionaries do, some report experiencing the supernatural through smelling roses or seeing unusual lights or sun activity. Most appreciate being part of a crowd, singing and praying together. Some seek healing. Pilgrims want to visit a physical site they associate with the sacred, and going to the actual site has more meaning than simply reading about it. Geographer Carolyn V. Prorok notes, “Once the news of a miraculous event...goes beyond the experience of the individuals who first report it, the community of potential devotees has to determine the event’s and the teller’s believability.” People want to be sure a site is authentic before traveling there.<sup>4</sup> However, since the Catholic Church has approved only one Marian apparition claim in the United States—the experience of Adele Brise in 1859 in Champion, Wisconsin-- that means that believers have to decide about whether a vision claim is believable enough to

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<sup>3</sup> Lisa M. Bitel, *Our Lady of the Rock: Vision and Pilgrimage in the Mojave Desert* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 27.

<sup>4</sup> Carolyn V. Prorok, “Becoming a Place of Pilgrimage: An Eliadean Interpretation of the Miracle at Ambridge, Pennsylvania,” in Robert H. Stoddard and Alan Morinis, ed., *Sacred Places, Sacred Spaces: The Geography of Pilgrimages* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1997), 132.

see it for themselves based on what information they read or hear about from others. Sites that are close to their home involve less expense, so pilgrims might be willing to go out of curiosity, but traveling further away requires them to justify the journey and the potential benefits of going there. The increase in communications technology, particularly the Internet, allows for potential pilgrims to research visionaries and apparition sites before deciding which ones are worthy. They are also able to maintain communication with other pilgrims and spread the word to others who might be interested.

When an apparition event is announced, it affects the area around the site in positive and negative ways. Whether the apparitions are real or not, an unexpected influx of visitors can strain civic services. Most of the sites included in the dissertation struggled to meet the basic needs of the pilgrims—restroom facilities, accommodations, medical needs—and neighbors complained of the inconveniences of traffic and noise. Local businesses could benefit from the events, as they had additional customers seeking food, lodging, and souvenirs. News coverage draws attention to the area, which can be seen as positive or negative. Some residents like the publicity and increased name recognition for their towns, while others believe it tarnishes the reputation of the town to be associated with religious fanatics. This is generally more of an issue for smaller cities and rural areas, as larger cities tend to have the existing infrastructure to handle the volume of visitors.

Over time, parachurch organizations developed around particular sites and visionaries. These organizations raised funds, managed the sites, and promoted materials related to the messages the visionary claimed to receive. While remaining separate from

churches, parachurch organizations play a similar role in members' lives, offering ministries and services traditionally fulfilled by churches, yet maintaining their independent status. The growing number of parachurch organizations is a particularly important development in American religious life since WWII.<sup>5</sup>

While most of the visionaries, pilgrims, and leaders of parachurch organizations are lay Catholics, not all of them are. Some priests and nuns claim to be visionaries, while others attend apparition events in unofficial capacities. There are also several conservative priests who serve as spiritual advisors to visionaries even though they do not live anywhere nearby. In addition, some pilgrims are not Catholic, but are interested in the apparition events for their own reasons.

Consumerism and tourism are also related to Marian apparitions. Pilgrims are a particular type of tourist, traveling to a specific site for religious purposes, but still coming to see a space and probably taking something tangible back with them. These souvenirs could be religious objects, such as rosaries or holy cards, or more secular objects, such as t-shirts. The relationship between the Marian pilgrimage experience and consumerism is explored particularly in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

While most of the pilgrims and visionaries in the United States are white, this is not exclusively the case. Latinos are becoming a larger proportion of Catholics in the US, and they participate in apparition events as well. One of the Arizona visionaries was of Mexican descent, and many of the pilgrims to the sites in Arizona and Georgia

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<sup>5</sup> Wesley K. Willmer, J. David Schmidt, and Martyn Smith, *The Prospering Parachurch: Enlarging the Boundaries of God's Kingdom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), xii; Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 112.



especially were Latinos. The parachurch organizations involved with those sites made sure to incorporate Spanish-language materials to be inclusive to those pilgrims. Latino Catholics have a long tradition of Marian spirituality and personal devotions led by women, which is discussed in depth in the last chapter of this dissertation.<sup>6</sup>

The first chapter of the dissertation focuses on the apparitions at Necedah, Wisconsin, which began in the 1940s. They have been officially disapproved by the Catholic Church, but the shrine to Mary is still active there, with no mention on their website that the devotion has been declared heretical. The Van Hoof farm in Necedah, Wisconsin, became the first significant site of Marian pilgrimage in the United States, and the links of the apparitions at Necedah to the Cold War and the apparitions at Fatima, which had been approved in 1946, were a major reason for that development. The chapter explores the association of the Catholic Church with anti-communism and how that enabled American Catholics to assert their patriotism during the Cold War. This is also the only example discussed in the dissertation of a schism from the Roman Catholic Church that resulted from a visionary and believers refusing to obey the hierarchy.

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<sup>6</sup> David A. Badillo, *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), xv. Other sources supporting the significant role played by mothers and older women in Latino religion include Tarcisio Beal, "Hispanics and the Roman Catholic Church in the United States," in *Hispanics and the Church: Up from the Cellar*, ed. Philip E. Lampe (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1994), 41; Ana María Díaz-Stevens and Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, *Recognizing the Latino Resurgence in U.S. Religion: The Emmaus Paradigm* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 80-81; Díaz-Stevens, "Latinas and the Church," 241-242; Orlando O. Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 4-5; and Gilberto M. Hinojosa, "The Mexican-American Church, 1930-1965," in *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church, 1900-1965*, ed. Jay P. Dolan and Gilberto M. Hinojosa (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 109.

The second chapter explores how American Catholicism changed after WWII, especially related to Vatican II. The Catholic Church in the United States experienced a period of rapid change in the twentieth century. The combination of social changes and changes in the Church in the aftermath of Vatican II caused believers to reconsider what Catholic identity entails. In the process, Catholics pursued a variety of paths for practicing their faith and interacting with clergy. As Catholics became more assimilated into American society and culture, some tried to preserve a distinct Catholic identity. Marian apparitions are one way to demonstrate that distinction. They also allow lay believers to make decisions for themselves about what apparitions are worthy of belief, even if church authorities disagree. While Vatican II discouraged many traditional popular devotions, particularly Marian ones, its emphasis on individual religious experience and sense of the Church as a community contributed to visionary culture as a source of spiritual certitude that some Catholics found otherwise lacking in a post-Vatican II Church. These changes contributed to the growth of the Marian visionary movement in the late twentieth century.

The third chapter explores six apparition claims that occurred in Ohio over the entire time period covered by this dissertation. This study is the first academic treatment of these apparitions. They took place in urban, suburban, and rural areas of different regions of the state and involved visionaries from a variety of backgrounds. The cluster of apparitions in Ohio allows for comparisons of the development of the modern pilgrimage culture in the United States and demonstrates the persistence of belief in Marian apparitions within Catholic culture.

The fourth chapter focuses on the apparitions at Conyers, Georgia, which started in the 1980s. Nancy Fowler became the best-known visionary of her time, but opposition from the archbishop, trouble with her parachurch organization, and financial and family problems came along with her fame. The chapter especially discusses the role of consumerism around apparition events. While Fowler lost her family and went bankrupt, she saw others profit from her visions.

The last chapter of the dissertation examines apparitions around a group of eleven visionaries that began in Phoenix/Scottsdale, Arizona, and continued in Emmitsburg, Maryland. The visionaries consisted of a priest, nine members of the young adult prayer group at his Scottsdale parish, and a middle-aged Latina living in South Phoenix, Estela Ruiz. These apparitions started in 1988 and demonstrate the appeal of the Virgin Mary across race and class. The Scottsdale visionaries ended their public roles in 1992 except for one, Gianna Talone-Sullivan, who moved to Emmitsburg, Maryland with her husband, where her vision claims attract believers from around the world, even after the Archdiocese of Baltimore declared that her apparitions were definitely not supernatural, then ordered her not to share any further messages within the archdiocese. The Internet provides a space for believers to continue to read her messages and set up meetings in other locations outside the archdiocese, demonstrating the limits of the institutional church to control the Marian apparition movement. Ruiz established a separate parachurch organization that blends Catholicism and evangelicalism. Her public apparitions ended in 1998, though the organization continues. The chapter incorporates research by numerous scholars about Latino Catholicism in the United States and how it relates to Ruiz and Marian apparitions.

Overall, the dissertation draws on a variety of sources to explain how Marian apparitions are an important part of many Americans' faith since WWII. Newspapers and magazines provide insight into how the events were covered at the time they took place. Those articles also offered names of people who were present at apparition events and others who were affected, such as city officials, church officials, and neighbors. This author used those names to find people to interview about their experiences. Many of the parachurch organizations operate websites and/or have published material about the apparitions, as have some of the visionaries. The Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center in Norwood, Ohio, has its own library. I also visited diocesan archives in Cleveland, Ohio, and Covington, Kentucky, the US Catholic Collection at the University of Dayton, and the University of Notre Dame's special collections. In addition, several people involved with the apparition events shared pamphlets and other publications related to apparitions with me.

In terms of scholarly sources, apparitions are connected to multiple disciplines. Most of the apparitions that have been subjects of study have taken place in Europe, such as Lourdes, Fatima, and Medjugorje. Since only one American apparition has been approved by the Catholic Church, and that happened relatively recently, the scholarship on American apparitions tends to focus on those that have been declared heretical by the Church because there are sources produced by the investigation process. For similar reasons, scholars have tended to focus on one particular apparition in depth rather than the network aspect of modern American apparition claims. The scholars whose work has been most helpful for this dissertation are historian Thomas Kselman, who studied the Necedah, Wisconsin apparitions; historian and religious studies scholar Kristy Nabhan-

Warren, who wrote a book about the Phoenix visionary; philosopher Sandra Zimdars-Swartz, who explored particular apparitions in Europe and the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, including Necedah, South Phoenix, and Conyers; and anthropologist Paolo Apolito, who wrote about the role of technology in the apparition experience.<sup>7</sup> In addition to history, philosophy, religious studies, and anthropology, scholars working in sociology, geography, Latino studies, gender and women's studies, journalism, and theology provided useful information for this dissertation.

Studying these particular sites and the meaning they hold for believers adds to the body of scholarship on lived religion by demonstrating how the faithful create meaning through their own religious practices. In this case, the apparition movement creates a

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<sup>7</sup> Paolo Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna: Religious Visionary Experience on the Web*, translated by Antony Shugaar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Thomas A. Kselman, ed. *Belief in History: Innovative Approaches to European and American Religion* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991); Thomas A. Kselman, "Our Lady of Necedah: Marian Piety and the Cold War," Charles and Margaret Hall Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism Working Paper Series 12, Number 2 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, Fall 1982); Thomas A. Kselman and Steven Avella, "Marian Piety and the Cold War in the United States," *Catholic Historical Review* Vol. 72, No. 3 (July 1986): 403-424; Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio: Marian Apparitions, Catholic Evangelizing, and Mexican American Activism*; Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, "The Marian Revival in American Catholicism: Focal Points and Features of the New Marian Enthusiasm," in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, ed. Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 213-240; Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, "Religious Experience and the Public Cult: The Case of Mary Ann Van Hoof," *Journal of Religion and Health* Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring 1989): 36-57.

space within Catholicism for people to feel connected to the supernatural in ways they do not find in the mainstream Church.

## CHAPTER 2. MISSILES TO HEAVEN: NECEDAH, WISCONSIN AND THE COLD WAR

On August 15, 1950, the Feast of the Assumption, 100,000 pilgrims arrived at a farm in rural Wisconsin to hear what a forty-year-old mother of eight with an elementary school education said the Virgin Mary had told her. Mary Ann Van Hoof reported that Mary first visited her on November 12, 1949, but remained silent. The first time she heard Mary's voice was April 7, 1950, when Van Hoof said the corpus on her crucifix doubled in size and glowed. Mary returned on May 28, May 29, June 4, June 16, August 15, and October 7, 1950. So many appearances drew the attention of the clergy and spurred growth of the Necedah cult. The Diocese of La Crosse, Wisconsin, urged caution until an investigation could be completed, but the Catholic devotional press and national news services spread the word beyond the initial small crowds of family, friends, and locals, and the pilgrims kept coming. Mary gave Van Hoof messages for herself and for the world. Mary warned Van Hoof that she would be mocked, but urged Van Hoof to pray and gave her instructions about her parish priest and relatives, such as for her pastor to lead the rosary every night at 8 PM. For the world, Mary urged Americans to pay attention to her messages, to pray for the conversion of Russia, to live by the Ten Commandments, to love Christ more than worldly goods, and to work together against the devil.<sup>1</sup> The Necedah apparition series was the largest, earliest, and most historically

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<sup>1</sup>*The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Necedah, Wisconsin, USA* (Necedah, WI: For God and My Country, 1978), 1-3; Thomas A. Kselman, "Our Lady of Necedah: Marian Piety and the Cold War," Charles and Margaret Hall Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism Working Paper Series 12, Number 2 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, Fall 1982), 16; Thomas A. Kselman and Steven Avella,

significant, setting the standard for an American, apocalyptic, conspiracy-driven type of private revelation.<sup>2</sup> The Van Hoof farm in Necedah, Wisconsin, became the first significant site of Marian pilgrimage in the United States, and the links of the apparitions at Necedah to the apparitions at Fatima and the Cold War were a major reason for that development.

During the period immediately after the Second World War, Americans were favorably disposed toward Marian apparitions. They were familiar with the apparitions at Fatima, Portugal, and Lourdes, France. The film *The Song of Bernadette* in 1944 had boosted the popularity of Lourdes in the US. Fatima began to draw international attention after one of its seers, Sister Lucia, wrote an account of Mary's messages. American Catholics heard the revised message of Fatima during World War II, and by the late 1940s, the cult of Fatima rivaled Lourdes as the major Marian devotion in the US. The Catholic Church officially approved the apparitions at Fatima in 1946. Historian William A. Christian, Jr., suggests, "the new emphasis on Fatima... had a side effect of producing a new wave of visions. That it stimulated visions... is not surprising. The imagery and message of Fatima entered the subconscious of Catholics."<sup>3</sup> Necedah was part of a postwar wave of apparitions, over 100 in the US and Europe in the 1940s and

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"Marian Piety and the Cold War in the United States," *The Catholic Historical Review* 72, no. 3 (July 1986), 414-415.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Garvey, *Searching for Mary: An Exploration of Marian Apparitions Across the U.S.* (New York: Plume, 1998), 204.

<sup>3</sup> William A. Christian, Jr., "Religious Apparitions and the Cold War in Southern Europe," in Eric R. Wolf, ed., *Religion, Power and Protest in Local Communities: The Northern Shore of the Mediterranean* (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1984): 249.



1950s. In addition, Pope Pius XII decreed the doctrine of the Assumption in August 1950, which referred to the Virgin Mary being taken bodily into heaven at her death. The Church was clearly willing to recognize modern supernatural events and encourage Marian devotion.<sup>4</sup>

1950 was also the year that Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin began his efforts against communism in the US. Historians Thomas Kselman and Steven Avella suggest, “Marian cults provided the Church with an opportunity to link the need for supernatural help for individual anxieties with its larger collective and political goals.”<sup>5</sup> In this case, Marian apparitions were clearly tied with anti-communist anxieties of the Cold War. The Fatima message of praying for the conversion of Russia was heavily promoted. *The Catholic Periodical Index* shows a serious increase in the references to Fatima during the post-WWII period, from single-digit occurrences in 1930-1944 to 35 in 1945-49, 51 in 1950-54, and 49 in 1955-59. Popular Catholic publications such as *Novena Notes* and the popular devotion the Block Rosary shifted their focus from World War II to Fatima and the Cold War. Radio priest Fulton Sheen was devoted to Lourdes and Fatima, and Pope Pius XII was sympathetic to the cult of Fatima. *Ave Maria* published Fatima-related items nearly every week in the 1950s. In 1952, Warner Brothers produced a film, *The Miracle of Our Lady of Fatima*, and Twentieth Century Fox broadcast a feature-length television special about the Fatima apparitions in the late 1950s, reaching tens of millions

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<sup>4</sup> Kselman, “Our Lady of Necedah: Marian Piety and the Cold War,” 2; Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, Volume II: From the Reformation to the Present Day (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 146, 148.

<sup>5</sup> Kselman and Avella, “Marian Piety and the Cold War in the United States,” 412.

of American homes.<sup>6</sup> The Blue Army, an devotional organization of laypeople formed in 1947, became known both for its promotion of Marian devotion and for fervent anti-communism. As journalist Kenneth Briggs writes, “The army’s passion for converting Russia was, quite understandably, inextricably bound up with virulent anticommunism. Within Blue Army tradition, utter disdain for Marx had quickly become the flip side of devotion to Mary. The combined theme became the army’s trademark and a powerful rallying cry for many Catholics in the darkest period of the cold war following World War II.”<sup>7</sup> American Catholics were obsessed with anti-communism and Communist religious persecution. Fatima gave Catholics a way to fight Communists through praying the rosary and taking communion. As historian Paula M. Kane illustrates, “The Cold War fostered the slogan ‘Fatimize or be atomized’ and made the recitation of the Rosary a ‘weapon for peace.’”<sup>8</sup> Scholar Kathryn Ann Johnson continues this imagery of expressions of faith as “a part of the arsenal of American democracy,” when she refers to

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<sup>6</sup> Kselman and Avella, “Marian Piety and the Cold War in the United States,” 408-411; James P. McCartin, “‘The Love of Things Unseen’: Catholic Prayer and the Moral Imagination in the Twentieth-Century United States” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2003), 105-106. The information about *Ave Maria* and *The Miracle of Our Lady of Fatima* can be found in McCartin’s footnotes 75 and 78, respectively. The Block Rosary is a devotion which encourages Catholics to meet with neighbors to pray the rosary together.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth A. Briggs, *Holy Siege: The Year That Shook Catholic America* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 479; Michael P. Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 220; James Hitchcock, “Catholic Activist Conservatism in the United States,” in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 120.

<sup>8</sup> Paula M. Kane, “Marian Devotion Since 1940: Continuity or Casualty?” in *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. James M. O’Toole (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 101.

an article in the *Catholic Educator* from 1950: “If bombs be the measure of a nation’s strength and security, Our Lady’s bomb is one already tested and proved.... Truly Mary’s weapon, her R-bomb [the rosary,] will succeed where the bombs of men are doomed to failure. The R-bomb brings peace; the A-bomb, destruction; and the H-bomb, in all probability, utter annihilation.”<sup>9</sup> Many American Catholics believed that prayers to Mary, particularly the rosary, could cause Russia to overthrow communism and protect the US from nuclear attack, so Marian devotion became a way they could actively influence their world at a time when government seemed unable to protect them from the communist threat.<sup>10</sup>

Mary Ann Van Hoof’s messages calling for the conversion of Russia echoed the Fatima messages and resonated in the new Cold War world. “The warnings and promises of Mary to Mrs. Van Hoof spoke to the political and religious anxieties of American Catholics and provided them with reassurance about their ability to master the current crisis.”<sup>11</sup> Fear of communism and internal subversion were major themes. Necedah repeated the Fatima warnings about Russia while stressing Mary’s concern for the US and the need to fight the enemy within. Prayer could preserve peace. The Cold War was

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<sup>9</sup> Kathryn Ann Johnson, “The Home Is a Little Church: Gender, Culture, and Authority in American Catholicism, 1940-1962,” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1997), 23. Quote from Sr. Mary Amatora, OSF, “Mary’s Weapon– The R-Bomb,” *Catholic Educator* (October 1950), 99, cited in Johnson, 125.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, “The Home Is a Little Church,” 128, 157-159.

<sup>11</sup> Kselman and Avella, “Marian Piety and the Cold War in the United States,” 418.

depicted as a reflection of the apocalyptic war in heaven against the Antichrist.<sup>12</sup>

Believers described their prayers as missiles to heaven.<sup>13</sup> The world divided by the Cold War and living with the threat of nuclear destruction produced an environment of people seeking guidance to avoid God's anger, which the postwar wave of visions seemed to provide.<sup>14</sup> Given that many Catholics saw communism as the work of the devil and Stalin as a potential Antichrist, it would not be surprising to them for the Virgin Mary to appear and warn people.<sup>15</sup>

Catholics had long been in the forefront of the anti-communist movement, but after the Second World War, their anti-communism helped them to fit into mainstream American society. As historian Donald Crosby explains, "...one wonders if anything has so mesmerized Catholicism in the past century as the continuing problem of Marxism. Long before the cold-war years, Catholics stood in the vanguard of those dedicated to the eradication of communism. In the McCarthy era this impulse reached its zenith, for true Americanism and true Catholicism both found a common base in the drive against the

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<sup>12</sup> Kselman and Avella, "Marian Piety and the Cold War in the United States," 418-419; Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 138.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Ann Van Hoof, *Fundamentals of Our Faith: Instructions from the Blessed Virgin Mary to Mrs. Fred (Mary Ann) Van Hoof, May 30, 1950* (Necedah, WI: For My God and My Country, Inc., 1971).

<sup>14</sup> Christian, "Religious Apparitions and the Cold War in Southern Europe," 258-259.

<sup>15</sup> Charles R. Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York: Random House, 1997), 229.

Communists.”<sup>16</sup> The Catholic Church associated Marxism with atheism, anarchism, violence, and materialism. Though the Church had opposed all radical leftist movements since the mid-nineteenth century as anti-religious and against human interest, the Bolshevik Revolution intensified the Church’s hostility, leading to a worldwide Catholic campaign of prayer for Russian Catholics. The Vatican, especially Pope Pius XII, negotiated with fascist leaders, including Adolf Hitler, with the belief that fascism was less threatening to the Church than communism. American Catholic leaders were concerned over President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s recognition of the USSR during the 1930s as well as the role of communism in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>17</sup> Even during World War II, when the Soviet Union was an American ally, American Catholics sustained their opposition to communism. By the end of the war, anti-communism was not just one

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<sup>16</sup> Donald F. Crosby, S.J., *God, Church, and Flag: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and the Catholic Church, 1950-1957* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), xi.

<sup>17</sup> Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985*, 24-25; Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 4-7; E. Ann Matter, “Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century: Apocalyptic, Representation, Politics,” *Religion* Vol. 31, No. 2 (April 2001), 138. The actions of Pope Pius XII during the Second World War, particularly in relation to the Holocaust, have been the subject of several scholarly studies. Works that I found most helpful were Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); and Michael Phayer, *Pius XII, The Holocaust, and the Cold War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008). Further studies include John Cornwall, *Hitler’s Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000); Carlo Falconi, *The Silence of Pius XII*, trans. Bernard Wall (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970); Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, ed., *Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust* (New York: Continuum, 2002); José M. Sánchez, *Pius XII and the Holocaust: Understanding the Controversy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002); and Susan Zuccotti, *Under His Very Windows: The Vatican and the Holocaust in Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

concern among many but a way of life, an obsession encouraged by much of the press and electorate which shared it. Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe and persecution of the Church, especially in Poland, heightened American Catholic anxiety, and figures such as Archbishop Aloysius Stepinac of Yugoslavia and Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty of Hungary became symbols of Catholic suffering and encouraged renewed Catholic protests against communism.<sup>18</sup> Catholics recognized anti-communism could be “a means of identifying themselves with the greater American society.”<sup>19</sup> Even as the Communist attacks on the Church began to wane, the American Catholic press continued reporting as if there had been no change. Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York City, the political leader of American Catholic anti-communism, was concerned not only about the countries behind the Iron Curtain, but with the threat of communist subversion in the US.<sup>20</sup> Because Catholics had been warning about the communist threat for years, they could boast of being the staunchest anti-communists, in effect targeting other groups for the kind of nativist treatment American Catholics had endured for decades.<sup>21</sup> As author Charles R. Morris writes, “During the Cold War, as Daniel Patrick Moynihan put it, it

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<sup>18</sup> Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 63; Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 8-13; Frank J. Coppa, “Pope Pius XII and the Cold War: The Post-war Confrontation between Catholicism and Communism,” in *Religion and the Cold War*, ed. Dianne Kirby (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 58, 60; Peter C. Kent, “The Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII,” in *Religion and the Cold War*, ed. Dianne Kirby (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 68, 70, 73.

<sup>19</sup> Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Lawrence H. Fuchs, *John F. Kennedy and American Catholicism* (New York: Meredith Press, 1967), 127-128.

was Fordham men who checked the anticommunist and patriotic credentials of Harvard men.”<sup>22</sup> While organizations such as the Catholic War Veterans and Knights of Columbus were particularly zealous about pursuing anti-communist activities after World War II, most lay Catholics passively observed the debate among their leaders about the best way to combat communism. They were not overwhelmingly more anxious over communism than other Americans, and although predisposed toward McCarthyism, they were often indifferent.<sup>23</sup>

As for the senator himself, Joseph McCarthy grew up faithfully attending St. Mary’s, the Irish-American Catholic Church in Appleton, Wisconsin. He graduated from Marquette, but Crosby (a Jesuit himself) argues that the Jesuits had little impact on his character or values. Biographer Thomas Reeves corroborates this point, describing much of McCarthy’s time at Marquette as devoted to gambling, boxing, and partying with his fraternity brothers.<sup>24</sup> David Oshinsky, another biographer, argues that McCarthy chose Marquette because he could not afford to go to college out of state, Milwaukee was a bigger city than Madison and offered more job opportunities, and Marquette was a Catholic school. While Oshinsky, like Reeves, discusses McCarthy’s gambling, boxing, and partying, and even states that McCarthy’s favorite entertainment was the burlesque

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<sup>22</sup> Morris, *American Catholic*, ix.

<sup>23</sup> Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 16-18, 24-25; Vincent P. De Santis, “American Catholics and McCarthyism,” *The Catholic Historical Record* 51, no. 1 (April 1965): 29-30; Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverría, *Under the Heel of Mary* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 248-249.

<sup>24</sup> Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 26-28; Thomas C. Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy: A Biography* (New York: Stein and Day, 1982), 3, 6, 12-18.

show, Oshinsky gives McCarthy more credit for religious devotion. Oshinsky details acquaintances' memories of McCarthy spending Saturday evenings drinking and bedding women, then getting up early for Mass on Sundays. After graduation, friends recall finding McCarthy kneeling in prayer before bed.<sup>25</sup> Oshinsky writes, "Throughout his life Joe remained close to the Church. He went regularly to confession, observed meatless Fridays, gave generously to Catholic charities, and rarely missed Sunday Mass."<sup>26</sup> He was deferential to priests and followed Church rules, but Crosby notes that McCarthy did not apply his faith to his politics or his personal life.<sup>27</sup>

When running for office, McCarthy "did not ignore the Catholic vote...but he never paraded his own identity as a Catholic to get Catholics to vote for him."<sup>28</sup> Historian Arthur Herman confirms that McCarthy did not use his faith for any political advantage, but tried to keep his religious life private.<sup>29</sup> McCarthy described himself as "not 'a candle-lighting' Catholic."<sup>30</sup> However, because McCarthy focused his political career "on the fight against the Communists; with anticommunism such an important part of Catholicism, his religion inevitably became a public topic, subject to incessant

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<sup>25</sup> David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 11-13, 27-28.

<sup>26</sup> Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 35-36.

<sup>28</sup> Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 29.

<sup>29</sup> Arthur Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator* (New York: Free Press, 2000), 177.

<sup>30</sup> Cited by Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 35, and Herman, *Joseph McCarthy*, 23.



discussion and debate.” Yet McCarthy wanted to be seen as anti-subversive, not as a Catholic senator, and paid little attention to the philosophies of his religion, according to Crosby.<sup>31</sup> McCarthy’s interest in anti-communism was a political crusade, not a religious one.<sup>32</sup>

The Catholic press showed divisions among Catholics over McCarthy similar to the divisions among the nation at large— regional, urban/rural, ethnic, educational, and liberal/conservative.<sup>33</sup> As Crosby argues, “The war over McCarthyism exacerbated all of these antagonisms, and Catholics participated intimately in each phase of the struggle.”<sup>34</sup> McCarthy actually did poorly among Catholics in his 1952 re-election campaign, doing well only with rural voters despite the nationwide Republican landslide; but many observers at the time still saw Catholics as unified supporters of McCarthy and the Church and McCarthy as inseparable.<sup>35</sup> By 1954, Catholics were over McCarthy just like the rest of the nation and ready to move on— 40-60 percent of Catholics saw the McCarthy issue as insignificant.<sup>36</sup> However, McCarthy matters for more than just his political influence:

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<sup>31</sup> Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 34.

<sup>32</sup> Herman, *Joseph McCarthy*, 177.

<sup>33</sup> Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 55, 68-69.

<sup>34</sup> Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 69.

<sup>35</sup> Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 96-97, 117; Karl Ernest Meyer, “The Politics of Loyalty: From LaFollette to McCarthy in Wisconsin: 1918-1952,” PhD diss. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1956), 210.

<sup>36</sup> Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 195; De Santis, “American Catholics and McCarthyism,” 25.

Seen at the deepest level, [the Catholic division over McCarthy] symbolized the status that American Catholics had attained in the postwar decade. After years of feeling estranged from the rest of American society, Catholics were at last well on the way toward attaining full status as Americans: they were no longer Catholics who happened to be Americans but rather American Catholics who had become fully American and fully Catholic. In the matter of Senator Joe McCarthy, Catholics failed to vote their religion because they were ready to vote their conscience, their party, their region, or their status. The Catholics of the 1950s felt less threatened than they had felt in the past: the overt religious warfare of the 1920s was gone, as were the years of privation that marked the decade of the thirties. With the World War giving further proof of their patriotism, they could enter the mainstream of American life confident that for most Americans their Catholicism was no barrier to full acceptance as American citizens...the signs persisted that Catholic distinctiveness was disappearing.<sup>37</sup>

Still, religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics was renewed during the postwar period. As scholar Will Herberg wrote at that time, “The fear of ‘Rome’ is indeed the most powerful cement of Protestant community consciousness, and it seems to loom larger today than it has in some time. Discussion of Protestant communal affairs moves increasingly under the shadow of the ‘Catholic problem,’ and Protestant attitudes tend more and more to be defined in terms of confrontation with a self-assured and aggressive Catholicism. The tension here has become really acute.”<sup>38</sup> In 1949 Paul Blanshard’s *American Freedom and Catholic Power* became a bestseller, demonstrating Protestant fear over the growing influence of American Catholics as they became the largest denomination in the US. Historian Kevin Schultz writes, “The Catholic Church’s vigorous growth and its authoritative position on the Cold War made many Protestants fearful of Catholic ambitions. And Catholics did not allay these fears, widely promoting

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<sup>37</sup> Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 116.

<sup>38</sup> Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology*, rev. ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 1960), 231.

[their] ‘Make America Catholic’ movement and reporting a hundred thousand American converts annually.”<sup>39</sup> Protestant-Catholic tensions centered around the relationship between church and state, primarily over the debate on having an ambassador to the Vatican and giving federal aid to parochial schools, but also over Catholic efforts to legalize moral positions on abortion, birth control, film censorship, and removing anti-Catholic books from public libraries. Protestants associated Catholics with a disinterest in civil liberties, a demand for conformity, an intolerance to opposition, mindless dogma, and abuse of the democratic process.<sup>40</sup> By the late 1950s, Catholics seemed to be more a part of American society in terms of access to professions, suburban residence, and impact on national politics, making them less threatening to the American democratic system than they had seemed a few years earlier, though the church-state issue would remain a source of division into the 1960s. Anti-communism gave Catholics an opportunity to prove their patriotism by becoming the most American of Americans.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985*, 18; Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 235; Mark S. Massa, S.J., *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 59-61; Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 95.

<sup>40</sup> Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 122-123; Fuchs, *John F. Kennedy and American Catholicism*, 137-138; Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, 232; Massa, *Anti-Catholicism in America*, 66, 68; Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*, 95.

<sup>41</sup> Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985*, 20; Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 244-245; De Santis, “American Catholics and McCarthyism,” 30; Fuchs, *John F. Kennedy and American Catholicism*, 128; Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*, 95.

McCarthy was little known, barely covered by the Wisconsin press, and seen as kind of bumbling until he attacked the Truman Administration in 1950.<sup>42</sup> Since McCarthy's targets were primarily centered in Washington, DC, his anti-communist campaign was yet to become a burning issue in Wisconsin.<sup>43</sup> McCarthy spent more time in the Northeast than in Wisconsin. He did not really give attention to Communist suspects in Wisconsin, instead seeming distant and "almost irrelevant" there.<sup>44</sup> The Wisconsin Republican Party was more interested in its own interests than in McCarthy, especially as his targets changed.<sup>45</sup> Writer Ingo Swann suggests that Mary Ann Van Hoof might have been prescient by delivering McCarthyite messages of Communist infiltration before McCarthy himself became a well-known public figure.<sup>46</sup> McCarthy and Van Hoof appealed to a similar base, and McCarthy grew up in a town only 60 miles northeast of Necedah.<sup>47</sup>

Mary Ann Bieber was born in 1909 in Philadelphia, the first child of Hungarian immigrants, Matthias Bieber and Elizabeth Gallman. Mary Ann's mother was a

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<sup>42</sup> Michael O'Brien, *McCarthy and McCarthyism in Wisconsin* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980), 100-101.

<sup>43</sup> Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 71.

<sup>44</sup> Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag*, 233.

<sup>45</sup> O'Brien, *McCarthy and McCarthyism in Wisconsin*, 112.

<sup>46</sup> Ingo Swann, *The Great Apparitions of Mary: An Examination of Twenty-Two Supranormal Appearances* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 172.

<sup>47</sup> Peter Wyatt Wood, "Quoting Heaven: Narrative, Ritual, and Trope in an Heretical Shrine of the Virgin Mary in Rural Necedah, Wisconsin," PhD diss. (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester, 1986), 671.

practicing Spiritualist and ran a boarding house. After a brief residence in Ohio, they moved to Kenosha County, Wisconsin. Mary Ann went to the Pleasant Prairie Public School through either fifth or eighth grade before leaving home, supporting herself by working as a maid in New England and as a waitress in Philadelphia. Mary Ann briefly went to Methodist Sunday School and attended the Community Protestant Church of Pleasant Prairie, Wisconsin, for two years, showing little interest in religion until she started working for Fred Van Hoof. She was sixteen years his junior, but Mary Ann had been previously married and was already the mother of one child. She had learned her first marriage was invalid and returned with her infant to live with her mother, who was divorced from her father. During this time, Mary Ann was hospitalized and saw a crucifix glowing and floating in the air, something she would later describe as her first visionary experience. She was baptized as a Catholic, but did not practice that faith until she married Godfred "Fred" Van Hoof in 1934, a few months after she answered his advertisement for a housekeeper in the *Wisconsin Farmer and Agriculturalist*. Mary Ann and Fred Van Hoof started their own family, first having twins who did not reach term, then eight more children, one of whom died as an infant, in addition to the child from Mary Ann's first marriage. The Van Hoofs sharecropped in the Southwest for a few years before finally settling in Necedah, buying their farm in 1944. Despite becoming a practicing Catholic, Mary Ann Van Hoof was active in the local spiritualist association and may have served as its vice president from 1945 to 1948.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 204; Kselman, "Our Lady of Necedah: Marian Piety and the Cold War," 16; Kselman and Avella, "Marian Piety and the Cold War in the United States," 413; Richard H. Leonard, "Farm Woman 'Sees' Virgin as Thousands Watch," *Milwaukee Journal*, 15 August 1950, 2; Marlene Maloney, "Necedah Revisited: Anatomy of a Phony Apparition," *Fidelity* Vol. 8, No. 3 (February 1989), 21-22; Swann,

In 1950, Necedah, Wisconsin was a sleepy town of 838. The majority of the residents was Protestant. Since the end of the logging boom in 1900, Necedah had little prosperity, but in the late 1940s the building of a new dam on the Wisconsin River five miles away brought an influx of Catholic workers to the town. St. Francis parish grew, and the pastor, Father Sigismund Lengowski, built a new parish hall and turned an old mansion into a convent and home for elderly women. The Protestants in town felt threatened.<sup>49</sup> When Mary Ann Van Hoof began experiencing visions, she initially did not tell anyone because she feared people would think she was crazy. When she did tell, it was her husband who suggested the visions might be from Mary. As word spread about the apparitions, her earliest support came from the nuns at the home for the elderly, Father Lengowski's mother, and local businessmen. Over 1,000 people attended the June 16 apparition, including the director of the diocesan press, Father Anthony Wagener, as well as Lengowski, who commented publicly that he believed the apparitions were true, though he could not reveal the evidence that convinced him at that time. Catholic lay

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*The Great Apparitions of Mary*, 166-167; Wood, "Quoting Heaven," 38-39; Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, "Religious Experience and Public Cult: The Case of Mary Ann Van Hoof," *Journal of Religion and Health* Vol. 28, No. 1 (Spring 1989), 40-41. In this last point, there is conflicting information. Maloney, Wood, and Zimdars-Swartz list Mary Ann's mother, Elizabeth Bieber, as the vice president of the spiritualist association, but Kselman states that it was Mary Ann herself, and Zimdars-Swartz writes that Mary Ann did participate in the group. Clearly Mary Ann was not as distant from spiritualist activities as the Catholic Church would have preferred.

<sup>49</sup> Margaret Frakes, "Setting for a Miracle," *Christian Century* 67 (August 30, 1950), 1019-1020.

leaders from Milwaukee, Appleton, and Necedah formed a voluntary committee to handle the Van Hoof situation.<sup>50</sup>

Once the Necedah Committee was formed, they began publicizing the apparition event planned for August 15, the date Mary had announced she would next appear to Van Hoof. The committee was headed by the president of the Necedah Chamber of Commerce, Henry Swan. The members determined to spread the word of the apparitions beyond the local area. They hired a Milwaukee company to offer refreshments, printed literature to be distributed, and allowed stands to sell religious articles. Ten hot dog and ice cream stands were built along the highway to feed hungry pilgrims, and neighbors built their own stands to sell soft drinks and local produce, competing with the official food concession. The committee bought radio time to report the messages and promote the event on August 15. Extra telegraph operators were brought in as well as additional long-distance telephone circuits. Northwestern Railroad had to run six special trains to accommodate pilgrim passengers. Six planes bearing pilgrims landed in the Van Hoof pasture. Hotels within 50 miles of Necedah were fully booked, spare rooms in houses in the village had been reserved weeks in advance, and many pilgrims spent the night in cars or tents. It was a popular vacation time, and hotels and camps within a 100-mile radius could not meet the demand. The committee arranged for state troopers to help with traffic control. A 60-acre lot north of the Van Hoof farmhouse was packed with cars

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<sup>50</sup> Frakes, "Setting for a Miracle," 1020-1021; Kselman, "Our Lady of Necedah: Marian Piety and the Cold War," 16-17; Richard H. Leonard, "Necedah Is Booming on 'Vision Day' Eve," *Milwaukee Journal*, 14 August 1950, 2; Stanley Pieza, "'Vision Miracle' for Wisconsin," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 17 June 1950, 1; Zimdars-Swartz, "Religious Experience and Public Cult," 37, 42-43, 48.

from all over the US, Canada, and Cuba. Loudspeakers were set up so that the rosary could be recited continually and so the crowd could hear Van Hoof repeat Mary's message. There was a special section fenced off for the sick and disabled. The committee erected a shrine, featuring a crucifix from Italy set up on a hill, although the hill's ownership was disputed. The committee set up floodlights on the shrine and set up two restrooms near the farm. The diocese refused the committee's request to allow priests to conduct open-air masses at the site, but Bishop John Patrick Treacy agreed to allow additional masses at St. Francis. Since the Feast of the Assumption was a holy day, he did not want thousands of Catholics to enter a state of mortal sin. The masses started every half hour beginning at 4 AM. Already popular support for the Necedah apparitions was having an impact on Church decisions. Although Bishop Treacy was concerned about the growth of the Necedah shrine, enough that he began an episcopal investigation, the investigation would take time. The La Crosse Chancery office released critical statements, urging caution and describing the events as having a "questionable nature," but did not condemn the apparitions.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> "Ban Changes 'Vision' Plans," *Milwaukee Journal*, 10 August 1950, 1; "Bishop Bans 'Vision' Mass," *Milwaukee Journal*, 10 August 1950, 8; "Crowd Kneels Through Night Before Shrine," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 15 August 1950, 1; Frakes, "Setting for a Miracle," 1019-1020; Charles House, "Hottest Aug. 15 in 14 Years 'Burns' Necedah," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 16 August 1950, 5; Johnson Kanady, "Woman Prays, Claims to See Vision Again," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 16 August 1950, 1, 8; Kselman, "Our Lady of Necedah: Marian Piety and the Cold War," 19; Kselman and Avella, "Marian Piety and the Cold War in the United States," 414-417; "Lame and Halt Suffer, Pray," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 16 August 1950, 7; Leonard, "Farm Woman 'Sees' Virgin as Thousands Watch," 2; Leonard, "Necedah Is Booming on 'Vision Day' Eve," 1, 2; "Pray and Pray Hard," *Newsweek*, 28 August 1950, 31; Jo-Ann Price, "Catholics Jam 'Vision' Rites," *Milwaukee Journal*, 15 August 1950, 3; Robert J. Riordan, "Multitude Tense but Orderly as Farm Woman Reviews 'Talk,'" *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 16 August 1950, 1, 7; Robert J.



On August 15, the 100,000 pilgrims who came to Necedah were the largest crowd ever assembled in rural Wisconsin, according to police captain Preston McAvoy, who had 45 deputies directing traffic.<sup>52</sup> “All through Sunday and Monday the narrow bridge spanning the Yellow [R]iver just outside the village bore a constant stream of cars on their way to the ‘Van Hoof shrine’.” Charter buses were too heavy for the bridge, so those pilgrims had to walk— “the pilgrims made their way through inch-deep sand past a barnlot choked with weeds and rusting machinery to join the crowd standing outside the dilapidated gray farmhouse. Behind a wire fence, a rude platform bearing a statue of the Virgin had been erected on the spot where Mrs. Van Hoof said her vision first appeared.”<sup>53</sup> Journalist Richard Leonard described the Van Hoof home as “shabbiness itself,” with the only beauty coming from the hollyhocks behind the house, and “a pathetic little garden” of marigolds and zinnias in the front; “everything else is drab.”<sup>54</sup> The continual rosaries stopped for an hour at 10:30 AM for a talk about Fatima, warning the “only armor against Communism is prayer.”<sup>55</sup> The oldest Van Hoof child crowned

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Riordan, “Throng Prays for Miracle at Necedah Today,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 15 August 1950, 5; Zimdars-Swartz, “Religious Experience and Public Cult,” 49-50.

<sup>52</sup> Kanady, “Woman Prays, Claims to See Vision Again,” 1; “Look at Sun Is Deceiving,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 16 August 1950, 5; “Pray and Pray Hard,” 31.

<sup>53</sup> Frakes, “Setting for a Miracle,” 1019.

<sup>54</sup> Leonard, “Necedah Is Booming on ‘Vision Day’ Eve,” 2.

<sup>55</sup> Frakes, “Setting for a Miracle,” 1020. This talk was given by layman Stephen Breen, editor of *Scapular* magazine. “‘No Vision Miracles,’ Catholic Diocese Says,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 16 August 1950, 3; Riordan, “Multitude Tense but Orderly as Farm Woman Reviews ‘Talk,’” 7.

the statue of Our Lady of Fatima with roses at 11:30.<sup>56</sup> At noon Mary Ann Van Hoof came out of the house, knelt before the shrine, then repeated the message over the loudspeaker. She asked the crowd not to crush her flower beds, then went back into her kitchen on the arm of her husband, crying. The rosary resumed.<sup>57</sup> Scapulars were handed out on the grounds, which were supposed to save the wearer from eternal fire if they were worn at the time of death. Journalist Margaret Frakes reported that the crowd did not seem underprivileged; they were well-dressed and drove newer cars, and few had foreign accents.<sup>58</sup> Most of the pilgrims were white, Midwestern, practicing cradle Catholics. The great majority were of German-American heritage.<sup>59</sup> Pilgrims reported they found the journey worthwhile because of the prayers, and many felt a sense of certainty that a miracle would happen there. Some believers felt that being around Van Hoof during an apparition meant being in the presence of Mary, and helping her cause by spreading the messages and reciting the rosary might bring them special graces.

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<sup>56</sup> “‘Pray and Pray Hard,’” 31.

<sup>57</sup> Richard S. Davis, “‘It Happened’ Is Word Given Anxious Crowd,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 15 August 1950, 2; Frakes, “Setting for a Miracle,” 1019-1021; “‘No Vision Miracles,’ Catholic Diocese Says,” 3; “100,000 in Wisconsin Watch Virgin’s ‘Visit,’” *New York Times*, 16 August 1950, 19.

<sup>58</sup> Frakes, “Setting for a Miracle,” 1020.

<sup>59</sup> Peter W. Wood, “Pilgrimage and Heresy: The Transformation of Faith at a Shrine in Wisconsin,” in Alan Morinis, ed., *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 120; Wood, “Quoting Heaven,” 624.

Reservations were made for the next scheduled apparition on October 7, the Feast of the Rosary, though the crowd on that day decreased to 30,000.<sup>60</sup>

Necedah was strained by the crush of pilgrims, but the town made money from the visitors. There were more people in the stores and restaurants than ever. “Stores hastily placed signs advertising ‘religious goods’ and the St. Francis Catholic church sold the articles in the parish house, with the profits to go to a building fund.”<sup>61</sup> The local soda fountain sold rosaries, statues of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, and Necedah souvenirs.<sup>62</sup> Before Van Hoof’s apparition claims,

the only tourists attracted to Necedah were those who came to fish or hunt. With sandy soil making the land virtually useless and no industry fueling its economy, this isolated central Wisconsin village...was considered a dying community. Although Van Hoof’s claims initially raised local eyebrows, the village’s Chamber of Commerce soon had visions of its own that meant setting aside skepticism to take advantage of the economic opportunities created by the flood of pilgrims pouring into town.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Frakes, “Setting for a Miracle,” 1020-1021; “‘Pray and Pray Hard,’” 32; Wood, “Quoting Heaven,” 37; Zimdars-Swartz, “Religious Experience and Public Cult,” 53.

<sup>61</sup> Kanady, “Woman Prays, Claims to See Vision Again,” 8.

<sup>62</sup> Charles House, “What’s In Store for Us Today? Natives Wonder,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 15 August 1950, 4; Leonard, “Farm Woman ‘Sees’ Virgin as Thousands Watch,” 2; Leonard, “Necedah Is Booming on ‘Vision Day’ Eve,” 1.

<sup>63</sup> Susan Hogan-Albach, “Seeds of Heartache in a Field of Faith,” *Chicago Tribune*, 22 April 1992, 8. In reaction to an apparition claim in 1992 in Kettle River, Minnesota, near Duluth, religion reporter Hogan-Albach wrote a feature comparing the Kettle River apparitions with those at Necedah.

While local opinion was divided, both Protestant and Catholic, over whether the visions were a hoax, sincere, or misguided, Necedah would be forever changed because of the events at the Van Hoof farm.<sup>64</sup>

The episcopal investigation decided against Mary Ann Van Hoof relatively quickly. Six priests had gone to the August 15 apparition as part of a special committee to question her. The next day, the *Milwaukee Journal* reported that an anonymous diocese spokesman discredited Van Hoof because her talk was a “garbled” version of the one she gave in June, her words were contradictory, and the people around her “sort of cursed at me” when the observers entered the house. The people closest to her appeared to be “off the beam,” he said. There were no claims of unusual signs.<sup>65</sup> Father Claude Heithaus, a Jesuit who led the diocesan investigation, reported, “Mary Ann repeatedly interrupted her questioners and screamed hysterically at them, continually gave evasive answers, and when cornered, tried to run out of the room or flared up in a tirade.”<sup>66</sup> Van Hoof’s spiritualist history, her invalid first marriage and resulting child, and the financial benefits the Van Hoofs received from the visions all hurt her claims.<sup>67</sup> In November of

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<sup>64</sup> Frakes, “Setting for a Miracle,” 1020.

<sup>65</sup> “Church Aide Skeptical of Necedah Vision,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 17 August 1950, 3; “Church Doubts ‘Vision’,” *New York Times*, 17 August 1950, 29; “Church Official Discredits New Necedah Story,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 17 August 1950, 19; Paul E. Gustafson, “Priest Says There Was No Necedah Apparition,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 16 August 1950, 7; Kanady, “Woman Prays, Claims to See Vision Again,” 8; “‘No Vision Miracles,’ Catholic Diocese Says,” 3.

<sup>66</sup> Maloney, “Necedah Revisited,” 24.

<sup>67</sup> Kselman, “Our Lady of Necedah: Marian Piety and the Cold War,” 22; Kselman and Avella, “Marian Piety and the Cold War in the United States,” 420.

1950, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee ordered the statue of Mary removed from the Van Hoof farm as well as the Stations of the Cross on a bluff in the village. The parish priests at St. Francis were replaced three times in as many years due to their inability to stop the movement or distance it from the parish.<sup>68</sup> The bishop asked the Van Hoofs to remove another shrine from their property in May 1951. Mary Ann Van Hoof underwent medical and psychological tests in Milwaukee in April 1952 at Bishop Treacy's request. In 1953 lead investigator Father Heithaus concluded the apparitions were false, and the investigation finally ended in 1955 with Bishop Treacy's proclamation condemning the Necedah apparitions.<sup>69</sup>

As early as February 1951, even the Vatican mentioned Necedah as an example of apparitions not recognized by the Church. Monsignor Alfredo Ottaviani of the Congregation of the Holy Office wrote, "there seems to be a tendency on the part of the faithful to disregard warnings of ecclesiastical authorities and to manifest their religious feelings at new popular shrines rather than in churches," which he saw as dangerous because "these uncontrolled religious manifestations might be seized upon by enemies of the church." In addition to concern about how these activities would look to outsiders, Ottaviani warned that belief in events like the ones at Necedah "create the danger of

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<sup>68</sup> "Prelate Bars Shrine on Farm," *New York Times*, 28 November 1950, 12; Wood, "Quoting Heaven," 37; Zimdars-Swartz, "Religious Experience and Public Cult," 49.

<sup>69</sup> David G. Bromley and Rachel S. Bobbitt, "Visions of the Virgin Mary: The Organizational Development of Marian Apparitional Movements," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* Vol. 14, No. 3 (February 2011), 25; Wood, "Quoting Heaven," 37, 40-41; Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 265.

discrediting real miracles.”<sup>70</sup> However, skepticism on the part of the clergy is a standard part of apparition accounts, and believers still hoped that Church approval would come eventually.<sup>71</sup> The devotion at Necedah continued.

Believers worked under the assumption that one day the world would see that they were right. They collected testimonials from participants, which could be used as evidence by the Church in a later investigation. However, this was a risky move because it could help make the case for the apparitions’ validity or disqualify them for being part of a “public cult.”<sup>72</sup> Believers formed a non-profit organization in 1958 to take over for the Necedah Committee. For My God and My Country, Incorporated, supplied organization, managerial skill, and material resources, though it never originated programs or policies and rarely carried them out.<sup>73</sup> They had a board of directors, dues-paying members, and legal ownership of real estate and property. Their purpose was to promote Van Hoof’s visions and accomplish what Mary requested, but members of the

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<sup>70</sup> “Vatican Condemns Alleged Miracles,” *New York Times*, 4 February 1951, 76.

<sup>71</sup> Bromley & Bobbitt, “Visions of the Virgin Mary,” 24-25; Kselman and Avella, “Marian Piety and the Cold War in the United States,” 421; Zimdars-Swartz, “Religious Experience and Public Cult,” 51.

<sup>72</sup> For My God and My Country, *Testimonials of Pilgrims: Queen of the Holy Rosary Mediatrix of Peace Shrine, Necedah, Wisconsin, 1950-1966*. Volume 1 (Necedah, WI: For My God and My Country, Inc., 1966); For My God and My Country, *Testimonials Attributed to Queen of the Holy Rosary Mediatrix of Peace Shrine at Necedah, Wisconsin, 1950 to 1969*, Volume 2 (Necedah, WI: For My God and My Country, Inc., 1969); Wood, “Quoting Heaven,” 380-393.

<sup>73</sup> *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Necedah, Wisconsin, U.S.A.*, 14; Wood, “Quoting Heaven,” 41, 117.

group were a small subset of believers.<sup>74</sup> Decisions were made by a 33-member body called the “Inner Circle,” particularly a smaller committee called the “Monday Morning Meeting.” The “Monday Morning Meeting” was the “only group with power.”<sup>75</sup> The Catholic press questioned Van Hoof’s claims as early as August 1950 and condemned them by February 1951, but the secular press helped keep the movement alive with stories portraying a small group standing up to the powerful Church. This theme changed in the 1970s when the stories portrayed believers as a cult or throwback group.<sup>76</sup> Believers found themselves in an awkward position, still considering themselves as practicing Roman Catholics but violating the Church by participating in activities at the Necedah shrine. Some resolved this position by using the claims of conspiracies and infiltration of the Church to deny the validity of the investigations.<sup>77</sup> Others claimed that they were not violating the Church since the Vatican had not condemned Necedah, just local bishops through flawed investigations.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Wood, “Quoting Heaven,” 80.

<sup>75</sup> Wood, “Quoting Heaven,” 115, 137.

<sup>76</sup> Robert J. McClory, “TV report says ‘fanatics’ run shrine at Necedah,” *National Catholic Reporter*, 21 December 1979, 3, 19; Mark Winiarski, “Where Mother Cabrini Warns Against Speeding,” *National Catholic Reporter*, 12 September 1975, 1-2; Wood, “Quoting Heaven,” 213-214.

<sup>77</sup> Diamond Star Constellation Research and Investigation, *Marian Apparitions and Apocalyptic Research: Research Spectrum Status Report #1, Special Deluxe Edition* (Necedah, WI: Diamond Star Constellation Research and Investigation, 1994), 17-18, 30.

<sup>78</sup> *Clergy Testimonials: Queen of the Holy Rosary Mediatrix of Peace, Mediatrix Between God and Man* (Necedah, WI: For My God and My Country, Inc., n.d.): 6, 10-11; Diamond Star Constellation Research and Investigation, *Marian Apparitions and Apocalyptic Research*, 12.

Because the Necedah believers continued to defy the Church, Bishop Frederick Freking, who succeeded Bishop Treacy after his death in 1964, felt compelled to take stronger action. In 1969 Bishop Freking ordered a new investigative commission. This commission concluded in 1970 with the recommendation to re-state the 1955 condemnation. These results were made public in February 1971. In 1972, Freking wrote an official document telling Van Hoof to stop shrine activities. She responded by wrapping the statues in black plastic. On September 6, 1973, Freking warned publicly that the leaders of the Necedah shrine were ignoring his order to stop and risked “personal interdiction.” Finally, on March 2, 1975, Freking placed Van Hoof and six of her supporters under interdict. This means that they were forbidden to receive sacraments (except confession) in Catholic churches. On March 8, the priest at St. Francis at the time told church members who refused to obey Freking’s instructions with regard to the Necedah shrine to leave, and several hundred walked out.<sup>79</sup>

After the 1975 decision, believers had to make difficult choices in relation to the Catholic Church. Most commuted to parishes where they were not known or where the priests disagreed with the Diocese of La Crosse. They also appealed to Rome, hiring a Vatican lawyer. Since the parish priest was enforcing Freking’s order, Catholics in the village were divided between those who believed in the shrine and those who did not, and the two groups had little direct contact, proceeding with a policy of mutual avoidance. Non-believers controlled the village, but the believers were a potentially powerful bloc.<sup>80</sup> Believers had grown in numbers over the years. At the time of Fred Van Hoof’s death in

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<sup>79</sup> Wood, “Quoting Heaven,” 42-44.

<sup>80</sup> Wood, “Quoting Heaven,” 189, 197-199, 211.



1960, Mary Ann could count 15 families as supporters. By 1975, her supporters included 300 families.<sup>81</sup> Some of this came from the belief that “Mary was said to have promised that anyone living within 5 miles of the Van Hoofs would be spared on the day of chastisement.”<sup>82</sup> This area was called “The Island,” and they believed they might be rescued by the angel Gabriel on a flying saucer to the North Pole. This was information for the Inner Circle and not shared with new pilgrims.<sup>83</sup> Failing to do good works and to pray that Mary would restrain an angry Jesus from destroying humanity would hasten the chastisement. Most believers experienced signs— seeing a statue move, a rosary turning from silver to gold, unnatural light, music with no source, unexplained smells, a glimpse of an angel or other heavenly figure in the clouds— but no one except Van Hoof could see or communicate with Mary. These experiences served as a dividing line between pilgrims and committed believers. Other Catholic shrines are open to the possibility of pilgrims encountering the miraculous at the site but do not see it as likely or common.<sup>84</sup>

Because believers felt persecuted and were barred from the Roman Catholic Church, they began their own parish as part of the American National Catholic Church, Roman Catholic Ultrajectine in 1979.<sup>85</sup> The American National Catholic Church was associated with the German Old Catholic Church, which broke with Rome over the issue of papal infallibility in the nineteenth century. The years 1978-1981 were the period

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<sup>81</sup> Wood, “Quoting Heaven,” 42, 44.

<sup>82</sup> Hogan-Albach, “Seeds of Heartache in a Field of Faith,” 8.

<sup>83</sup> Wood, “Pilgrimage and Heresy,” 126.

<sup>84</sup> Wood, “Pilgrimage and Heresy,” 127-128.

<sup>85</sup> Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 225.

when the Necedah shrine had its largest resident following, but its association with the American National Catholic Church shifted the shrine's focus from the reaction against Vatican II that appealed to many Catholic traditionalists and had given the movement a second wind after the Church's condemnation. In 1979, half of the 500 shrine families left the movement.<sup>86</sup> The exodus continued as priests who were in charge of the Necedah parish for the American National Catholic Church quit, returned to the Roman Catholic Church, and proclaimed the Necedah visions to be a sham. Some were exposed as frauds and were not priests at all. Two-thirds of the remaining shrine families left the movement.<sup>87</sup>

Mary Ann Van Hoof reported that the Virgin Mary told her to marry Ray Hirt, one of her followers, in 1977. She died on March 18, 1984. The Roman Catholic Church refused to allow a funeral Mass for her.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Julie Byrne, "'Catholic Means Universal': An Essay on Other Catholics" (paper presented at the Princeton American Religion Workshop, 22 October 2009), 8-9; Wood, "Quoting Heaven," 45, 48, 57-58.

<sup>87</sup> Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 225-226; Hogan-Albach, "Seeds of Heartache in a Field of Faith," 8; Maloney, "Necedah Revisited," 33-34; "North American Old Catholic Church, Ultrajectine Tradition," in *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. J. Gordon Melton (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1987), 183-184; Wood, "Quoting Heaven," 45.

<sup>88</sup> Diamond Star Constellation Research and Investigation, *Marian Apparitions and Apocalyptic Research*, 245; Maloney, "Necedah Revisited," 34; Wood, "Quoting Heaven," 45, 143. There is disagreement about the marriage date among these sources. Wood states on page 44 that Van Hoof married Hirt in 1978, but Diamond Star Constellation Research and Investigation reports they married in 1977, and Maloney gives Advent 1977 as the date of a message that they were to be married, then explains that while they had at least three ceremonies, they never had a marriage license.

The messages Van Hoof passed along from Mary initially fit the approved pattern. She urged people to pray to become closer to Christ, pray the rosary, and do penance. Some were similar to messages at LaSalette in France or repeated the Fatima warning about Russia. Emphasizing prayer gave Catholics reassurance that they could do something, which was a major source of the apparitions' appeal, especially in the context of the atomic age. The messages had clear references to the apparitions at Fatima.<sup>89</sup> However, the messages grew more controversial over time, especially after Vatican II. Van Hoof claimed that in addition to the Virgin Mary, the Trinity and over 100 saints appeared to her.<sup>90</sup> She said that the devil worked through churches, schools, the government, the arts, the news media, and food to destroy Christians, especially youth. Drugs, pornography, music, art, sex education, and textbooks were tools of the devil. The efforts made by Van Hoof, her family, and her believers would meet with persecution.<sup>91</sup> Messages against abortion and euthanasia took a racist turn: "What will happen to the future white generations if the white people do not stand up and be willing to bear their own children?" Van Hoof also said that Mary told her 30,000 communists had trained as priests and ministers to infiltrate and destroy Catholic and Protestant churches.<sup>92</sup> Her visions warned that: "the Catholic Church has been infiltrated to a marked degree by the Yiddish Zionists and Masons who do not want the truth of the

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<sup>89</sup> Kselman, "Our Lady of Necedah: Marian Piety and the Cold War," 17, 20-21; Kselman and Avella, "Marian Piety and the Cold War in the United States," 414, 418-419; Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 260.

<sup>90</sup> *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Necedah, Wisconsin, U.S.A.*, 3.

<sup>91</sup> *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Necedah, Wisconsin, U.S.A.*, 6-7.

<sup>92</sup> *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Necedah, Wisconsin, U.S.A.*, 8.

Blessed Virgin’s message to reach the faithful,” another claim that trafficked in xenophobia and racism.<sup>93</sup> According to Van Hoof, Mary wanted prayers for Pope Paul VI to return the Mass to the “way My Divine Son instituted it on Holy Thursday. He does not seek for an easier way.”<sup>94</sup> Van Hoof’s messages showed that Mary was concerned about deviations in the Mass and in the way Catholics took communion, but urged believers not to abandon the Church. Van Hoof herself also claimed to be a victim soul, suffering the wounds of the crucifixion and sleeping only 10-15 minutes at a time.<sup>95</sup> In addition, Van Hoof reported that Mary wanted nuns to continue wearing habits and a return to traditional gender roles because the women’s liberation movement was “scandalous and ridiculous.”<sup>96</sup> Van Hoof also presented messages about “the dangers of food additives and music by the Beatles.”<sup>97</sup> Van Hoof warned of communists coming down from Canada or Midwestern cities, spies, “men in black” with “infrared headlights,” pollution from paper mills upstream, and fluoridation. Believers ate foods from the shrine health food store that were supposed to be pure and used windmills for

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<sup>93</sup> Diamond Star Constellation Research and Investigation, *Marian Apparitions and Apocalyptic Research*, 15. Zimdars-Swartz suggests this turn toward racist, conspiracy-driven messages came from Henry Swan’s influence. *Encountering Mary*, 261-262.

<sup>94</sup> *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Necedah, Wisconsin, U.S.A.*, 9.

<sup>95</sup> *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Necedah, Wisconsin, U.S.A.*, 4-5, 14. Zimdars-Swartz defines being a victim soul as “to suffer on behalf of sinners and to experience the passion of Christ.” “Religious Experience and Public Cult,” 37.

<sup>96</sup> *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Necedah, Wisconsin, U.S.A.*, 10-11.

<sup>97</sup> Jessica McBride and Jim Stingl, “A wayward flock, an unsolved killing—Kunz clues sought near shrine,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 24 May 1998, 1A.

electricity and to pump water because they wanted to be prepared in case a communist takeover denied them access to utilities. Members of the leadership accused each other of witchcraft.<sup>98</sup>

The site itself developed over time, particularly during the 1960s. Although the Van Hoof home was destroyed by fire in 1959, a replica was built. The site is also home to an information building, the Mediatrix of Peace Hall, St. Joseph the Worker Hall, St. Francis of Assisi Home for Unwanted Men, and an unfinished House of Prayer. The “Sacred Spot of Apparitions” features a life-sized statue of the Queen of the Holy Rosary Mediatrix of Peace, the vision of Mary that Van Hoof claimed to see, and four ash trees, but it is not open to ordinary pilgrims. The site also celebrates patriotism with songs, flags, and a Patriotic Shrine with life-sized statues of Jesus, George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln, though the flags are kept at half-mast to remember aborted babies.<sup>99</sup> A postcard of the Joan of Arc Shrine at the site claims that she helped Washington with the American Revolution and Lincoln with the Civil War.<sup>100</sup> Van Hoof controlled the details of construction, the order, and the placement, supposedly at Mary’s specifications. Sculptures were commissioned, but most other work was done by volunteers. The shrine also features sites honoring St. Anne, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Michael battling Satan,

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<sup>98</sup> McClory, “TV report says ‘fanatics’ run shrine at Necedah,” 19; Wood, “Quoting Heaven,” 667-668, 685; Zimdars-Swartz, “Religious Experience and Public Cult,” 53.

<sup>99</sup> *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Necedah, Wisconsin, U.S.A.*, 16-20; Bromley & Bobbitt, “Visions of the Virgin Mary,” 17-18; Wood, “Pilgrimage and Heresy,” 125; Wood, “Quoting Heaven,” 743-746; Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary*, 262-263.

<sup>100</sup> Wood, “Quoting Heaven,” 699.

Mother Cabrini, the Holy Family, a Nativity Grotto, the Last Supper, the First Mass, the Crucifixion, the Way to Calvary, the Way to Peace, and the Unity Medal and a bell.<sup>101</sup> Many of these sites depict saints as parallels to Van Hoof, such as Joan of Arc, St. Anne, and Mother Cabrini, and the Way of Peace actually includes Van Hoof, showing the shrine's hope that one day Van Hoof will be named a saint.<sup>102</sup> As for programs, the shrine offered a Constant Vigil of Prayer, Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and a rosary group; it also ran a home for unwed mothers and unwanted babies. They also campaigned against pornography, for cleaning up television, and for "Mary-like" dress.<sup>103</sup> Van Hoof's messages shifted in emphasis from anti-communism to anti-abortion sometime between the 1950s and 1970s, presumably related to *Roe v. Wade*, as well as changing from being for all Christians to an explicitly Catholic focus, coinciding with the changes in the Catholic Church brought about by Vatican II.

The insistence on dressing like Mary at Necedah is part of a larger campaign shown both in popular Catholic rhetoric and more mainstream American culture during the 1950s and 1960s. During the Cold War, strong themes of immoral women taking on men's roles to ruin or endanger the US could be detected. Control of women's sexuality combined with the fear of communism in the 1950s, so women embracing traditional gender roles in terms of motherhood, domesticity, and demure clothes and behavior, was

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<sup>101</sup> Wood, "Quoting Heaven," 623, 704-706. In Catholic theology, the Last Supper and First Mass are the same event, but Van Hoof was told to make sites for them as separate events. Wood, "Pilgrimage and Heresy," 129.

<sup>102</sup> Wood, "Quoting Heaven," 726-728, 731-735, 762, 766.

<sup>103</sup> *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Necedah, Wisconsin, U.S.A.*, 14-16; Wood, "Quoting Heaven," 539-542.

viewed as a way to combat the Soviets. Historian Elaine Tyler May addresses the Cold War idea that sexually liberated women were potentially destructive, and found a link between out-of-control sexuality and Cold War insecurities in writings and media of the era. She writes, “It was not just nuclear energy that had to be contained, but the social and sexual fallout of the atomic age itself.”<sup>104</sup> This containment could be achieved only “in marriage where masculine men would be in control with sexually submissive competent homemakers at their side.”<sup>105</sup> May argues that women’s changing economic and sexual behavior contributed to much Cold War anxiety, and emphasizing domesticity could offer security in the wake of the Great Depression, World War Two, and the development of atomic weapons.<sup>106</sup>

In addition, some male authors linked a rise in sexual immorality to a decline in devotion to Mary. Thus, a campaign to “Be Marylike by Being Modest” developed, connecting strict rules for appropriate dress, purity literature, and Marian devotions.<sup>107</sup> This idea was supposed to give women a sense of power, that they could keep America safe from communism by acting as “modern Marys.”<sup>108</sup> Even today, female visitors to the shrine who are not dressed appropriately are stopped at the entrance and loaned wrap

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<sup>104</sup> Kane, “Marian Devotion Since 1940: Continuity or Casualty?,” 104-106; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 63, 93-94, 109-110, 112-113.

<sup>105</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, 99.

<sup>106</sup> May, *Homeward Bound*, 11, 24, 93.

<sup>107</sup> Kane, “Marian Devotion Since 1940: Continuity or Casualty?,” 104-106.

<sup>108</sup> Johnson, “The Home Is a Little Church,” 23.

skirts or modest blouses which are kept there. There is no mention of appropriate dress for male visitors.<sup>109</sup>

The Necedah shrine still exists today. It is not marked well and can be challenging for pilgrims to find since there are only two signs, both on the road from the east when the main approach is from the south, but inside the shrine has lots of signs, explanations, and fences, sending the message that the shrine is a place of order in a disorderly world.<sup>110</sup> Despite all the instability within the movement, the multiple condemnations by the institutional church, and the visionary's death, this place of popular devotion persists after seven decades, though not as a serious threat to the authority of the institutional church. Their numbers never reached those of 1950 again; most Catholics' willingness to obey the institutional church meant that believers in Necedah would have to be a small sect. Building on the Fatima apparitions in the context of the Cold War played an important role in how the site grew, but the movement shifted its emphasis over time in response to changing events. The Necedah apparitions remain the largest in American history.

While the Necedah shrine was the first major site for Marian pilgrimages in the United States, it was certainly not the last. The American apparition claims that have followed those in Necedah have not been as directly tied to the Cold War or resulted in

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<sup>109</sup> Queen of the Holy Rosary Shrine, <http://www.queenoftheholynosaryshrine.com/Welcome%20Page.htm> Accessed 6 January 2009; Virgin Mary Appeared Here, Necedah, Wisconsin, <http://www.roadsideamerica.com/story/17527> Accessed 18 June 2011.

<sup>110</sup> Wood, "Pilgrimage and Heresy," 124-125; Wood, "Quoting Heaven," 634-636.



schisms with the institutional church. However, the pilgrimage experience started at Necedah is part of a pattern found in later apparition events. For example, the development of a group responsible for maintaining the apparition site, organizing events, and disseminating messages received by the visionary, first seen in Necedah with *For My God and My Country*, is quite common with later apparition events. The economic benefits for local businesses while neighbors resist the influx of outsiders is another common element. The structure of apparition events, involving recitation of the rosary and other prayers, a public reading of the messages received by the visionary, and the experience of some pilgrims of smelling the fragrance of roses where there are none, seeing the sun spin or turn color, or having a rosary change color, is remarkably similar at the various American apparition sites, as is the availability of religious goods and souvenirs for pilgrims to purchase. In addition, particularly since the emergence of the Internet, believers have turned to technology to spread the word about various visionaries and pilgrimage sites and to buy apparition-related goods, such as books of messages. Even though Van Hoof died before the popular emergence of the Internet, the Necedah apparitions still have an online presence.

Apparitions put believers in a difficult position with regard to the institutional church. The believers at Necedah clearly practiced an alternative form of Catholicism, to the point that they finally broke from the Roman Catholic Church. Although believers at other US apparition sites remain part of the Roman Catholic Church, they too practice an alternative form of Catholicism. The visionaries tend to be women, who are receiving messages from the Virgin Mary and Jesus without any mediator, such as a priest. This puts the visionary in a position of authority not otherwise available to women within the

Catholic Church. Despite this unusual power, the messages from the visionaries' apparition experiences are often politically and socially conservative. At Necedah, these messages emphasized anti-communism and the importance of prayer, then shifted to anti-abortion, traditional gender roles, and disapproval of changes in the Church as a result of Vatican II. Later visionaries' messages have less to do with communism, but continue the idea that the world is in peril, particularly due to social change, and the importance of prayer.

Vatican II was one reason for the shift in emphasis shown in the messages at Necedah. The impact of the Second Vatican Council on the Catholic Church cannot be overstated. The next chapter explores the significance of Vatican II for American Catholicism.

### CHAPTER 3. “SIGNS OF THE TIMES”: US CATHOLICISM AFTER WWII, THE IMPORTANCE OF VATICAN II, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PARACHURCH ORGANIZATIONS

The Second Vatican Council was a transformative moment for the Roman Catholic Church as a whole, but also for an American church that had been enjoying unprecedented success during the twentieth century. As religion scholar Chester Gillis argues, the Catholic Church in the US changed more from 1965 to 1969 than in the previous 350 years.<sup>1</sup> Although Vatican II did not develop overnight, the sweep and extent of its reforms startled many American Catholics who were unprepared for such change. Vatican II created change not just in the way Catholics worshiped, but in the relationship between parishioners and Church authorities, and in their identity as Catholics.

Before Vatican II, American Catholics had developed a thriving subculture. Catholics tended to hope they could merge Catholic culture with American culture, making American culture more Catholic rather than making Catholics more American. For example, journalist John Cogley wrote that the “real challenge facing Catholics is how to undergird American democracy with the principles of unchanging morality for which the Church is today almost the sole remaining consistent spokesman.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chester Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 26.

<sup>2</sup> John Cogley, “Catholics and American Democracy,” *Commonweal* Vol. 58, No. 10 (12 June 1953), 248; Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), 351-352.

After World War Two, Catholics became even more eager to bring their Catholicism into other parts of their lives, including literature, politics, philosophy, and athletics. As historian John T. McGreevy writes, “At no point before or since have the connections between the Church and its members been so dense; at no point the Catholic culture so cohesive.”<sup>3</sup> The dominant attitude was that Catholics could save Western civilization and were clearly superior to non-Catholics, as shown by population growth of American Catholics, building boom in terms of churches and schools, and record numbers of people taking religious vocations, as well as institutions like the Catholic Legion of Decency, which forced Hollywood to make movies suitable for Catholic standards, not just approved by the Production Code, or face boycotts by Catholic audiences. Director Elia Kazan, furious over alterations made to his film *A Streetcar Named Desire* to avoid condemnation by the Legion, pointedly asked one of its representatives, “How can you seek to enforce...an ethical position which is that of your Church on the entire population of this country?” Kazan even wrote the *New York Times* to complain, “My picture had been cut to fit the specifications of a code which is not my code, is not the recognized code of the picture industry, and is not the code of the great majority of the audience.” This attitude of “Catholic smugness,” in Flannery O’Connor’s words, was a defining characteristic of the pre-1960 Catholic culture.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 351-352; Sally Fitzgerald, ed., *The Habit of Being: Letters of Flannery O’Connor* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979), 131; Elia Kazan, *A Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 435; Elia Kazan, “Pressure Problem,” *New York Times*, 21 October 1951, 101. Some important works on the history of the Legion of Decency include Gregory D. Black, *The Catholic Crusade Against the Movies, 1940-1975* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Gregory D. Black,

The Catholic subculture was made possible by the presence of separate Catholic institutions, many of which originally emerged due to anti-Catholic discrimination and the needs related to massive Catholic immigration.<sup>5</sup> Education was a clear example of this, thanks to the parochial school system and the development of Catholic colleges and universities.<sup>6</sup> Parochial schools taught children mainline devotional Catholicism as well as serving as Americanizing agents. The US Catholic population doubled between 1940 and 1960, and the 1950s brought on the largest expansion of Catholic schools and churches since the Third Council of Baltimore in 1884.<sup>7</sup> Related to the growth of schools, there was a movement among Catholics to ensure that teaching nuns had minimum educational preparation. Still, the influence of parochial schools should not be exaggerated, as almost half of Catholic students attended public schools.<sup>8</sup> The relatively newly developed Catholic high schools were not connected with an individual parish, so

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*Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); James M. Skinner, *The Cross and the Cinema: The Legion of Decency and the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993); and Frank Walsh, *Sin and Censorship: The Catholic Church and the Motion Picture Industry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Dean R. Hoge, "Interpreting Change in American Catholicism: The River and the Floodgate," *Review of Religious Research* Vol. 50 (Special Issue 2008), 58-59; John Tracy Ellis, *American Catholicism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 149-151.

<sup>6</sup> I am using the term "parochial" in its meaning as associated with individual parishes, not the more recent meaning of limited or narrow. Parochial schools would most often be elementary or grade schools.

<sup>7</sup> Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 76.

<sup>8</sup> Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 397-398; Colleen McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II: A History of Catholic Reform in America* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 47-48.

they weakened youth's parish ties. As for colleges and universities, Catholic institutions began to establish graduate programs after World War Two. As the University of Notre Dame in particular became known as a research institution rather than just a football program, a debate emerged in the 1950s about what Catholic intellectual life entailed.<sup>9</sup> Catholic broadcasting and publications encouraged "Catholic smugness," as did participation in Catholic organizations such as the Knights of Columbus, Catholic Youth Organization, National Catholic Welfare Council, as well as more explicitly religious activities such as the Blue Army of Mary, sodalities, and foreign missions.<sup>10</sup> Church attendance was high-- in 1950, 70% of US Catholics regularly attended Sunday Mass-- and church teachings were generally accepted.<sup>11</sup>

Historian Jay Dolan states, "The thirty years after World War I was the time when devotional Catholicism hit its peak." Marian piety was especially popular in this time period. Praying the Rosary, crowning statues of Mary in May, and celebrating Marian feast days were central in the religious life of many Catholics. The novena, a nine-day period of prayer for special graces, was the most popular devotion after the First World

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<sup>9</sup> Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 399-401; Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 287-291; John T. McGreevy, "Thinking on One's Own: Catholicism in the American Intellectual Imagination, 1928-1960," *Journal of American History* Vol. 84, No. 1 (June 1997), 100-119; Thomas F. O'Dea, *American Catholic Dilemma: An Inquiry into the Intellectual Life* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958), 90-91, 106.

<sup>10</sup> Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 391-394.

<sup>11</sup> James P. McCartin, "'The Love of Things Unseen': Catholic Prayer and the Moral Imagination in the Twentieth-Century United States," (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2003), 53.

War, probably because it took place in the evening and was in the vernacular rather than in Latin.<sup>12</sup> The doctrine of the Assumption, the belief that Mary was taken bodily to heaven at her death, was proclaimed in 1950; the centenary of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception took place in 1954, spurring Pope Pius XII to declare it a Marian Year and to proclaim Mary as the Queen of Heaven; and the centennial anniversary of the apparitions at Lourdes was celebrated in 1958, all further contributing to Marian devotion. From 1948 to 1957, ten million volumes were published on Mary, more than ever before or since. The sodality movement promoted Marian devotion and frequent Communion. Devotion to the Eucharist and the associated adoration and frequent reception of it surged in the twentieth century, and frequent Communion required frequent confession. Popes were increasingly popular in this period as well, particularly with the growth of electronic media, which made them more familiar to Catholics.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 384; Paula M. Kane, "Marian Devotion Since 1940: Continuity or Casualty?" in *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. James M. O'Toole (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 97. A rosary chain is made of 53 small beads, 6 large beads, a medallion of Mary, and a cross. There are 67 separate prayers in a complete circuit, which are divided into the Joyful, Sorrowful, and Glorious Mysteries, corresponding with important events relating to Mary and Jesus. Kathryn Ann Johnson, "The Home Is a Little Church: Gender, Culture, and Authority in American Catholicism, 1940-1962" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1997), 144.

<sup>13</sup> Frank J. Coppa, "Pope Pius XII and the Cold War: The Post-war Confrontation between Catholicism and Communism," in *Religion and the Cold War*, ed. Dianne Kirby (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 59; Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 385-387; McCartin, "'The Love of Things Unseen'," 69; Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 116. Sodalities are religious and charitable societies of laypeople.

However, while the Catholic subculture was thriving, not all Catholics were satisfied. By the 1950s, devotional Catholicism was starting to decline, and its primary critics were members of the liturgical movement. These Catholics wanted more active participation by the laity, more of the Mass in the vernacular, and more emphasis on Christ, the Mass, the Bible, and the community. For example, in some parishes in the 1940s and 1950s, lay Catholics prayed aloud along with the priest and chanted parts of the liturgy. They became more familiar with the Mass by following along in a missal rather than silently praying or participating in other devotions. Though Pius XII did take steps in this direction, the majority of Catholics were uncomfortable with liturgical change and clung to the old style, making them unprepared for the vast changes and resulting divisions that would come with Vatican II.<sup>14</sup>

Those liberal Catholics who had been more involved in labor and social action movements during the 1930s and 1940s were more prepared for Vatican II and for more interaction with non-Catholics. Catholic support for labor helped show other Americans that Catholics could work within the American liberal tradition and made Catholicism more American. Catholics were becoming part of the American mainstream.<sup>15</sup> American anticommunism in the 1950s was “arguably the first time that a national political

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<sup>14</sup> Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 389-390; McCartin, “‘The Love of Things Unseen’,” 60-62; McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, 40-43; James F. White, *Roman Catholic Worship: Trent to Today*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 99-101.

<sup>15</sup> Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 407.



consensus had come to track closely a long-held and identifiably Catholic view.”<sup>16</sup> The post-World War Two economic boom, rise of Catholics into the middle class, rising levels of education, especially after the GI Bill, and suburbanization all contributed to weakening Catholic ties to the parish and Catholic subculture. Many Catholic soldiers moved to the South and West after having been stationed there, leaving their traditional Catholic neighborhoods in the Midwest and Northeast. The rate of conversion to Catholicism more than doubled from 1930 to 1950, and media drew attention to Catholicism with stories about famous converts such as Thomas Merton, Henry Ford II, and Clare Booth Luce. The increasing number of Catholics at secular schools such as Harvard, Princeton, and Yale (including William F. Buckley, who became prominent with the publication of *God and Man at Yale* in 1951), the appointment of William Brennan to the Supreme Court in 1956, and the election of John F. Kennedy as president in 1960 showed that Catholics had become integrated into American society and were seen as signs of success for American Catholics. By the 1960s, American Catholics were similar to other Americans in terms of education, economics, and politics.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Charles R. Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York: Random House, 1997), 230.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 21; Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America: A History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 93; Jim Castelli & Joseph Gremillion, *The Emerging Parish: The Notre Dame Study of Catholic Life Since Vatican II* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 23; Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 422, 427; Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 77; James Hennesey, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 283, 314-315; McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, 39; McGreevy, “Thinking on One’s Own,” 128-129; Morris, *American Catholic*, ix; Anthony Burke Smith, *The Look of Catholics: Portrayals in Popular Culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 38, 102-103.

In 1962 Pope John XXIII opened the Second Vatican Council, and it took place in four sessions between that date and 1965.<sup>18</sup> John XXIII said he wanted to promote *aggiornamento*, meaning to bring the Church up to date, which he described as opening the windows of the Church to let fresh air in. Vatican II did not develop out of nowhere. Drawing on the concerns of the liturgical movement, the Council diminished many activities of devotional Catholicism, instead emphasizing the Mass as the main devotional activity. The rosary and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, a sort of vigil near the elements of the Eucharist, were de-emphasized.<sup>19</sup> The liturgy would be in the vernacular, no longer in Latin, the altar would be turned around so the priest faced the congregation, and the laity would be expected to participate actively. Statues and votive candles were removed from the sanctuary. Participation in Communion and Extreme Unction (also known as “last rites” or the “sacrament of the sick”) rose, while confession and attendance declined. The Church was to be seen as the “people of God,” a servant church with social responsibilities. Where previously Catholics had been encouraged to separate themselves from non-Catholics, now the Church supported religious freedom and ecumenism. Lay Catholics gained the freedom to dissent thanks to the new emphasis on

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<sup>18</sup> Pope John XXIII died in 1963. The Council was completed by Pope Paul VI.

<sup>19</sup> Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament involves “paying homage to Christ’s body in the form of a transformed wafer of bread, or host.” After Mass, leftovers are put in a tabernacle, where Catholics believe Christ is still physically present. Coming to the otherwise empty church and praying near the tabernacle allows Catholics to express their devotion to Christ, to be more open to grace, and to remind them of their living faith. This time of prayer usually takes place in half-hour or hour-long shifts over a 24-hour period. Timothy Ignatius Kelly, “The Transformation of American Catholicism: The Pittsburgh Laity and the Second Vatican Council, 1950-1980” (PhD diss., Carnegie Mellon University, 1990), 62-63.

personal spirituality and self-conscious prayer. Vatican II created a wave of experimentation and change as no one was certain how to interpret and implement its reforms.<sup>20</sup>

Vatican II was not the only event to shake up American Catholics in this era. The Church under Vatican II encouraged engagement with society, but American Catholics became immersed in an American society in flux. The social issues of the 1960s and 1970s, including the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, feminism, the gay rights movement, rising divorce rates, the environment, *Roe v. Wade*, and the Watergate scandal all contributed to a prevailing spirit of conflict, but also inspired reform efforts as part of the mainstream. Traditional religions and institutions declined in the face of these issues.<sup>21</sup> In addition, changes to immigration law in 1965 enabled large-scale immigration from outside Northern Europe, including many Catholics, particularly Latinos and Asians.<sup>22</sup> The impact of Vatican II combined with these social changes to destabilize American Catholicism.

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<sup>20</sup> Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 95-96; McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, 120; John T. Noonan, Jr., *A Church That Can and Cannot Change: The Development of Catholic Moral Teaching* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 154-158.

<sup>21</sup> Carey, *Catholics in America*, 115, 123; William Dale Dinges, "Catholic Traditionalism in America: A Study of the Remnant Faithful" (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1983), 269; Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 422-424; Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 125; McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 207; Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 88; Claire E. Wolfteich, *American Catholics Through the Twentieth Century: Spirituality, Lay Experience, and Public Life* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 82, 99-100.

<sup>22</sup> Hennessey, *American Catholics*, 313; Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 89.

American Catholics struggled with what being “American” and being “Catholic” meant. Vatican II bore some responsibility for forcing Catholics to rethink the meaning of Catholicism for a modern world by accelerating reform that was already building. As Dolan explains, “Catholics tried to solve the riddle of religion and modernity overnight. It proved to be quite difficult.”<sup>23</sup> Catholics had to adjust to dissent, change, and diversity in an institution that had been seen as immutable. In the 1940s and 1950s calls for reform came from below, but after Vatican II they came from the top too, exposing bishops to both criticism and praise. The changes to the Mass were sudden, and although most Catholics went along, some did rebel. Marian devotions, such as novenas and rosaries, were fewer as Mary’s role in the Church was downplayed by the Council and competing opportunities for lay religious participation developed, including groups such as the *cursillo* movement, Marriage Encounter, and Charismatic Renewal.<sup>24</sup> Churches

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<sup>23</sup> Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 428.

<sup>24</sup> Timothy Matovina defines the *cursillo* as “a lay-run retreat movement that trained participants to actively live and spread their Catholic faith.” Matovina, *Guadalupe and Her Faithful: Latino Catholics in San Antonio, from Colonial Origins to the Present* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 142. The *cursillo de cristiandad*, or “short or little courses in Christianity,” aims at a renewal and revitalization of Catholicism, particularly in terms of language, which takes place primarily during a weekend retreat but also involves follow-up gatherings to refresh the participants’ commitment to enthusiasm, joy, and change in the church. No country has a higher number of *cursillo* centers than the US, and they are particularly popular in the Southwest. Marcene Marcoux, *Cursillo: Anatomy of a Movement: The Experience of Spiritual Renewal* (New York: Lambeth Press, 1982), 6, 20-21, 25-26, 36, 72, 76. Marriage Encounter is “a weekend of prayer for married couples,” which combines religious and interpersonal exercises. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 431; James M. O’Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 226. Charismatic Renewal emerged from interaction between Catholics and Pentecostals, particularly in the US, and is most commonly identified with speaking in tongues, receiving prophecy, and miraculous healings. James Hitchcock, “Catholic Activist Conservatism in the United

incorporated more Bible readings and Bible studies. The shift in understanding of sin away from legalism to an emphasis on individual conscience and love led to a change and decline in confessions.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, the relationship between Catholics and Protestants visibly changed. Non-Catholic observers were invited to the Council, and media coverage of Vatican II made all Americans more aware of how the Catholic Church worked. Vatican II's emphasis on ecumenism encouraged interaction between Catholics and Protestants rather than the separation previously insisted upon. Catholics became more accepted by Protestants as the Catholic Church was clearly embracing the American relationship between church and state.<sup>26</sup> Shortly after Vatican II, Pope Paul VI ruled that Catholics who married before a non-Catholic minister would no longer be excommunicated, and

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States," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 125-126; McCartin, "'The Love of Things Unseen,'" 211-219; Edward D. O'Connor, C.S.C., *I Am Sending You Prophets: The Role of Apparitions in the History of the Church* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing Company, 2007), 334-335.

<sup>25</sup> Carey, *Catholics in America*, 119; John Cogley, "Vatican II Re-educates the American Bishops," *New York Times*, 22 November 1964, SM34-35, 135-136; Clyde F. Crews, *American and Catholic: A Popular History of Catholicism in the United States* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1994), 151; Dinges, "Catholic Traditionalism in America," 35; Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 429-434; Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 314, 317; O'Toole, *The Faithful*, 225-230.

<sup>26</sup> Milton Bracker, "Pope to Proclaim Dogma This Week," *New York Times*, 1 December 1963, 26; Milton Bracker, "Vatican Council Lists Observers," *New York Times*, 28 September 1963, 2; Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 312; McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, 67, 116; Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Catholic Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), 62; "On Ecumenism," *New York Times*, 7 October 1964, 46; John Seidler and Katherine Meyer, *Conflict and Change in the Catholic Church* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 54; "Unity Guidelines Listed By Vatican," *New York Times*, 22 November 1964, 69.

marriages between a Catholic and non-Catholic no longer required the non-Catholic partner to pledge to raise any children as Catholics.<sup>27</sup> Marian devotion had distinguished Catholics from other US churches, but with Vatican II de-emphasizing those devotions, that distinctiveness faded.<sup>28</sup> American bishops ruled that Catholics could now eat meat on Fridays except during Lent, another practice that had distinguished them as Catholic.<sup>29</sup> Protestants became aware of the divisions among Catholics (as did Catholics) and no longer saw them as part of a totalitarian-like institution, following the Pope without question.<sup>30</sup> Some mainline Protestants even adopted some of the changes they observed Catholics making as a result of the Council, such as following a lectionary and using contemporary language.<sup>31</sup>

After Vatican II, the number of priests and vowed religious declined. Nuns and monks left in large numbers, usually because they desired swifter changes and self-fulfillment and drew on the growing spirit of independence in the wake of the Council.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> “Pontiff Is Expected to Ease the Rules on Mixed Marriage,” *New York Times*, 7 April 1965, 45; “Pope Eases Intermarriage Rules,” *New York Times*, 19 March 1966, 1, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Kane, “Marian Devotion Since 1940,” 93, 98.

<sup>29</sup> George Dugan, “Meatless Fridays Will End on Dec. 2 for U.S. Catholics,” *New York Times*, 20 November 1966, 1, 16.

<sup>30</sup> George Dugan, “Vatican Council Proves Surprise,” *New York Times*, 2 December 1962, 24; Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 262-264; Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 75.

<sup>31</sup> White, *Roman Catholic Worship*, 101. A lectionary is a schedule of Bible readings.

<sup>32</sup> Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 438.

Since Vatican II had made it clear that nuns and monks were still laypersons, they did not hold any special status in the Church, the sacrifices of religious life had less appeal, particularly in a modern world with opportunities for them to serve others without isolating themselves in a religious community. As for priests, the changing understanding of ministry as well as the celibacy issue created a crisis in numbers. Lay people had to become more active in ministry and took on unprecedented responsibilities in parish life.<sup>33</sup> The US Catholic Church has experienced a wave of structural change through the institution of retirement ages, lay ministers and deacons, floating parishes, parish councils, arbitration boards, and lay involvement, not just clerical, with the Canon Law Society.<sup>34</sup> This situation has created confusion in contemporary Catholic ministry, as priests still claim ultimate authority despite the involvement of laity, but lay Catholics are less willing to accept decisions made by the hierarchy without question.<sup>35</sup>

The United States has become the main arena for the debate over lay-clerical power.<sup>36</sup> By the late twentieth century, bishops were selected based on their loyalty to Vatican policies rather than geography. This created distance from their parishioners, lots of moving and isolation, and development of careerism since bishops had few friends

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<sup>33</sup> David Gibson, *The Coming Catholic Church: How the Faithful Are Shaping a New American Catholicism* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), 53; McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, 171.

<sup>34</sup> Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 315-316.

<sup>35</sup> Richard J. Gelm, *Politics and Religious Authority: American Catholics Since the Second Vatican Council* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 128; McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, 177.

<sup>36</sup> Gibson, *The Coming Catholic Church*, 51.

to help or advise them, which limited their effectiveness since they were all outsiders.<sup>37</sup> Since the bishops have a loyalty to Rome rather than to the diocese which they oversee, this can cause an adversarial relationship between the bishop and his parishioners since he has no need for popular support and can be distant from grassroots appeals for change.<sup>38</sup> In addition, although bishops were the ones at the Council and thus most familiar with the documents, local priests were the ones with primary responsibility for interpreting the documents and making the changes requested. This put parish priests in a difficult position whether they supported or resisted change, as they had to consider the needs of their parish as well as the demands of their bishop, who could undermine the priests' autonomy. As one might expect, resignations by priests rose dramatically in the wake of Vatican II.<sup>39</sup> Between 1966 and 1972, 10% of active clergy resigned. However, the Church faced a longer term problem— the number of students in seminary dropped from 26,200 in 1966 to 13,600 in 1972, which meant that there would not be enough new priests to replace those who were resigning.<sup>40</sup>

The decline of the institutions of the old Catholic subculture has perpetuated the identity crisis in American Catholicism. Catholic organizations and publications have

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<sup>37</sup> O'Toole, *The Faithful*, 294-295.

<sup>38</sup> Hoge, "Interpreting Change in American Catholicism," 56; Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 307-308.

<sup>39</sup> Seidler & Meyer, *Conflict and Change in the Catholic Church*, 69-70, 76.

<sup>40</sup> Seidler & Meyer, *Conflict and Change in the Catholic Church*, 128; William D. Dinges, "Roman Catholic Traditionalism," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991), 93.



decreased. New catechetical materials show less certainty or precision. Parochial schools have declined due to the falling birth rate but also their increased cost amid questions of their value. One reason for this rising cost is the shift from unpaid nuns to lay teachers who expect salaries, especially when parochial schools have improved the student-teacher ratio. Clergy and laity question the quality of the religious education children receive and are concerned about the younger generation's support for the Church. Research by sociologist William D'Antonio and others shows that Catholics with the most education in Catholic schools after Vatican II are less likely to conform to Church teachings than those with less Catholic schooling.<sup>41</sup> Catholic colleges and universities also face issues of academic freedom, particularly regarding theology. Although there are twice as many students at Catholic colleges and universities today as before Vatican II, most Catholic students go elsewhere.<sup>42</sup> Church activities are still available, but compete with sports, public school activities, professional demands, secular social life, and cultural temptations for consumption and entertainment.<sup>43</sup> While the Church has a renewed commitment to issues of social justice and the Catholic peace movement has grown since the 1960s, most Catholics say they are offended by priests

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<sup>41</sup> William V. D'Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Ruth A. Wallace, *Laity, American and Catholic: Transforming the Church* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996), v, 95-100; Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 441-443; McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, 169.

<sup>42</sup> James John Annarelli, *Academic Freedom and Catholic Higher Education* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987), 87, 125, 153-156; D'Antonio et al., *Laity, American and Catholic*, v, 15-16; Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 443-445; Gleason, *Contending with Modernity*, 308-313, 317; Seidler & Meyer, *Conflict and Change in the Catholic Church*, 76.

<sup>43</sup> Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 38.

and bishops involving themselves in worldly affairs and want such issues left to people in politics and business.<sup>44</sup> Parishioners concerned about losing their neighborhoods, defined by their parish, were puzzled and angered by priests and nuns who seemingly suddenly developed interests in social activism, sometimes even expressing hostility toward clergy who participated in protest marches.<sup>45</sup> These concerns combine with the tensions related to the priesthood over celibacy, ordination of women, and sexual ethics.<sup>46</sup>

D'Antonio et al. argue that authority involves voluntary obedience as opposed to coercion, which involves nonvoluntary obedience. In order for one to have authority, someone else must agree to obey and follow.<sup>47</sup> Rising levels of education, changes in the Church, and a growing skepticism toward institutions in general after the social turmoil of the 1960s contributed to a weaker Church authority and more challenges to the hierarchy. The Catholic ghetto was no more, and American and Catholic culture blended in the mainstream. Despite Rome's efforts to scale back some changes, such as through the encyclical against artificial birth control in 1968, *Humanae Vitae*, it was too late to separate Catholics from American culture. Dissent over birth control showed the limits to the authority of individual conscience vs. papal authority and disillusioned many American lay Catholics. Still, there are some groups of Catholics and other Americans

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<sup>44</sup> Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 445-453.

<sup>45</sup> Benedict M. Ashley, O.P., "The Loss of Theological Unity: Pluralism, Catholic Thomism, and Catholic Morality," in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, ed. Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 80; McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 170, 189.

<sup>46</sup> D'Antonio et al., *Laity, American and Catholic*, v.

<sup>47</sup> D'Antonio et al., *Laity, American and Catholic*, 25.

who support emphasizing traditional values and resist cultural trends. These conflicting visions of the Catholic Church have created divisions that for the first time in modern history have made Catholics unable to agree on what it means to be Catholic.<sup>48</sup>

According to William Dale Dinges, a scholar of religion and culture, “Vatican II provided an institutional context and legitimation for a collective rethinking of Catholic identity... Conflicting opinions about what the documents actually meant and what they properly authorized as ‘renewal’ greatly facilitated the rise of factions and interest groups in the postconciliar Church since both sides could find some pretense for legitimating their actions and opinions within the framework of the documents. The important aspect of this ensuing factionalism was not that it was new to the Church, but that by the late 1960's it had become increasingly immune to effective hierarchical control.”<sup>49</sup> Before Vatican II, the Church had clear rules for behavior that were seen as unchanging, but Vatican II opened the Church to negotiation. The “eternal truths” of the faith had been changed by the very people presumed to preserve them.<sup>50</sup>

Non-institutional groups have emerged as parallel church activities. Many of these include groups who feel alienated from the institutional church, such as homosexuals, women, former priests, and others working for change. Groups such as

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<sup>48</sup> D’Antonio et al., *Laity, American and Catholic*, 15-16; Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 428; Joseph A. Komonchak, “Interpreting the Council: Catholic Attitudes toward Vatican II,” in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, ed. Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 18; McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, 197.

<sup>49</sup> Dinges, “Catholic Traditionalism in America,” 32.

<sup>50</sup> Dinges, “Catholic Traditionalism in America,” 35, 40.

Call to Action and Catholics for a Free Choice felt Vatican II did not go far enough.<sup>51</sup>

Although most Catholics tried to follow the new order to varying degrees, some Catholics opposed Vatican II and were drawn to alternative, “traditional” groups and literature.

Dinges defines Catholic traditionalism as, “a sectarian-type social movement in which groups of Catholic clergy and laity have organized a campaign to preserve and promote constituent symbols and structural elements of Catholic identity and ecclesiology that

have lost legitimacy and credibility in the wake of the Second Vatican Council.”<sup>52</sup> The

Catholic Traditionalist Movement was the first traditionalist organization in the United

States. Founded by Father Gommar De Pauw in 1964, it was initially set up not to

repudiate Vatican II but to voice concerns about preserving Catholic identity and fears

that the Church was becoming too similar to Protestants. In 1965 De Pauw wrote the

“Catholic Traditionalist Manifesto,” explaining his concerns about Vatican II. These

included that ordinary lay Catholics lacked input, that liturgical changes went too far, that

Catholic distinctiveness was being lost, and that the documents were being interpreted

poorly. De Pauw became a media darling, urging that Catholics be allowed to choose

between the new English Mass and old Latin one. By 1967, after years of conflict with

Baltimore Archbishop Lawrence Cardinal Shehan, De Pauw was calling Vatican II a

mistake.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 124-125; O’Toole, *The Faithful*, 244.

<sup>52</sup> Dinges, *In Defense of Truth and Tradition*, 1.

<sup>53</sup> Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985*, 130; Dinges, “Catholic Traditionalism in America,” 127-145; William Dinges, *In Defense of Truth and Tradition: Catholic Traditionalism in America 1964-1974* (Notre Dame, IN: Working Paper Series, Charles and Margaret Hall Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, Series 17, No. 2, Spring 1986), 2-14; Dinges, “Roman

Traditionalist Catholics were not limited to the Catholic Traditionalist Movement. The Society of St. Pius X was created by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre in 1970. Lefebvre rejected Vatican II and used his seminary in Ecône, Switzerland, to promote the idea that the new Mass was invalid. The Society spread to the United States in 1971, where it established several chapels, Mass centers, and a seminary. Lefebvre was suspended in 1976 and excommunicated in 1988 for ordaining bishops without authority from Rome, but the excommunication was lifted by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009, eighteen years after Lefebvre's death, as part of an effort to bring the members of the Society of St. Pius X back into the church.<sup>54</sup> Another group, the Orthodox Roman Catholic Movement, was

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Catholic Traditionalism,” 70-72; William D. Dinges, “‘We Are What You Were’: Roman Catholic Traditionalism in America,” in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, ed. Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 243, 247; George Dugan, “Catholic Group Opposes Reform in Liturgy Approved in Rome,” *New York Times*, 28 March 1965, 1, 35; Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 315; McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, 175; O’Toole, *The Faithful*, 243. At the time he wrote the “Catholic Traditionalist Manifesto,” Gommard De Pauw was a theology professor and academic dean at Mt. St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Joseph P. Chinnici, O.F.M. and Angelyn Dries, O.S.F., *Prayer and Practice in the American Catholic Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 250; Dinges, *In Defense of Truth and Tradition*, 2; Dinges, “Roman Catholic Traditionalism,” 70; Dinges, “‘We Are What You Were,’” 243; Dugan, “Catholic Group Opposes Reform in Liturgy Approved in Rome,” 1, 35.

<sup>54</sup> Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985*, 131; Julie Byrne, “‘Catholic Means Universal’: An Essay on Other Catholics” (paper presented at the Princeton American Religion Workshop, 22 October 2009), 8; Dinges, “Catholic Traditionalism in America,” 152-163; Dinges, “Roman Catholic Traditionalism,” 66, 74-78; Dinges, “‘We Are What You Were,’” 246, 249; Laurie Goodstein and Ian Fisher, “Wider Use of Latin Mass Likely, Vatican Officials Say,” *New York Times*, 28 June 2007, A3; Steven Greenhouse, “Archbishop Lefebvre, 85, Dies; Traditionalist Defied the Vatican,” *New York Times*, 26 March 1991, B8; Steven Greenhouse, “Rebel Archbishop Anoints 4 Bishops,” *New York Times*, 1 July 1988, A1, A4; Steven Greenhouse, “Rebel Archbishop Ready to Defy Pope in a Schism,” *New York Times*, 30 June 1988, A7; Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 315; McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, 175; “Pope lifts excommunications of 4 bishops,”

founded in Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1973 by Father Francis Fenton and some lay supporters. Fenton had been very involved with the John Birch Society, so ORCM publications showed a blend of right-wing political themes and traditional Catholic doctrine. They established a network of chapels and Mass centers across the US. In 1979 Fenton left the ORCM to form a new organization, Traditional Catholics of America.<sup>55</sup> The newspaper *The Remnant* is the most widely circulated traditionalist publication in the US since 1967. It does not consider the new Mass to be invalid, but still campaigns for the pre-Vatican II liturgy.<sup>56</sup> In 1984, Pope John Paul II decreed that Catholics could use the old Mass in specific conditions, with the approval of the local bishop, and as long as they were not involved with any group that considered the new Mass to be invalid. This satisfied conservative Catholics, but the fiercest traditionalists

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[http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/28831756/ns/world\\_news-europe/t/pope-lifts-excommunications-bishops/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/28831756/ns/world_news-europe/t/pope-lifts-excommunications-bishops/) Accessed 26 May 2011. Although I have been unable to verify why the society chose this name, it would make sense that they chose Pope Pius X because of his firm stance against modernism. His 1910 “Oath Against Modernism” includes that dogma may not “be tailored according to what seems better and more suited to the culture of each age; rather, that the absolute and immutable truth preached by the apostles from the beginning may never be believed to be different, may never be understood in any other way.” This fits with the society’s opposition to changes wrought by Vatican II. Pope Pius X, “The Oath Against Modernism,” <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius10/p10moath.htm> Accessed 29 May 2012. The society might also be drawn to potential credibility they could gain from his status as a saint, something not applicable to other popes who also critiqued modernism.

<sup>55</sup> Dinges, “Catholic Traditionalism in America,” 145-152; Dinges, *In Defense of Truth and Tradition*, 15-17; Dinges, “Roman Catholic Traditionalism,” 72-74; Dinges, “‘We Are What You Were’,” 248; George Dugan, “Latin Mass of Old Is Luring Catholics,” *New York Times*, 6 January 1974, 73.

<sup>56</sup> Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985*, 130-131; Dinges, “Catholic Traditionalism in America,” 167-169; Dinges, *In Defense of Truth and Tradition*, 21-22; Dinges, “Roman Catholic Traditionalism,” 69.

felt it justified their efforts. In 1988, after excommunicating Lefebvre, the pope issued *Ecclesia Dei*, saying that approval for the old Mass should be granted widely and generously, hoping to reconcile traditionalists from schism. In 2007, Pope Benedict XVI ended the requirement of approval from a bishop.<sup>57</sup>

The traditionalist cause has rallied around the campaign to “save the true Mass,” the Latin Tridentine rite. Using illicit traditionalist church structures and the development of “wildcat parishes” not affiliated with any group has created open conflict with the hierarchy.<sup>58</sup> Some Catholics on the fringe have even seen Vatican II as a conspiracy against the Church, arguing that its reforms are invalid because Pope Paul VI was secretly replaced by an “imposter pope,” or that mistranslations from the Latin liturgy cause heresy in the postconciliar Church.<sup>59</sup> This idea leads to the concept of sedevacantism— that none of the popes since Vatican II were validly chosen, thus the papal seat is empty, and Catholics owe no allegiance to whoever claims to occupy it.<sup>60</sup> Vatican II did not create the traditionalist movement; rather, the way Vatican II was implemented and its perceived possibility of contradicting old doctrine did.<sup>61</sup> Opposition

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<sup>57</sup> Dinges, “‘We Are What You Were’,” 244, 246; Goodstein & Fisher, “Wider Use of the Latin Mass Likely, Vatican Officials Say,” A3.

<sup>58</sup> Dinges, *In Defense of Truth and Tradition*, 18.

<sup>59</sup> Dinges, *In Defense of Truth and Tradition*, 26, 29; O’Toole, *The Faithful*, 243; Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World As We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 86.

<sup>60</sup> Dinges, “Roman Catholic Traditionalism,” 88; Dinges, “‘We Are What You Were’,” 253-255, 257.

<sup>61</sup> Dinges, *In Defense of Truth and Tradition*, 23.

to traditionalists has come primarily from the hierarchy and conservative Catholics, who fear traditionalists hurt their own efforts to preserve the Latin liturgy and preconciliar devotions.<sup>62</sup>

Since Vatican II, old practices have found new adherents, such as the adoration of the host, priests in black cassocks, and young priests who are more conservative than both older priests and the laity. Interest in apparitions and prophecy grew in the wake of the upheaval of Vatican II, presumably as a way to address the unrest within the Church and in the world around it. Just as the number of religious brothers and sisters peaked in 1965, so too has the rate of Catholics leaving the Church increased since that date. The concept of the geographical parish, already weakened by suburbanization, further declined as laypeople searched for liturgies and programs that suited their needs. While changes could strengthen Catholics' faith, dissent made Catholicism more volatile.<sup>63</sup>

By the late 1960s, liberal Catholics were using rights language to apply to the oppressive structures of the Church while conservative Catholics were appalled by the theological and social effects of the new parochial world. As McGreevy states, "In this way, the crisis within Catholicism both mirrored and shaped the more general

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<sup>62</sup> Dinges, "We Are What You Were," 259.

<sup>63</sup> Dinges, "Catholic Traditionalism in America," 271; Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 329; McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 261; O'Toole, *The Faithful*, 264-265, 299-301.



reorientation of American society.”<sup>64</sup> By eliminating a uniform language and ritual in favor of emphasizing pluralism and the local, Vatican II created disunity.<sup>65</sup>

In the wake of the social unrest and questioning of traditional institutions that occurred during the 1960s, the Catholic visionary movement, particularly the Marian visionary movement, has grown astonishingly, “drawing in hundreds of new seers, thousands of eyewitnesses of wondrous and miraculous phenomena, and millions of believers.” Anthropologist Paolo Apolito argues, “This process has profoundly altered the very perception of religion among a substantial number of Catholics, shifting the course of the post-Vatican II transformation of the Catholic Church in a completely unexpected direction.”<sup>66</sup> Believers blended old and new— apparitions and the internet, spinning suns and camcorders, stigmata and laboratories, miracles and technology— to create a modern visionary culture.

The US has experienced particular growth in apparitions, especially after 1980. From 1945 to 1979, there were 21 reports of apparitions in the US. From 1980 to 2005, there were over 150.<sup>67</sup> There are several factors responsible for why visionary activity grew so much starting in the 1980s. One was the influence of Pope John Paul II. He

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<sup>64</sup> McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries*, 207.

<sup>65</sup> R. Scott Appleby, “The Triumph of Americanism: Common Ground for U.S. Catholics in the Twentieth Century,” in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, ed. Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 37-38; McGreevy, 223.

<sup>66</sup> Paolo Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna: Religious Visionary Experience on the Web*, translated by Antony Shugaar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>67</sup> Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna*, 23.

dedicated his pontificate to Mary and was a strong supporter of Marian devotion, crediting Our Lady of Fatima for preserving his life during the 1981 assassination attempt. As such, he was less inclined to suppress new apparition claims. He declared 1987-88 a Marian Year, launched with a global rosary linked by 18 satellites. He even consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.<sup>68</sup> Vatican II itself contributed to an openness to visionary culture through its emphasis on individual religious experience and sense of the Church as a community. In other ways, those feeling unmoored by the changes brought about during Vatican II could find the mystical connection they associated with the pre-Vatican II church through apparitions. Apparitions offered spiritual certitude and consolation some Catholics found lacking in the post-Vatican II institutional church and were easily accessible to ordinary believers since apparitions require only devotion and trust.<sup>69</sup> Another change that helped apparitions to blossom was

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<sup>68</sup> Clodovis Boff, "Toward a Social Mariology," in *The Many Faces of Mary*, ed. Diego Irarrazabal, Susan Ross, and Marie-Theres Wacker (London: SCM Press, 2008), 51; Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 150; McDannell, *The Spirit of Vatican II*, 213; Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverría, *Under the Heel of Mary* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 287-294, 311; E. Ann Matter, "Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century: Apocalypse, Representation, Politics," *Religion* Vol. 31, No. 2 (April 2001), 139-140; William A. Reck, *Dear Marian Movement: Let God Be God* (Milford, OH: The Riehle Foundation, 1996), 148.

<sup>69</sup> Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna*, 28-29; David G. Bromley and Rachel S. Bobbitt, "Visions of the Virgin Mary: The Organizational Development of Marian Apparitional Movements," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* Vol. 14, No. 3 (February 2011), 9; Michael W. Cuneo, *The Smoke of Satan: Conservative and Traditionalist Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5-6, 44; René Laurentin, *Pilgrimages, Sanctuaries, Icons, Apparitions: An Historical and Scriptural Account*, translated by William Fackovec (Milford, OH: The Riehle Foundation, 1994), 28; Matter, "Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century," 140.

that Catholic canon law changed during the period from 1966 to 1978. These changes made it possible for people to publish and speak about new apparitions without requiring an imprimatur, or statement of approval, from the Church hierarchy. Books about new apparitions generally include a disclaimer on the copyright page explaining that they no longer need an imprimatur and pledging to submit to the authority of the Vatican for final judgment. The Church also altered the guidelines for evaluating private revelations. The most significant change was that it provided for circumstances where a conference of bishops or the Vatican could intervene in an apparition event rather than just a local bishop.<sup>70</sup> The 1980s made some Americans feel insecure about economic progress and the unpredictability of the world. The rise of the Religious Right and televangelists offered opportunities for Americans to include faith in public discourse and for television specials about particular visionaries to spread word about events more widely than before.<sup>71</sup> Apolito argues that not only did television change the way people learned about apparitions, it also changed the structure of apparitions; it became much more common for apparitions to occur daily or at the same time every week, just like a TV schedule. Earlier, most significant apparitions were limited in number and duration, but in the television era, apparitions happen for years, producing volumes of messages. The new seers have a more familiar relationship with Mary and Jesus because of their frequent

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<sup>70</sup> Frederick M. Jelly, "Discerning the Miraculous: Norms for Judging Apparitions and Private Revelations," *Marian Studies* 44 (1993), 41, 45-48, 53; Laurentin, *Pilgrimages, Sanctuaries, Icons, Apparitions*, 92; Reck, *Dear Marian Movement*, 167-168, 185-188.

<sup>71</sup> Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna*, 10-11, 28-29, 34, 47.

interactions.<sup>72</sup> The approach of the year 2000 and associated concerns about the end of the world also influenced the rise of apparition events.<sup>73</sup>

The major catalyst for the rise of apparitions in the 1980s was Medjugorje, in Bosnia. This was the first Catholic vision site to use global communications for a publicity campaign. The Franciscan Center in Steubenville, Ohio, coordinated media coverage of Medjugorje to the faithful around the world. This media coverage seemed to legitimize the story, showing the increasing numbers of pilgrims and support from well-known religious figures. The Medjugorje seers traveled around the world speaking about their experiences, creating a precedent for later visionaries to embark on speaking tours. Medjugorje has become the greatest force to legitimize other apparitions even though it has been opposed by the Diocese of Mostar. Visionaries worldwide try to gain recognition by connecting themselves to Medjugorje.<sup>74</sup>

Some modern visionaries and followers draw connections to other apparition sites as well, particularly Lourdes and Fatima. Contemporary Marian visions show the influence of the apocalyptic visions of Fatima and the hopeful visions of Lourdes through the possibility of physical and spiritual healing averting chastisements for sin. Mary

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<sup>72</sup> Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna*, 11, 123-124.

<sup>73</sup> Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna*, 28; Matter, "Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century," 139; R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 253; Paul Prather, *Modern-Day Miracles: How Ordinary People Experience Supernatural Acts of God* (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1996), 196-198; James J. Preston, *Mother Worship: Theme and Variations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 539.

<sup>74</sup> Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna*, 35-37, 46, 62, 68-69, 71-73.

appears to the laity and offers hope and healing, asks followers to be true to religious beliefs, and helps form a community with a relationship to the local church that is also separate and distinct, usually asking for a shrine to be built outside of the Church. The majority of twentieth-century Marian visions include calls for religious and social reform. The apparitions at Conyers, Cold Spring, Cleveland, Scottsdale, South Phoenix, and Medjugorje all emphasize group prayer, daily personal prayer, and commitment to Jesus and Mary as ways to bring about a new and better time and the power of prayer to defeat evil in the world.<sup>75</sup>

The spread of belief in the Medjugorje apparitions in the United States contributed to the conservative Marian revival of the mid-1980s. Travel to apparition sites was the most popular Marian devotional activity of the 1980s and 1990s. US apparitions create “native” Marian traditions for believers, boost patriotism, create pilgrimage sites, and generate new artifacts. After traveling to an apparition site, pilgrims can read newsletters and attend Marian conferences. Marian-centered Catholics fill what they find lacking in the institutional Church by creating a community amongst themselves.<sup>76</sup>

Most American Marian devotees are conservative Catholics, according to anthropologist Kristy Nabhan-Warren. After Vatican II, conservative Catholics tried to

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<sup>75</sup> Kristy Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio: Marian Apparitions, Catholic Evangelizing, and Mexican American Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 93-96, 98-99; Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 209.

<sup>76</sup> Kane, “Marian Devotion Since 1940,” 121, 127; Reck, *Dear Marian Movement*, 151-152, 163.

preserve a distinct Catholic identity and defend the Catholic faith. Unlike Catholic traditionalists, Catholic conservatives do not form alternate communities, but they do see a need for moral battle to restore the Church.<sup>77</sup> Father Michael Freze argues that one distinctive element of the Catholic faith is “the belief that we as [a] Church are not separated or isolated from the divine; that our God includes us in His master plan and intervenes in our lives on a personal and intimate basis.” Voices, visions, and apparitions are a way to demonstrate that divine intervention, and those of the Virgin Mary are the most frequent and popular.<sup>78</sup>

Historically visionaries have been single women and children, particularly the uneducated and poor. However modern US visionaries are usually middle-aged, middle-class, educated, married women. They believe they have been chosen on purpose with revelations for themselves and the public. Some, like Estela Ruiz and Nancy Fowler, two of the visionaries discussed in later chapters of this dissertation, think they were chosen because they were skeptics in order to show the power of the Virgin Mary.<sup>79</sup>

The Internet has been a great help for the growth of the Catholic visionary movement. Supporters of a visionary create webpages that include messages,

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<sup>77</sup> Cuneo, *The Smoke of Satan*, 4-5; Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 96-97.

<sup>78</sup> William A. Christian, Jr., *Visionaries: The Spanish Republic and the Reign of Christ* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 400; Michael Freze, *Voices, Visions, and Apparitions* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1993), 5, 8; Hitchcock, “Catholic Activist Conservatism in the United States,” 121; Kevin McClure, *The Evidence for Visions of the Virgin Mary* (Wellinborough, Northamptonshire: Aquarian Press, 1983), 134; Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, 300-301.

<sup>79</sup> Freze, *Voices, Visions, and Apparitions*, 90; Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 93-94.

testimonials, and first-person accounts. Other websites discuss visionaries in general, promoting conversation and debate about different apparition sites. Technology enables visionary culture to operate outside a physical space, outside the ability of Church authorities to regulate, and offers believers the ability to participate in apparition events without having to leave their own home. Many do still choose to attend apparition events in person, though, particularly those in search of healing. Individual Internet users can bypass institutional authorities and make their own decisions about what they find credible.<sup>80</sup>

The Internet can also be helpful for financing apparition events. The organizations that develop around many modern visionaries establish parts of their websites where believers can purchase books, videos, audio recordings, newsletters, and other religious goods. In addition, the faithful can make donations to the organization online.<sup>81</sup>

Another example of how technology is used in modern visionary culture is photography. Believers want to capture what they see at apparition sites so they can preserve the experience and share it with others. Commonly the camera will capture images that were not seen by the human eye, which believers perceive to be signs from heaven that prove the presence of the supernatural. Polaroid photography was preferred for these images because there could be no accusation of tampering when the photograph

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<sup>80</sup> Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna*, 4, 17, 77, 155, 174, 205; Brian Britt, "Snapshots of Tradition: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Georgia," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* Vol. 2, No. 1 (October 1998), 111, 117-118, 121.

<sup>81</sup> Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna*, 59-60, 101.

was being developed. Having some kind of tangible representation of the divine, like saints' relics, is important to Catholic popular piety, and these photos fill that role for modern Marian devotion.<sup>82</sup>

Marian apparitions are an old phenomenon that offers a new direction for American Catholics. They create grassroots movements that blend official and popular Catholicism, which fits the broader American ideas of individualism, free choice, and religiosity. Laity try to win over priests and bishops rather than simply following the hierarchy. Pilgrims make decisions about apparition sites based on their personal experiences, not waiting for approval by clergy, and the Church does not investigate unless there are believers, so there is a degree of lay leadership required in any apparition claim.<sup>83</sup> As scholar William A. Christian, Jr., explains, "Part of the attraction of the not-yet-approved is precisely its novelty, its dynamic, changing nature, its very fragility. The believer can add little to approved, official devotions. By praying at new places, by

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<sup>82</sup> Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna*, 110; Britt, "Snapshots of Tradition," 109; Bromley & Bobbitt, "Visions of the Virgin Mary," 22; Kane, "Marian Devotion Since 1940," 121; Matter, "Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century," 134, 137; *Our Lady of the Roses, Mary Help of Mothers: A Book About Heavenly Apparitions to Veronica Leuken at Bayside, New York* (Lansing, MI: Apostles of Our Lady, 1982), 22; Wojcik, *The End of the World As We Know It*, 83; Daniel Wojcik, "'Polaroids from Heaven': Photography, Folk Religion, and the Miraculous Image Tradition at a Marian Apparition Site," *Journal of American Folklore* Vol. 109, No. 432 (Spring 1996), 130, 132, 137, 140, 142. Apolito has a provocative discussion about how this kind of photography changes the relationship between pilgrim, Mary, and equipment, making the equipment most powerful, 113-117.

<sup>83</sup> Bromley & Bobbitt, "Visions of the Virgin Mary," 25; Christian, *Visionaries*, 7-8; Richard Cimino and Don Lattin, *Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millennium* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 12, 18; Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 105-106; Reck, *Dear Marian Movement*, 40; Turner & Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, 8, 32.



venerating uncanonized holy people, by joining groups not yet approved, Catholics make a statement...”<sup>84</sup> This complicates ideas of what it means to be Catholic.

The Catholic Church in the United States experienced a period of rapid change in the twentieth century. The combination of social changes and changes in the Church in the aftermath of Vatican II caused believers to consider what Catholic identity entails. In the process, Catholics pursued a variety of paths for practicing their faith and interacting with clergy.

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<sup>84</sup> Christian, *Visionaries*, 399-400.

#### CHAPTER 4. "OHIO: THE HEART OF IT ALL"

For a variety of reasons, the modern Marian movement has strong connections to Ohio. The University of Dayton, a Marianist school, features a library with the largest collection of printed materials on the Virgin Mary in the world, as well as non-print materials such as videos, audio cassettes, slides of artwork, statues, medals, rosaries, and postage stamps. The Marian Library is the headquarters for the Mariological Society of America, an organization devoted to the study of the Virgin Mary.<sup>1</sup> Steubenville is the headquarters for Catholics United for the Faith, a conservative organization started in 1968 in response to attacks on *Humanae Vitae*, the encyclical which affirmed the Church's opposition to artificial birth control. Participants in the organization are laypeople who aim to be guardians of orthodoxy. They are particularly concerned about religious education and liturgical practice and bring grievances to the attention of the bishop or Vatican. At their meetings, they usually include devotions such as group recitation of the rosary or novenas, both of which are traditionally connected to Mary.<sup>2</sup> Steubenville is also home to the Franciscan University of Steubenville, which became a charismatic institution under the leadership of president Father Michael Scanlan in the

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<sup>1</sup> Marian Library, <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/library.html> Accessed 23 May 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 131-132; Catholics United for the Faith, <http://www.cuf.org> Accessed 24 May 2012; Michael W. Cuneo, *The Smoke of Satan: Conservative and Traditionalist Dissent in Contemporary American Catholicism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 30; James Hitchcock, "Catholic Activist Conservatism in the United States," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 116-118.

1970s and 1980s. While other Catholic schools were becoming more secular, Franciscan tried to integrate faith into all aspects of university and student life. According to scholar Jeffrey Warren, students monitor the university to ensure it is as Catholic as possible.<sup>3</sup> Franciscan priests serve the parishes of Medjugorje and use an international network to promote the apparitions there as worthy of belief. Franciscan University established a strong relationship with Medjugorje, becoming the US center for distributing information. Theology professor Mark Miravalle is a noted advocate for the authenticity of the Medjugorje apparitions.<sup>4</sup> Miravalle is also president of an organization called *Vox Populi Mariae Mediatrici*, or Voice of the People for Mary Mediatrix. The group is petitioning for a new Catholic dogma that would proclaim the Virgin Mary as “Co-Redemptrix” with Jesus, meaning that Mary participates in the salvation of mankind.<sup>5</sup> In

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<sup>3</sup> Hitchcock, “Catholic Activist Conservatism in the United States,” 139; Jeffrey D. Warren, “Creating a ‘Normal Catholic University’: Franciscan University of Steubenville and the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, 1974-1992,” M.A. thesis (Dayton, OH: University of Dayton, 2004), 48, 62, 74, 108, 152.

<sup>4</sup> Paolo Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna: Religious Visionary Experience on the Web*, translated by Antony Shugaar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 36-37; Pryor, “Mary’s Place, God’s Time,” 17; Warren, “Creating a ‘Normal Catholic University,’” 117.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Miravalle, *The Immaculate Conception and the Co-Redemptrix* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 2004); Mark Miravalle, ed., *Mary Co-Redemptrix: Doctrinal Issues Today* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 2002); Mark Miravalle, *Mary: Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 1993); Mark Miravalle, ed., *Mary Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate: Theological Foundations: Toward a Papal Definition?* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 1995); Mark Miravalle, ed., *Mary Co-Redemptrix, Mediatrix, Advocate: Theological Foundations II: Papal, Pneumatological, Ecumenical* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 1997); Mark Miravalle, *Mary Co-Redemptrix: A Response to 7 Common Objections* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 2001); Mark Miravalle, “*With Jesus*”: *The Story of Mary Co-Redemptrix* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing, 2003); William A. Reck, *Dear Marian Movement: Let God Be God* (Milford, OH: Riehle Foundation, 1996), 106-107; Jan

addition, in Milford, Ohio, a Cincinnati suburb, the Riehle Foundation was established. This non-profit, tax-exempt charitable organization produced and distributed Catholic materials. It was dedicated to Mary and her role in mankind's salvation and solely supported by donations and prayer.<sup>6</sup> The foundation and its Faith Publishing Company published and distributed over six million books, brochures, and newsletters, nearly all about Mary, and distributed countless rosaries, scapulars, medals, and prayer cards.<sup>7</sup>

While these links between Ohio and the Virgin Mary aided the development of Marian devotion there, they are not the only reasons. Ohio would also be the site for numerous Marian apparition claims, six of which will be explored in this chapter. These apparitions took place in urban, suburban, and rural areas in different parts of the state, involving visionaries from varying backgrounds, and over the entire time period covered by this dissertation. As a result, numerous parachurch organizations developed that offered believers an opportunity to participate in religious activities outside of the Catholic Church while still belonging to the Catholic Church. The cluster of apparitions in this area allows for comparisons of the development of the modern pilgrimage culture in the United States and demonstrates the persistence of belief in Marian apparitions within Catholic culture.

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Jarbow Russell, "Seeking a Promotion for the Virgin Mary," *New York Times*, 23 December 2000, B11, B13; Kenneth L. Woodward, "Hail, Mary," *Newsweek*, 25 August 1997, 48-55.

<sup>6</sup> René Laurentin, *Pilgrimages, Sanctuaries, Icons, Apparitions: An Historical and Scriptural Account*, translated by William Fackovec (Milford, OH: The Riehle Foundation, 1994), 104.

<sup>7</sup> Reck, *Dear Marian Movement*, vi.

## Our Lady of America

On December 8, 2010, Green Bay Bishop David Ricken approved the apparitions of Adele Brise as worthy of belief, the first time for any US apparition claim.<sup>8</sup> Until then, the US apparitions that had come closest to gaining institutional approval were those of Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil. In 1933 Neuzil joined the Sisters of the Precious Blood in Dayton, Ohio. She was usually assigned to domestic tasks for the order, and though known for her humility, she showed no apparent signs of difference from the rest of her religious community.<sup>9</sup> In 1938 she began having mystical experiences, but she thought it was common for all religious, so she did not tell anyone for ten years, at which point she told her confessor. He advised her to be cautious, but her experiences became more intense and the messages she received grew more pressing.<sup>10</sup> She kept a diary of these experiences and messages. Sister Neuzil started receiving messages from Jesus in the

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<sup>8</sup> ABC News, "Miraculous Mysteries," *Primetime Nightline: Beyond Belief*, season 1, episode 2, aired 13 July 2011; René Laurentin and Patrick Sbalchiero, *Dictionnaire des <<apparitions>> de la Vierge Marie: Inventaire des origines à nos jours: Méthodologie, bilan interdisciplinaire, prospective* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), 397; Charles H. Lippy, *Being Religious, American Style: A History of Popular Religiosity in the United States* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), 116; "Mary appeared thrice in Wisconsin, bishop says," *Christian Century* 128 (11 January 2011), 16; Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help, [http://www.gbdioc.org/images/stories/Evangelization\\_Worship/Shrine/Documents/Shrine-of-Our-Lady-of-Good-Help.pdf](http://www.gbdioc.org/images/stories/Evangelization_Worship/Shrine/Documents/Shrine-of-Our-Lady-of-Good-Help.pdf). Accessed 16 December 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Heintz, *A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary* (Sacramento, CA: Gabriel Press, 1995), 200; Peter Mullen, *Shrines of Our Lady: A Guide to Fifty of the World's Most Famous Marian Shrines* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 167-168; Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, *Our Lady of America* (n.p.: 1993), 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> Mullen, *Shrines of Our Lady*, 167; Neuzil, *Our Lady of America*, 2.

1940s, who called her “Little White Dove,” but in 1954 apparitions and messages from both Jesus and Mary became frequent.<sup>11</sup> She also received messages and visions from St. Joseph and angels Gabriel, Michael, Sultra, and Sardus.<sup>12</sup> While she was living in Rome City, Indiana, Sister Neuzil said the Virgin Mary gave her a mission to promote a special devotion to Our Lady of America.<sup>13</sup> In 1956 she saw a figure of Our Lady of America and created a drawing that was to be used to create a statue for the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC, a place Mary said should be a special pilgrimage site.<sup>14</sup> Mary also requested a medal of Our Lady of America be made which was supposed to be a shield against evil.<sup>15</sup> According to Sister Neuzil, the Virgin Mary said, “America, the United States in particular, is being given the tremendous, yet privileged, opportunity to lead all nations in a spiritual renewal never before so

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<sup>11</sup> Heintz, *A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary*, 198, 200; Neuzil, *Our Lady of America*, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Heintz, *A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary*, 201; Neuzil, *Our Lady of America*, 7-9, 13, 17, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Neuzil, *Our Lady of America*, 3, 9-10.

<sup>14</sup> René Laurentin and Patrick Sbalchiero, *Dictionnaire des <<apparitions>> de la Vierge Marie*, 304; Mullen, *Shrines of Our Lady*, 168; Neuzil, *Our Lady of America*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> Heintz, *A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary*, 204-205; Mullen, *Shrines of Our Lady*, 168; Neuzil, *Our Lady of America*, 25.

necessary, so important, so vital.”<sup>16</sup> In May 1958, Sister Neuzil entered a cloistered community in New Riegel, Ohio at her request.<sup>17</sup>

The messages Sister Neuzil received were primarily about the need for Americans to be faithful. “It is the United States that is to lead the world to peace... unless the United States accepts and carries out faithfully the mandate given to it by heaven to lead the world to peace, there will come upon it and all nations a great havoc of war and incredible suffering.” Of course, if the rest of the world refused to go along, the US would not be held responsible.<sup>18</sup> She reported that Mary told her that Americans must turn away from impurity: “Oh, if you knew the punishments I am holding back from you by my pleading and intercession on your behalf!”<sup>19</sup> She said that a picture or statue of Mary should be venerated in every Christian home. Mary also emphasized the need for youth to be leaders in the spiritual renewal she was urging.<sup>20</sup>

Sister Neuzil’s spiritual director from 1940 until his death in 1972 was Paul Leibold, who served as archbishop of Cincinnati from 1969 until 1972. Leibold approved the creation of the medal and authorized two printings of the messages Sister Neuzil received, but he died suddenly at age 57 before he could begin an official

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<sup>16</sup>Neuzil, *Our Lady of America*, 25.

<sup>17</sup>Heintz, *A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary*, 200; Laurentin & Sbalchiero, *Dictionnaire des <<apparitions>> de la Vierge Marie*, 304.

<sup>18</sup>Neuzil, *Our Lady of America*, 38.

<sup>19</sup>Neuzil, *Our Lady of America*, 21.

<sup>20</sup>Neuzil, *Our Lady of America*, 24, 26.

investigation of her apparition claims.<sup>21</sup> Sister Neuzil reportedly had an apparition of him five minutes after his death.<sup>22</sup>

Sister Neuzil eventually left the Congregation of the Sisters of the Precious Blood after the order suppressed their cloistered branch in 1979. She became a Contemplative Sister of the Indwelling Trinity in Fostoria, Ohio. She passed away in 2000 at the age of 83.<sup>23</sup>

Since Sister Neuzil's death, the devotion to Our Lady of America has faced divisions. There are groups headquartered in Rome City, Indiana, since that is where Sister Neuzil received the initial request to honor Mary as Our Lady of America, as well as Fostoria, Ohio, since that is where Sister Neuzil last lived. Because Sister Neuzil experienced visions in more than one diocese, it is possible for more than one bishop to initiate an investigation, but so far no bishop with a jurisdictional claim has. Instead, in 2007 then-Archbishop of St. Louis, Raymond L. Burke, sent a letter to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops about a study of the devotion that he had conducted,

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<sup>21</sup> Roger Fortin, *Faith and Action: A History of the Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821-1996* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 358, 362; Laurentin & Sbalchiero, *Dictionnaire des <<apparitions>> de la Vierge Marie*, 304; Neuzil, *Our Lady of America*, 3.

<sup>22</sup> Laurentin & Sbalchiero, *Dictionnaire des <<apparitions>> de la Vierge Marie*, 654.

<sup>23</sup> Sister Noreen Jutte, e-mail to the author, 7 June 2007; "The Story of Our Lady of America," <http://www.ourladyofamerica.org/explanation.php>. Accessed 27 May 2011. There is a dispute about when exactly Sister Neuzil changed orders. Sister Jutte, the archivist for the Sisters of the Precious Blood, writes it was 1981, but the official websites for Our Lady of America and the Sisters of the Precious Blood give the date as 1979.



concluding that the devotion had been encouraged and approved by Leibold.<sup>24</sup> This would have made Sister Neuzil's visions the first approved in the US, and were even promoted as such by Marian theologian Mark Miravalle; however, Burke had no authority to make any rulings, and Leibold had never launched a formal investigation to make an official judgment about Sister Neuzil's apparition claims. Instead, competing groups claim to promote Sister Neuzil's legacy and attempt to raise enough funds to continue operating.<sup>25</sup> This was only the first example of apparition claims in Ohio leading to parachurch organizations and pilgrimage sites.

### **Greater Cleveland**

Sister Neuzil was far from the only Ohio woman to claim apparitions. In April 1978, Ivana (Sarto) Buchdrucker saw a vision of the Virgin Mary on her bedroom wall in Cleveland, witnessed by her daughter Christine and friend Anna May Dumbrowski. Mary promised to heal Ivana, and five days later, she could walk again for the first time

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<sup>24</sup> Most Rev. Raymond L. Burke, Regarding Our Lady of America, 31 May 2007, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/BISHOPS/burkeolamer.pdf> Accessed 27 May 2011.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Miravalle, "Our Lady of America to the World," Marycast #89, 8 December 2009 post on Our Lady the Immaculate Virgin- Our Lady of America- Rome City- Virgin Mary, <http://www.oltiv.org/>. Accessed 27 May 2011; Mark Miravalle, "America Must Respond," Marycast #90, 8 December 2009 post on Our Lady the Immaculate Virgin- Our Lady of America- Rome City- Virgin Mary, <http://www.oltiv.org/>. Accessed 27 May 2011; Mark Miravalle, "Our Lady of America- Fruitful Suffering," Marycast #108, 14 January 2010 post on Our Lady the Immaculate Virgin- Our Lady of America- Rome City- Virgin Mary, <http://www.oltiv.org/>. Accessed 27 May 2011; Our Lady of America, <http://www.ourladyofamerica.com>. Accessed 27 May 2011; Our Lady of America, <http://www.ourladyofamerica.org>. Accessed 27 May 2011; Our Lady of America and Rome City, Indiana: Urgent Appeal to Save the Apparition Site in Rome City, Indiana, <http://oloaromecity.blogspot.com/2011/04/urgent-appeal-to-save-apparition-site.html>. Accessed 18 June 2011.

in five years. The story made the local news. Her orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Pradist Satayathum, was unable to explain her recovery as anything but a miracle.<sup>26</sup>

In the following weeks, more mystical events happened. Statues moved. The statue of the Virgin Mary reportedly wept, smiled, bowed, walked, and could become less heavy. Buchdrucker received visions of Padre Pio, St. Rita, St. Martha, St. Elizabeth, St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, and about every two weeks, the Virgin Mary. She also reported many visits from Satan, who would torment her until she drove him away with holy water. Buchdrucker claimed to experience ecstasies, the gift of bilocation— where she was physically in two places at the same time, and the scent of roses where there were none, typically associated with the presence of the Virgin Mary. Buchdrucker also endured stigmatic wounds on her hands, side, and feet, and a wound in the shape of a cross on her forehead. Since her miraculous healing, she did not sleep, instead praying every night from midnight to six in the morning, without any ill effects. For one 60-day period, Buchdrucker lived on only the Eucharist and water.<sup>27</sup>

An immigrant from Venice, Italy, Buchdrucker attended St. Rocco's Church, "...one of the strongest Italian communities in the Cleveland area... especially with regard to the perpetuation of Italian customs and traditions," according to historian Charles

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<sup>26</sup> Archives, Diocese of Cleveland; Laurentin & Sbalchiero, *Dictionnaire des <<apparitions>> de la Vierge Marie*, 1078. There are multiple spellings of Ivana Buchdrucker's name in the materials in the Cleveland diocesan archives. I have chosen to use this spelling because it is the way she spelled her name on a letter in the files.

<sup>27</sup> Archives, Diocese of Cleveland; Laurentin & Sbalchiero, *Dictionnaire des <<apparitions>> de la Vierge Marie*, 1078.

Ferroni.<sup>28</sup> She was a devout Catholic, a member of the Blue Army of Mary and a prayer group to Padre Pio, and a relative of Pope Pius X. However, diocesan authorities developed strong reservations about Buchdrucker's claims. In February 1980, Chancellor Edward F. Weist concluded that Buchdrucker's experiences were not authentic but the result of self-delusions. Bishop James Hickey told her to stop having public prayer meetings at her home and wearing distinctive clothing. Bishop Anthony Pilla later reaffirmed this position. Buchdrucker was unhappy with her spiritual directors. A report that she claimed Padre Pio blessed her faucet so it poured holy water was later explained as a result of a language barrier between her and her spiritual director. In 1984-85, she claimed to experience the pains of childbirth many times throughout the day, representing children being aborted. By 1991, Chancellor Ralph Wiatrowski reported that Buchdrucker still had a small following within the diocese, but she was not taken seriously, yet her influence outside the diocese persisted.<sup>29</sup> She passed away in August 2004.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Archives, Diocese of Cleveland; Charles D. Ferroni, *The Italians in Cleveland: A Study in Assimilation* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 72. St. Rocco Parish still offers Mass in both Italian and Latin in addition to English. They also continue the Italian tradition of a procession through the neighborhood streets as part of their annual festival. St. Rocco Church, Cleveland, Ohio, USA, <http://www.stroccocleveland.org/> Accessed 29 May 2012. It sounds similar to the processions described in Robert Orsi's *Madonna of 115<sup>th</sup> Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>29</sup> Archives, Diocese of Cleveland. A diocesan chancellor is essentially a secretary for the bishop.

<sup>30</sup> "Death Notices," *Plain Dealer*, 20 August 2004, B6.

A more serious problem for the Diocese of Cleveland has been Maureen Sweeney-Kyle. Since 1985, she has claimed apparitions of Mary, Jesus, St. Joseph, Padre Pio, St. Theresa, St. Michael, St. Raphael, Cure d’Ars, Juan Diego, St. Ursula, St. Anthony, St. John Bosco, St. Faustina, St. Francis, St. Thomas Aquinas, and more.<sup>31</sup> The organization associated with her has changed names and locations numerous times. Currently known as Holy Love Ministries and located in Elyria, Ohio, the organization calls itself ecumenical, thus putting it outside the authority of the diocese. In August 1999, the Diocese issued a cautionary statement to clarify that the organization does not have their approval or support in any way.<sup>32</sup>

Maureen Sweeney-Kyle has lived her entire life in the Greater Cleveland area. She was raised Catholic, earned a degree in art education from Bowling Green State University, and worked as a substitute teacher in Cleveland. In 1965 she married her first husband, Paul Hinko. Together they adopted four children, sending them to public schools. The family attended Mass on Sundays, but did not pray the rosary at home. She was known for selling wooden figurines at craft fairs until the visions started in 1985. Mary began appearing every day.<sup>33</sup> She asked Sweeney-Kyle to pray for the church, to

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<sup>31</sup> Heintz, *A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary*, 525; *Holy Love: Messages from Our Blessed Mother Leading Souls to Holiness* (Cleveland, OH: Holy Love Ministries, 1994), x; Laura Putre, “Blessed Other,” *Cleveland Scene* 30, no. 32 (12-18 August 1999), 11; Laura Weldon, “Mixed Messages: Ministry in Lorain County has its believers— and skeptics,” *Plain Dealer*, 24 September 2005, E1.

<sup>32</sup> Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, Caution—Holy Love Ministries, [http://dioceseofcleveland.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=477&Itemid=313](http://dioceseofcleveland.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=477&Itemid=313); Holy Love Ministries, <http://www.holylove.org/> Accessed 27 May 2011.

<sup>33</sup> *Holy Love*, x; Laurentin & Sbalchiero, *Dictionnaire des <<apparitions>> de la Vierge Marie*, 1078; Michele M. Melendez, “Maureen Sweeney Speaks Softly and

pray for the souls of corrupt priests, and to take her medicines on time. Sweeney-Kyle confided in Father Ferris Kleem, a Marianist priest who led charismatic retreats. Fr. Kleem told her to write the messages in a journal and had an usher type them to share with the prayer group.<sup>34</sup> The pastor at Sweeney-Kyle's church discouraged belief in her apparitions, so her prayer group met in private homes. In 1986 she, Fr. Kleem, and the usher met with Fr. Wiatrowski, who did not believe visions should be approved while they are still taking place and had serious misgivings about the messages questioning Church authority.<sup>35</sup> One example is when Mary complained, "Position within the church hierarchy needs great humility such as the Holy Father has. What grieves me greatly is the lack of openness by some in authority to my authentic apparitions. But time and good fruits will bear the truth."<sup>36</sup> Some messages showed errors, such as that Mary declared Boris Yeltsin was the Antichrist or that George H. W. Bush would be re-elected in 1992; Sweeney-Kyle explained that she must have misunderstood Mary. Other messages included advice about cooking and shopping.<sup>37</sup> Sweeney-Kyle's spiritual advisor, Father Frank Kenney, claimed that the Virgin Mary healed him of heart palpitations because of

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Carries Holy Messages to Thousands," *Plain Dealer*, 17 November 1996, 2B; Putre, "Blessed Other," 9, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Putre, "Blessed Other," 9.

<sup>35</sup> Michele M. Melendez, "Diocese Official, Holy Love Begin Talks on Ministry," *Plain Dealer*, 23 July 1996, 1B; Putre, "Blessed Other," 11.

<sup>36</sup> *Holy Love*, 81.

<sup>37</sup> Putre, "Blessed Other," 11-12.

his connection with Sweeney-Kyle.<sup>38</sup> As spiritual advisor, he reviewed the wording of the messages. He has a doctorate in Marian theology, a credential Sweeney-Kyle and her organization emphasize to reinforce her legitimacy as a visionary.<sup>39</sup> However he also reported that Mary helped Sweeney-Kyle buy him a scarf for a bargain and looked after soup that was cooking while Sweeney-Kyle prayed, activities that troubled Fr. Wiatrowski, who felt they trivialized the experience of a visit from the Blessed Mother. He also worried about Sweeney-Kyle relying on Fr. Kenney, a Marianist priest who lived in Dayton, to be her spiritual advisor instead of making an attempt to find a local one or defer to the local bishop.<sup>40</sup>

In 1987, Sweeney-Kyle had asked the diocese to approve the title “Our Lady Protectress of the Faith,” which she said Mary had requested. Fr. Wiatrowski sent the messages to the spiritual director of St. Mary’s Seminary, who replied that the messages were “made up of cliches and phrases which contain little substance or direction,” so Sweeney-Kyle’s request was denied.<sup>41</sup> Because of this situation as well as some of the troubling messages denouncing the Catholic Church and dealing with political events,

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<sup>38</sup> *Holy and Divine Love: The Remedy and The Triumph* (Elyria, OH: Archangel Gabriel Enterprises, Inc., 1999), xiii; Putre, “Blessed Other,” 14.

<sup>39</sup> Paolo Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna: Religious Visionary Experience on the Web*, trans. Antony Shugaar (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 63; *Holy and Divine Love*, xv; Putre, “Blessed Other,” 14; Nancy Smeltzer, “Visionaries Raise Spirits of Believers,” *Columbus Dispatch*, 28 November 1997, 01G.

<sup>40</sup> Putre, “Blessed Other,” 14.

<sup>41</sup> Molly Kavanaugh & Michele M. Melendez, “They’re Called to a Field to Hear the Virgin Mary,” *Plain Dealer*, 17 November 1996, 1B; Melendez, “Diocese Official, Holy Love Begin Talks on Ministry,” 1B; Weldon, “Mixed Messages: Ministry in Lorain County has its believers— and skeptics,” E1.

several members of the ministry left. In 1990 the remaining members created a new organization called Project Mercy. They focused on anti-abortion issues. The name changed to Holy Love Ministries in 1995.<sup>42</sup>

In 1994, Sweeney-Kyle's first book of messages was published. The book explains, "The primary focus should be on the messages and not the messenger. The instrument for the messages in this book remains anonymous."<sup>43</sup> However, three pages later, there is a biography of Sweeney-Kyle with her name and photo, explaining, "Until recently she has remained anonymous. Due to the extreme urgency of the times, Our Lady has requested Maureen to step out in faith and speak publicly."<sup>44</sup> Mary asked for the formation of prayer groups, the establishment of a lay apostolate and secular order called the Missionary Servants of Holy Love, the promotion of a United Hearts chaplet and scapular, distribution of prayers and meditations, the printing and distribution of her messages, and the promotion of an image of Mary as Refuge of Holy Love that she helped Sweeney-Kyle to draw.<sup>45</sup> Mary explained that Jesus also wanted the messages to be published: "Jesus sends me to seek publication in book form of my messages leading souls to holiness. He wants this widely circulated in book stores, and promoted both here

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<sup>42</sup> Weldon, "Mixed Messages: Ministry in Lorain County has its believers– and skeptics," E1.

<sup>43</sup> *Holy Love*, vii.

<sup>44</sup> *Holy Love*, x.

<sup>45</sup> *Holy and Divine Love*, xvi, 270-271; *Holy Love*, x. The United Hearts refers to the combination of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. An apostolate is an association of people with a religious mission. A chaplet is a type of prayer, usually involving beads. A scapular is made of two pieces of cloth connected by a string and worn over the shoulder as a sign of devotion.

and in other countries.”<sup>46</sup> Mary wanted Sweeney-Kyle to accept international speaking engagements about the messages. Suddenly this “shy reluctant woman of frail health” found herself in demand on the international speaking circuit.<sup>47</sup> In 1999 Sweeney-Kyle met Pope John Paul II and gave him a copy of her second book of messages.<sup>48</sup>

Sweeney-Kyle and her organization accepted the donation of a house in Seven Hills, Ohio, to be their headquarters until the neighbors complained and a judge ruled in 1994 that they could no longer use the house for their gatherings.<sup>49</sup> Finding a new headquarters and raising funds to pay for it and all the programs requested by the Virgin Mary became a major priority. In 1990, they raised \$10,370. In 1994, they raised \$112,688.<sup>50</sup> They established a 900 number for believers to call to hear messages, and in 1996, their mailing list included 7,000 names. A wooden box was put out during services for pilgrims to donate. People can also donate online, and they report responses from as far away as New Zealand.<sup>51</sup> Fund-raising peaked in 1996 at \$506,724.<sup>52</sup> They bought an 83-acre farm in Lorain County with ample parking for shuttle buses and built Stations of the Cross, a chapel, a gift shop, and a teardrop-shaped lake. They named the site

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<sup>46</sup> *Holy Love*, 59.

<sup>47</sup> *Holy and Divine Love*, xvi; Putre, “Blessed Other,” 11.

<sup>48</sup> *Holy and Divine Love*, inside front cover.

<sup>49</sup> Putre, “Blessed Other,” 12, 14.

<sup>50</sup> Putre, “Blessed Other,” 12.

<sup>51</sup> Carol Biliczky, “Believers Flocking to See Holy Vision,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, 6 May 1996, A1; Kavanaugh & Melendez, “They’re Called to a Field to Hear the Virgin Mary,” 1B; Putre, “Blessed Other,” 15.

<sup>52</sup> Putre, “Blessed Other,” 17.



Maranatha Spring and Shrine. The shrine part features statues of Mary and St. Joseph surrounded by flowers on a hill. The “sacred spring” is a well whose water believers claim Mary blessed as “the Lourdes of this continent,” but unfortunately was declared unsafe for drinking in 1996. In addition, Sweeney-Kyle claimed that Mary provided a strand of her hair to be kept in a glass case in a small prayer room in the chapel. In July 1994, Sweeney-Kyle reported the Virgin Mary wanted the group “to pray my prayer center into being.”<sup>53</sup> As the first book of messages explained, “Our Lady has promised a second site of Maranatha Spring on the *future* grounds of her Immaculate Heart of Mary Prayer Center. All graces attendant to the original site will be present at the Prayer Center site.”<sup>54</sup> This was important since in December 1993, Mary had said, “This is my last significant apparition site. These are the last significant messages extended to humanity.”<sup>55</sup> They even moved a piece of carpet from the “Blessing Point” at the Seven Hills house to the new chapel.<sup>56</sup>

The biggest gathering was on May 5, 1996. They celebrated the “Feast of Holy Love,” in honor of the second anniversary of discovering the “sacred spring.” 6,000

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<sup>53</sup> Kavanaugh & Melendez, “They’re Called to a Field to Hear the Virgin Mary,” 1B; Michele M. Melendez, “Holy Love Ministry Gets Permit to Build Pole Barn for Shelter,” *Plain Dealer*, 17 August 1996, 1B; Michele M. Melendez, “Ministry Says New Water Tests Show Well Is Safe,” *Plain Dealer*, 27 July 1996, 1B; Putre, “Blessed Other,” 9, 15, 17; Smeltzer, “Visionaries Raise Spirits of Believers,” 01G; Weldon, “Mixed Messages: Ministry in Lorain County has its believers– and skeptics,” E1. “Maranatha” is Aramaic for “Our Lord is coming.”

<sup>54</sup> *Holy Love*, 91.

<sup>55</sup> *Holy Love*, 58.

<sup>56</sup> Putre, “Blessed Other,” 15; Weldon, “Mixed Messages: Ministry in Lorain County has its believers– and skeptics,” E1.

people came that day from as far as Missouri and Florida, and some reported seeing a doorway in the clouds and a rainbow around the sun, as well as smelling roses when there were none. The atmosphere was described as like a picnic, with people praying in the field bearing cameras, chairs, and blankets. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of every month, there is a gathering to recite the rosary in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe. They also meet every Thursday. The gatherings are usually a few hundred people.<sup>57</sup> After the May 5 gathering, Fr. Wiatrowski requested a meeting with representatives from Holy Love, the first time there had been any interaction between the diocese and the organization in nearly nine years. The meeting was described as “congenial,” opening a dialogue, but the diocese still urged “extreme caution” relating to the group.<sup>58</sup> Sweeney-Kyle warned, “you can’t be so cautious that you block grace and you block what heaven is trying to do.”<sup>59</sup> In light of Fr. Wiatrowski and the diocese’s clearly stated concerns, this response appears to indicate that she was not particularly concerned about winning over the Church.

As the meetings grew, Sweeney-Kyle’s marriage suffered. While her husband, Paul, was devout and attended the early meetings, he was skeptical and not interested in

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<sup>57</sup> Archives, Diocese of Cleveland; Carol Biliczky, “Believers Flocking to See Holy Vision,” A1; *Holy Love*, x; Stephen Hudak, “A Vision of Faith from the Heavens: Thousands Gather at Eaton Twp. Farm to Pray, Perhaps Glimpse Virgin Mary,” *Plain Dealer*, 6 May 1996, 1A; Molly Kavanaugh, “Contractor Duns Love Ministries for Unpaid Work,” *Plain Dealer*, 13 June 1996, 1B; Melendez, “Holy Love Ministry Gets Permit to Build Pole Barn for Shelter,” 1B; Putre, “Blessed Other,” 14.

<sup>58</sup> Melendez, “Diocese Official, Holy Love Begin Talks on Ministry”: 1B.

<sup>59</sup> Kavanaugh & Melendez, “They’re Called to a Field to Hear the Virgin Mary,” 1B.

further involvement. Paul particularly disliked the attention paid her by her driver, Don Kyle, something that made her followers uncomfortable, too. Kyle was a former police officer who had been married and divorced three times. He became the spokesman for Holy Love. By the early 1990s, Kyle and Sweeney-Kyle were inseparable. By 1993 Sweeney-Kyle had moved out of her marital home, and in May 1995 her divorce was final. She and Kyle married in February 1997, with Fr. Kenney officiating. Some volunteers at the ministry complained that Kyle could be physically violent. Reporter Laura Putre wrote that Sweeney-Kyle could be interviewed only with Kyle's consent and in his presence.<sup>60</sup> Now they refuse to do interviews at all.<sup>61</sup>

Gatherings continue at the Maranatha Spring and Shrine. Sweeney-Kyle is sequestered during the events. Due to chronic asthma, severe allergies, and her shy disposition, she spends most of her time indoors. When she reports that Mary is present, the pilgrims are asked to kneel. Sweeney-Kyle whispers the messages she receives from Mary into a recorder held by her husband. Then the messages are transcribed and delivered to the pilgrims. When Mary has gone, the pilgrims are free to rise and finish the prayer service. Ministry workers walk through the crowd with bags for donations.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Melendez, "Maureen Sweeney Speaks Softly and Carries Holy Messages to Thousands," 2B; Putre, "Blessed Other," 9, 13; Weldon, "Mixed Messages: Ministry in Lorain County has its believers— and skeptics," E1.

<sup>61</sup> Don Kyle, letter to the author, 28 June 2008.

<sup>62</sup> Melendez, "Maureen Sweeney Speaks Softly and Carries Holy Messages to Thousands," 2B; Weldon, "Mixed Messages: Ministry in Lorain County has its believers— and skeptics," E1.

The development of the parachurch organization and pilgrimage shrine fit the pattern for many modern apparition claims in the United States.

### **Greater Cincinnati**

“I haven’t seen her yet today...[b]ut we all feel she’s here.” Andrea Bojrab joined an estimated 15,000 pilgrims on a church lawn in Norwood, Ohio, on August 31, 1997, in hopes of seeing signs of the Virgin Mary. Although Mary was not expected until midnight, many of the faithful came early to claim space on the lawn, setting up folding chairs and coolers. Booths full of rosaries and candles and tents where priests heard confessions filled the streets and lawns around the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center, contributing to the bazaar atmosphere.<sup>63</sup> This would be the fifth time in as many years that an anonymous visionary from Batavia, Ohio, told the Rev. Leroy Smith that Mary would appear on August 31.

Father Smith was a receptive choice for this message. Born and raised in Northern Kentucky, the third of five children, he longed to be a performer and had no thought of becoming a priest until he saw the film *Going My Way*. He became the moderator of the Marian Movement of Priests clerical cenacle. He made his first trip to Medjugorje in October 1988, and went seventeen more times in a ten-year period. As

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<sup>63</sup> Dan Horn, “Thousands Gather For Glimpse of Mary,” *Cincinnati Post*, 1 September 1997, 10A. The Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center occupies the old Mt. St. Mary’s Seminary complex. The seminary was named for Mt. St. Mary’s Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Francis Joseph Miller, *A History of the Athenaeum of Ohio, 1829-1960: A History of the Seminaries of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati* (n.p., 2006), 38, 51, 147; Reck, *Dear Marian Movement*, 202; Father R. Leroy Smith, *Going His Way: One Priest’s Journey with a Few Stops Along the Way* (Ft. Mitchell, KY: Our Lady of Light Publications, 1998), 93-96.

locals became aware of the events at Medjugorje and heard from pilgrims, a wave of Marian activity arose. Thousands from the Cincinnati area visited Medjugorje, so Fr. Smith arranged a local Medjugorje prayer group. Eventually he led trips to several apparition sites around the world, including Medjugorje, Fatima, Lourdes, Guadalupe, Garabandal in Spain, Knock in Ireland, Betania in Venezuela, and Rue de Bac in Paris, France. Fr. Smith credits his experiences with Medjugorje and his devotion to Mary as setting him apart.<sup>64</sup>

Fr. Smith explained the lights as a “phenomenon we accept from God,” a manifestation of the Virgin Mary as Our Lady of Light.<sup>65</sup> Initially the visions had appeared in 1992 at St. Joseph Church in Cold Spring, Kentucky, where Fr. Smith was pastor. After his retirement as a parish priest in 1993, he worked at the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center in Norwood. In 1994 the visions moved there as well, due to road construction in Cold Spring. “She was asked if she would come and do it here, [a]nd she did,” said Dorothy Pfeifer, another attendee. “Sometimes she sends bright lights shooting

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<sup>64</sup> Pryor, “Mary’s Place, God’s Time,” 145-149; Smith, *Going His Way*, 2, 4, 6, 14, 47, 51, 77, 81-82, 87-88, 124. There are several definitions for cenacle. In the Marian Movement of Priests, cenacles are groups of priests who meet for prayer and reflections on readings by founder Father Stefano Gobbi.

<sup>65</sup> Stephen Huba, “Pilgrims Flock To See Sign of Blessed Virgin,” *Cincinnati Post*, 29 August 1997, 1A.

across the sky.”<sup>66</sup> Although Fr. Smith did not see anything in 1997, the visionary told him that Mary had appeared, as did many of the faithful.<sup>67</sup>

In fact, these gatherings continued through 1999, when the visionary told Fr. Smith that Mary said that would be her last visit. By that time, Fr. Smith had retired as a priest, but still served as president and spiritual director of the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center. He explained, “Sometimes the lights are more evident than others. Some don’t see anything. Some people think I have strobe lights on the roof, and that’s silly. A lot of things happen. Some see Mary. Some just see the lights. Some just have a spiritual experience.”<sup>68</sup> In 1999, close to 20,000 people came to the center to await the appearance of Mary. Fr. Smith insisted that the visits were real. “It is a phenomenon I can’t explain. Who can explain miracles? I think she is appearing because...the world is in pretty bad shape and she wants to bring people back to Christ and a Christian way of living.” He continued, “I remember that very first time at Cold Spring. It was real...There were lights on that occasion that I have never seen since. Everything lit up. The buildings, the trees –just boom– then, Our Lady. They have a picture of Our Lady on top of the bell tower. You can see her very plainly.” However, Fr. Smith explained, “These are all personal...private revelations. You never have to put any stock in private

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<sup>66</sup> Dan Horn, “Thousands Gather For Glimpse of Mary,” *Cincinnati Post*, 1 September 1997, 10A; Smith, *Going His Way*, 73.

<sup>67</sup> Dan Horn, “Many See Mary Near Sunset,” *Cincinnati Post*, 2 September 1997, 9A.

<sup>68</sup> Christine Wolff, “Thousands Expected in Norwood,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 31 August 1999, Metro 3B.

revelations. So, there are people who say they don't believe. That's their prerogative – even as Catholics.”<sup>69</sup>

Perceived miracles occurred in multiple forms in Greater Cincinnati in the 1990s. The lights at Cold Spring and Norwood were the first of several claims that the Virgin Mary spoke or appeared to local Catholics. These private revelations, the physical sites associated with them, and the organizations that developed around them formed a network of religious activity outside the official sanction of the Roman Catholic Church and led by both priests and laity. A significant number of believers were attracted to the messages and personalities of the visionaries as well as to the sense of belonging and mission that the organizations provided.

Although reports of Marian apparitions occur all over the world and at various times, this cluster of activity in the Greater Cincinnati area in such a confined period of time was unusual.<sup>70</sup>

Some of the followers of the parachurch organizations credited a unique Cincinnati Good Friday ritual as finding favor with Mary. Since 1860, Cincinnatians have “prayed the steps” to the church now known as Holy Cross-Immaculata on Mount Adams on Good

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<sup>69</sup> Walt Schaefer and Tom McCann, “Waiting for Mary: ‘The Important Thing Is That This Brings Thousands of People Together in Prayer,’” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1 September 1999, News 1-A. The Catholic Church considers Scripture and Church tradition to be public revelations, thus making any other revelations “private.”

<sup>70</sup> The area has a relatively high proportion of Catholics. In Kentucky, the Diocese of Covington has the highest percentage of Catholics relative to the population, nineteen percent. The Archdiocese of Cincinnati runs the sixth largest Catholic school system in the US, even though the archdiocese is the 38<sup>th</sup> most populous in the US. Julie Irwin Zimmerman, “In God We Trusted,” *Cincinnati* (April 2016), 52; Pryor, “Mary’s Place, God’s Time,” 42-43.

Friday. Archbishop John Purcell started building Immaculata Church in 1859 and asked the faithful to pray for the success of the building effort. The laity started the pilgrimage to the site before the steps or the church were finished. Purcell was pleased by this show of faith and dedicated Immaculata as a “pilgrim church.”<sup>71</sup> The pilgrimage became a Good Friday tradition under the influence of Passionist priests, the symbolism of the cross on the hill, and the practical aspect of better weather in spring rather than winter, when it had originated.<sup>72</sup> The Immaculata pilgrimage has remained noncommercial, with fees covering the cost of food, but no profits. For over 150 years, thousands of believers, primarily but not solely Catholic, have prayed on each step up the hill to the church, even as such public displays of faith fell out of favor after Vatican II. A priest blesses the steps at midnight, then the laity pray (usually the rosary) and climb the steps until the Good Friday worship service at three in the afternoon. Some believers in the Marian movement believe this demonstration of faithfulness and dedication to Mary could be a possible reason for why Cincinnati might have found favor with Mary, and thus why the cluster of Marian apparitions occurred there.<sup>73</sup> Bill Reck, of the Marian-dedicated Riehle

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<sup>71</sup> Pryor, “Mary’s Place, God’s Time,” 103.

<sup>72</sup> Pryor, “Mary’s Place, God’s Time,” 107.

<sup>73</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), 384, 388; Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 239-241; Paula M. Kane, “Marian Devotion Since 1940: Continuity or Casualty?” in *Habits of Devotion: Catholic Religious Practice in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. James M. O’Toole (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 98; Pryor, “Mary’s Place, God’s Time,” 111; Smith, *Going His Way*, 85; Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, “The Marian Revival in American Catholicism: Focal Points and Features of the New Marian Enthusiasm,” in *Being Right: Conservative*



Foundation and Faith Publishing Company, writes, “There may not be another location of claimed private revelation, anywhere in the country, that has a stronger base of committed and devoted Marian followers than the Southern Ohio-Northern Kentucky area... there is a tremendous Catholic presence here, as well as a heavy commitment to the Mother of God.”<sup>74</sup> In 1991, 27% of US Catholics attended Mass, but 44% of Catholics in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati did, the highest rate for any big-city diocese.<sup>75</sup>

The apparitions in Ohio, especially the Greater Cincinnati area, fit within a larger scholarly discussion about sacred space. Geographer Mary Lee Nolan and writer Sidney Nolan argue that, “...the urge to identify certain places and things as especially significant, indeed sacred, seems a deeply rooted human need, as is the desire to go as pilgrims to such places.”<sup>76</sup> Sociologist Jeffrey S. Bennett suggests that as more people visit a site, it seems more worthy of visiting. Jonathan Z. Smith, a historian of religion, addresses the idea of sacred spaces in several of his works. In particular, he explains how pilgrims can imbue a place with meaning: “The ordinary...becomes significant, becomes sacred, simply by *being there*. It becomes sacred by having our own attention drawn to it in a special way.” In addition, he explains, “A sacred place is a place of clarification (a focusing lens) where men and gods are held to be transparent to one another.”<sup>77</sup> Scholar

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*Catholics in America*, ed. Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 216-217, 221.

<sup>74</sup> Reck, *Dear Marian Movement*, 202.

<sup>75</sup> Fortin, *Faith and Action*, 366.

<sup>76</sup> Mary Lee Nolan & Sidney Nolan, *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 338.

<sup>77</sup> Jeffrey S. Bennett, *When the Sun Danced: Myth, Miracles, and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century Portugal* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012),

of religion Thomas S. Bremer agrees that pilgrims invest spaces with meanings based on their stories and experiences there, though he adds that the places have a sense of permanence beyond the experiences of the original religious community. Myra Shackley, an archaeologist, Anglican priest, and tourism specialist, and James J. Preston, a sociologist, both suggest that apparition sites provide an opportunity for pilgrims to take part in the experience of the original apparition and reenact the encounter with the divine. Philosopher Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz states that modern American Catholic pilgrims have transitioned from the traditional pilgrimage to established apparition sites such as Lourdes, Fatima, and Guadalupe, in favor of apparition sites where visions are still taking place, hoping to see and speak with visionaries. Religious studies scholar Joseph P. Laycock argues that control of sacred space is particularly important for apparition movements due to the connection between a physical location and a supernatural presence. By using sacred space and rituals strategically, these movements can influence Catholic culture and make faith visible. Church authorities try to enforce the boundaries of Catholicism, limiting access to the sacred within certain times, spaces, and rituals, and express concern about how the Church might be perceived, while the laity seek miracles in a broader range of places, rarely worrying about what outsiders might think. Catholicism is shaped by both lay Catholics and Church authorities and is not monolithic.<sup>78</sup>

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150; Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jamestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 54-55.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas S. Bremer, "Sacred Spaces and Tourist Places," in *Tourism, Religion & Spiritual Journeys*, ed. Dallen J. Timothy & Daniel H. Olsen (New York: Routledge, 2006), 28, 30; William V. D'Antonio, Michele Dillon, & Mary L. Gauthier, *American Catholics in Transition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013), 154; Joseph P. Laycock, *The Seer of Bayside: Veronica Lueken and the Struggle to Define*

With so many apparitions taking place around the world, what would draw pilgrims from all over the United States to a small, blue-collar, Midwestern city to look at mysterious lights?<sup>79</sup> Karen Messina, of Fairfield County, Connecticut, made her fourth trip to Norwood in 1999, “to give devotion to Mary, and I truly believe she is appearing and giving her message for the world – prayer, peace and reconciliation...I have seen the lights and I believe she is being manifested in them. But the important thing is that this brings thousands of people together in prayer and is a demonstration of faith. Despite the scoffers, we are here, willing to profess our belief.” Mary Englebrink, of Ross, Ohio, came for seven years to see the lights. “I always see it...It’s a supernatural light that bathes everyone. It’s not cameras. It’s not anything natural. It’s the blessed lady surely appearing to us.” Others said they came not for miracles, but for the fellowship and prayer of the gathering. Al Ehrman, of Delhi Township, Ohio, spent the day at the center

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*Catholicism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 11-12, 14; James J. Preston, “Spiritual Magnetism: An Organizing Principle for the Study of Pilgrimage,” in *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, ed. Alan Morinis (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 34; Myra Shackley, “Empty Bottles at Sacred Sites: Religious Retailing at Ireland’s National Shrine,” in *Tourism, Religion & Spiritual Journeys*, ed. Dallen J. Timothy & Daniel H. Olsen (New York: Routledge, 2006), 101; Boris Vukonić, “Sacred Places and Tourism in the Roman Catholic Tradition,” in *Tourism, Religion & Spiritual Journeys*, ed. Dallen J. Timothy & Daniel H. Olsen (New York: Routledge, 2006), 245; Zimdars-Swartz, “The Marian Revival in American Catholicism,” 234.

<sup>79</sup> In the 1990s, Norwood was a struggling city. It alone of all neighboring communities had avoided annexation by Cincinnati because of its strong industrial base and independent water supply, but by the 1980s, was an example of a Rust Belt city without enough economic diversification to ensure the city’s stability after its major employers left. Norwood’s population quickly declined, and even in 2006, after successfully cultivating new businesses, the city still faced the serious prospect of bankruptcy. It occupies an anomalous position as a city surrounded entirely by another city.

in prayer and meditation, but claimed, “Even if nothing happens, at 1 a.m., when it’s all over, you say, ‘yes, I’m glad I came...’ Some people see lights shining, fantastic things, but that’s just gravy on the potatoes for me. The whole thing for me is being with these lovely people in prayer by the thousands. That’s what makes it worthwhile.”<sup>80</sup>

Although these pilgrims make the apparitions sound appealing, the initial predictions of Marian apparitions at Cold Spring in 1992 provoked wariness on the part of Church and city officials. The city government dreaded the traffic and crowds that would come in hopes of seeing something, the parish council feared the harm that could come to the parish, both in terms of physical property and reputation, and the Church feared people’s expectations might be disappointed if the predictions turned out to be inaccurate. Covington Bishop William Hughes released a statement over a month before Mary was expected to appear, warning Catholics not to put too much faith in predictions of Marian appearances and instead, to rely on more traditional methods to connect with God, such as the Bible and Holy Communion. “I urge a renewed fidelity to these and less interest in the unusual or extraordinary,” he said in the statement.<sup>81</sup> In his memoir, Fr. Smith claims that he tried to use discretion. He met with the visionary and decided she was not disturbed, then he asked Nancy Fowler in Georgia, Fr. Jack Spaulding in Arizona, one of the Medjugorje seers, and Sister Brieger McKenna in Florida to pray for him and his parish. He temporarily kept the information from the parish council, but

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<sup>80</sup> Walt Schaefer and Tom McCann, “Faithful Gather to See a Vision: Visit Expected to Be the Last,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1 September 1999, News 1-A.

<sup>81</sup> Beth Menge, “Be Wary of ‘Vision’ Prediction, Bishop Advises,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 22 July 1992, A-12; Smith, *Going His Way*, 63.

after he told his Friday night prayer group about the visionary's prediction, asking them to keep it quiet, media from all over the world descended the next day.<sup>82</sup> Although Fr. Smith was responsible for making the prediction public, he expressed some ambivalence about the predicted visions, saying, "Of course, it's just one of those things that you take on faith...If Our Lady wants it to happen, it's going to happen. If not, it won't....The visionary says Our Lady is going to appear in St. Joseph Church. Not to me. Not to any one particular individual...Just that she's going to make her appearance known."<sup>83</sup>

As the word of the predicted visions spread, the bishop met with Fr. Smith and Cold Spring mayor Paul Weghorn to address the situation. Bishop Hughes urged Fr. Smith to make the event private. Fr. Smith did suggest that people who were not members of St. Joseph parish stay home and pray or go to their own churches rather than coming to St. Joseph. However, by this time, it was only two weeks before Mary was expected to appear, the story had drawn national attention, and people were already descending on Cold Spring.<sup>84</sup> Eventually, parish members would be allowed inside St. Joseph Church by invitation only, and all non-members had to wait outside.<sup>85</sup> The

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<sup>82</sup> Smith, *Going His Way*, 61-62.

<sup>83</sup> Menge, "Be Wary of 'Vision' Prediction, Bishop Advises": A-1. A similar idea is expressed in Jean Bach, "Covington Priest 'Mary's Ambassador,'" (*Cincinnati Catholic Telegraph*, 14 August 1992, 1, 5. Found in "Cold Spring Apparitions" file, Diocese of Covington Archives.

<sup>84</sup> Peggy Kreimer, "Town to Restrict Visitors on Night of Prediction," *Cincinnati Post*, 18 August 1992, 5A.

<sup>85</sup> "Church to Limit Pilgrims," *Cincinnati Post*, 22 August 1992, 5A; Smith, *Going His Way*, 64; Paul Weghorn, Jr., interview by author, Cold Spring, KY, 21 July 2008.

capacity of the church was set at 1,000, and cameras and recording equipment were prohibited.<sup>86</sup> Although he obeyed the bishop, Fr. Smith reasoned, “[I]f Our Blessed Lady is calling people here, they are going to come.” He also said the visionary told him that followers should spend three days fasting before the vision.<sup>87</sup> “If it happens, it will be the greatest grace that ever happened to Cold Spring...If it doesn’t, it won’t shake my faith,” Fr. Smith stated.<sup>88</sup> He, the Diocese of Covington, and the city of Cold Spring all tried to lower expectations and keep the event small. “[P]lease do not expect something extraordinary to happen on Aug. 31...She is just as much present to us in our own churches, our own homes, etc., as she is in the places of apparition.”<sup>89</sup>

The city officials took steps to deal with the expected crowd problems, setting strict rules about parking, driving, food, vendors, and camping. “There’s going to be no Madonnas, T-shirts or anything like that...There’s no way we’re going to make any money on this. How much we lose will depend on how many show up,” said Mayor Wegman. “I’d rather not have them [the crowds]. We’re not equipped to handle them.

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<sup>86</sup> Geoff Hobson, “Vision of Mary on Aug. 31 Not Certain, Pastor Advises,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 22 August 1992, B2.

<sup>87</sup> Smita Madan Paul, “Church May Shun Visitors: Night of Vision Just for Ky. Parish,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 18 August 1992, D1; Peggy Kreimer, “Cold Spring limits access to see ‘vision’: Church members need invitation,” *Kentucky Post*, 25 August 1992, 1K, 2K.

<sup>88</sup> Elaine Dillhunt, “Tiny city braces for influx of faithful,” *Catholic Telegraph*, 14 August 1992, 5. Found in “Cold Spring Apparitions” file, Diocese of Covington Archives.

<sup>89</sup> Geoff Hobson, “Vision of Mary on Aug. 31 Not Certain, Pastor Advises,” B2.

We've done these things to accommodate our citizens and businesses, they come first."<sup>90</sup> The Campbell County town of 2,800 called in assistance from the Kentucky State Police and National Guard to deal with crowd control. They also made special arrangements with the Transit Authority of Northern Kentucky to operate shuttles to the church and resurfaced an old drive-in theater to allow parking for buses and cars. Still, the city worried that US-27, the main road through town, might need to be shut down if crowds grew too large.<sup>91</sup>

Despite Cold Spring's rules, people came from across the country, some for the spiritual experience and others for commercial opportunities. Gary Chism sold T-shirts he created as souvenirs for the pilgrims, featuring Mary's face looking at rays of light with the words, "Lady of Light. Cold Spring, Ky., 1992." Although T-shirt sales were banned in Cold Spring, Chism sold his shirts in neighboring Highland Heights. Bill Gasdorf, owner and operator of Bill's Catering, one mile south of St. Joseph Church, had property just outside the Cold Spring city limits. He charged \$50 a night for RV camping in his yard and sold food.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Geoff Hobson, "Cold Spring Sets Rules for Vision Vigil," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 21 August 1992, E1.

<sup>91</sup> "Church to Limit Pilgrims," 5A; Tony Scotta, "Village Plans for Predicted Apparition: Officials Seeking Outside Help for Potentially 'Serious' Crowd Problems," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 30 July 1992, B2; Peggy Kreimer, "Town Braces for Blitz," *Cincinnati Post*, 29 August 1992, 5A; Beth Menge, "Town Braces for Mary Visitors: Tiny Cold Spring Ponders How to Cope With Expected Crowd," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 26 August 1992, B2; Paul Weghorn, Jr., interview by author, Cold Spring, KY, 21 July 2008.

<sup>92</sup> Beth Menge, "'Hungry to Know God...': As They Await a Visitation from Mary, Believers Flocking to Cold Spring from All Points of the Compass Are Finding

The first Cold Spring apparition drew an estimated 7,900 people. Several reported seeing Mary in a tree outside the church, on a church wall, or on the roof. Others reported seeing strange lights flashing. These lights were explained as “similar to heat lightning,” possibly caused by people taking photos, TV cameras and National Guard flashlights, or manifestations of Mary’s presence. There were also reports of rosaries turning color. Activities at the church started at 9 AM with an outdoor Mass and twelve priests hearing confessions until midnight. Loudspeakers were set up so those outside the church could hear the prayers inside. Bishop Hughes did not attend, but after talking with Fr. Smith, made a statement that “nothing of a miraculous nature happened at St. Joseph Church.” This meant that Bishop Hughes would not appoint a commission to investigate the event, a step that prevented the process of gaining official Church approval from ever starting. Hughes also restated his encouragement for more traditional routes to connection with God.<sup>93</sup>

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Tight Security, Roped-Off Yards and Commemorative T-Shirts,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 31 August 1992, A1.

<sup>93</sup> Beth Menge, “Prayers, Rosaries and Faith,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1 September 1992, A1, A6; Brenda Breaux, “Cold Spring Takes Crowd Precautions: Extra Officers Called In as Nearly 8,000 Gather,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 1 September 1992, A6; Peggy Kreimer, “For the Faithful, A Night of Miracles,” *Cincinnati Post*, 1 September 1992, 1A, 3A; Dick Rawe, “Faithful Gathered for Vision See ‘Miracle’ in Crowd,” *Cincinnati Post*, 1 September 1992, 3A; Beth Menge, “Bishop Discounts Vision: But Some Insist They Saw Mary in Cold Spring,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 2 September 1992, A1, A10; Brenda J. Breaux, “Believers’ Faith Holds Strong,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 2 September 1992, A10; Jean Bach, “Gathering in prayer: ‘Nothing of a miraculous nature occurred,’ bishop says of event in Cold Spring church,” (Louisville) *Record*, 3 September 1992, 2 [found in “Cold Spring Apparitions” file, Diocese of Covington Archives]; Jean Bach, “No Miracle, Says Bishop,” (Lexington) *Cross Roads*, 13 September 1992, 1, 3; Smith, *Going His Way*, 65-66, 68. An anonymous typed note on an article in the “Cold Spring Apparitions” file, Diocese of Covington Archives, indicates the frustration toward the bishop felt by at least one parishioner: “YOU ARE WRONG AGAIN BECAUSE



Xavier University theology professor Rev. Edward Carter was one of the people inside St. Joseph Church on Aug. 31, 1992. He claimed that he felt a sense of peace, but saw nothing unusual. However, he predicted that the site would become a place of pilgrimage for believers from around the world. Fr. Carter also said that the people who claimed to have seen Mary at Cold Spring, "...seem well-balanced individuals. My own personal preference is to take them at their word."<sup>94</sup>

Within a few months, another pilgrimage site emerged in rural northern Kentucky, at a farm outside Falmouth, around 35 miles south of Cincinnati. In 1993, Sandy Rasmussen told a Cincinnati television reporter that the Virgin Mary would appear on the farm on the eighth of every month.<sup>95</sup> Rasmussen later claimed, "This has nothing to do with me...It just shows the beauty of God's love for mankind and how strong it is....He is now using worldly ways, through his mother, to save the souls of mankind." After the broadcast, the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center was inundated with mail.<sup>96</sup>

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YOU WERE NOT THERE!!! IF ONLY YOU HAD TAKEN THE TIME TO COME AND JOIN IN THE PRAYERS \_ YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN IMPRESSED BY ALL THE YOUNG PEOPLE GOING TO CON\_ FESSION. Your priests senate defended your trip to Chicago by stating you were interested in all people – it is just too sad that you were not interested in people just simply praying to OUR BLESSED MOTHER which is very ordinary and no one danced on the tab les or called on strange spirits – How ordinary did you consider this behavior." [sic] Found on Jeanne Houck, "Bishop says that Mary didn't appear," *Kentucky Post*, no date or page on clipping.

<sup>94</sup> Menge, "Prayers, Rosaries and Faith," A6; Menge, "Bishop Discounts Vision," A10.

<sup>95</sup> David Wecker, "Mission Offers Hope and Home to the Terminally Ill," *Cincinnati Post*, 9 June 2001, At Home 1C.

<sup>96</sup> Jean Bach, "People Flock to Falmouth for Predicted Apparition," (Covington) *Messenger*, 14 January 1994, 13. From "Falmouth [sic] Apparitions" file, Diocese of Covington Archives.

During 1994 and 1995, tens of thousands came to the farm in hopes of seeing Mary. Rasmussen “never meant for any of it to become public.” Instead, she claimed, “The Falmouth apparitions made up one tiny part of my soul’s journey...The experience was a turning point for me. The main message that came out of it was a call to conversion, for people to change their lives.” Rasmussen believes she saw her first apparition at age seven, when she was in an iron lung suffering from polio, and had other visionary experiences in 1985, when she was hospitalized with seizures, respiratory arrest, and a coma. She gave up her goal to become a registered nurse, instead hearing “a voice telling me that I didn’t need a degree for what I was being called to do, that all I needed was a compassionate heart.” Rasmussen started visiting people at their families’ request. She said that a message in Falmouth from Mary asking her to work with the terminally ill led to her creation of the Mary Rose Mission in Covington, Kentucky, in 1999. By 2001, she had moved from Villa Hills to Highland Heights, Kentucky. She and the other volunteers cared for people diagnosed with less than three months to live and tried to convert them.<sup>97</sup>

Although she may not have wanted to be a public figure, when the Marian apparitions began at the Falmouth farm on January 8, 1994, the “Visionary Sandy” was at the center of the phenomenon. The 47-year-old married mother of three and grandmother of four inspired around 5,000 people that day to brave the frigid conditions in hopes of seeing the Virgin Mary.<sup>98</sup> In 1992, Rasmussen was not particularly involved in her religion. She had been educated in Catholic schools in Wisconsin, but in 1992, she was

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<sup>97</sup> David Wecker, “Mission Offers Hope and Home to the Terminally Ill,” 1C.

<sup>98</sup> Jean Bach, “People Flock to Falmouth for Predicted Apparition,” 1.

not involved in any prayer groups, had never heard of Marian apparitions, and was worried that she might need professional help because of the abnormal things she was seeing and hearing.<sup>99</sup> In June 1993, at Mary's insistence, she went to St. Joseph Church in Cold Spring, a place she had never heard of, and prayed the rosary with her husband, something that was unusual for them.<sup>100</sup> While she was there, Rasmussen saw a statue start to glow. In response to Mary's urging, Rasmussen began going to St. Joseph Church every day. She had dreams of Mary, then began seeing apparitions at the church and seeing the statue's eye color change. Mary told her to talk to Fr. Smith, which Rasmussen did, although she was afraid to do so. Fr. Smith told Rasmussen to document everything, told her about other apparitions, and reassured her that she was not crazy.<sup>101</sup>

In 1993, Rasmussen had visions of a white farmhouse. She was invited to go to Mike Walls's farm in Pendleton County to pray, and she saw Mary appear over a bush. Eventually statues of Jesus and Mary were placed on this spot. By the end of 1993, Rasmussen was sharing the message that Mary would appear at the farm on the eighth of every month because Mary wanted another place since St. Joseph Church and the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center were not large enough to hold the number of people who wanted to meet in prayer. The 100-acre farm near rural Highway 159 could

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<sup>99</sup> There are certainly contradictions in Rasmussen's story, as evidenced here. She makes reference several times to visions that she had as a child before she knew what visions were, and again in 1985 with her near-death experience, but then when she has them in 1992 she suddenly finds it abnormal.

<sup>100</sup> D. Dennie, "Virgin Mary Appears to Woman on a Hillside in Pendleton County," *Falmouth Outlook*, 11 January 1994, 1; *Sandy of Falmouth, KY 5/17/94 at Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center*. Video lecture, no credits.

<sup>101</sup> *Sandy of Falmouth, KY 5/17/94 at Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center*.

accommodate larger crowds, but parking proved to be a serious problem, and after buses had trouble turning, resulted in the use of shuttle vans from Kincaid Lake State Park. Several people parked illegally on the side of the highway, much to the distress of the neighbors. As the gatherings continued month after month, many neighbors made a point of blocking their fields and yards so that pilgrims could not use them for parking.<sup>102</sup>

The distress of the neighbors with the influx of pilgrims was only part of the problem faced by the Catholic Church in Pendleton County. As it had with Cold Spring, the Diocese of Covington took pains to spread the word that the Church did not sponsor the events at the farm. Nearly a month before the first apparition, the pastor of St. Francis Xavier Church in Falmouth, Father Louis Dickman, released a statement urging caution and emphasizing the personal nature of visions.<sup>103</sup> He explicitly disavowed any connection to his parish or the diocese despite the participation of some priests. Fr. Dickman also raised concerns about the prospect of large groups of people descending on this rural area.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *Our Lady's Farm: Falmouth, Kentucky*. Video with no credits. For the name of the farm's owner, D. Dennie, "Virgin Mary Appears to Woman on a Hillside in Pendleton County," 1; None of the source materials indicate an exact date for when the statues were added; Jean Bach, "People Flock to Falmouth for Predicted Apparition," 1, 13; "Thousands go to Falmouth Looking for Miracles," *Messenger*, 13 May 1994, 6. From "Falmouth Apparitions" file, Diocese of Covington Archives.

<sup>103</sup> St. Francis Xavier Church is the only Catholic Church in Pendleton County, which would explain why Fr. Dickman felt so compelled to deny any relationship between the events at the farm and his parish.

<sup>104</sup> Father Louis H. Dickman, "A Clarification About Catholics & Visions of the Virgin Mary," *Falmouth Outlook*, 14 December 1993, 3.

As pilgrims continued to pour into Pendleton County, Bishop Hughes reaffirmed his earlier statements about alleged apparitions. He said, “We need not look for miracles when God’s beauty is all around us.” The diocese also asked Fr. Smith to advise pilgrims against looking directly at the sun after at least one developed solar retinopathy.<sup>105</sup>

The chancellor of the diocese, Father Roger Kriege, continued the attempts by the Church to dissuade people from attending, saying, “We have no reason to believe that anything of a verifiable supernatural nature in the sense of a miracle occurred in Pendleton County.” He continued to admonish Catholics, “We do not need the spectacular to support our faith, nor is it necessary to go to an out-of-the-way place to hear some special person to know God’s presence or the care of our Blessed Mother Mary...Focusing on singular events or persons can blind us to the graces offered to us daily for our growth in faith. We diminish our faith in looking for the sensational.”<sup>106</sup> Once again, as in Cold Spring, the Diocese of Covington dismissed the alleged apparitions without conducting a formal investigation.<sup>107</sup>

Also similar to Cold Spring, pilgrims came from across the United States to the farm. They claimed to see lights in the sky, sometimes in different colors; rainbows; and the sun spinning. Some claimed their rosaries turned from silver to gold. Others

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<sup>105</sup> “At Least One Person Has Lost Sight by Staring at Sun,” *Messenger*, 22 April 1994, 3. From “Falmouth Apparitions” file, Diocese of Covington Archives.

<sup>106</sup> “Thousands Go to Falmouth Looking for Miracles,” 6.

<sup>107</sup> Smith claims that Hughes told him that Hughes did not believe in private revelation, not even the Church-approved Fatima. Smith, *Going His Way*, 62. Hughes retired in July 1995.

believed they smelled roses, a sign of Mary's presence.<sup>108</sup> There were also descriptions of "doors" in the sun, which some people saw in Polaroid photographs as well as live.<sup>109</sup> Rasmussen described the apparitions as occurring in a pink mist, and they usually happened around two in the afternoon.<sup>110</sup> Fr. Smith led prayer masses at the farm, which usually began around 1:30 PM, then were interrupted when visions appeared.<sup>111</sup>

The February gathering was smaller, around 2,000, attributed to icy road conditions. A new element was added to events at the farm when Falmouth resident Angela Gross claimed to be healed from an injured knee and "degenerating back disease" as a result of prayer at the farm.<sup>112</sup> The numbers rose in March to around 3,000 despite continued inclement weather, and reportedly "hundreds of non-[C]atholics attended this time."<sup>113</sup> In April, people reported seeing figures of angels in the clouds.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Jean Bach, "People Flock to Falmouth for Predicted Apparition," 1.

<sup>109</sup> Many of these visions are similar to signs reported at Fatima. Joseph A. Pelletier, AA, *The Sun Danced at Fatima* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1983); Rev. John De Marchi, *The Crusade of Fátima: The Lady More Brilliant than the Sun* (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1947). The importance of Polaroid images is discussed in other chapters of this dissertation.

<sup>110</sup> "Thousands Go to Falmouth Looking for Miracles," 6.

<sup>111</sup> D. Dennie, "Virgin Mary Appears to Woman on a Hillside in Pendleton County," 1, 5.

<sup>112</sup> Laura Feltner, "Falmouth Lady Says Virgin Mary Took Away Her Severe Back and Leg Pain," *Falmouth Outlook*, 15 February 1994, 1, 4.

<sup>113</sup> L. Feltner, "Appearance of Virgin Mary Still Drawing Large Crowds to Farm," *Falmouth Outlook*, 15 March 1994, 5.

<sup>114</sup> L. Feltner, "Thousands Viewed Cloud Formations Gathered over Virgin Mary Shrine," *Falmouth Outlook*, 12 April 1994: 1, 20.

The largest gathering at the farm was on May 8, Mother's Day. Over 25,000 came that day in hopes of seeing a miracle. News stations sent their helicopters to cover the event, and over forty buses came from the Cincinnati area. People set up chairs on the grass and had picnics on the hillsides. Reporter Laura Feltner claimed, "at least half of the crowd was non-Catholic, according to my sources." However, many of the owners of surrounding farms were so disturbed by the monthly gatherings that they were trying to sell their properties out of fear of damage or loss of privacy, something Feltner scorned, saying the pilgrims were peaceful and not destructive.<sup>115</sup>

In August, a Canadian television crew raised the profile of the farm. The crew interviewed people for part of a program on miracles, recording several stories of healings believed to result from prayer. The producers interviewed Feltner and asked if she believed the apparitions were a hoax, but she answered that she "can objectively say that what is happening here in Pendleton County is very real and very holy." As with earlier gatherings, many people took photographs they believed showed angels or doors in the sky.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Laura Feltner, "Thousands Gather at 'The Farm,' Hoping to See the Virgin Mary," *Falmouth Outlook*, 10 May 1994, 1, 5. Evidence of Feltner's perceptions of events at the farm from her first article show that she was sympathetic to the believers, but with each successive article, she participated increasingly in the events. Her experiences with the visions sometimes led her to become quite defensive when readers or others, such as the neighbors, were skeptical or simply questioned the truth of what was happening at the farm, usually resulting in articles concluding with admonitions for readers to come to the farm to see for themselves that the place was holy. By her second article, in March, she was encouraging people to go to prayer meetings at the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center in Norwood and providing contact information for the Center.

<sup>116</sup> Laura Feltner, "Canadian TV Station Films Segment for Their Show at 'The Farm,'" *Falmouth Outlook*, 16 August 1994, 1, 5.

The media attention continued in September, when a Nashville television station chartered a plane to cover the trip of three Nashville women and Monsignor George W. Rohling to the farm. Rohling said, "I am convinced there is something good here...Nothing but good can come of it." The September trip was his second time at the farm.<sup>117</sup> Television stations from Columbus, Ohio, and Cincinnati also covered the September gathering, which coincided with the celebration of Mary's birthday. Candlelight vigils began to be held on the seventeenth of every month at the farm.<sup>118</sup> In November, Lexington's WLEX sent a camera crew. The Batavia visionary came to the farm at least once, as one reporter included a message she claimed to receive there.<sup>119</sup>

The December gathering celebrated the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Reports of the sun spinning, a rainbow, a rainbow sun, cloud angels, and large cloud crosses were made. Irene Mause claimed to see an outline of the Virgin Mary in the clouds.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> "Nashville Visitors Charter a Flight for the Virgin Mary's Appearance," *Falmouth Outlook*, 13 September 1994, 1. "Monsignor" is a title that can be given to a broad range of positions within the hierarchy. A monsignor is higher than a parish priest, but lower than a cardinal.

<sup>118</sup> Laura Feltner, "Thousands Gather to Remember the Birthday of the Holy Mother and Await Her Apparition," *Falmouth Outlook*, 13 September 1994, 7.

<sup>119</sup> Laura Feltner, "Mary's Message Says Teach Your Children the Importance of Faith," *Falmouth Outlook*, 15 November 1994, 7.

<sup>120</sup> Laura Feltner, "Followers of Virgin Mary Apparition Celebrate Feast of the Immaculate," *Falmouth Outlook*, 13 December 1994, 9.



The Our Lady of Light Foundation, part of the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center, bought the farm from Walls.<sup>121</sup> An old tobacco barn was converted into the Chapel of the Good Shepherd, and a spring nearby which did not dry up during a drought was taken by some to be a sign of Mary's favor. The Stations of the Cross and replicas of the Holy Sepulchre and Calvary were also set up on the farm for pilgrims to view. Fr. Smith recorded a message for pilgrims to hear.<sup>122</sup> Unlike at Cold Spring, there were no goods sold at the farm, though donation boxes were placed around the property.<sup>123</sup> These gatherings continued for a total of twenty-two months before Mary announced that she would no longer appear there.

The last visions discussed in this chapter appeared to a Cincinnati woman named Rita Ring and a Jesuit priest, the Rev. Edward J. Carter. Ring taught math at the University of Cincinnati, and Father Carter taught theology at Xavier University. Ring, a married mother of four, turned to prayer to relieve stress. She had been raised by her widowed father to go to Mass every day, and one of her brothers became a priest. Ring later remembered smelling roses when her mother died of cancer, which made Ring associate Mary with her mother from the time Ring was five years old. She had never planned to teach, and in 1991, her eldest daughters, Carol and Sharon, were in college and had little contact with their mother. After spending over a year praying to be "baptized in the Holy Spirit," in October 1991 Ring heard her first message from Jesus.

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<sup>121</sup> Again, the source materials do not indicate a date for this purchase, though it must have happened while the visions were still taking place.

<sup>122</sup> *Our Lady's Farm: Falmouth, Kentucky* video.

<sup>123</sup> "Thousands Go to Falmouth Looking for Miracles," 6.

Ring wrote letters to Jesus in a notebook as an outlet for stress, using the letters to complain about her family. When writing in her notebooks, she began to write messages she believed were from Jesus. In December 1991, Ring had her first vision, a glowing Sacred Heart with a light in the middle, “just like the lights at Cold Spring.” Ring kept teaching and sang in a professional choir, but in January 1992, she lost her voice for two years. After she stopped teaching, her voice came back. She read her notebooks to her two younger children, Cathy and Joe, but kept her messages secret from others. She claimed she was never interested in anything Marian until she started receiving messages. Then she read *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy*, the book of messages received by Gianna Talone-Sullivan in Scottsdale. In February 1993, she went to a Mass led by Fr. Smith, and in October asked him about the messages. As he had done with Rasmussen, Fr. Smith reassured Ring that others heard messages too. She traveled to Medjugorje that month. Ring attended Mass around the region, particularly at churches with priests active in the Marian movement. She claimed that the time after Communion was particularly active for visions or messages.<sup>124</sup> Ring believes that she still receives messages from Mary, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God the Father nearly every day.

The first published reference to Ring’s visions was in relation to a building in Clearwater, Florida, in 1997. This building featured what appeared to be a rainbow-colored image of Mary on the windows. Ring released a message of why the Virgin

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<sup>124</sup> *Messages from Jesus: Video Interview with Rita Ring*. 60 min. No credits. Recorded 17 April 1994 at the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center. The children’s names are not all mentioned in the video; all of them can be found in the dedication of Ring’s book, *God’s Blue Book 4: The Love of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary* (Morrow, OH: Shepherds of Christ Publications, 2005), xvii.

Mary appeared on the building, which became a pilgrimage site. She also gave out copies of an audiotape, rosaries, and meditations.<sup>125</sup> The building features a Message Room with Ring's daily messages in upright files organized by day, which can also be accessed on the internet, and videos are available. Ring usually visits on the 5<sup>th</sup> of each month.<sup>126</sup>

By this point, Ring was already at the heart of an organization called the Shepherds of Christ, who would send pilgrims to Clearwater starting around February 1997 and buy the "Virgin Mary building" in 1998.<sup>127</sup> A few years earlier, Ring had turned to Fr. Carter to be her spiritual advisor. In 1994, they created the Shepherds of Christ organization and newsletter, which was sent to priests. Their goal was to provide priests with religious reading material that would inspire them to become purer, higher quality priests, but the newsletters also promoted Ring's books of revelations and Shepherds of Christ materials. The first year of newsletters was published with the assistance of the Our Lady of Light Foundation, and the first Shepherds of Christ prayer group met at the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center. In addition to Ring's visions, Fr.

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<sup>125</sup> "Insider's Notebook," *St. Petersburg Times*, 10 February 1995, 1.

<sup>126</sup> William H. Swatos, Jr., "Our Lady of Clearwater: Postmodern Traditionalism," in William H. Swatos, Jr., and Luigi Tomasi, ed., *From Medieval Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism: The Social and Cultural Economics of Piety* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 185.

<sup>127</sup> Wilma Norton, "The Virgin Mary: One Year Later," *St. Petersburg Times*, 17 December 1997, 1D.

Carter first saw a vision of Mary and received a message from her in March 1996, witnessed by the Batavia visionary.<sup>128</sup>

As the organization garnered more publicity, Fr. Carter's Jesuit provincials grew nervous. By 1998, leaders were claiming 2,000 members of Shepherds of Christ, and the provincials were displeased by Fr. Carter's involvement in the organization, especially due to the role given to Ring's messages.<sup>129</sup> In particular, the Jesuits were concerned about messages that linked the 1997 floods in Falmouth to divine punishment. Fr. Carter was limited to editing the newsletter for priests until he passed away in 2000.<sup>130</sup>

The messages Ring received from Jesus and Mary made other priests concerned about the organization as well. Father Tom Madden of Dunedin, Florida, faulted Ring's revelations as "not Gospel based," and Father Robert Kinast, director of the Center for Theological Reflection in Indian Rocks Beach, Florida, feared people might not recognize that the Shepherds of Christ is not officially approved by the Church. Kinast said, "(Shepherds of Christ) presume to speak for God in a way they have no

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<sup>128</sup> Edward J. Carter, S.J., ed. *Shepherds of Christ Newsletters: Selected Writings on Spirituality for All People as Published in "Shepherds of Christ" Newsletter for Priests* (Morrow, OH: Shepherds of Christ Publications, 1997), 62; Edward J. Carter, S.J., ed. *Shepherds of Christ Newsletters: Selected Writings on Spirituality for All People as Published in "Shepherds of Christ" Newsletter for Priests* Vol. 2 (Madison, IN: Shepherds of Christ Publications, 2002), F-1; Gerald G. Ross, ed. *Personal Revelations of Our Lady of Light* vol. 4 (Fort Mitchell, KY: Our Lady of Light Publications, 1997), 107-108.

<sup>129</sup> Deborah O'Neil, "Ohio ministry aims to elevate Virgin Mary site in Clearwater," *St. Petersburg Times*, 19 July 1998, 1.

<sup>130</sup> Stephen Huba, "Ministry negotiating to buy image: Virgin 'miracle' on Fla. building," *Cincinnati Post*, 30 July 1998, 1A:2. Shepherds of Christ, "A Gift, A Warning & A Solution," 6.

authorization to do. Worse than that, they are capitalizing on human tragedies. That sort of thing can't be supported at all." The Diocese of St. Petersburg urged Catholics to be skeptical about the group.<sup>131</sup> The Archdiocese of Cincinnati has never investigated the organization or Ring's visions.

In addition to the "Virgin Mary building" in Clearwater, the Shepherds of Christ bought a house near Morrow, Ohio, and the decommissioned St. Anthony's Church in China, Indiana (near Madison, Indiana). The house is used as the group's headquarters. The church and the Florida building are both used as spiritual centers where Shepherds of Christ volunteers have prayer services, hand out literature, and sell religious goods.<sup>132</sup> They also sell books of the messages received by Ring. In 1998, the group added a crucifix next to the image of the Virgin Mary, hoping to draw more pilgrims.<sup>133</sup> The format of the newsletter changed to appeal to both priests and laity in 2000. Also starting in 2000, the organization made rosaries in the Florida building, but by 2002, that had ended due to lack of staff and funding.<sup>134</sup> The Shepherds of Christ explicitly link their organization to the approved apparitions at Fatima, stressing the importance of devotion to the "immaculate heart of Mary and the sacred heart of Jesus." President John Weickert

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<sup>131</sup> Deborah O'Neil, "Ohio ministry aims to elevate Virgin Mary site in Clearwater," 1. Parentheses in original.

<sup>132</sup> Deborah O'Neil, "Ohio ministry aims to elevate Virgin Mary site in Clearwater," 1.

<sup>133</sup> Amelia Davis, "Ministry to unveil crucifix at Mary site," *St. Petersburg Times*, 17 December 1998, 1.

<sup>134</sup> Deborah O'Neil, "Message to believers: Make rosaries," *St. Petersburg Times*, 15 October 2000, 1; Eileen Schulte, "Image of Mary beckons few now," *St. Petersburg Times*, 28 September 2002, 8.

said, “Our ministry is really a practical application of what was asked for in 1917,” referring to Mary’s request at Fatima that the world be devoted to her immaculate heart.<sup>135</sup> The Shepherds of Christ are distinctive in their emphasis on individual spiritual renewal and on lay Catholics praying for holy priests. Traditionally the expectation was that priests interceded for the sinful laity.<sup>136</sup>

In 2004, the Clearwater building was vandalized by a disgruntled teenaged boy. Kyle Maskell used a slingshot to shoot three ball bearings at the glass, destroying several panes that had formed part of Mary’s head. The Shepherds of Christ replaced the panes with clear glass, as Ring said Mary asked.<sup>137</sup> The number of visitors to the site, already declining, continued to drop. However, ministry officials began to emphasize that since the image of Mary had been destroyed, an image of Jesus’ face had emerged.<sup>138</sup> Site leader Rosie Reed explained, “Mary always leads us to Jesus.” Still, the organization worried about the low number of visitors and the \$1.3 million they owed on the

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<sup>135</sup> Stephen Huba, “Ministries distribute messages,” *Cincinnati Post*, 17 December 1999, 16A.

<sup>136</sup> Swatos, “Our Lady of Clearwater,” 187-188, 191.

<sup>137</sup> Chris Tisch, “For Mary’s faithful, a shattering loss,” *St. Petersburg Times*, 2 March 2004, 1A; Mary Jo Melone, “The faithful find power even in ruins of Mary site,” *St. Petersburg Times*, 5 March 2004, 1B; Chris Tisch, “Teen held in Virgin Mary smashing,” *St. Petersburg Times*, 11 May 2004, 1A.

<sup>138</sup> Chris Tisch, “Virgin Mary Case: 10 days in jail for ruining image,” *St. Petersburg Times*, 13 July 2004, 1.

building.<sup>139</sup> Reed admitted the group was struggling, but maintained her faith that the group would continue.<sup>140</sup>

In 2020, the Shepherds of Christ are still an active group. They continue to operate all three of their buildings, hold prayer groups, distribute literature, and urge believers to consecrate themselves to the hearts of Jesus and Mary. After Fr. Carter's death, publishing the newsletter became intermittent. Copies of issues from 1994 to 2001 are available on the Shepherds of Christ website. They offer Mary and Jesus water at the Clearwater site, claiming the water has healing properties.<sup>141</sup> Shepherds of Christ is the broadest of the Cincinnati-based organizations that emerged at this time, drawing members from around the world. They have various smaller groups that are part of the organization, including the Apostles of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, which is led by Ring; Shepherds of Christ Associates; Junior Shepherds of Christ Associates; and Handmaids and Servants of the Good Shepherd. They support ministries in nursing homes and prisons, and provide rosaries and educational materials as well as their own devotional literature. The Shepherds of Christ are struggling financially, but do still exist.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Eileen Schulte, *St. Petersburg Times*, 18 July 2004, 1, 7B.

<sup>140</sup> Eileen Schulte, "Unstable soil threatens shattered Virgin image," *St. Petersburg Times*, 26 October 2004, 1. Public property records indicate a lien on the Morrow house in August 2004 of \$183,400. Warren County Recorder, <http://www.co.warren.oh.us/recorder/search/docdisplay.asp>. Accessed 15 February 2006.

<sup>141</sup> Shepherds of Christ, FAX of assorted daily messages from 2005. In author's possession. Shepherds of Christ, <http://www.sofc.org> Accessed 27 May 2011.

<sup>142</sup> A website supposedly authored by a former member of Shepherds of Christ claims that the organization is actually a Satanic cult led by Rita Ring, but no other evidence to support this assertion has been found. Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center:

The Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center is still operating as well. Although Our Lady of Light no longer appears there, the Center continues to offer a place for prayer groups, Bible studies, retreats, a religious gift shop, a Catholic radio station, and a library. They still operate Our Lady's Farm near Falmouth, which continues to offer a place for quiet reflection and official times for prayer, though Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary has not appeared in over a decade. The Batavia visionary has remained anonymous and still claims to receive messages from Mary, though none to be shared with the public. Fr. Smith resigned as president of the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center and moved to Florida in 2003 due to health concerns. He continued to serve as spiritual director for the Batavia visionary until his death in 2012. Rasmussen revealed her identity with the 2001 article about her ministry with the dying, but no longer claims to receive messages from Mary.

According to Riehle Foundation publisher Bill Reck, "The Batavia Visionary, through Mary, related how the entire Tri-State area [Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky] was to become the major center of renewal for the Church."<sup>143</sup> Fr. Smith described places where Mary appeared or which had particular meaning to her in the region as forming the shape of a cross. The vertical part of the cross extended from St. John Bergamo Shrine in Dayton south through the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center in Norwood, the Holy Cross-Immaculata Church on Mount Adams, and St. Joseph Church in Cold Spring, to the farm in Falmouth. The horizontal part of the cross included the farms in Indiana and

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Catholic Cult & Brainwashing,  
<http://www.unitypublishing.com/NewReligiousMovements/HolySpiritCenter.html>.  
Accessed 28 January 2006.

<sup>143</sup> Reck, *Dear Marian Movement*, 203.



Ohio where the Batavia visionary met Our Lady of Light.<sup>144</sup> The Batavia visionary also explained that Mary had chosen certain priests to be her ambassadors. Fr. Smith was the main ambassador and responsible for the middle section of the US. Father Donald Rinfret, who directed the Jesuit Seminary and Mission Bureau of the Maryland Province, would be her ambassador for the East until his death in 1997. Father Lawrence Sweeney of Utah was ambassador for the West. In 2004 Fr. Sweeney moved into the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center.<sup>145</sup>

The Ohio visionaries have similarities and differences. All of the women except Sister Neuzil were middle-aged married mothers when they revealed the messages they received.<sup>146</sup> This raises questions related to the role of women in the Catholic Church, as they could not assume any position of official authority, yet they were claiming to be receiving information directly from the Mother of God. As mothers, the visionaries had an additional connection with Mary, the Blessed Mother. The Batavia visionary maintained her anonymity, Sister Neuzil, Rasmussen, and Sweeney-Kyle attempted

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<sup>144</sup> Pryor, “Mary’s Place, God’s Time,” 2-3; Smith, *Going His Way*, 99. Apparently someone named Pat MacDonald claimed to receive messages from Mary at St. John Bergamo Shrine in Dayton sometime in the 1990s, but I have been unable to find more information about this person beyond a mention by Pryor and a book of messages for sale on eBay.

<sup>145</sup> *Personal Revelations: Continued Guidance of Our Lady of Light* Vol. 5 (Ft. Mitchell, KY: Our Lady of Light Publications, 2005), 5; Pryor, “Mary’s Place, God’s Time,” 143; Reck, *Dear Marian Movement*, 202; Gerald G. Ross, ed., *Personal Revelations of Our Lady of Light* (Ft. Mitchell, KY: Our Lady of Light Publications, 1992), 26; Ross, *Personal Revelations of Our Lady of Light* Vol. 4, xii, 12-14, 16, 24.

<sup>146</sup> Buchdrucker’s marital status at the time her visions started is unclear. She was a mother and married at some point, but there is no mention of her husband in any materials that I found, even in her obituary. So she may have been separated, divorced, or widowed.

anonymity for a while, and Buchdrucker and Ring never tried to hide their identities. While Rasmussen dismissed higher education, Sweeney-Kyle had a teaching degree and Ring taught at a university. Rasmussen claimed her visions started while she was a child, and Sister Neuzil's began when she was a young adult, but the others did not have any until middle age. Sister Neuzil's and Rasmussen's visions were in rural areas, Sweeney-Kyle's were in suburbs, Buchdrucker's and Ring's were in an urban setting, and the Batavia visionary's took place in urban, suburban, and rural areas. All three of the Cincinnati-area visionaries connected with Fr. Smith, and Sister Neuzil and Sweeney-Kyle had ties to Southwest Ohio through their spiritual directors. The Batavia visionary, Rasmussen, Ring, and Sweeney-Kyle were central to the formation of organizations that drew thousands of followers despite official Church opposition. What all of the women had in common was that they all believed they could discern and reveal messages from Mary (and sometimes, Jesus and other religious figures).

The apparition events in this area also reveal how the pilgrimage culture of American Catholicism works because of their connections with each other. Although Sister Neuzil was relatively isolated due to her position as a cloistered nun, and Buchdrucker's immigrant background and condemnation by the Church probably limited her connections, the other visionaries knew about each other as well as visionaries discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, such as Gianna Talone-Sullivan and Nancy Fowler. Because there were so many apparition claims taking place in the United States in the 1990s, and the media was publicizing these events, believers were able to visit sites without waiting for a bishop's approval. They were also able to join the parachurch organizations that developed around these apparition claims. Groups such as the

Shepherds of Christ, the Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center, Holy Love Ministries, and Our Lady of America continue to this day, even as some of the visionaries have died or stopped receiving messages. Even without new messages, believers find something worthwhile about these organizations.

Parachurch organizations are not limited to Ohio, though the cluster of them in Ohio is noteworthy. As explained by scholars Wesley K. Willmer, J. David Schmidt, and Martyn Smith, “the parachurch is made up of organizations that are not part of the traditional, organized church, yet that are engaged in churchlike activities.”<sup>147</sup> Thus, these organizations offer ministries and services that would usually be associated with churches, while remaining independent of any particular church or denomination. More parachurch groups have been founded since the end of World War II than during the entire previous century, which makes some traditional church leaders concerned about the possible impacts on local churches.<sup>148</sup> Willmer, Schmidt, and Smith report that almost half of religious donations go to parachurch organizations, as opposed to local churches or traditional denominations.<sup>149</sup> Clearly people are turning to these organizations to supplement their religious beliefs or fill a need that is not being met by the traditional church.

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<sup>147</sup> Wesley K. Willmer, J. David Schmidt, and Martyn Smith, *The Prospering Parachurch: Enlarging the Boundaries of God’s Kingdom* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 12.

<sup>148</sup> Willmer, Schmidt, and Smith, *The Prospering Parachurch: Enlarging the Boundaries of God’s Kingdom*, xii; Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 112.

<sup>149</sup> Willmer, Schmidt, and Smith, *The Prospering Parachurch: Enlarging the Boundaries of God’s Kingdom*, xi.

Pilgrimage to apparition sites that are run by these parachurch organizations offers believers the opportunity to put their religious beliefs into action. As anthropologists Jill Dubisch and Michael Winkelman explain, “Making contact with the sacred, fulfilling a vow, seeking healing for physical or spiritual ailments, marking a life passage, doing penance, affirming cultural identity, and simple curiosity are among the diverse motivations for undertaking pilgrimage.”<sup>150</sup> The pilgrims decide the meaning for themselves. Pilgrimage is popular today because believers can make choices, engage in rituals in a flexible way, and experience a positive effect from their journey. Rising affluence, increasing ease of transportation, and media making sites known more widely also contribute to a rise in pilgrimage travel. Women are particularly interested in pilgrimage, as some are restricted from other travel, women are generally more associated with concern for the care and health of their family, and they may identify with the Virgin Mary.<sup>151</sup> While male church leaders may focus on the afterlife and emphasize financial donations, women pilgrims take physical action over concerns of this world.<sup>152</sup> Although most religious leaders are men, most believers are women, and their support for a religious group is necessary for its survival, even for conservative religious groups.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Jill Dubisch and Michael Winkelman, “Introduction,” *Pilgrimage and Healing* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), xiii.

<sup>151</sup> Dubisch and Winkelman, “Introduction,” *Pilgrimage and Healing*, xvii-xxiii.

<sup>152</sup> Lena Gemzöe, “The Feminization of Healing in Pilgrimage to Fátima,” in Jill Dubisch and Michael Winkelman, ed., *Pilgrimage and Healing* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005), 39.

<sup>153</sup> Brenda E. Brasher, *Godly Women: Fundamentalism and Female Power* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 28, 46; Marta Trzebiatowska and

The Virgin Mary is particularly appealing for these pilgrims because apparitions enable believers to have a direct relationship with the supernatural without the church as an intermediary.<sup>154</sup> As anthropologist Lena Gemzöe suggests, “When people experience difficult moments, they want Mary to be as *present* and as *accessible* as possible. It is the desire to experience Mary’s physical presence and to see her face-to-face that makes stories of her apparition so appealing.”<sup>155</sup> Historian Lisa Bitel explains that Catholics have grown up surrounded by the Virgin Mary and holy places, so they evaluate new vision claims based on their experiences with images of Mary and stories of previous apparitions. Believers look for the relationship between the new apparition claims and past ones, examine the effects of the claims, take pictures, and do research. As a result, apparition events tend to follow predictable routines, though they are not exactly the same at every place.<sup>156</sup> As Robert Orsi describes, “Devotion to Mary in the various forms she has taken for her visits constitutes a global web of connections and stories, of devotional objects and images exchanged, and of the circulation of souvenirs, postcards, e-mails, websites, texts, and instant messages.”<sup>157</sup> Pilgrims want physical connections to symbolize their supernatural experience with a visionary, apparition site, or parachurch

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Steve Bruce, *Why Are Women More Religious Than Men?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 6.

<sup>154</sup> Gemzöe, “The Feminization of Healing in Pilgrimage to Fátima,” 46.

<sup>155</sup> Gemzöe, “The Feminization of Healing in Pilgrimage to Fátima,” 42.

<sup>156</sup> Lisa M. Bitel, *Our Lady of the Rock: Vision and Pilgrimage in the Mojave Desert* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 3-4, 153.

<sup>157</sup> Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 50.

organization. The apparition events not only demonstrate the relationship between believers and the supernatural, but also the relationship among the group of people present at a certain place and time. They create a special connection with this version of the Virgin Mary as their own.<sup>158</sup> Bitel suggests that the changes in the Catholic Church created by Vatican II might have actually contributed to an increase in Marian devotion and pilgrimage because it emphasized the laity taking an active role in their faith, so lay groups are forming without opposition by the Church.<sup>159</sup> Sociologist Wade Clark Roof finds that such groups may be particularly appealing to Catholics, as they may follow religious interpretations that do not follow the Church's official positions, while still maintaining their Catholic identity.<sup>160</sup>

The six visionaries examined in this chapter provide a window into pilgrimage culture. The parachurch organizations demonstrate how believers continue their devotion even once supernatural revelations have ended. The visionaries' different backgrounds, locations, and time periods show the persistence of Marian apparition beliefs within the Catholic culture of Ohio, in urban, rural, and suburban areas both before and after Vatican II.

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<sup>158</sup> Orsi, *History and Presence*, 50, 66.

<sup>159</sup> Bitel, *Our Lady of the Rock: Vision and Pilgrimage in the Mojave Desert*, 14.

<sup>160</sup> Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 94.

## CHAPTER 5. “EAT, DRINK, AND SEE MARY”: CONYERS, GEORGIA AND THE BUSINESS OF APPARITIONS

Nancy Fowler had an unusual relationship with Jesus. Since 1987, she heard from him or the Virgin Mary nearly every day. He advised her about shopping for a home and buying a car. Other times Jesus teased her about her weight, poked fun at her faulty memory, or when she used face cream told her, “You look funny.”<sup>1</sup> On the 13<sup>th</sup> of every month from October 1990 to May 1994, the Virgin Mary appeared to Fowler with messages for the US. After May 1994, Mary continued to appear to Fowler each October 13, with the final public message in 1998. The estimated crowd that day at a farm near Fowler’s home in the Atlanta suburb of Conyers, Georgia was estimated at 100,000– the largest crowd ever drawn at The Farm, as it was known, and equaling the record set at the Necedah, Wisconsin apparition of August 15, 1950. Fowler became the best-known visionary of her time, but opposition from the archbishop, trouble with her organization, and financial and family problems came along with her fame.

Fowler’s unusual experiences began in 1983. She was married to Ron Fowler, a civil service employee and former Air Force officer she had met in Florida in the 1970s, raising their first son, and working as a nurse.<sup>2</sup> Originally from Cambridge,

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Garvey, *Searching for Mary: An Exploration of Marian Apparitions Across the U.S.* (New York: Plume, 1998), 14-15; Our Loving Mother’s Children, comp., *“To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God” Vol. 1: Reported Teachings and Messages to the World from Our Lord and Our Loving Mother* (Newington, VA: Our Loving Mother’s Children, 1991); Greg Schneider, “Visions of the Virgin Mary,” *Virginian-Pilot*, 22 December 1993, B1; Gayle White, “Sharing a Vision of the Virgin Mary,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 14 September 1991, B1.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Marie Hancock, *Wake Up America! Take My Heart, Take My Hand* (Norfolk, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, 1993), 43; “Messages From Mary Draw Large Crowds,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 14 October 1994, 14; Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz,

Massachusetts, she had lost her mother at the age of 11, and in later years, she would say this was when she developed a strong devotion to the Virgin Mary.<sup>3</sup> Fowler and her family were living in Illinois when she took a nursing position that paid better but required her to work on weekends, so she was unable to spend as much time with her family or on her religion.<sup>4</sup> She started seeing things-- eyes, shadows, demons-- and sought help from a priest, who told her to send the demons away in Jesus' name.<sup>5</sup> After she gave up her new job, went to confession, and attended Mass, the demon attacks stopped. However, early in 1987 Fowler was suffering from severe depression.<sup>6</sup> She heard Jesus' voice in church telling her that she was sane, and eventually she started

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“The Marian Revival in American Catholicism: Focal Points and Features of the New Marian Enthusiasm,” in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, ed. Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 228.

<sup>3</sup> Victor Balaban, “The Marian Apparition Site at Conyers, Georgia,” in *Religions of Atlanta: Religious Diversity in the Centennial Olympic City*, ed. Gary Laderman (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 220; Conyers - Our Loving Mother - Nancy Fowler Passed Away, [http://www.ourlovingmother.org/CurrentNews\\_01-10-2012\\_NancyFowlerPassedAway.aspx](http://www.ourlovingmother.org/CurrentNews_01-10-2012_NancyFowlerPassedAway.aspx), accessed 29 January 2012; René Laurentin, *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary Today*, translated by Luke Griffin (Dublin: Veritas, 1991), 196.

<sup>4</sup> Balaban, “The Marian Apparition Site at Conyers, Georgia,” 220-221; Jeff Kunerth, “They Hail Mary from a Hilltop,” *Orlando Sentinel*, 14 April 1992, A3; “Messages from Mary Draw Large Crowds,”<sup>14</sup>; Zimdars-Swartz, “The Marian Revival in American Catholicism: Focal Points and Features of the New Marian Enthusiasm,” 228.

<sup>5</sup> Chris Merrifield, dir. and prod., *Miracle at Conyers: The Visions of Nancy Fowler. The Conyers Chronicles, Vol. 1* (Conyers, GA: Little Drummer Boy Productions, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> Zimdars-Swartz, “The Marian Revival in American Catholicism: Focal Points and Features of the New Marian Enthusiasm,” 228.



seeing Jesus.<sup>7</sup> Fowler took a trip to Medjugorje in October and believed she was called there to become a prophet. Shortly after her return home, in 1988 she started receiving visions of Mary in addition to daily visions of Jesus, and in 1990 Mary told Fowler to make her experiences public.<sup>8</sup> “I wasn’t convinced I wasn’t crazy,” Fowler later explained, but she came to believe she had a duty to minister to others.<sup>9</sup> She reported that Jesus told her in July 1989, “Nancy, I have commissioned you. You are My chosen one. You are My apostle.”<sup>10</sup> In November 1990 she said Jesus told her, “Through you I will show the world My love and mercy.”<sup>11</sup> Having already moved to Norcross, Georgia, in 1990 the Fowlers moved to the farm near Conyers to which Jesus guided her, where the visions became publicly known and began to draw large crowds.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Merrifield, *Miracle at Conyers*.

<sup>8</sup> Balaban, “The Marian Apparition Site at Conyers, Georgia,” 221; Our Loving Mother’s Children, “*To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God*,” 9; Tara Lynn Sweeney, “The Therapeutic Landscape of a Marian Apparition Site in Conyers, Georgia” (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1996), 42; Zimdars-Swartz, “The Marian Revival in American Catholicism: Focal Points and Features of the New Marian Enthusiasm,” 228. Janice T. Connell gives the date of Fowler’s trip to Medjugorje as 1988 on page 307 of *Meetings with Mary: Visions of the Blessed Mother* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> S. E. Vanderboom, “Gathering Is Smallest of Year,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 14 July 1994, 1A.

<sup>10</sup> Our Loving Mother’s Children, “*To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God*,” 48.

<sup>11</sup> Our Loving Mother’s Children, “*To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God*,” 95.

<sup>12</sup> Balaban, “The Marian Apparition Site at Conyers, Georgia,” 221; Sweeney, “The Therapeutic Landscape of a Marian Apparition Site in Conyers, Georgia,” 42; Zimdars-Swartz, “The Marian Revival in American Catholicism: Focal Points and Features of the New Marian Enthusiasm,” 228.

Conyers, the only city in Rockdale County, the second smallest county in Georgia, was an unusual choice for a Marian apparition. The area was predominantly Protestant, particularly Baptist and Methodist.<sup>13</sup> In 1994, there were only 200,000 Catholics in the entire state of Georgia, and even that was an astronomical increase from twenty years earlier, when there were only 61,000.<sup>14</sup> However, Monsignor Peter Dora explained, “Down here, you’ve got every flavor of religious enthusiasm... the Bible Belt is accustomed to absolutely anything happening in the name of religion.”<sup>15</sup> Conyers was primarily known for its historic railroad associations. “Olde Town Conyers” still features a steam locomotive outside the train depot. The area also includes a golf course designed by Arnold Palmer and the Georgia International Horse Park, which was built to host the equestrian events for the 1996 Olympic Games. The city also hosted mountain biking races and the last two events of the pentathlon in those Olympics. However, the presence of a Cistercian monastery south of the city, and the area’s growing identification with Fowler’s apparition claims and the resulting pilgrims, associated the community with religion, especially Catholic spirituality.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the area’s proximity to Atlanta,

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<sup>13</sup> Virginia Anderson, “Room for many faiths,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 25 July 1996, R1; Will Anderson, “Conyers’ religious history has been mixed blessing,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 27 July 1996, C2; Sweeney, “The Therapeutic Landscape of a Marian Apparition Site in Conyers, Georgia,” 88.

<sup>14</sup> Helen Blier, “A ‘Catholic’ Catholic Church: The Roman Catholic Community of Atlanta,” in *Religions of Atlanta: Religious Diversity in the Centennial Olympic City*, ed. Gary Laderman (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 68.

<sup>15</sup> Monsignor Peter Dora, interview by author, Rutledge, GA, 6 August 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Virginia Anderson, “Room for many faiths,” R1; Will Anderson, “Conyers’ religious history has been mixed blessing,” C2; Sweeney, “The Therapeutic Landscape of a Marian Apparition Site in Conyers, Georgia,” 25.

with its international airport and mass transit, made travel easier and less expensive for American pilgrims than going to Medjugorje or Fatima.<sup>17</sup>

Fowler reported that Mary wanted to be known at Conyers as “Our Loving Mother,” but the messages Fowler received often centered on threats of godly punishment. Fowler urged listeners to be prepared for Jesus to come at any time. She received visions of heaven, hell, and purgatory. Fowler saw maps of the world with continents that turned red as Mary pleaded with people to stop offending God. The messages also emphasized traditional gender roles and the importance of honoring motherhood. Many of the messages focused explicitly on abortion and that the US must put an end to abortion or suffer God’s wrath. Jesus and Mary also urged the faithful to pray the rosary daily, read the Bible, participate in the sacraments frequently, and pray and sacrifice to show their love for God.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Deborah Halter, “Charisma in Conyers: A Journey from Visionary to Apparition Site to Church,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* Vol. 14, No. 3 (February 2011), 109; Sweeney, “The Therapeutic Landscape of a Marian Apparition Site in Conyers, Georgia,” 85.

<sup>18</sup> Balaban, “The Marian Apparition Site at Conyers, Georgia,” 216, 220; Brian Britt, “Snapshots of Tradition: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Georgia,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* Vol. 2, No. 1 (October 1998), 111, 115; Merrifield, *Miracle at Conyers*; Ron Tesoriero, *Mother of Great Love, Mother of Great Sorrow: An Account of the Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Conyers, (Near Atlanta) Georgia in the United States of America* (Gosford, New South Wales, Australia: Ron Tesoriero, 1992), 59-60; S. E. Vanderboom, “8,000 Faithful Gather for Apparition,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 15 May 1995, 1A; S. E. Vanderboom, “Large Pilgrim Crowd Includes Many Sick and Dying,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 14 March 1994, 1; Jeff Wilkinson, “Ms. Fowler’s Visions Become Phenomenon in ‘91,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 2 January 1992, 13A; Zimdars-Swartz, “The Marian Revival in American Catholicism: Focal Points and Features of the New Marian Enthusiasm,” 228-229.

Most of the messages in the printed volume, *To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God*, fell into traditional themes. Many messages urged people to follow Jesus, to put Jesus in charge of their lives and surrender to God's will.<sup>19</sup> A related theme is the importance of prayer, since part of turning to Jesus involved prayers of thanks as well as requests.<sup>20</sup> A few messages addressed the love Jesus and the Virgin Mary had for the people,<sup>21</sup> but there was also a threatening element to many of the messages. They emphasized that rejecting Jesus put the US in danger as well as the individual in danger of hell.<sup>22</sup> They warned that punishment and suffering were coming for the world and reminded believers of the suffering Jesus and Mary endured during the crucifixion on behalf of others.<sup>23</sup> Scholar of religion Sandra Zimdars-Swartz proposes that suffering is a motif in most modern Marian apparitions. The shared suffering of the Virgin Mary, the seer, and the pilgrims creates a community and gives their suffering a greater meaning. The visions can offer some explanation for their suffering and direction for how to ease

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<sup>19</sup> Our Loving Mother's Children, "*To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God*," 26-32, 40, 43-44, 47-48, 52-58, 61-62, 65-66, 69-70, 72, 93-94.

<sup>20</sup> Our Loving Mother's Children, "*To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God*," 59-60, 72-75, 84, 86, 90.

<sup>21</sup> Our Loving Mother's Children, "*To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God*," 24-25, 37-38, 50, 52-56, 65-66, 68-69.

<sup>22</sup> Our Loving Mother's Children, "*To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God*," 41, 50-51, 87-89, 91-92.

<sup>23</sup> Our Loving Mother's Children, "*To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God*," 37-38, 53-54, 67-70, 75-76, 92, 95-98.

it.<sup>24</sup> Robert Orsi, another scholar of religion, suggests that suffering is particularly meaningful for Catholics, finding that pain is almost encouraged in Catholic culture as a means of sanctification and identification with the divine because of Jesus' suffering for the church.<sup>25</sup>

Other messages in the printed collection were more surprising. For example, Fowler was scolded by Jesus for "lack[ing] many virtues," for overeating and wanting sex too much, for thinking she knew what was in others' hearts and minds, and when she said, "The one thing I lack is a memory," Jesus responded, "If that was the only thing, I would be rejoicing."<sup>26</sup> The Virgin Mary complained that Fowler was taking too long finishing the book.<sup>27</sup> Fowler claimed that Jesus ended the Gulf War as a result of prayer.<sup>28</sup> Other messages that might give the Catholic Church pause included that the four points of the cross represented the Trinity and the Virgin Mary, that all mankind was

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<sup>24</sup> Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 266-267.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Orsi, "'Mildred, Is It Fun to Be a Cripple?': The Culture of Suffering in Mid-Twentieth-Century Catholicism," in *Catholic Lives, Contemporary America*, ed. Thomas J. Ferraro (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 19-64. A revised version of the same article can be found in Orsi's collection, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 19-47.

<sup>26</sup> Our Loving Mother's Children, "To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God," 43, 55-56, 95.

<sup>27</sup> Our Loving Mother's Children, "To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God," 67.

<sup>28</sup> Our Loving Mother's Children, "To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God," 84-85.

part of the Trinity, and that the Virgin Mary and Jesus were one.<sup>29</sup> In an interview Fowler said, “I’m not here to interpret the visions but to share them and bring people back to God,” but she said this immediately after she explained a vision she received about a polar bear, Asian man, and Native American man with a tomahawk as meaning that China would take control of satellite systems controlling US Tomahawk missiles.<sup>30</sup>

In addition, Fowler claimed that the visions she received were “linked directly to Fatima.” For instance, in October 1994, Fowler compared Rockdale County officials to those at Fatima who opposed those apparitions. The Fatima apparitions also occurred on the 13<sup>th</sup> of the month, and at the Conyers gatherings, the pilgrims sang “The Fatima Song” and prayed “The Fatima Prayer.” The “miracle of the sun,” where people reported seeing the sun dance, spin, or change colors, first occurred at Fatima, and several pilgrims reported similar experiences at Conyers.<sup>31</sup> In the printed collection, Fowler reports numerous messages from Jesus and Mary related to Fatima. For instance, on February 2, 1991, Fowler said the Virgin Mary told her that her requests at Fatima had not been

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<sup>29</sup> Our Loving Mother’s Children, *“To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God,”* 38-39, 69.

<sup>30</sup> Scotty Fletcher, “Fowler unable to appear on first live broadcast of ‘Rosary for Peace,’” *Rockdale Citizen*, 14 January 1999, 10A.

<sup>31</sup> Kevin M. Boyar, *Conversion: A Journey to the Light* (Newington, VA: Our Loving Mother’s Children, 1992), 41; Meg & Tony Jatcko, interview by author, Woodstock, GA, 9 August 2009; Marie McGuirl, interview by author, Huntingdon Valley, PA, 25 July 2009; S. E. Vanderboom, “Fowler Lashes Out at County,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 14 October 1994, 1A; S. E. Vanderboom, “Passel of Pilgrims Expected At Farm,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 12 May 1994, 1A.

carried out.<sup>32</sup> There is a whole section of the book devoted to Fatima and messages about it.<sup>33</sup> This explicit connection to the approved apparitions at Fatima would contribute to the appeal of the Conyers apparitions.

As word began to spread of the monthly messages, crowds descended on Fowler's backyard. Initially several hundred people, by August 1991 the Rockdale County government took issue with the numbers gathering on the property. Robert Hughes, a Fowler supporter and Virginia businessman, bought 30 acres of land adjacent to the Fowler home so they could better accommodate the pilgrims. He also started an organization, Our Loving Mother's Children, to help plan the apparition events, collect donations, and distribute literature.<sup>34</sup> Hughes explained he bought the land as "an act of faith" because of his devotion to the Virgin Mary. He also paid \$10,000 toward the first printing of a book of Fowler's messages. By the end of the year, thousands of pilgrims were coming each month.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Our Loving Mother's Children, *"To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God,"* 66.

<sup>33</sup> Our Loving Mother's Children, *"To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God,"* 98-100.

<sup>34</sup> Balaban, "The Marian Apparition Site at Conyers, Georgia," 221. Balaban lists the property bought as 130 acres, but numerous newspaper articles give the figure as 30 acres, which seems more reasonable.

<sup>35</sup> "A 30-second glance at state and local news," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 14 December 1991, B2; Bill Osinski, "Apparition Event in Rockdale," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 13 June 1993, E6; Bill Osinski, "Too Many Pilgrims?" *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 12 March 1993, G1; Sweeney, "The Therapeutic Landscape of a Marian Apparition Site in Conyers, Georgia," 27.

The monthly gatherings developed a pattern. Around noon, Fowler would kneel in the “Apparition Room” despite her usual knee trouble, accompanied by invited guests, usually priests, nuns, or the sick. Fowler’s former spokesman Tony Jatcko and his wife Meg, also a volunteer at the site, were invited once to be in the Apparition Room and witness Fowler receiving a vision. Tony Jatcko described this experience: “She kneeled on a wooden kneeler for fifteen ducats of the rosary and didn’t move, and she kind of went into a trance state and looking up... and every once in a while would talk in a... different kind of tone.” Meg Jatcko explained, “...when she’d start talking, you could almost just see when the Holy Spirit took over... that wasn’t her.”<sup>36</sup> A scribe would write what she said. This scribe was usually George Collins, a former engineer whose faith was energized after a trip to Medjugorje. Collins stood at Fowler’s side when she addressed the pilgrims each month and helped answer questions. He and Fowler became so close that he lived at the Farm and was mentioned by name in messages. For example, on January 10, 1991, Fowler received a message that she and Collins needed to work together reviewing the messages because the two were stronger against Satan together.<sup>37</sup> Pilgrims would surround the house, reciting the rosary and other prayers, singing, and waving white handkerchiefs. They brought chairs, blankets, food, religious objects, and containers for holy water. Fowler reported seeing a light when the Virgin Mary was about to appear. Someone else would announce it to the crowd, which spurred pilgrims

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<sup>36</sup> Meg & Tony Jatcko, interview by author, Woodstock, GA, 9 August 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Boyar, *Conversion*, 24; Our Loving Mother’s Children, “*To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God*,” 11, 83; S. E. Vanderboom, “Fowler Aide’s House Burns,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 27 July 1994, 1A; Jeff Wilkinson, “Group Buys More Land,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 10 July 1992, 1A.



to take pictures, look at the sun, and hold up objects for blessing. An announcement was made when the Virgin Mary was departing, which was also a popular time to take photos. After a brief service, Fowler would come out onto her porch to recite the message she had just been given and answer questions. Pilgrims were familiar with signs associated with apparitions— the “miracle of the sun,” rosaries turning gold, the smell of roses where there were none, statues moving, miraculous healings, photos of the “door of heaven”— and would talk about if they experienced any of these. People with “good pictures,” which might also include streaks of light in the form of religious symbols, were seen as blessed. Some pilgrims would trade photos like baseball cards.<sup>38</sup>

As for the pilgrims themselves, they were a diverse group. There were more women than men. Many pilgrims were senior citizens whose flexible schedules allowed them to travel, in addition to their pre-Vatican II religious background making them likely to seek this kind of devotional experience. Around half of the pilgrims were

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<sup>38</sup> Balaban, “The Marian Apparition Site at Conyers, Georgia,” 216-217; David S. Bromley and Rachel S. Bobbitt, “Visions of the Virgin Mary: The Organizational Development of Marian Apparitional Movements,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* Vol. 14, No. 3 (February 2011), 21-22; Phillip W. Davis and Jacqueline Boles, “Pilgrim Apparition Work: Symbolization and Crowd Interaction when the Virgin Mary Appeared in Georgia,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* Vol. 32, No. 4 (August 2003), 380-381, 384, 389-390; Matthew A. Hennie, “Fowler Announces Year-Long Silence to Thousands Who Came for Guidance,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 16 October 1995, 7A; Marie McGuirl, interview by author, Huntingdon Valley, PA, 25 July 2009; Sweeney, “The Therapeutic Landscape of a Marian Apparition Site in Conyers, Georgia,” 73. The “door of heaven” is a rectangular image formed by pointing a Polaroid camera directly at the sun. The Polaroid company explained this image as a result of the camera design, but “miraculous photos” have meaning to pilgrims and have become an expected part of contemporary Marian apparitions. Davis & Boles, “Pilgrim Apparition Work,” 392; E. Ann Matter, “Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in the Late Twentieth Century: Apocalyptic, Representation, Politics,” *Religion* Vol. 31, No. 2 (April 2001), 134.

Latinos, so all messages and announcements were made in both English and Spanish. There was a strong contingent of Latino pilgrims from Florida, especially the Miami area, but they also came from Mexico and Latin America. Significant numbers of pilgrims came from Europe and Canada. There were very few African Americans. Most pilgrims came as part of a group, not alone. People came for different reasons. As one might expect, there were many pilgrims with disabilities or illnesses seeking healing. Some visitors were curious about the events taking place at Conyers or interested in experiencing the spectacle, while others were devout believers.<sup>39</sup>

The city of Conyers was unsure how to handle the situation. Residents were upset by the noise and traffic problems that arose on the 13<sup>th</sup> of every month. The city was also concerned about safety issues. However, because the apparition group was not a church or sanctioned by the Archdiocese of Atlanta, the usual planning and zoning regulations did not apply. Local officials also had trouble figuring out with whom they could negotiate to resolve problems. As County Attorney John Nix said, “No one is in charge

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<sup>39</sup> Balaban, “The Marian Apparition Site at Conyers, Georgia,” 217; Patrick Barnes, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 9 August 2009; Davis & Boles, “Pilgrim Apparition Work,” 378; Monsignor Peter Dora, interview by author, Rutledge, GA, 6 August 2009; Michael Kinlein, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 10 August 2009; Bill Osinski, interview by author, Norcross, GA, 12 August 2009; Sweeney, “The Therapeutic Landscape of a Marian Apparition Site in Conyers, Georgia,” 17, 50-52; Zimdars-Swartz, “The Marian Revival in American Catholicism: Focal Points and Features of the New Marian Enthusiasm,” 229. In a footnote, Zimdars-Swartz explains, “The pilgrimage of Miami Catholics to the Conyers apparitions may be based on a longstanding ‘Cuban’ connection between Atlanta and Miami. The Cursillo movement played an important role in the 1970s and 1980s in establishing this link. Included in the Spanish-speaking audience of the Conyers apparition may be an older generation of Cuban immigrants as well as other non-Cuban Latinos.” Footnote 18, “The Marian Revival in American Catholicism: Focal Points and Features of the New Marian Enthusiasm,” 239.

out there...They are kind of an exception to everything.”<sup>40</sup> Pilgrims had been parking along Georgia Highway 138, and once there had been a car fire in a field where pilgrims were parking. Pilgrims often walked along the highway or stopped on the highway to let passengers out. These activities worried the local government. Although traffic problems had eased with the purchase of the new property, Rockdale County deputies still had to handle traffic, and the sheriff recognized they would be unable to manage if the crowds grew to 10,000 or 20,000.<sup>41</sup> The county also worried about the well on the property, where pilgrims believed Jesus had blessed the water. The county tested the water and determined it was contaminated and unsafe for drinking, but because the well was on private property, it was not subject to local or state regulations. In September 1991 the Georgia Environmental Protection Division warned Fowler that the well could be contaminated, but she did not respond. The Rockdale County Health Department asked that she at least post a sign to warn visitors.<sup>42</sup>

At the same time, local businesses were overjoyed by the influx of new customers. Motels were completely full on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of the month and often on weekends due to Sunday prayer gatherings at the apparition site, and restaurants

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<sup>40</sup> Jeff Wilkinson, “‘Pilgrims’ Creating Hazard,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 12 November 1991, 15.

<sup>41</sup> Bill Osinski, “Visions of Virgin Mary are mixed blessing in Rockdale,” *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 January 1992, A1.

<sup>42</sup> Joe Nickell, *Looking for a Miracle: Weeping Icons, Relics, Stigmata, Visions and Healing Cures* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1993), 153; Bill Osinski, “Woman asked to post warning about water at apparition site,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 15 February 1992, B2; Jeff Wilkinson, “‘Holy Water’ Is Possibly Contaminated,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 12 February 1992, 1A.

increased business on those days as well. Three Catholic souvenir shops opened along the highway. At least one resident made the best of the situation and allowed pilgrims to park in his pasture for a fee. Another sold T-shirts, while yet another sold coffee, doughnuts, kneeling pads, and Polaroid film. The only problem these business owners had with the pilgrims was an occasional language barrier, since some of the pilgrims were from outside the United States.<sup>43</sup> Overall, the apparition events brought \$500,000-\$1,000,000 into the community each month, not including donations to Fowler or Our Loving Mother's Children. Hotels, restaurants, convenience stores, and supermarkets appreciated the increased business from friendly customers. The off-duty police officers working at the site made \$20 an hour without having to deal with any serious trouble. The city had the opportunity to promote other area attractions.<sup>44</sup> For example, many pilgrims also visited the nearby Cistercian Monastery of the Holy Spirit, crowding the bookstore and buying the monastery's entire supply of fresh-baked bread. The bookstore expanded as a result of the increased demand. Some visitors signed up for religious retreats offered at the monastery.<sup>45</sup> While Fowler made clear, "I don't get one dime from

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<sup>43</sup> Kunerth, "They Hail Mary from a Hilltop," 1A; Osinski, "Visions of Virgin Mary are mixed blessing in Rockdale," A1; Sweeney, "The Therapeutic Landscape of a Marian Apparition Site in Conyers, Georgia," 90; Jeff Wilkinson, "8-10,000 Pilgrims Visit; Few Problems Evident," *Rockdale Citizen*, 14 January 1993, 9A; Jeff Wilkinson, "'Virgin' Is Economic Blessing," *Rockdale Citizen*, 9 January 1992, 1A, 8A; Zimdars-Swartz, "The Marian Revival in American Catholicism: Focal Points and Features of the New Marian Enthusiasm," 230.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Kinlein, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 10 August 2009; S. E. Vanderboom, "Pilgrims Are an Economic Godsend," *Rockdale Citizen*, 17 June 1994, 1A, 10A.

<sup>45</sup> "A Holy Community Began 50 Years Ago," *Rockdale Citizen*, 14 October 1994, Special Section 12; Patrick Barnes, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 9 August

this,” there certainly were many others in the Conyers area who profited from her claims.<sup>46</sup>

The Archdiocese of Atlanta began looking into the Conyers apparition claims in the fall of 1991. Archbishop James P. Lyke wrote to priests in the archdiocese to remind them not to allow reports of visions or apparitions to distract from what was important to the faith, not to lead groups to the site, and not to conduct Mass there. There was no penalty for priests or nuns who attended the events, but Archbishop Lyke did not want to give the impression that the Church approved of the apparitions. However, he decided against starting a formal investigation. In March 1992, Archbishop Lyke wrote a letter to Catholic bishops across the US expressing “grave doubt” about the apparitions and asking them to discourage pilgrimages to Conyers.<sup>47</sup> After Lyke’s death from cancer in December 1992, new Archbishop John F. Donoghue decided not to investigate the apparitions but to maintain Lyke’s policies of storing any testimonies they received for the future, discouraging organized pilgrimages to the site, prohibiting any formal

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2009; Monsignor Peter Dora, interview by author, Rutledge, GA, 6 August 2009; Bill Osinski, “Cistercian Community,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 22 February 1993, B1.

<sup>46</sup> Jill Hannity, “Mrs. Fowler Says ‘Message’ Brings Crowds to Rockdale,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 13 April 1993, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Balaban, “The Marian Apparition Site at Conyers, Georgia,” 221-222; Stephen Crawford, “New Archbishop Studying Supposed Apparitions,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 1A; Gayle White, “Lyke seeks end to pilgrimages to ‘apparition’ site,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 14 March 1992, B6; Zimdars-Swartz, “The Marian Revival in American Catholicism: Focal Points and Features of the New Marian Enthusiasm,” 230.

sacraments at the site, and keeping the Vatican aware of what was going on.<sup>48</sup> Donoghue explained,

At no time did I consider it my duty to launch a formal investigation, or for that matter, to frame any personal opinion about the validity or invalidity or the alleged apparitions. I believe such matters require time, the seasoned contemplation of the Faithful, and the procedural inquiries of the Church's *magisterium* or teaching authority, before any final determination can be made as to whether apparitions have or have not occurred, and if they have, to what extent they are meant for the benefit of the Faithful in general, that is, meriting the Church's approval as "worthy of belief," as opposed to the personal or private benefit of the seer.<sup>49</sup>

He did meet with Fowler several times and worked with her and the local authorities to try to ensure the safety of the pilgrims and "the dignity of the Faith."<sup>50</sup> Because local priests had a duty to obey the Archbishop, priests from outside the archdiocese heard confessions at the site clandestinely.<sup>51</sup> Monsignor Peter Dora, Archdiocese spokesman and later Vicar General while the apparition events were taking place, met with Fowler and talked with her on the telephone several times, attended one of the apparition events unofficially, and read all the messages. Although Monsignor Dora said he was "absolutely convinced that she was absolutely convinced that this was authentic," he was "turned off" by the site and messages. He explained, "Dealing with the apparitions

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<sup>48</sup> Balaban, "The Marian Apparition Site at Conyers, Georgia," 222; Most Rev. John F. Donoghue, letter to the author, 5 September 2009, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Donoghue, 2.

<sup>50</sup> Donoghue, 2. Archbishop Emeritus Donoghue writes that the Archives of the Archdiocese of Atlanta has "possibly thousands of letters" about the Conyers apparitions, but the archives were closed for renovation when I traveled to Georgia, so I do not know if these letters would be available for researchers once the archive re-opens. Donoghue, 3.

<sup>51</sup> Meg & Tony Jatcko, interview by author, Woodstock, GA, 9 August 2009.

wasn't so much the problem as dealing with the spectacle and what the media wanted to turn it into." He admitted that there was foot-dragging on the part of the Archdiocese despite public pressure for an official investigation.<sup>52</sup>

With the Archdiocese unwilling to take action, Rockdale County officials felt compelled to take stronger measures. County officials attended the March gathering to determine if any codes were being violated. A neighbor, Sal Serio, showed the county flyers advertising Fowler merchandise, and they had heard allegations that Our Loving Mother's Children was selling materials for profit. Nix felt certain that they were violating the zoning regulations if the group had become a commercial venture and was soliciting. He also argued that the renovated barn they were using as a chapel was a violation because they had no permits for the renovations or for occupancy. The county posted a sign on the barn warning people not to enter it.<sup>53</sup> By April, the barn was still closed, but concrete drinking fountains, landscaping, and a gravel driveway for buses had been added to the site. Donations were no longer accepted at the site, (previously there were donation boxes around the site, though no explicit requests for money) though envelopes were available for pilgrims to send donations through the mail. Books were given away for free, but there were flyers inside the books that advertised merchandise that could be bought by mail.<sup>54</sup> Serio threatened to sue Rockdale County for selectively

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<sup>52</sup> Monsignor Peter Dora, interview by author, Rutledge, GA, 6 August 2009.

<sup>53</sup> Julie Mills, "Pilgrims Want to Abide by All Regulations," *Rockdale Citizen*, 13 March 1992, 1A; Jeff Wilkinson, "County to Crack Down on 'Vision'," *Rockdale Citizen*, 11 March 1992, 1A, 9A.

<sup>54</sup> Helen Lombard, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 11 August 2009; Bill Osinski, "Lyke's doubts on 'visions' ignored," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 14 April 1992, D4; Sweeney, "The Therapeutic Landscape of a Marian Apparition Site in

enforcing zoning laws by allowing commercial activities to take place in a residential area, but County Chairman Randy Poynter responded that the county was doing its best, as the situation was unusual and not covered by the normal codes.<sup>55</sup> The county turned to the state for help. Emergency vehicles could not get in or out of the site, so when a woman had heart trouble, she had to be carried a quarter-mile on a gurney to get to an ambulance.<sup>56</sup> The state added troopers to Highway 138 and re-stripped the road to add a turn lane. Our Loving Mother's Children agreed to have tour buses park at a nearby school. They also set up contracts with paramedics to run a first-aid station at the site with an ambulance and hired off-duty police officers to prevent people from walking on the highway. That problem was finally resolved by purchasing even more land so that all of the apparition properties would be connected. The traffic pattern was re-routed so that pilgrims would be directed to the interstate instead of state highways.<sup>57</sup>

By February 1993, the crowd of pilgrims reached 40,000. Residents complained they could not leave their houses on the 13<sup>th</sup> of the month because of all the traffic, pilgrims were parking in their yards and driveways, and when police towed them, some

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Conyers, Georgia," 67; Jeff Wilkinson, "Permanent 'Place of Prayer'," *Rockdale Citizen*, 14 April 1992, 1, 5.

<sup>55</sup> Jeff Wilkinson, "'Virgin' Neighbor Threatens Suit," *Rockdale Citizen*, 13 May 1992, 1A.

<sup>56</sup> "Metro & Georgia in Brief," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 22 June 1992, C2; Jeff Wilkinson, "County Warns Apparition Group," *Rockdale Citizen*, 19 June 1992, 1A, 12A.

<sup>57</sup> Jeff Wilkinson, "Fewer Pilgrims Expected," *Rockdale Citizen*, 10 July 1992, 1A, 17A; Jeff Wilkinson, "Group Buys More Land," 1A; Jeff Wilkinson, "Rain Curbs Crowd; Pilgrim Group Buys Land," *Rockdale Citizen*, 14 August 1992, 1A; Jeff Wilkinson, "Record Crowd Gathering," *Rockdale Citizen*, 13 October 1992, 5.



pilgrims verbally abused the officers.<sup>58</sup> James and Barbara Frazier shared a driveway with The Farm until they sold their property to Our Loving Mother's Children because the apparition events, according to James, "drove us up a wall."<sup>59</sup> They had pilgrims coming onto their property all night, some asking for things, tour buses damaged their yard, and portable toilets blocked their way out. According to Barbara, The Farm "is the only reason we're leaving." They had planned to retire there before the apparition events started.<sup>60</sup> Several neighbors frustrated by the inconveniences associated with the apparition events moved, enabling believers from around the country to move close to the site.<sup>61</sup>

Rockdale County increased the requirements for Our Loving Mother's Children. They had to hire 18-20 off-duty police to control traffic and train parking attendants, buy forty radios and hire an off-duty communications officer so all public safety organizations would be on the same frequency, hire two off-duty firefighters with a "brush truck" in case of grass fires, and conform to the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Farm needed to create a separate entrance and exit for buses and two entrances to the

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<sup>58</sup> Balaban, "The Marian Apparition Site at Conyers, Georgia," 222; Helen Lombard, letter to editor, *Rockdale Citizen*, 12 March 1993, 5A; Jeff Wilkinson, "Pilgrim Crowd Doubles Record," *Rockdale Citizen*, 15 February 1993, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Jill Hannity, "Apparition Site Expands Again," *Rockdale Citizen*, 28 April 1993, 1A.

<sup>60</sup> Hannity, "Apparition Site Expands Again," 11A.

<sup>61</sup> Patrick Barnes, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 9 August 2009; Meg & Tony Jatcko, interview by author, Woodstock, GA, 9 August 2009; Michael Kinlein, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 10 August 2009; Sweeney, "The Therapeutic Landscape of a Marian Apparition Site in Conyers, Georgia," 88-89; Jeanie Toracinta, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 10 August 2009.

satellite parking lot. Barricades, cones, and stripes should be used to park more pilgrims more efficiently. Only buses could park at the elementary school, and a drop-off area for the handicapped needed to be established. Law enforcement would enforce an “immediate tow” policy for any pilgrims parked illegally and have tow trucks stationed at various locations to prevent pilgrims from parking in residential areas. Law enforcement set up a central command post to coordinate the different agencies involved.<sup>62</sup> The county was investigating the possibility of using the state law regulating mass gatherings. Poynter said, “It’s gotten to the point where it threatens the health, safety, and welfare of the public, and it’s creating a nuisance.”<sup>63</sup> However, the state decided the apparition events would not be covered by the Mass Gatherings Act because there is an exemption for religious gatherings, even though Our Loving Mother’s Children had claimed to be exempt from county regulations on religious gatherings because they were not a church. The Georgia General Assembly gave Rockdale County a \$100,000 grant to help with pilgrimage-related expenses and take some of the burden off taxpayers.<sup>64</sup> The county

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<sup>62</sup> Osinski, “Too Many Pilgrims?” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 12 March 1993, G1; Jeff Wilkinson, “County Has New Rules for Pilgrim Group,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 1 March 1993, 9A.

<sup>63</sup> Bill Osinski, “Apparition events called a ‘nuisance’,” *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 8 March 1993, B4.

<sup>64</sup> Balaban, “The Marian Apparition Site at Conyers, Georgia,” 222; Jill Hannity, “County Looks for ‘Miracle’ Law,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 12 April 1993, 1A; Bill Osinski, “Did Rockdale jump the gun with mass-gatherings law?” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 27 March 1993, C7; Bill Osinski, “State law won’t be used to stop gathering,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 3 April 1993, C5; Sweeney, “The Therapeutic Landscape of a Marian Apparition Site in Conyers, Georgia,” 47; Jeff Wilkinson, “Pilgrims Call New Demands Harassment,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 26 March 1993, 1A, 14A; Jeff Wilkinson, “Reaction Is Lukewarm to \$100G Pilgrim Grant,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 24

sheriff's department started offering free passes for local drivers so they would not be steered to apparition parking by deputies.<sup>65</sup>

Members of the local Catholic church, St. Pius X, felt under siege from the crowd of pilgrims. Parishioner Paul J. Bieger wrote that the church had to hire police officers for traffic control, a fire marshal, and emergency medical personnel. Parishioners were unable to sit in their own church because there were so many pilgrims at services, and the pilgrims were not offering to help with any of the expenses they created. Some pilgrims treated residents badly, leaving trash in people's yards and damaging property.<sup>66</sup> Others interrupted services, slept in the church building, and asked parishioners to pay for their food, lodging, and transportation.<sup>67</sup> Pilgrims were prostrate on the floor, and babies and children slept in the aisles of the church, creating a hazardous situation. Parishioner Ruth Alexander wrote, "For those who cannot find God in their own communities, how do you expect to recognize Him here?"<sup>68</sup> Pat Barnes, who was the chairman of the Parish Council during the apparition events, said, "I'm sure we lost some parishioners" because of the hassle.<sup>69</sup>

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March 1993, 1A; Jeff Wilkinson, "State to Rule on Apparition Site," *Rockdale Citizen*, 2 April 1993, 1A, 16A.

<sup>65</sup> "Traffic Passes Available for Residents," *Rockdale Citizen*, 12 July 1993, 1A.

<sup>66</sup> Paul J. Bieger, letter to editor, *Rockdale Citizen*, 5 March 1993, 5A.

<sup>67</sup> Patrick Barnes, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 9 August 2009; Jeff Wilkinson, "Up to 70,000 Pilgrims Expected," *Rockdale Citizen*, 12 March 1993, 14A.

<sup>68</sup> Ruth Alexander, letter to editor, *Rockdale Citizen*, 12 March 1993, 5A.

<sup>69</sup> Patrick Barnes, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 9 August 2009.

The apparitions were drawing the attention of international media. Documentary crews from Australia, the University of South Carolina, and Atlanta came to the October 13, 1992, apparition. The Conyers apparitions were featured in *Time* magazine and the *National Examiner* tabloid, as well as the two-part television series, "The Miracle Seekers," which had aired the Friday and Saturday before the February 13 apparition.<sup>70</sup> Film crews from Puerto Rico, *Hard Copy*, the three major networks, CNN, and a television station in Monroe, Louisiana, working on a five-part series on Fowler's apparitions all came to Conyers. *People* magazine sent a photographer.<sup>71</sup> The Conyers apparitions were covered on the talk shows *Donahue* and *Rolonda*.<sup>72</sup>

In March 1993 an unexpected snowstorm forced the cancellation of the scheduled apparition event, but 8-10,000 pilgrims had already arrived and were stranded. Some pilgrims refused to leave until Fowler urged them to go. Some wore only light jackets or shorts. The St. Vincent de Paul Society at St. Pius X Church set up an emergency shelter and evacuated people from The Farm. They fed more than 500 people and organized a missing persons bureau for the displaced. By the afternoon, there were still 251 pilgrims at St. Pius, and 38 spent the night there. The Monastery of the Holy Spirit housed 50. Some stayed at the Farm. People were separated from their groups, got on the wrong

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<sup>70</sup> Jill Smolowe, "A Heavenly Host in Georgia," *Time*, 18 January 1993, 55; Jeff Wilkinson, "Crowd of 20,000 Hears Message," *Rockdale Citizen*, 14 October 1992, 1A; Wilkinson, "Pilgrim Crowd Doubles Record," 1.

<sup>71</sup> Stephen Crawford, "15-20,000 Gather at Farm; Mrs. Fowler Tested Again," *Rockdale Citizen*, 14 July 1993, 1A; Stephen Crawford, "Other Apparition Sites Possible," *Rockdale Citizen*, 16 August 1993, 1; Merrifield, *Miracle at Conyers*.

<sup>72</sup> S. E. Vanderboom, "Apparition Site Becomes Talk Show Topic," *Rockdale Citizen*, 12 January 1995, 1A, 9A.

buses, or simply could not go home because the roads were closed. Kmart and Goodwill donated blankets, Blockbuster provided televisions and videos, and many residents volunteered to help with the situation.<sup>73</sup>

By June 1993, the crowds of pilgrims reached a new level while questions arose about Fowler's authenticity. 80,000 pilgrims attended the June 13 apparition.<sup>74</sup> 3,000 people attended Mass at St. Pius that Saturday even though it seated only 300.<sup>75</sup> However, former associates were publicly revealing their disillusionment with Fowler. Ann Wall, Martha Fernandez-Sardina, and Kuwon Kim described Fowler as subject to extreme mood swings and obsessed with demons, and alleged that she prepared some monthly messages in advance. All three reported that Fowler wanted to live as a nun, even though she was a married mother with two sons. Wall said that Fowler was preoccupied with the end times, stocking canned goods in preparation, and became vindictive after Wall quit, accusing her of theft and of having an affair with Fowler's husband. Kim said her doubts were raised when some of the messages included details

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<sup>73</sup> Patrick Barnes, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 9 August 2009; Helen Lombard, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 11 August 2009; Bill Osinski, "The Blizzard of '93," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 14 March 1993, B1; Bill Osinski, interview by author, Norcross, GA, 12 August 2009; Fred Turner, "Quiet Heroes Come to the Aid of Pilgrims," *Rockdale Citizen*, 15 March 1993, 1, 5.

<sup>74</sup> Balaban, "The Marian Apparition Site at Conyers, Georgia," 222; Stephen Crawford, "Pilgrim Crowd Sets Record," *Rockdale Citizen*, 14 June 1993, 1A; Richard Whitt, "80,000 wait as visionary tested," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 14 June 1993, D1; Zimdars-Swartz, "The Marian Revival in American Catholicism: Focal Points and Features of the New Marian Enthusiasm," 228. Crowd counts are always estimates. The Crawford article says the crowd was 70,000, as does Police Sgt. Michael Kinlein in "Weekend Report," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 14 November 1993, D2.

<sup>75</sup> Crawford, "Pilgrim Crowd Sets Record," 12A.

like warning Fowler to stay away from soft drinks.<sup>76</sup> Other volunteers grew suspicious of requests Fowler claimed Jesus made, which often involved doing favors or making repairs for Fowler. They would pull weeds, paint, cut grass, clean Fowler's house, and do anything else that was needed. As Meg Jatcko recalled, "If you told her no, you were out of there and somebody else would take your place. ...I know she turned on us then because I wouldn't drive [Fowler's son James] to school, which was clear in town."<sup>77</sup> Angry neighbors played loud rock music during the prayers, beat on metal pipes, and shot guns. A truck on a hill nearby carried a banner raising questions about Hughes: "Where's the money Bob?" and "Who's Bob anyway?"<sup>78</sup> Former neighbor James Frazier said, "as far as Bob Hughes goes, he's just a businessman out to make money," and journalists reported seeing direct requests for donations at the April 13 apparition event. In 1992 Our Loving Mother's Children received \$147,000 in donations. After spending around \$65,000 on books and videos, this left around \$82,000 in gross profits. While Hughes claimed he received no compensation for his work with Our Loving Mother's Children and that he had spent nearly \$1 million of his own money buying land, many still had suspicions and questions.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Bill Osinski, "Three of little faith," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 13 June 1993, E1.

<sup>77</sup> Meg & Tony Jatcko, interview by author, Woodstock, GA, 9 August 2009.

<sup>78</sup> Crawford, "Pilgrim Crowd Sets Record," 12A; Whitt, "80,000 wait as visionary tested," D1.

<sup>79</sup> Hannity, "Apparition Site Expands Again," 1A; Jill Hannity, "Pilgrims Gave 147G in 1992," *Rockdale Citizen*, 23 April 1993, 1A, 10A.

Another development at the June 13 apparition was the arrival of doctors and scientists to run tests on Fowler. Ricardo Castanon, professor of neuropsychology at the Bolivian Catholic University at La Paz, was the head of the team investigating Fowler. He had been an atheist until he met her. He proposed that tests be done by American doctors and scientists he did not know.<sup>80</sup> In April baseline tests were done by Dr. Ramon Sanchez in Atlanta, who had been chosen from the phone book.<sup>81</sup> On June 13, Castanon, Sanchez, psychiatrist George Hogben, biophysicist Philip Callahan, and radiation scientist Umberto Velesquez examined Fowler.<sup>82</sup> They determined that there were unusual results that they could not explain and that could not have been faked, but no evidence of any neurological or psychological disorder.<sup>83</sup> Fowler preferred not to be

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<sup>80</sup> Crawford, "15-20,000 Gather at Farm; Mrs. Fowler Tested Again," 1A; Osinski, "Three of little faith," E1; Ron Tesoriero, *Why Do You Test Me?: Does the Virgin Mary Appear to Nancy Fowler at Conyers, Georgia, USA?* (Gosford, New South Wales, Australia: Ron Tesoriero, 1994), 14-15.

<sup>81</sup> Tesoriero, *Why Do You Test Me*, 17.

<sup>82</sup> Paolo Apolito, *The Internet and the Madonna: Religious Visionary Experience on the Web*, translated by Antony Shugaar (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 131-132; Tesoriero, *Why Do You Test Me*, 24; Whitt, "80,000 wait as visionary tested," D1.

<sup>83</sup> Tesoriero, *Why Do You Test Me*, 10, 30-31, 50. Velesquez detected ionized radiation in the room during the time of the apparition, 28. Callahan found Fowler's body normally registered 14-20 hertz, but during the vision dropped instantly to 4 hertz, so low she should have been sleeping, 29. Callahan also registered readings of electrical energy from a wooden crucifix when Fowler said it was lit up, which he could not explain, 33-35. Review of records showed further inexplicable results for tests by Sanchez and by Castanon, 44-45. Castanon said that Fowler's heart rate decreased during the apparitions to 3-4 beats per minute, which should be impossible ("Hopes of Hearing Last Message from Mary Lures 100,000 to Farm," *Chicago Tribune*, 13 October 1998, 12). Basically these researchers were saying the brain scans of Fowler showed that she should not have been awake or communicating but she was, and energy was

tested during the monthly apparitions after that, but she did agree to further tests at Sanchez's clinic, the results of which continued to stump the doctors.<sup>84</sup>

Neighbors, still frustrated after years of disruption, formed a committee to study the impact of the site on the neighborhood and report their findings to the Conyers-Rockdale County Planning Commission. Residents feared the neighborhood would become too commercial and wanted The Farm to be regulated by land-use permits. The White Road Committee was headed by Roger Hatch, who was a supervisor for the Rockdale Soil and Water Conservation District and lived across the street from The Farm. He wanted the site regulated for sound, parking lots, camping, environment, and helicopter landing pads. The committee made a 30-minute presentation to the planning commission on May 12. Using video, a slide show, overhead maps, and a 50-page study, the committee recommended the county require a development/land disturbance permit for the site and a special use permit because the Special Event Permit covered only three gatherings. They also wanted a county ordinance to be passed addressing any type of mass gatherings. The group did acknowledge that Fowler had made some changes, including that portable toilets were no longer visible from the right-of-way, signs were posted that camping was not permitted, and she was using a radio frequency instead of loudspeakers to broadcast the monthly message.<sup>85</sup>

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appearing in places where it should not have been, but they have no way to explain why these things were happening.

<sup>84</sup> Tesoriero, *Why Do You Test Me*, 70, 72-77.

<sup>85</sup> Lisa Anderson, "White Road Group to Study Impact of Apparitions," *Rockdale Citizen*, 16 March 1994, 1A, 8A; Mary Hawk, "Panel Urges Changes at Apparition Site," *Rockdale Citizen*, 13 May 1994, 1A, 10A.



Before these recommendations could be put in place, the apparition situation changed. Fowler announced that May 13, 1994 was the last monthly message from Mary. Although the monthly gatherings would continue, and Mary would still appear to Fowler at various times, there would no longer be public messages for the US. After that, the crowds diminished dramatically. The numbers increased for the October 13 gatherings, when Mary returned to give an annual message and the pilgrims celebrated the anniversaries of Mary's appearances at Conyers and at Fatima, but the local officials and businesses were more prepared. Hotels were booked 50 miles away. Area hospitals were on alert. County deputies, state troopers, firefighters, emergency medical personnel, and communications staff were on duty for three days around the event. Two medical stations were set up instead of the usual one. Restaurants called in extra staff and stocked additional food. School buses had alternate routes planned, and public safety officials designed a plan to re-route traffic if Highway 138 became clogged by traffic. Residents were asked to avoid Highway 138 on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>, and those on the same street as The Farm could get residential priority passes to alert traffic deputies. Troopers and volunteers would also direct traffic near the Monastery of the Holy Spirit since officials expected pilgrims would likely visit there and St. Pius Church as well as The Farm. Our Loving Mother's Children had been heavily promoting the event, and expected a large crowd from all over the world. Interpreters were available for Spanish, French, Italian, and Portuguese. Government resources would be stretched, but businesses were excited.<sup>86</sup> The expected crowd numbers were high, but weather interfered, and only

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<sup>86</sup> Mary Hawk, "Pilgrim Crowd to Tax Resources," *Rockdale Citizen*, 4 October 1994, 1A, 7A; Mary Hawk, "Pilgrims Expected to Clog Ga. 138," *Rockdale Citizen*, 11 October 1994, 1, 11; Hollis R. Towns, "The faithful start arriving in

23,500 pilgrims came. The weather still helped businesses, however, as pilgrims bought rain gear and other unexpected supplies.<sup>87</sup>

The final apparition event on October 13, 1998 was the largest of them all. Since Fowler had announced the previous year that it would be the last, pilgrims were able to make arrangements well in advance. Neighbors and businesses were not as bothered by a once-a-year event as they had been by the monthly ones. Public safety officials were skilled at handling the large crowds due to the earlier apparition events as well as the 1996 Olympics.<sup>88</sup> More than 100,000 pilgrims came. It took ten hours to get them all onto the Farm property and six hours to get them out.<sup>89</sup>

Ethnographers Phillip Davis and Jacqueline Boles attended most of the apparition events from October 1991 to 1998. They observed improvements at the site over time, including more parking lots, more portable toilets, a better sound system, and overall better management of the day. They noticed a growing emphasis on collecting

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Conyers,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 12 October 1994, C2; Hollis R. Towns, “Rockdale ready for a Mary-thon,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 8 October 1994, C1; S. E. Vanderboom, “100,000 Pilgrims: Gift or Curse?,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 7 October 1994, 1A, 12A; S. E. Vanderboom, “Pilgrim Crowd Lull Before Storm?,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 14 September 1994, 1, 5; Gayle White, “Faithful await another apparition,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 8 October 1994, E8.

<sup>87</sup> Peter Scott, “Fewer pilgrims show in Conyers,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 13 October 1994, F1; Peter Scott and Hollis R. Towns, “Virgin Mary’s ‘Visitation’,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 14 October 1994, D1; S. E. Vanderboom, “Crowd Forming Despite Rain, Mire,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 13 October 1994, 1A, 3A; S. E. Vanderboom, “Mary, Message, Mud,” *Rockdale Citizen*, 14 October 1994, 1A, 10A.

<sup>88</sup> Peter Scott, “Vision of sacred beauty,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 11 October 1998, D1.

<sup>89</sup> Peter Scott and Virginia Anderson, “Faithful amass to hear last pronouncement,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 14 October 1998, B1.

testimonies, photographs, and evidence for Church consideration. Davis and Boles also observed Our Loving Mother's Children telling people not to buy anything at the site to avoid the appearance that it was all about money.<sup>90</sup>

The apparitions took a toll on Fowler's family. Although her husband, Ron, believed that Nancy was receiving apparitions, he wanted to live a private life and did not participate in the apparition events. He was active in the church but often out of town for work.<sup>91</sup> The Fowlers had adopted two sons who attended public schools and were teased because of their mother's apparition claims. They were 10 and 15 when the gatherings ended in 1998.<sup>92</sup> The Fowler family income declined rapidly over the course of the visions. In 1997, Ron divorced Nancy. She remained in the house with their younger son, but her oldest son cut off contact with her for unspecified reasons. As Tony Jatcko stated, "Nancy gave up a lot— her family and everything; it's kind of wrecked her whole life."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Davis & Boles, "Pilgrim Apparition Work," 381.

<sup>91</sup> Hancock, *Wake Up America!*, 19; S. E. Vanderboom, "Bourdon: Jesus and Mary Picked Conyers," *Rockdale Citizen*, 12 October 1994, 12A.

<sup>92</sup> Vanderboom, "Bourdon: Jesus and Mary Picked Conyers," 12A. Other sources give different ages for the boys and for Nancy. The only agreement seems to be that Nancy was in her 40s while the apparitions were going on, and the boys were young, but possibly not this young. I am using the ages provided in this article by Bernie Bourdon, who was quite involved with Our Loving Mother's Children and close to Nancy, so he should be somewhat more credible than the series of reporters providing a variety of ages.

<sup>93</sup> Henry Farber, "Vision dims: Virgin Mary sightings lead to lawsuit," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 4 September 1999, G3; Mary Anne Gordon, "Preparing to Greet the Virgin Mary," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 12 October 1997, C1; Meg & Tony Jatcko, interview by author, Woodstock, GA, 9 August 2009; Our Loving Mother's Children, *To Bear Witness that I Am the Living Son of God*, 9.

By the end of February 1999, Fowler publicly separated herself from Our Loving Mother's Children. The organization had been continuing to publicize Fowler, but since she was no longer receiving messages, they began to feature a Bolivian visionary named Catalina Rivas, nicknamed "Katya."<sup>94</sup> Fowler explained, "I simply object to the mixing of my messages with hers."<sup>95</sup> Fowler and Hughes (the head of Our Loving Mother's Children) disagreed over who owned the rights to the messages she received, and Fowler accused Hughes of overcharging believers for the videos and books of messages.<sup>96</sup> In 2000 Our Loving Mother's Children agreed to stop publishing some publications and turned their copies over to Fowler, which she then had destroyed because they included too many references to Our Loving Mother's Children to remove.<sup>97</sup> A court-ordered audit revealed that Our Loving Mother's Children had used money for ministries that were not associated with Fowler, that Hughes had paid himself over \$450,000, and that

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<sup>94</sup> Monsignor Peter Dora, interview by author, Rutledge, GA, 6 August 2009; Allison Floyd, "Fowler separating from Our Loving Mother's Children," *Rockdale Citizen*, 17 March 1999, 1A, 5A; Meg & Tony Jatcko, interview by author, Woodstock, GA, 9 August 2009; "Web site focuses on Passover," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 13 March 1999, B1.

<sup>95</sup> Farber, "Vision dims: Virgin Mary sightings lead to lawsuit," G3.

<sup>96</sup> Maria Lameiras, "Book of Conyers messages held up," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 5 August 1999, JR7; Duane D. Stanford, "Attorneys try to settle fight over messages," *Atlanta Constitution*, 15 June 1999, E6.

<sup>97</sup> Monsignor Peter Dora, interview by author, Rutledge, GA, 6 August 2009; Henry Farber, "Visionary, ex-followers settle suit," *Atlanta Constitution*, 13 January 2000, C8; Allison Floyd, "Books with Marian messages destroyed at Fowler's request," *Rockdale Citizen*, 22 January 2000; Allison Floyd, "Case closed: Fowler will keep Marian 'messages'," *Rockdale Citizen*, 11 January 2000, 1A, 4A.

over \$600,000 in donations could not be accounted for.<sup>98</sup> However, Fowler's lawsuit accusing them of fraud and racketeering was dismissed.<sup>99</sup> The organization had collected over \$4 million in donations.<sup>100</sup> Monsignor Peter Dora explained that Fowler "unwittingly attracted all kinds of manipulative people who scented money, because once you get crowds like that, money flows." He accused Hughes of making Our Loving Mother's Children into a money-making enterprise while masquerading as Fowler's protector.<sup>101</sup> Religious publisher Bill Reck estimated \$100 million of materials about the Virgin Mary and apparitions were purchased in the period from 1991 to 1996 alone, so there were obvious opportunities for people to capitalize on this market.<sup>102</sup> The Jatcos left Conyers because they felt "humanism and materialism" had gotten in the way of the principles that had originally drawn them there, and they felt pressured to choose sides

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<sup>98</sup> Chandler Brown, "Audit cites misuse of fund for Fowler," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 9 May 2002, JC1; Allison Floyd, "Judge sends message in Fowler case," *Rockdale Citizen*, 12 April 2002, 1A.

<sup>99</sup> Allison Floyd, "Fowler suit dismissed after audit funds dry up," *Rockdale Citizen*, 21 March 2002, 1A; Ric Latarski, "Judge rules Fowler must bear cost of audit," *Rockdale Citizen*, 17 January 2003, 1A.

<sup>100</sup> Brown, "Audit cites misuse of fund for Fowler," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 9 May 2002, JC1; Chandler Brown, "East Metro Notebook," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 13 June 2002, JC2; Chandler Brown, "Jury to rule in visionary's suit," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 14 June 2002, D6; Chandler Brown, "Lawsuit Dismissed: Fowler, attorney to discuss options," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 12 September 2002, JC1; Chandler Brown, "Rockdale mystic rebuffed in court," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 7 September 2002, E4; "Law & Order," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 9 October 2002, B6.

<sup>101</sup> Monsignor Peter Dora, interview by author, Rutledge, GA, 6 August 2009.

<sup>102</sup> William A. Reck, *Dear Marian Movement: Let God Be God* (Milford, OH: Riehle Foundation, 1996), 167.

between Fowler and Hughes. They still thought Hughes was “a good guy,” though they admitted, “We were never privy to any of the money aspects of it.” They had met Rivas, liked her, and even traveled with her. They attributed the rift between Fowler and Hughes to Fowler’s view of Rivas as competition. As Meg Jatcko explained, “[Fowler] just thought [Hughes] was stealing the money, and I think it was all about the Katya thing, as far as we could see.”<sup>103</sup>

After the lawsuit, Fowler limited communication with the public. Court costs pushed her into bankruptcy, and her declining health left her unable to work. She survived on alimony until her ex-husband passed away. Fowler attended church in another town and sat by herself. She did not grant interviews, though her website posted updates periodically. These updates were most often about Fowler’s health, particularly her three-year battle against cancer. She passed away January 10, 2012, at the age of 63.<sup>104</sup>

People still gather at The Farm for prayer at noon on the 13<sup>th</sup> of every month. The site is well-marked, with signs to The Farm and on buildings around the property. Despite its proximity to the Georgia International Horse Park, the area around The Farm is still relatively undeveloped and still lacks sidewalks. The site features tablets of the Ten Commandments in Spanish near the parking lot, outdoor Stations of the Cross, and

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<sup>103</sup> Meg & Tony Jatcko, interview by author, Woodstock, GA, 9 August 2009.

<sup>104</sup> Conyers - Our Loving Mother - Nancy Fowler Passed Away, [http://www.ourlovingmother.org/CurrentNews\\_01-10-2012\\_NancyFowlerPassedAway.aspx](http://www.ourlovingmother.org/CurrentNews_01-10-2012_NancyFowlerPassedAway.aspx), accessed 29 January 2012; Davis & Boles, “Pilgrim Apparition Work,” 382; Halter, “Charisma in Conyers,” 111; Jeanie Toracinta, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 10 August 2009.

religious statues both outside and inside the house. Signs still designate areas for “pilgrim parking,” and loudspeakers remain on the outside of the house. On a Tuesday morning, not the 13<sup>th</sup>, there were people in the Apparition Room praying, and recordings of religious music filled the house.

The Conyers apparitions became famous worldwide and forever impacted the people involved with them. Nancy Fowler was an international celebrity for years and claimed a special relationship with Jesus and the Virgin Mary, but she lost her family and went bankrupt, knowing many others had profited from the visions that seemed to ruin her life. Despite the infelicitous ending of the apparition experience at Conyers, many people still remember the events there with fondness. For example, Tony Jatcko observed that his public involvement with Fowler “hurt [him] in the corporate world,” but “It was just a great, very rewarding experience. I’m glad I did it.... I would do it all again.” His wife Meg said, “It made my faith grow.”<sup>105</sup> Police officer Mike Kinlein and Protestant neighbor Helen Lombard both remarked that the site had a special aura.<sup>106</sup> Even reporter Bill Osinski, who believed Fowler “was a fraud,” acknowledged that people did have a spiritual experience at the Farm and that “It’s a good thing when people come together to pray.”<sup>107</sup> Although former mayor Charles Walker said the financial dispute between Hughes and Fowler brought a stigma to the community, Pat Barnes remarked that Conyers is still well-known, especially throughout the Southeast, because

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<sup>105</sup> Meg & Tony Jatcko, interview by author, Woodstock, GA, 9 August 2009.

<sup>106</sup> Michael Kinlein, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 10 August 2009; Helen Lombard, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 11 August 2009.

<sup>107</sup> Bill Osinski, interview by author, Norcross, GA, 12 August 2009.

of its association with the apparitions, more than would otherwise be expected of a town of its size. Barnes also pointed out that St. Pius Church benefitted from the apparitions because of the wider highway and gaining a traffic light since the traffic survey was conducted during an apparition weekend.<sup>108</sup> The effects from visitors who came to “eat, drink, and see Mary” were lasting for both individuals and the community, personally, religiously, and economically.

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<sup>108</sup> Patrick Barnes, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 9 August 2009; Charles Walker, interview by author, Conyers, GA, 10 August 2009.



CHAPTER 6. “OUR LADY HAS BEEN SENT HERE TO THE DESERT”:  
PHOENIX/SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA AND EMMITSBURG, MARYLAND

St. Maria Goretti Church occupies nearly an entire block of a meticulously kept Scottsdale neighborhood on the edge of Paradise Valley, known as the “millionaire’s ghetto.”<sup>1</sup> In contrast, Estela Ruiz’s family shrine to Our Lady of the Americas can be found in the barrio of South Phoenix, ten miles away. The apparitions that started in 1988 in the Phoenix metropolitan area to a cluster of eleven visionaries demonstrate the appeal of the Virgin Mary across race and class.

Scottsdale, Arizona, first developed a reputation as a winter resort for affluent visitors. Tourists and health-seekers came for its sunshine, desert air, and resorts. The rapid growth of the entire Phoenix metropolitan area after the Second World War, which the presence of military bases and defense plants as well as mass availability of air conditioning enabled, attracted more industry, tourists, and residents. Scottsdale grew remarkably quickly. In 1951, when it was incorporated, Scottsdale’s population was around 2,000 people. In 2010, the population was over 200,000. Scottsdale emerged as an exclusive suburban city, known for its art galleries, fashionable shops, and designer golf courses.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Janice T. Connell, *Meetings with Mary: Visions of the Blessed Mother* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), 283; Robert Faricy, S.J., and Lucy Rooney, S.N.D. de N., *Return to God: The Scottsdale Message* (Santa Barbara: Queenship Publishing Company, 1993), 3; Mark Garvey, *Searching for Mary* (New York: Plume, 1998), 115.

<sup>2</sup> Michael F. Logan, *Desert Cities: The Environmental History of Phoenix and Tucson* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 138, 141; Bradford Luckingham, *Phoenix: The History of a Southwestern Metropolis* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1989), 3, 8-10, 195, 264; Phyllis Cancilla Martinelli, *Ethnicity in the Sunbelt: Italian American Immigrants in Scottsdale, Arizona* (New York: AMS Press, 1989), 6-7; Patricia Myers McElfresh, *Scottsdale, Jewel in the Desert: An Illustrated*

St. Maria Goretti Church is a relatively new parish in the Scottsdale area, built in 1967.<sup>3</sup> The church is sleek and modern, demonstrating both its newness and the wealth of its parishioners. Writer Mark Garvey describes the church as, “four vaulted sections of cream-colored stucco joined in the center and overarched by a white, parabolic exoskeleton surmounted by a white cross.” Inside the church, the sanctuary features “a stained glass cross of rich pinks, purples, and blues inlaid at the apex... Above the altar hangs an etched-glass rendering of Salvador Dali’s *Christ of St. John of the Cross*.”<sup>4</sup> The parish bulletin featured advertisements for pool maintenance, Mercedes repair, home theater and home security systems, and a golf shop. The apparitions that occurred at St. Maria Goretti were to “privileged parishioners and their pastor at an unusually well-off parish,” not the more typical poor, uneducated seer historically associated with Marian apparitions. The pastor, Father Jack Spaulding, explained, “The reason this happened here is that if *we* can be converted, no one else has an excuse not to be except ‘I don’t want to be.’ This is a wealthy parish. We’ve got kids that were into everything. I was

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*History* (Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor Publications, 1984), 48-49, 64-65, 85; Tom Miller, ed., *Arizona: The Land and the People* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986), 245, 247; Scottsdale (city) QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/04/0465000.html>, accessed 30 May 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 115; Peter Heintz, on page 631 of *A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary* (Sacramento, CA: Gabriel Press, 1995), says the church was built in the 1970s. This seems like something that should be easily verified, so I do not understand why there is a discrepancy.

<sup>4</sup> Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 115-116.

on the fast track– I was a good priest, but I was very busy, and I think Our Lord and Our Lady did it here to prove that if it could happen here, it could happen anywhere.”<sup>5</sup>

At the time of the first apparition reports, Fr. Spaulding was in his forties and involved in many activities outside the parish. Fr. Spaulding became the pastor at St. Maria Goretti in 1982 after having served as the Chancellor for the Diocese of Phoenix. For four years he had his own television show on Eternal Word Television Network. He traveled to Medjugorje for the first time in June 1987 to film a television special for EWTN, but it became a spiritual event for him. He would return to Medjugorje five times in two years, a pilgrimage that had great meaning for him. In October 1987 Fr. Spaulding led a group of parishioners to Medjugorje.<sup>6</sup> In the midst of Fr. Spaulding’s pilgrimages, Mary and Jesus appeared to a number of his flock. The first of these, parishioner Susan Evans, came to see Fr. Spaulding in the fall of 1987. She revealed that she was experiencing supernatural manifestations. By 1989, nine members of St. Maria Goretti’s prayer group for young adults, as well as Fr. Spaulding himself, would report receiving apparitions or supernatural messages. In the summer of 1988, Gianna Talone,

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<sup>5</sup> Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 122-123.

<sup>6</sup> Joyce Coronel, “Care for disabled, love for Eucharist, Mary, drive priest,” *Catholic Sun*, 1 March 2010, n.p.; Dom Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg: The Center of Her Immaculate Heart* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing Company, 2000), 19-20; Heintz, *A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary*, 631-632; René Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale: Fruitful Charisms in a Traditional American Parish*, trans. Doris and Ernesto V. Laguette (Milford, OH: Faith Publishing Company, 1992), 9-12; René Laurentin and Patrick Sbalchiero, *Dictionnaire des <<apparitions>> de la Vierge Marie: Inventaire des origines à nos jours: Méthodologie, bilan interdisciplinaire, prospective* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), 1319. According to Faricy and Rooney in *Return to God*, 21, Fr. Spaulding continued to produce films for Catholic Life Productions with Fr. Dale Fushek, but Faricy and Rooney report that he is banned from EWTN. They offer no explanation for why.

one of the nine, told Fr. Spaulding that she received a vision of the group, though at the time she was not acquainted with all of the people in it. The nine people in Talone's vision, ranging in age from sixteen to thirty and pursuing a variety of careers, individually contacted Fr. Spaulding to talk about the unusual spiritual phenomena they were experiencing and discovered their connection. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, thousands of pilgrims would travel to St. Maria Goretti to be near them.

### **The Scottsdale Nine**

When Susan Evans approached Fr. Spaulding, she was 29 years old. She had graduated from the University of Arizona with a degree in business and marketing. She had suffered with health issues since the age of eleven, including lupus, fibromyalgia, and scleroderma, but she was pious as a youth and experienced visions of Jesus on rare occasions. Later her religious fervor diminished as she was distracted by her studies and health until the locutions, or audible messages, came in 1987. She helped form the young adult prayer group and went to Mass daily.<sup>7</sup>

Like Evans, Stefanie Staab graduated from the University of Arizona. She earned a degree in finance and accounting in 1987, and she had a high-level management job that paid well. Although she had been raised Catholic, her parents divorced when she was five, and she reportedly felt like the Catholic faith was forced and routine. When a friend from work had a conversion experience in 1987, it made Staab reconsider. Staab also had a vision of Satan late one night. She saw Fr. Spaulding's Medjugorje video and met Susan Evans, working with her to start the prayer group, then met Fr. Spaulding. In

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<sup>7</sup>Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 17; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 14-16.

August 1988 she told Fr. Spaulding that she was hearing a voice and felt compelled to write with no control over what she wrote. Fr. Spaulding thought the voice was the Virgin Mary. Staab also received messages from Jesus starting that summer. She received ten messages from Jesus between mid-May and late October 1989. She learned that others in the parish were receiving messages and locutions in 1988 and was added to the group of visionaries in December. She became a Eucharistic minister and participated in the prayer groups on Thursday and Friday nights after the Virgin Mary asked her to in September 1988. Staab had messages for the group, but no apparitions. She also participated in the Monday night prayer group for teens. In October 1988, Staab developed mononucleosis. When she suffered a relapse in 1989, she had to stop working for nine months and moved in with five spiritual young women. She found a job in the fall of 1990 in Dallas, but she felt she had to return to Scottsdale and took a job as a file clerk. She resumed her career in computers and economics in 1991.<sup>8</sup> She never published her messages, but in March 1992 Jesus told her to give a copy of the messages to Fr. Robert Faricy as well as an eleventh message He gave her a week later.<sup>9</sup> The messages were calls to conversion, but they also addressed divorce, abortion, and

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Faricy, S.J., and Lucy Rooney, S.N.D. de N., *Our Lady Comes to Scottsdale: Is It Authentic?* (Santa Barbara: Queenship Publishing Company, 1993), 43, 64; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 17-20, 39, 123. In the Catholic Church, Eucharistic ministers are lay people who are authorized to distribute Communion, but they cannot recite the prayers reserved for priests or wear vestments. They are not ordained but usually participate when a priest is not available, there are too many people at Mass for the available priests to handle in a reasonable time, or visiting the homebound. They are not paid for this.

<sup>9</sup> Faricy & Rooney, *Return to God*, 43; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 19.

chastity.<sup>10</sup> In 1993, she married Robert Mendivil. The couple had three children before they divorced. Presently Stefanie Staab-Mendivil lives in Columbus, Ohio.<sup>11</sup>

Gianna Talone was a thirty-year-old married woman in 1987, the eldest of the group and most educated. As a child, she had been an actress and the family had lived in Beverly Hills for a while, but Gianna and her sister Claudia were ridiculed at their Catholic school for being poor because their mother taught there and they attended for free. Gianna asked that the family move back to Arizona, where she won the title of Miss Arizona Teenager and was runner-up for Miss National Teenager. A straight-A student, she won a scholarship to UCLA for drama but changed her major to chemistry. She worked with handicapped children, read to the blind, and put on shows for disabled children. She won “Congeniality Student of the Year” and “Outstanding Achievement in Community Service.” She was also the class president. Talone applied to medical schools and did well with her applications, but she was unsuccessful at every interview.<sup>12</sup> She earned a doctorate in pharmacology from the University of Southern California and worked as a pharmacist in the geriatric pharmaceutical section of St. Joseph Hospital in

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<sup>10</sup> Faricy & Rooney, *Return to God*, 44-54.

<sup>11</sup> Case Listing, <http://fcdcfcs.co.franklin.oh.us/CaseInformationOnline/nameSearch>, accessed 4 July 2011; *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy, a Documentary: The Events in Scottsdale, Arizona* (Scottsdale: The Mercy Foundation, 1994), 90 min.

<sup>12</sup> Faricy & Rooney, *Return to God*, 39-40.

Phoenix.<sup>13</sup> In September 1987 Talone first saw the Virgin Mary.<sup>14</sup> Talone started going to Mass daily and praying for hours. In November 1987 she heard the voice of the angel Gabriel. She went to Medjugorje with Fr. Spaulding in June 1988, where she met Wayne Weible, a journalist who converted from Lutheranism to Catholicism because of his experiences at Medjugorje and has become one of the main authors in support of the apparitions there. Weible told Talone that she would be “significant” in the Virgin Mary’s plan. She heard Mary’s voice that day and every day since.<sup>15</sup> On June 9, Talone talked privately with Vicka Ivankovic, one of the Medjugorje visionaries. Talone told few people what had happened, and only her mother was supportive. The Virgin Mary sent Talone to talk to Fr. Spaulding a week after they returned to Scottsdale, and he was initially indifferent. Talone had a vision in the summer of 1988 of the nine people at St. Maria Goretti who would eventually be involved. During Lent in 1989 Talone suffered pain and reported that she was regularly attacked by the devil at night. In 1991, Talone’s husband, Michael Bianchi, divorced her because he did not want children and could not

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<sup>13</sup> Connell, *Meetings with Mary*, 286; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 20.

<sup>14</sup> Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 111; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 20. Pope John Paul II visited Phoenix in September 1987. Fr. Spaulding met the pope briefly during this visit, according to Fr. Spaulding’s book, *Hope for the Journey* (Santa Barbara: Queenship Publishing Company, 1995), 48. According to the Vatican website, the pope visited St. Joseph Hospital, where Talone worked. That same month she started seeing the Virgin Mary. This seems like at least a noteworthy coincidence.  
[Http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/travels/sub\\_index1987/trav\\_stati-uniti-canada\\_en.htm](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/travels/sub_index1987/trav_stati-uniti-canada_en.htm), accessed 26 May 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 9; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 21.

tolerate the mystical developments in her life; the Church annulled the marriage. Talone claimed to experience apparitions of Jesus and Mary, spiritual communications, interior locutions, and the trials of others at night, and to have a gift for healing. She went to Rome in 1991 and gave a message to Pope John Paul II, and in 1994 she gave a message to President Bill Clinton on a golf course near her house. In 1993 Talone and her second husband, Michael Sullivan, a physician, moved to Emmitsburg, Maryland. They said that they felt called to move there by the Virgin Mary and started Mission of Mercy to help provide medical care for the poor.<sup>16</sup>

When Mary Cook contacted Fr. Spaulding, she was 24 and working as a waitress. She had been raised Catholic, but attended Mass on Sunday merely as a matter of routine. She went to college, but left after one year. In April 1988 she went on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje that so inspired her that she quit her job as a traveling salesperson, moved to Wisconsin to be near family, and read messages from Medjugorje.<sup>17</sup> She heard Jesus'

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<sup>16</sup> Connell, *Meetings with Mary*, 287; Faricy & Rooney, *Return to God*, 41; Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 6, 13-14, 29-30, 96; Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 112; Heintz, *A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary*, 634; *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy, a Documentary*; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 12-13, 23-24, 26-27, 119; Laurentin & Sbalchiero, *Dictionnaire des <<apparitions>> de la Vierge Marie*, 1320, 1334; Peter Mullen, *Shrines of Our Lady: A Guide to Fifty of the World's Most Famous Marian Shrines* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 172. Interior locutions mean that the person receives a spiritual message without an accompanying vision or presence, whereas apparitions involve the spiritual figure being visibly present with the person. Interior locutions differ from other types of locutions because the recipient does not hear the message with their physical sense of hearing.

<sup>17</sup> At this point, Laurentin shows some disagreement within his own book. On page 11 of *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, Laurentin states that Fr. Spaulding went on a trip to Medjugorje in October 1987 with a group of parishioners that included Mary Cook, but on page 28, it says nothing about the 1987 trip, instead discussing a trip she took to Medjugorje in 1988 as if it were her first visit, seemingly without Fr. Spaulding, and mentions her contacting him later. Peter Heintz in *A Guide to Apparitions*



voice ask her to leave her family and write to Fr. Spaulding. In August 1988 Staab and Talone came to Fr. Spaulding separately with messages about Cook, whom they barely knew. Since then Cook returned to Scottsdale at the request of voices she heard. Her family fought this decision, doubting her claims and dividing over them, which Laurentin explains was difficult for her because she was close to her family. The family wrote to the bishop asking him to intervene, which she found out about when visiting her relatives in July 1991. She reported that once she started hearing Jesus nearly every day, attending Mass daily, and participating in Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, she no longer suffered from anxiety or the temptation of alcoholism, and she had two apparitions of the Virgin Mary in 1990.<sup>18</sup> She became a Eucharistic minister at St. Maria Goretti parish and worked for the church, teaching preschool.<sup>19</sup>

Steve Nelson met Susan Evans in December 1987, when he was 21, and felt a need to develop his faith. He owned a successful home repair and painting business with a friend, while considering a possible career in rodeo. He started attending Mass daily

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*of Our Blessed Virgin Mary* states on page 632 that Cook went to Medjugorje with Fr. Spaulding on one of his 1988 trips, confirming it was in April 1988 on page 635.

<sup>18</sup> Heintz, *A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary*, 635; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 27-29. Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament involves Catholics keeping vigil over the exposed elements of the Eucharist at all times. This generally involves a schedule of participants so that there is always someone praying, day or night, every day. As for Cook's apparitions of Mary, Laurentin and Heintz agree on the date, but Faricy and Rooney state on page 13 of in *Return to God* that she first saw the Virgin Mary at a Medjugorje Conference in 1991 after earlier seeing a purple glow around a statue at St. Maria Goretti Church.

<sup>19</sup> Faricy & Rooney, *Our Lady Comes to Scottsdale*, 64; Heintz, *A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary*, 636; *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy, a Documentary*; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 122.

and fasting twice a week. He joined the young adult prayer group in September 1988, and met with Fr. Spaulding two days later. He began receiving messages for himself, which included messages to quit his promising rodeo career.<sup>20</sup> He had gone to the University of Stevenville in Texas on a rodeo scholarship and studied livestock management, but he transferred to a community college in Arizona where he earned an associate's degree in business. He occasionally received communications from Jesus and Mary when he needed guidance. He went to Medjugorje in 1989. In June 1992 he married Susan Raheb. He became one of the leaders of the young adult prayer group and a Eucharistic minister. In 1993 he was back in school studying for a diploma in medical technology in the hopes of working on an ambulance and eventually becoming a firefighter.<sup>21</sup>

Steve's younger sister, Wendy Nelson, was a student at Arizona State and part-time teacher before she started experiencing unusual spiritual events. She, Steve, and their younger sister Jenny grew up in South Dakota and Nebraska, but the family eventually moved to a house behind St. Maria Goretti Church in Scottsdale. Their father worked for Giant Oil Industries. Wendy heard a voice at home in 1987. She went to the Thursday night prayer group with their mother, and in the spring of 1988, she started hearing lessons and messages from Jesus around twice a week. She confessed to Fr.

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<sup>20</sup> Again, a contradiction in Laurentin. On page 31 of *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, Laurentin reports that Nelson received this message to quit the rodeo career, but on page 34, he says that Nelson receives only interior perceptions, no voices or messages. In *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy, a Documentary*, Nelson explains that he received personal messages, but none for the public.

<sup>21</sup> Faricy & Rooney, *Our Lady Comes to Scottsdale*, 47, 64; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 30-34, 122.

Spaulding. In August 1988 Fr. Spaulding gathered the six who had contacted him in his office to share their experiences. In the fall of 1990, she saw the Virgin Mary during prayer group. Wendy became interested in helping the poor and lived with the Mission of Charity Congregation in Phoenix, Mother Teresa's order, for a year and a half before leaving to study sociology at Arizona State. She still attended Mass daily and the prayer group on Thursday nights.<sup>22</sup>

Jimmy Kupanoff was raised Catholic, but his family was not very devout until they went to Medjugorje. Kupanoff went to Medjugorje in 1985 as a teenager with his family and girlfriend, then again in 1987. His family had a conversion experience and moved to Ohio, but he stayed in Scottsdale with his grandparents and joined St. Maria Goretti Church. He started working with the parish teens and lived in the rectory for a while. In early 1988, he met Mary Cook and they were close for a while, but then she left for Wisconsin and his best friend died of cancer, so Kupanoff reportedly felt abandoned. When Cook returned, they started attending the Friday night prayer group diligently. Both Talone and Estela Ruiz, the visionary from South Phoenix, gave Kupanoff special messages to consecrate his life to the Virgin Mary, but he was reluctant. Staab also had a message for Kupanoff from the Virgin Mary. He finally agreed when Fr. Spaulding invited him to the meeting of the six in August 1988. He went to Medjugorje again in 1988 and found it a profound experience. He was active in the Thursday and Friday night prayer groups and received messages from Jesus and Mary giving him personal

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<sup>22</sup> Faricy & Rooney, *Our Lady Comes to Scottsdale*, 43; Heintz, *A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary*, 635; *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy*, a Documentary; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 34-36; Mullen, *Shrines of Our Lady*, 171.

advice, but he became less active once he returned to school, studying communications at the University of Arizona.<sup>23</sup>

James Pauley was the youngest of the group. In August 1985, when he was fourteen, he went on a retreat led by Fr. Spaulding where Pauley experienced the presence of God, but no visions or apparitions. He went to Medjugorje in 1987. In 1989 he became part of the group of nine that Talone saw in her vision. Pauley attended the prayer groups on Monday, Thursday, and Friday, as well as Mass around four times a week and hours of personal prayer. He helped prepare teens for Confirmation, led prayer groups, and served as a Eucharistic minister for the church. In the summer of 1991, he spent five days on a retreat at a New Mexico monastery. He helped build a house for a poor family and went to Mexico with Wendy Nelson on a similar mission. In 1991 and 1992 Pauley went on speaking tours in England with Fr. Spaulding. In 1993 he was working as a full-time youth minister and director of the teen program for the parish. He attended a community college in Scottsdale.<sup>24</sup> Since then, Pauley earned bachelor's and master's degrees in theology from Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio. He earned a doctorate in sacred theology from the Liturgical Institute at the University of St.

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<sup>23</sup> *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy, a Documentary*; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 37-38.

<sup>24</sup> Faricy & Rooney, *Our Lady Comes to Scottsdale*, 64; Faricy & Rooney, *Return to God*, 12; *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy, a Documentary*; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 39-40.

Mary of the Lake in Mundelein, Illinois, and is now a professor of theology and catechetics at Franciscan. Pauley also married and has three children.<sup>25</sup>

The last of the group to meet with Fr. Spaulding was Annie Ross in April 1989. She completed college in Alabama and Phoenix, worked in finance and real estate, then opened her own flower shop. She was a Catholic, but not committed; she married a Turkish Muslim in 1984 when she was 21. She had left school and worked as a realtor to support her husband's studies.<sup>26</sup> She reported that she was verbally, emotionally, and sexually abused by her husband, and actively avoided the Church because she feared his wrath if she went.<sup>27</sup> She applied for an annulment in 1989, which she received in 1991. Ross considered joining the religious life before she married Eric Fitch in 1992. She grew up in a wealthy family, but lived a modest life. In March 1989, she heard the voice of the Virgin Mary during the Thursday night prayer group. She wrote the messages down to show Fr. Spaulding, who told her not to talk about them. In June, Jesus started talking. Later Ross started seeing future events. She saw visions of heaven and purgatory in October, and saw the Virgin Mary for the first time in December, stepping out of a statue. Ross closed her flower shop at Jesus' request, gave up paid employment,

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<sup>25</sup> Dr. James Pauley, Franciscan University of Steubenville, <https://spt.franciscan.edu/faculty/pauly-james/>, accessed 18 October 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Faricy & Rooney, *Our Lady Comes to Scottsdale*, 35; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 40.

<sup>27</sup> Ann Ross Fitch and Paul Robert De Grandis, S.S.J., *Walking in the Light* (n.p., 1993), 74. This information is found in a testimony by "A. F." of Metairie, LA, which is presumably Annie Ross Fitch, who was living in Metairie in 1993.

and gave her life to the Lord in the fall of 1991.<sup>28</sup> In September 1991, the Virgin Mary told Ross that she would appear in the future only on Ross's birthday and when needed. Previously Ross had been a superficial Catholic, but she began to attend Mass daily, pray for several hours every day, and became a Eucharistic minister. She stopped attending St. Maria Goretti.<sup>29</sup> A Catholic charismatic convention in Anaheim, California in 1991 changed her life, and she began attending the charismatic prayer group at Ascension parish. She also started a group called May All Respond Yes (MARY) Ministries.<sup>30</sup>

Annie and Eric Fitch moved to New Orleans in the summer of 1992. She worked full-time in pastoral ministry with Eric and often with Fr. Robert De Grandis, praying with prayer groups and Marian groups, as well as at religious conventions and conferences. Eric graduated from Loyola Marymount College in Louisiana with a degree in business administration, then he took classes at Ottawa University in Phoenix to become an elementary teacher, but he started ministering full-time with Annie.<sup>31</sup> She no longer saw the Virgin Mary regularly, but she did experience apparitions during her

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<sup>28</sup> Faricy & Rooney, *Our Lady Comes to Scottsdale*, 41; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 40-44, 126; Mullen, *Shrines of Our Lady*, 171.

<sup>29</sup> Faricy & Rooney, *Our Lady Comes to Scottsdale*, 64; Fitch & De Grandis, *Walking in the Light*, 74-77; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 44-45, 126-127. Yet another discrepancy: Heintz reports on page 635 of *A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary* that the Virgin Mary told Ross she would appear only on special occasions in October 1990, nearly a year before when Laurentin reports this message as taking place. Heintz also states on page 634 that Ross started hearing voices for the first time at home, not at the prayer group as Laurentin says. Fitch and De Grandis say nothing about when the apparitions started or ended, just that she began going to Mass and taking Communion daily in March 1989.

<sup>30</sup> Faricy & Rooney, *Return to God*, 71-72; Mullen, *Shrines of Our Lady*, 181.

<sup>31</sup> Faricy & Rooney, *Return to God*, 66, 71, 74.

wedding and on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe in 1992. Jesus appeared three times in late November 1991, once at the end of December, and once the Sunday after her wedding. Annie spoke with Jesus and Mary daily and sometimes with St. Teresa of Avila and Padre Pio. She had problems with her hands and feet. Sometimes her hands oozed oil, but she said Jesus told her to use it to anoint people she prays with. In spring 1992 she reported that Jesus told her not to take on any more projects until she finished writing two books.<sup>32</sup> In the introduction to *Healing Through the Rosary*, she states that Jesus asked her to write this book, a collection of meditations and visualizations around each part of the rosary.<sup>33</sup> In September 1992, she was listed as one of the speakers at a Marian devotional conference in Arizona.<sup>34</sup> She also published two devotional books with Fr. De Grandis in 1993.<sup>35</sup> *Walking in the Light* includes a description of her experience being delivered from evil spirits through praying in tongues and the laying-on of hands. It also refers to certain prayers in the book as given to Annie by the Virgin Mary in apparitions.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Faricy & Rooney, *Return to God*, 73.

<sup>33</sup> Ann Ross Fitch, *Healing Through the Rosary* (Metairie, LA: Ann Ross Fitch, 1992), introduction. There is also a preface, written by Fr. Robert Faricy. There are no page numbers for any of the front matter of this book.

<sup>34</sup> “Arizona conference on Marian devotion this weekend,” *Arizona Republic*, 19 September 1992, B7.

<sup>35</sup> Ann Ross Fitch and Paul Robert De Grandis, S.S.J., *Take the First Step—Forgive!* (n.p., 1993); Fitch & De Grandis, *Walking in the Light*.

<sup>36</sup> Fitch & De Grandis, *Walking in the Light*, 9-10, 113, 171.

Initially there were two prayer groups to the Virgin Mary started at St. Maria Goretti, one for teens on Monday nights and one for adults on Thursday nights. These began late in 1987, after Fr. Spaulding's trip to Medjugorje, and featured traditional prayers. Attendance eventually averaged 500 weekly.<sup>37</sup> In June 1988, the first supernatural messages came, followed by the formation of the group of six. In August 1988 in Medjugorje, Fr. Spaulding heard locutions from the Virgin Mary on Assumption Day. In September Talone told Fr. Spaulding that Jesus wanted His messages to her published, something that happened when the Riehle Foundation published the first volume of *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy* in late 1989.<sup>38</sup> In November Fr. Spaulding no longer waited a week to share messages with the prayer group but felt the Virgin Mary and Jesus speak through him. He said sometimes the Virgin Mary or Jesus "take over"

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<sup>37</sup> Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 20; *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy, a Documentary*; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 48; Mullen, *Shrines of Our Lady*, 171.

<sup>38</sup> Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 48-51, 53. *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy: Lessons and Messages to the World from Our Lord and Our Lady* (Milford, OH: The Riehle Foundation, 1989) includes messages from Jesus covering September 1988-September 1989 and from Mary from July 1988-September 1989. Some are from Fr. Spaulding's homilies and the Thursday night prayer group, but most are from an unidentified "messenger," Gianna Talone. Publisher for the Riehle Foundation, Bill Reck, reveals that although he still believes in the early volumes, he decided not to publish a fourth volume of *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy* because the messages became more personal in nature, the style and delivery changed, it did not feel like the same author throughout, and parts of it seemed to come from other books. William A. Reck, *Dear Marian Movement: Let God Be God* (Milford, OH: The Riehle Foundation, 1996), 139-140.



his homily.<sup>39</sup> In December the young adult prayer group was started on Friday nights, and Estela Ruiz started receiving apparitions in South Phoenix. Ruiz met with Fr. Spaulding and started meeting for group prayer sessions with them in January 1989.<sup>40</sup>

All of the visionaries were asked to pray for the souls in purgatory and to fast. Talone, Ross, Wendy Nelson, and Cook all claimed to have visions of the Virgin Mary. They saw her as Our Lady of Joy, but said that she also wanted to be known as Our Lady of the Americas, which was the way she presented herself to Ruiz.<sup>41</sup> The visionaries would experience ecstatic trances during the rosary and Mass. The Arizona messages were not as apocalyptic as those of other apparition sites, instead urging a return to the Church, emphasizing the love and mercy of Jesus and Mary, and encouraging people to change themselves and their communities for the better. Thousands of pilgrims from all over the US and the world came to hear the messages.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 114; Heintz, *A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary*, 632; *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy, a Documentary*; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 52; Mullen, *Shrines of Our Lady*, 172.

<sup>40</sup> Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 51-53; Kristy Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio: Marian Apparitions, Catholic Evangelizing, and Mexican American Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 70-71. This is a disagreement with Laurentin, who claims on page 53 that the Scottsdale group did not even learn about Ruiz until February 1989. Laurentin also claims that Ruiz was unaware of the events at St. Maria Goretti until she met with Fr. Spaulding then, but Nabhan-Warren says that Ruiz had met Fr. Spaulding in the fall of 1988, went to a prayer session there, and was skeptical of him and the visionaries. Nabhan-Warren cites both Ruiz and Fr. Spaulding as her sources, which is strong support.

<sup>41</sup> *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy, a Documentary*; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 54.

<sup>42</sup> Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 114; Dan Harris, "Messages from Heaven," *Arizona Republic*, 23 May 1992, A2; Mullen, *Shrines of Our Lady*, 172; Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 71, 81. Carol Ameche says that she was invited to attend the

In the summer of 1989, Bishop Thomas O'Brien decided to investigate the apparition claims in his diocese—the first such investigation in Phoenix diocesan history. He appointed three people to a commission: Fr. Ernest Larkin, a Carmelite, theologian, and specialist in mystics; Sr. Theresa Sedlock, a Franciscan noted for her competence in spirituality; and Dr. James Lange, a psychologist. They interviewed Fr. Spaulding but lost the tape, and they interviewed the visionaries as a group. They completed their report in October.<sup>43</sup> The bishop made his decision about the alleged apparitions at St. Maria Goretti in January 1990 and though it was supposed to be confidential, the diocesan paper, *The Catholic Sun*, reported it in full about two weeks later.<sup>44</sup> The commission concluded that there was no proof of anything miraculous taking place, but the people involved showed no deceitful intent. The bishop ruled that the prayer

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young adult prayer group at St. Maria Goretti by the Virgin Mary, led prayer when Fr. Spaulding was not there, and became a confidant for the Scottsdale Nine. In May 1992 she says that she started receiving messages from Jesus and Mary herself, but her messages were more about the end times and Christ's Second Coming than the other St. Maria Goretti messages. Sources that mention her at all are few, but tend to describe her as a scribe for the group, not a participant. Carol Ameche, *As We Wait in Joyful Hope: For the Second Coming of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: Spiritual Preparation for the Purification, Tribulation, Chastisement and Reign of Antichrist* (Santa Barbara: Queenship Publishing, 1994), 39-40, 44, 127; *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy, a Documentary*; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 45.

<sup>43</sup> Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 24-26; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 57; Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 91; Kim Sue Lia Perkes, "Voices in the Desert: Panel to investigate religious 'messages,'" *Arizona Republic*, 19 August 1989, G3.

<sup>44</sup> Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 58. Unfortunately *The Catholic Sun* was unavailable to me. I have accessed other articles through the Internet, but there is no systematic digital archive of this newspaper, nor is it available via microfilm.

meetings could continue, but there could be no claims of miraculous intervention and the church should establish a Community of Discernment.<sup>45</sup> This group would “aid the prayer group in interpreting any future events; direct the development of devotion to Our Lady; [and] monitor the circulation of any publications produced by the prayer group.”<sup>46</sup> Fr. Spaulding was disappointed by what he saw as the poor quality of the investigation, but he pledged obedience to the bishop.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, in April 1990 the bishop concluded that the Ruiz apparitions were “not extraordinary or miraculous.” The Ruizes could continue their prayer meetings, but not claim unequivocally that the messages were from the Virgin Mary, and the bishop would appoint a Community of Discernment to monitor the prayer services and messages.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Thomas Collins and Thomas Petrisko, ed., *Our Lady of the Americas: The Messages of the Blessed Virgin Mary as Received by Estela Ruiz of South Phoenix, Arizona* (McKees Rocks, PA: Pittsburgh Center for Peace, 1994), unnumbered “The Messages;” Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 24-25; Heintz, *A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary*, 633; *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy, a Documentary*; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 59-60; “Messages aren’t miracles, bishop concludes,” *Arizona Republic*, 20 January 1990, F1; Mullen, *Shrines of Our Lady*, 172; Thomas W. Petrisko, “Our Lady of the Americas: An Interview with Visionary Estela Ruiz,” *Our Lady Queen of Peace* (McKees Rocks, PA: Pittsburgh Center for Peace, Winter 1994), 9; Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, “The Marian Revival in American Catholicism: Focal Points and Features of the New Marian Enthusiasm,” in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, ed. Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 232.

<sup>46</sup> *The Catholic Sun*, 18 January 1990, 14, as cited in footnote 24, Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 229.

<sup>47</sup> Kim Sue Lia Perkes, “Of true faith, feelings, and appearances,” *Arizona Republic*, 27 January 1990, F1.

<sup>48</sup> “Bishop dismisses woman’s claim of apparitions,” *Arizona Republic*, 5 May 1990, D6. Sources disagree about whether the same commission investigated the St. Maria Goretti apparition claims and the Ruiz claims, but the newspaper coverage is clear

Many people in Scottsdale were unaware of what was happening at St. Maria Goretti, even those who attended the prayer group meetings. Fr. Spaulding tried to blend the prayer groups with the parish. In September 1991 he stopped the practice of visionaries praying and laying hands on individuals because he said it took too much time and gave them too much importance. Fr. Spaulding reported that he wanted to preserve a dignified and prayerful atmosphere and prevent the events at St. Maria Goretti from turning into a circus; he tried to follow the bishop's request to avoid publicity. However, a Phoenix news station aired a series on the events at St. Maria Goretti, including film of Talone in ecstasy during an apparition, which aired in May 1992. Around the same time, she was named in the local newspaper as one of the St. Maria Goretti visionaries.<sup>49</sup> After that, Talone had to leave her job at St. Joseph Hospital and had difficulty finding another pharmaceutical job since she was perceived as a "religious weirdo."<sup>50</sup> As anthropologist Kristy Nabhan-Warren explains, Fr. Spaulding and the "Scottsdale nine" became "celebrities on the Marian pilgrimage network that included the United States, western Europe (primarily Lourdes and Fatima), Mexico, and Medjugorje," and "highly sought after as prayer leaders and guest speakers." All of the Scottsdale seers ended their public visionary roles in 1992 except Talone. They had devoted three years of their lives to the Virgin Mary and, according to Nabhan-Warren, felt it was her desire to stop the public

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that though the conclusions reached were the same, they came from two panels, not one combined investigation.

<sup>49</sup> Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 21; Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 123; Harris, "Messages from Heaven," A2; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 46, 54-55, 121-122.

<sup>50</sup> Faricy & Rooney, *Return to God*, 26; Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 39.

messages. They all reported that their lives were more spiritual and meaningful after their Marian experiences.<sup>51</sup> Bishop O'Brien transferred Fr. Spaulding to another parish soon after the ruling about the apparition events, which also contributed to the dispersal of the group of visionaries and returned St. Maria Goretti parish to a more classic style of worship.<sup>52</sup>

There were no medical studies done of the visionaries because the parish wanted to avoid disturbing prayer. However, in 1992 Fr. René Laurentin persuaded Talone to be tested during an apparition at the University of California-San Francisco Medical Center. This was possible since Talone usually experienced apparitions at a set time. Laurentin, Jesuit Fr. Bill Delaney, French neurologist Philippe Laron, and Charles Yingling, then-director of the UCSF neuromonitoring program, were present during the tests. Talone did not blink for eight minutes. The test results indicated there was nothing pathological—

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<sup>51</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 69.

<sup>52</sup> Laurentin & Sbalchiero, *Dictionnaire des <<apparitions>> de la Vierge Marie*, 1322. Before Fr. Spaulding's death in February 2020, he was suspended as a priest while he awaited the outcome of an investigation into four allegations of sexual misconduct involving young boys in the 1970s and 1980s which emerged in 2011. News - The Roman Catholic Diocese of Phoenix, <http://www.diocesephoenix.org/onenewsstory.php?themonth=201110&story=686041379>, accessed 1 June 2012; Mike Sakal, "Diocese sends Rev. Spaulding molestation case to Vatican for review," *East Valley Tribune*, 10 January 2012, n.p. In 2014, Fr. Spaulding was found guilty and dismissed as a priest, but he appealed the case, which was pending at the time of his death. He had been criminally indicted on charges of sexual misconduct with minors in January 2020. Diocese of Phoenix Statement on Death of John 'Jack' D. Spaulding, 26 February 2020, <https://dphx.org/statement-on-death-of-spaulding/>, accessed 18 October 2020.

no epilepsy, hallucination, sleep disorder, hysteria, or illusion. According to Father Alfred Pehrsson, further tests conducted in 2004 came to the same conclusion.<sup>53</sup>

### **Our Lady of Emmitsburg**

In 1993 Gianna Talone-Sullivan, as she was now known, and her husband moved to Emmitsburg, Maryland. Emmitsburg has a history as a heavily Catholic town and pilgrimage site. One of the town's legends is the story of a Piscataway chief named Ottawanta who was converted by Jesuits in the 1600s. When his wife and five daughters died, he planted trees at the head and foot of their graves and prayed the rosary, begging the Virgin Mary to reunite him with his family. One day she appeared to him and said he would soon join his family in heaven, but this spot near Emmitsburg would be important for her and her son. It would become the site of Mt. St. Mary's College and Seminary, which was founded in 1808 as the first independent Catholic college in the US.<sup>54</sup> In 1809 St. Elizabeth Ann Seton opened the first free Catholic school there and founded the first American Catholic religious community, the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph. In 1975 Seton became the first native-born American saint.<sup>55</sup> Before their marriage, the Sullivans

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<sup>53</sup> Faricy & Rooney, *Return to God*, 68-69; Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 117-118; *I Am Your Jesus of Mercy, a Documentary*; Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 66; Our Lady of Emmitsburg Testimony, Fr. Alfred Pehrsson, C.M., 1993-2006, <http://www.archive.org/details/OurLadyOfEmmitsburgTestimonyFr.AlfredPehrssonC.m.1993-2006>, accessed 12 August 2011.

<sup>54</sup> Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 65-66; William Carr, David McCarthy, William O'Toole, and William Portier, interview by author, Emmitsburg, MD, 17 July 2009; Raymond Sanders, interview by author, Emmitsburg, MD, 18 July 2009.

<sup>55</sup> Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 67, 69, 79; Bryan T. Froehle and Mary L. Gautier, *Catholicism USA: A Portrait of the Catholic Church in the United States* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books for the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at

visited the National Shrine Grotto of Lourdes at Mt. St. Mary's, where Talone-Sullivan reported experiencing a vision telling her that she had good work to do there.<sup>56</sup> The Sullivans married in June 1993 and moved near Emmitsburg that November.<sup>57</sup>

Emmitsburg is a small town of around 2,000 people just south of Gettysburg with one Catholic church, St. Joseph's. The pastor, Fr. Alfred Pehrsson, met the Sullivans, then called Fr. Spaulding, which cleared his doubts about Talone-Sullivan. The church had a Marian prayer group that had been meeting in a chapel for about two years before the Sullivans arrived. One week after Talone-Sullivan came, the group became too large to fit in the chapel. The service moved to the main church and changed meeting nights from Wednesday to Thursday in order not to conflict with choir practice. The Marian prayer group grew from about 12 members to averaging 700, which was all the fire code allowed for the sanctuary and parish hall. People would start staking claims to seats around 10 AM on Thursdays. Sometimes the overflow crowd would stand in the cemetery. Visitors came primarily from the mid-Atlantic region, but pilgrims from as far as Japan and Venezuela were reported. The minister of the Lutheran church allowed visitors to park in their lot, but parking and traffic were consistent problems and inconvenienced residents, though some local business owners appreciated the additional customers the apparition claims drew, particularly those who opened religious bookstores

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Georgetown University, 2000), 64, 127. Mayor James Hoover discussed Emmitsburg's government, attractions, and some history in my interview with him, 21 July 2009.

<sup>56</sup> Greg Tasker and Mary Gail Hare, "Following the Vision of the Virgin," *Sun*, 26 June 1994, 1B; Greg Tasker and Mary Gail Hare, "In Search of a Miracle, They Flock to Emmitsburg," *Sun*, 12 June 1994, 1B.

<sup>57</sup> Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 63-64.

in the wake of the vision claims. Some pilgrims moved to Emmitsburg to be close to the site of the visions.<sup>58</sup>

Visitors to the Thursday night prayer group reported many unusual experiences. Some saw the sun turn color or spin. Others reported their rosaries changed color or the smell of roses where there were none. Several people reported instances of physical healing, often involving children. Statues of the Virgin Mary were claimed to shed tears or emit light.<sup>59</sup> All of these are signs associated with apparition sites and would contribute to piquing the interest of believers.

The Sullivans started a nonprofit organization called Mission of Mercy which provides basic medical and dental care for those in need. Talone-Sullivan bought an RV

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<sup>58</sup> Anna Borgman, "Messages from Mary: Visions Appearing to Emmitsburg, MD., Woman Are Attracting Pilgrims from Around the World," *Washington Post*, 22 October 1994, B7; William Carr et al., interview by author, Emmitsburg, MD, 17 July 2009; Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 84-88; Sarah Fortney, "The Voices of Faith," *Frederick News-Post*, 8 January 2007, n.p.; Susie Glass, interview by author, Emmitsburg, MD, 21 July 2009; James Hoover, interview by author, Emmitsburg, MD, 21 July 2009; Greg Tasker, "Heavenly visions disturb small town's way of life," *Sun*, 15 September 1994, 1B. Forker consistently refers to Fr. Pehrsson as Fr. Pehrrson, but few other sources spell his name that way. He was pastor of St. Joseph Church from 1989 to 1996, when he was transferred to Michigan. I spoke with Fr. Pehrsson on the telephone in July 2009, but he declined my interview request in obedience to his Vincentian superiors. His account of the apparition events he witnessed in Emmitsburg can be found at the website, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg Testimony, Fr. Alfred Pehrsson, C.M., 1993-2006*, <http://www.archive.org/details/OurLadyOfEmmitsburgTestimonyFr.AlfredPehrssonC.m.1993-2006>, accessed 12 August 2011.

<sup>59</sup> Borgman, "Messages from Mary," B7; Raymond Buchheister, Jr., interview by author, Emmitsburg, MD, 20 July 2009; Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 90-92; Linda Holdcroft, "The Gift of Life: A Story of Healing By the Holy Spirit;" *Our Lady of Emmitsburg Testimony, Fr. Alfred Pehrsson, C.M., 1993-2006*, <http://www.archive.org/details/OurLadyOfEmmitsburgTestimonyFr.AlfredPehrssonC.m.1993-2006>, accessed 12 August 2011.



that was converted to a mobile medical unit thanks to donations. Mission of Mercy is based in Emmitsburg, but operates in sites in Maryland, Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Texas. Although Talone-Sullivan said the idea was inspired by a request from Jesus “to restore dignity and healing through love,” the organization does not proselytize.<sup>60</sup> Mission of Mercy has been recognized with awards from Frederick County, Mt. St. Mary’s, and the Tempe Board of Governors.<sup>61</sup> Sullivan saw the organization as connecting the Center of Jesus’ Divine Mercy (Phoenix/Scottsdale/Tempe) with the Center of Mary’s Immaculate Heart (Emmitsburg).<sup>62</sup>

Archbishop William Keeler of Baltimore learned of the events taking place at Emmitsburg. In June 1994 he met with Fr. Fred Jelly (Talone-Sullivan’s spiritual director and a professor of theology at Mt. St. Mary’s), Fr. George Jacobs, Fr. Louis Storms (Talone-Sullivan’s confessor), and Fr. Pehrsson. The archbishop asked Fr.

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<sup>60</sup> Connell, *Meetings with Mary*, 287; Faricy & Rooney, *Return to God*, 41; Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 99-102; Karen Gardner, “Mission of Mercy,” *Frederick News-Post*, 11 October 2009, n.p.; Mary Gail Hare, “Husband-wife team on mission of mercy,” *Sun*, 25 March 1996, 2B; Mary Gail Hare, “Mission of Mercy medical clinic on a roll for Frederick’s poor,” *Sun*, 16 December 1997, 8B; Mary Gail Hare, “Volunteer dentists fill a need,” *Sun*, 24 November 1996, 3B; Laurentin & Sbalchiero, *Dictionnaire des <<apparitions>> de la Vierge Marie*, 1334; Katie E. Leslie, “Surgeon general praises area clinic,” *Frederick News-Post*, 10 January 2006, n.p.; John Luciew, “Mobile clinic rolls on medical mission,” *Patriot-News*, 19 March 2005, B01; “Medical care on wheels,” *Sun*, 16 April 1996, 10A; Mission of Mercy, <http://www.amiissionofmercy.org>, accessed 25 May 2009; David Wenner, “Mission of Mercy: Mobile clinic to offer help in city,” *Patriot-News*, 28 September 2002, B01.

<sup>61</sup> Ashley Andyshak, “In Good Health: Local cardiologists, volunteers to be honored,” *Frederick News-Post*, 18 November 2008, n.p.; Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 110-111; Mary Gail Hare, “Traveling free medical clinic that offers ‘healing through love’ to receive award,” *Sun*, 8 December 1999, 3B.

<sup>62</sup> Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 111.

Pehrsson to read Talone-Sullivan's claimed messages from the Virgin Mary and Jesus before sharing them with the parish and not to use official letterhead when writing about the events, but otherwise to do what he felt was best. Archbishop Keeler also had the priests talk with the diocesan communications director about how to handle the growing media attention surrounding the events at Emmitsburg.<sup>63</sup> Archbishop Keeler met with Bishop O'Brien and decided to continue following the position of the Phoenix diocese, neutrality.<sup>64</sup>

Although church property could no longer be used, the faithful found creative venues for continuing to spread the word, including the virtual world—the Internet. New messages were posted on websites and via e-mail to over 4,000 list members. Supporters formed the Foundation of the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary in 2005 to disseminate the messages and organize prayer gatherings.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, 93-94; Laurentin & Sbalchiero, *Dictionnaire des <<apparitions>> de la Vierge Marie*, 1335; Our Lady of Emmitsburg Testimony, Fr. Alfred Pehrsson, C.M., 1993-2006, <http://www.archive.org/details/OurLadyOfEmmitsburgTestimonyFr.AlfredPehrssonC.m.1993-2006>, accessed 12 August 2011; Tasker & Hare, "Following the Vision of the Virgin," 1B.

<sup>64</sup> "Church officials to meet on visions of Mary," *Arizona Daily Star*, 15 June 1994, 4A; Greg Tasker, "Virgin Mary prayer services can continue," *Sun*, 14 June 1994, 2B.

<sup>65</sup> Fortney, "The Voices of Faith," *Frederick News-Post*, 8 January 2007, n.p.; Foundation of the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary, <http://www.centeroftheimmaculateheart.org>, accessed 25 May 2009; Hare, "Seeking validation of visions," 1A; Chris Landers, "Something About Mary," *City Paper*, 24 December 2008, n.p.; The Prophecies of Our Lady of Emmitsburg, <http://www.prourladyofemmitsburg.org/home.html>, accessed 18 June 2011; David Snyder, "Visions of Virgin Mary Divide Town's Flock," *Washington Post*, 11 May 2003, C1.

Over time, however, Archbishop Keeler's initial tolerance for the apparition events changed. In September 2000, the Archdiocese issued a press release expressing reservations about Talone-Sullivan's messages during the prayer meetings at St. Joseph Church, and ordered that the meetings be discontinued. Supporters of Talone-Sullivan had created a video, *Unbridled Mercy*, which the press release asked no longer be sold because the Church had misgivings about the message it sent, particularly its apocalyptic tone. Instead the press release encouraged the faithful to practice personal prayer and focus on the sacraments. Keeler named a three-priest commission to investigate the events in Emmitsburg. The Vatican affirmed Cardinal Keeler's actions. In June 2003, the Baltimore Archdiocese announced that Talone-Sullivan's apparitions were definitively not supernatural, and as such, no Church properties within the jurisdiction of the archdiocese could be used for any activities associated with her apparitions. Talone-Sullivan thanked the commission for their work and pledged obedience to the Church, though she continued to maintain that her apparitions were real. The prayer meetings continued at other sites, including a farm owned by a believer and a banquet hall. Some left St. Joseph's parish and crossed the state line to attend St. Mary's in Pennsylvania.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Amy Argetsinger, "A Lourdes in Foothills of MD.," *Washington Post*, 26 June 2001, B1; Archdiocese of Baltimore, Statement Concerning Archdiocesan Action Regarding Alleged Apparitions to Gianna Talone-Sullivan in Emmitsburg, Maryland, 13 September 2000, <https://www.archbalt.org/news-events/press-releases/alleged-apparitions.cfm>, accessed 25 May 2009; Raymond Buchheister, Jr., interview by author, Emmitsburg, MD, 20 July 2009; Sarah Fortney, "Sullivan maintains visions of Mary," *Frederick News-Post*, 5 February 2007, n.p.; Christopher Gaul, "Vatican Supports Action to Suppress Visionary," *Catholic Review*, 15 April 2003, n.p.; Mary Gail Hare, "Seeking validation of visions," *Sun*, 1 February 2003, 1A; Mary Gail Hare, "Woman told to stop services on visions," *Sun*, 14 September 2000, 1B; Mary Gail Hare, "Worshippers find St. Joseph closed after archdiocese's ruling on visions," *Sun*, 15 September 2000, 3B; "In Brief," *Washington Post*, 26 April 2003, B9; William Cardinal Keeler, 7 June 2003

The town of Emmitsburg and St. Joseph's parish divided over the visions. Many locals had seen the influx of outsiders as a negative, preventing them from getting into their own church or getting around their own town, and just wanted the issue to go away.<sup>67</sup> Some would even spit at Talone-Sullivan when they saw her around town. The town newspaper, the *Emmitsburg Dispatch*, included articles about the visions and tried to be objective, although the publisher, Ray Buchheister, participated in the prayer group. Tension over the apparitions as well as the economic downturn caused advertisers to withdraw their support, and with the paper's structure of free distribution rather than subscription, there was no money to continue. The paper folded at the end of 2008.<sup>68</sup>

In June 2008, Talone-Sullivan predicted the end of the world was imminent. Non-believers responded in force. The town had become associated with visions that the Catholic Church had ruled false. Michael Hillman, head of the town historical society and volunteer webmaster for the town website, took advantage of the opportunity to devote a portion of the website to debunking Talone-Sullivan's claims. Hillman knew it

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Decree, <https://www.archbalt.org/news-events/decrees/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&PageID=6475>, accessed 25 May 2009; Laurentin & Sbalchiero, *Dictionnaire des <<apparitions>> de la Vierge Marie*, 1335-1336; Tom Lobianco, "Church takes neutral stance on apparitions," *Frederick News-Post*, 8 December 2002, n.p.; Susan C. Nicol, "Church bans Virgin Mary prayer services," *Frederick News-Post*, 13 September 2000, n.p. Archbishop Keeler was appointed a cardinal in late 1994.

<sup>67</sup> James Hoover, interview by author, Emmitsburg, MD, 21 July 2009.

<sup>68</sup> Raymond Buchheister, Jr., interview by author, Emmitsburg, MD, 20 July 2009. Michael Hillman started a new monthly paper, the *Emmitsburg News-Journal*, after the collapse of the *Dispatch*. The bulk of the new paper is a journal section featuring creative writing and articles of local interest. Michael Hillman, interview by author, Emmitsburg, MD, 18 July 2009.

was a risk, but he felt a responsibility to respond to the messages Talone-Sullivan was spreading. Using the *Federalist Papers* as his model, Hillman organized a series of treatises by pseudonymous authors attacking the messages, though he was careful not to include any attacks on Talone-Sullivan herself. As Hillman explained, believers had been using the Internet to spread their movement, but they had not expected the Internet to be used against them.<sup>69</sup>

The Church took further action. Father Vincent O'Malley, the pastor of St. Joseph's since 2004, was clear that the Church had already ruled against these visions twice, that the Virgin Mary would not encourage disobedience to the Church, and that true visionaries obey the Church in silence. It is the responsibility of believers to yield to the Church and wait for time to tell. Father O'Malley and Hillman met with an auxiliary bishop to urge the Archdiocese to be clear and firm to end the division and tension in Emmitsburg. The tension was so high that summer that Father O'Malley feared that someone might be killed over the matter, including himself or Talone-Sullivan. "It was hellacious," Father O'Malley said, explaining that although in his life he had been mugged five times, held up at gunpoint, and involved in several legal actions, this situation was worse because "You can't reason with these people."<sup>70</sup> Archbishop Edwin O'Brien, who succeeded Cardinal Keeler as Archbishop of Baltimore, issued a pastoral advisory in October 2008 ordering Talone-Sullivan "not to communicate in any manner

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<sup>69</sup> Michael Hillman, interview by author, Emmitsburg, MD, 18 July 2009; Landers, "Something About Mary;" Our Lady of Emmitsburg Cult Watch, [http://www.emmitsburg.net/cult\\_watch/articles.htm](http://www.emmitsburg.net/cult_watch/articles.htm), accessed 25 May 2009.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Hillman, interview by author, Emmitsburg, MD, 18 July 2009; Father Vincent O'Malley, interview by author, Emmitsburg, MD, 20 July 2009.

whatsoever, written or spoken, electronic or printed, personally or through another in any church, public oratory, chapel, or any other place or locale, public or private within the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Baltimore any information of any type relating to or containing messages or locutions allegedly received from the Virgin Mother of God.” He also warned that the priests and followers who continued to promote these messages were doing a disservice to the Church.<sup>71</sup> Fr. O’Malley reported that the number of followers diminished after the 2008 advisory, and the town has become peaceful again.<sup>72</sup>

Believers continue to meet for prayer on occasion outside the Archdiocese of Baltimore. For instance, when the author was interviewing believers for this dissertation, she was encouraged to go to a gathering held in New Jersey in July 2009, but it was not possible with her travel plans. Flyers for this event describe the schedule as including Mass; a discussion of a new book by Dom Forker that covers “the many approved and yet-to-be authenticated Marian apparitions, including those in Emmitsburg, MD”; Talone-Sullivan, described as a “Mystic & Prophet,” leading the Rosary and presumably receiving a message from the Virgin Mary; and a lecture by Dr. Courtenay Bartholomew

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<sup>71</sup> Sarah Fortney, “Archbishop cautions against woman’s alleged apparitions,” *Frederick News-Post*, 15 October 2008, n.p.; Archbishop Edwin F. O’Brien, 8 October 2008 Pastoral Advisory, <https://www.archbalt.org/news-events/decrees/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&PageID=6473>, accessed 25 May 2009.

<sup>72</sup> Father Vincent O’Malley, interview by author, Emmitsburg, MD, 20 July 2009.

explaining how Talone-Sullivan's apocalyptic messages from Mary could be scientifically possible.<sup>73</sup>

In November 2010, Talone-Sullivan filed for divorce.<sup>74</sup> It is unclear how this may have affected the Mission of Mercy organization or if it has had any effect on the remaining believers for Talone-Sullivan to be twice-divorced, particularly after the Sullivans' claims that the Virgin Mary brought them together.

### **Our Lady of the Americas**

Similarly to Gianna Talone-Sullivan, Estela Ruiz was an educated, professional woman when she first experienced apparitions and locutions of the Virgin Mary. Ruiz earned a degree in education from Ottawa University in Phoenix in her 40s and a master's in education from Northern Arizona University. She became the administrator of bilingual programs for Phoenix's Murphy School District. Ruiz dyed her hair; wore makeup, fashionable clothes and jewelry; drove a new car; and made \$40,000 a year in the mid-1980s. She went to Mass on Sunday with her husband, Reyes, but she was embarrassed by his religiosity. Estela reported that she made fun of Reyes' fourth-grade education and low income, less than 1/5 of what she made, but she envied his devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Reyes had been devoted to the Virgin Mary his whole life, since his family prayed daily in a Marian shrine as farm workers in New Mexico. He worked as a minister to

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<sup>73</sup> Flyer for "An Afternoon with Our Lady," 25 July 2009. Can be found at <http://www.prouladyofemmitsburg.org/newjerseyprayerservice.html>, accessed 21 July 2009; Linda Holdcroft, interview by author, Knoxville, MD, 21 July 2009.

<sup>74</sup> "Today's Record," *York Sunday News*, 21 November 2010, 01-08. I have been unable to find any further information about whether this divorce was ever finalized.

farm workers for the Phoenix diocese from the 1960s through the 1980s and said the rosary at his own home shrine several times a day. Many Latino Catholics have altars in their homes, particularly in the American Southwest. These altars include statues of the Virgin Mary, Jesus, and other saints, flowers, and candles. The altar serves as a manifestation of divine presence in their home, reducing their dependence on the institutional church. Latinos can use this devotion to relieve oppression or exploitation in their work or society, illness, or personal problems through petitions to the figures represented on the altar. Believers develop a personal relationship with God, Jesus, Mary, and the saints shown through their use of familiar forms of address and treatment of the statuary in response to prayer. For example, if a prayer was not answered the way the believer wanted, a statue might be put in a less prominent place on the altar or turned to face the wall.<sup>75</sup>

In the 1970s and 1980s, Reyes was involved with the *encuentro* (“encounter”) movement. *Encuentro* started in 1972 and became a way for Latinos to confront the Church about its failure to meet Latinos’ needs. Because the Church had moved away from a national parish model, Latinos often felt marginalized, confined to Spanish Masses in the church basement instead of finding a source of social cohesion as earlier immigrants had. The Church’s emphasis on multicultural outreach rather than efforts specifically targeted to Latinos further contributed to their discomfort, as did the

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<sup>75</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 28-29; Philip E. Lampe, “The Practice of Religion Among Hispanics,” in *Hispanics in the Church: Up from the Cellar*, ed. Philip E. Lampe (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1994), 54; C. Gilbert Romero, *Hispanic Devotional Piety: Tracing the Biblical Roots* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 84, 92, 96.



Church's treatment of Latinos as immigrants even though many had lived in the US for generations. The Encuentro meetings gave Latinos opportunities to voice their concerns and develop strategies to combat discrimination in the Church. Meetings were held at diocesan, regional, and national levels with mixed results. While some dioceses significantly improved their ministry to Latinos, others never acted on their plans. The movement raised awareness in the Church about the need to serve the Latino community and taught Latinos to work together. Starting in 1992, all candidates for the priesthood had to learn Spanish and receive cultural sensitivity training for Latinos.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Allan Figueroa Deck, "The Challenge of Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity to Hispanic Catholicism in the United States," (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, Working Paper Series 24, No. 1, Spring 1992), 26; Allan Figueroa Deck, "The Challenge of Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity to Hispanic Catholicism," in *Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U.S.: Issues and Concerns*, ed. Jay P. Dolan and Allan Figueroa Deck (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 429-430; Ana María Díaz-Stevens, "Latinas and the Church," in *Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U.S.: Issues and Concerns*, ed. Jay P. Dolan and Allan Figueroa Deck (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 258; Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 217-218; Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, *One Church Many Cultures: The Challenge of Diversity* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1987), 155-157; Isidro Lucas, *The Browning of America: The Hispanic Revolution in the American Church* (Chicago: Fides/Claretian, 1981), 52-54; Timothy Matovina, *Latino Catholicism: Transformation in America's Largest Church* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 79; Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 29; Orlando O. Espín, "Popular Catholicism among Latinos," in *Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U.S.: Issues and Concerns*, ed. Jay P. Dolan and Allan Figueroa Deck (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 340; Arlene Sánchez Walsh, "The Mexican American Religious Experience," in *Introduction to the U.S. Latina and Latino Religious Experience*, ed. Hector Avalos (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), 23; Moises Sandoval, *On the Move: A History of the Hispanic Church in the United States* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 79-84; Moisés Sandoval, "The Organization of a Hispanic Church," in *Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U.S.: Issues and Concerns*, ed. Jay P. Dolan and Allan Figueroa Deck (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 141-143, 146; Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, "The Emergence of a Social Identity among Latino Catholics: An

In 1985 Reyes became a national representative for farm workers, something that Estela said annoyed her, as she was trying to fit in with educated people and felt above farm workers and “holy rollers.” Because she was focusing so much on her career, she was criticized by her family and community. They accused her of trying to weaken her Latina identity. Her husband was unhappy with her lack of Catholic devotion. However, Reyes was supportive of Estela’s career, and Estela acknowledged that she had more education and opportunities than many Mexican-American women her age or older.<sup>77</sup>

Estela was born in El Paso, Texas in 1936 to Manuel and Delfina Aguilera.<sup>78</sup> She and her three brothers grew up in Lordsburg, New Mexico. Her mother was a seamstress and provided for the family since Manuel was an alcoholic until he had a religious conversion in his 50s. In 1954 she married Reyes. They moved to Phoenix in 1957 and raised seven children.<sup>79</sup> While Estela was going to school and building her career, her mother’s health deteriorated, and Estela traveled back and forth between

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Appraisal,” in *Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U.S.: Issues and Concerns*, ed. Jay P. Dolan and Allan Figueroa Deck (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 97, 120.

<sup>77</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 30-31.

<sup>78</sup> Collins & Petrisko, *Our Lady of the Americas*, unnumbered introduction; Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 34. Collins and Petrisko say that Estela’s maiden name was also Ruiz, but Nabhan-Warren says it was Aguilera. The two sources also disagree about where Estela fits in the birth order. Both agree that she has three brothers, but Collins and Petrisko say Estela is the youngest child. Nabhan-Warren says she is the eldest. Nabhan-Warren is a scholar and lived with the Ruizes, so I am more inclined to see her information as accurate.

<sup>79</sup> Collins & Petrisko, *Our Lady of the Americas*, introduction; Carmen Duarte, “Miracles happen, lives change when Blessed Mother speaks,” *Arizona Daily Star*, 12 March 2000, 1A.

Lordesburg and Phoenix, which Estela implicates caused her own health to decline. Estela said she went into counseling to deal with her feelings of guilt for her mother's suffering. When Delfina died, Estela put even more effort into her career.<sup>80</sup> Historian David Blackbourn suggests that the loss or absence of a mother, sense of emotional loss, and unhappy family are common among Marian visionaries, a pattern that Estela Ruiz fits.<sup>81</sup>

In 1988, Reyes took a trip to Medjugorje while Estela stayed home. He had already traveled to Medjugorje once before. Their son Reyes Jr. was going through drug rehabilitation and their son Armando was divorcing for a second time, so Estela recalled being preoccupied. While Reyes was away, Estela twice heard a voice come from a painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe hanging in their home.<sup>82</sup> She did not tell anyone about this because she feared she would be "put away" for hearing voices.<sup>83</sup> She started attending daily mass at 6 AM at St. Catherine of Siena Church and was more open to Reyes' spirituality, which Reyes acknowledged surprised him when he returned home. He had dedicated his family to the Virgin Mary while he was in Medjugorje, but he had not expected Estela to agree to help their family become more spiritual. She started

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<sup>80</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 37-38.

<sup>81</sup> David Blackbourn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 23-24. While Blackbourn's book is primarily about nineteenth-century Germany, as the subtitle indicates, he also offers a section about apparitions and visionaries elsewhere.

<sup>82</sup> Collins & Petrisko, *Our Lady of the Americas*, unnumbered "History of the Apparition;" Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 40-41.

<sup>83</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 41.

having dreams of Mary. Apparitions began in December 1988. Reyes had met Fr. Spaulding during his October 1987 trip to Medjugorje and knew at least two people in Scottsdale, including Fr. Spaulding, were receiving messages from the Virgin Mary, so the Ruizes called him once Estela's apparitions started. Fr. Spaulding advised them to hold family prayer sessions. Estela had met Fr. Spaulding in the fall of 1988 and had been skeptical of him, but he became the family's spiritual advisor until December 1989 when Bishop O'Brien told them it was inappropriate since he was investigating both of them at the same time and the Ruizes had to find another spiritual director. During that year, the Scottsdale nine and the Ruiz family became close, according to Estela and Fr. Spaulding. They had joint prayer meetings weekly at the Ruiz house. Stefanie Staab received a vision where the Virgin Mary said that Estela was to be the group's spiritual mother; this gave Estela authority even over Fr. Spaulding to praise or punish as the Virgin Mary wished.<sup>84</sup> Fr. Spaulding told a reporter, "Our Lady has been sent here to the desert."<sup>85</sup>

At Mary's request, the Ruizes built a shrine in the backyard of their modest home bordering a trailer park. Once the apparitions became public in the spring of 1989, hundreds of pilgrims came each year. The shrine included homemade stations of the cross, a stone altar with statues and candles, a picture of the Virgin Mary with blue

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<sup>84</sup> Collins & Petrisko, *Our Lady of the Americas*, "History of the Apparition;" Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale*, 53; Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 25, 41-43, 53, 71, 75-76; Kim Sue Lia Perkes and Julia Lobaco, "Faithful drawn to Virgin Mary sightings," *Arizona Republic*, 16 August 1989, A7; Petrisko, "Our Lady of the Americas," 8; Zimdars-Swartz, "The Marian Revival in American Catholicism," 232.

<sup>85</sup> Perkes, "Voices in the Desert," G1.

curtains around it, and papier-mâché versions of a crucifix and Our Lady of Guadalupe. Reyes built the altar, the statue of Guadalupe, and most of the statues on the altar. He also created photo collages with the Ruizes at the center. For five years, Estela experienced apparitions of the Virgin Mary every Tuesday and Saturday morning. Estela would type the messages, which came in either English or Spanish, into her computer, then print copies in both languages to be distributed to the people who came to her backyard rosaries. Messages for the public stopped in 1998, though Estela still received occasional visits after that. The explanation for the public messages ending was that the Virgin Mary had done all she could and it was now up to her children to make way for Jesus' Second Coming. The private messages continued, though less frequently. Estela was distraught, but the Virgin Mary had said what she felt she needed to say, the Ruizes were spiritually stronger, and they had started a community of evangelizers. Estela felt empowered by the Virgin Mary to complete her master's degree, finish her contract with the school district, and become principal of a charter school run by her family.<sup>86</sup>

Although initially Estela avoided publicity, she became a minor celebrity in the early 1990s. She appeared on *Sally Jessy Raphaël*, *Geraldo*, and *The Joan Rivers Show* and was sought out as a speaker for Catholic and Marian groups. Estela and Reyes traveled to 35 states and 11 countries to give talks about the messages she was receiving

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<sup>86</sup> Duarte, "Miracles happen, lives change when Blessed Mother speaks," 1A; Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 126-127; Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 6, 26, 45-48, 100; Kim Sue Lia Perkes, "Holy Visions in S. Phoenix: Virgin Mary sightings draw faithful to home," *Arizona Republic*, 16 August 1989, B2; Perkes & Lobaco, "Faithful drawn to Virgin Mary sightings," A1; "Woman Says Virgin Mary Visits," *USA Today*, 18 August 1989, 2A; Zimdars-Swartz, "The Marian Revival in American Catholicism," 230-232.

from Mary. Being a visionary was difficult and demanding.<sup>87</sup> While some found Estela inspiring and even moved to Phoenix to be near her, she also had to deal with some “crazies” who would not leave her alone. Fr. Spaulding also had this problem, referring to them as “groupies who just go from shrine to shrine.”<sup>88</sup> However, the apparitions also enabled Estela to bring her family together, become an important religious figure in her community, and start a new career. They offered spiritual renewal on both individual and collective levels, emotional and ethnic healing, and stronger ties to the Catholic faith, especially with Fr. Spaulding and the Scottsdale visionaries. The Ruizes were able to “expand the boundaries of official and popular piety” within Catholicism.<sup>89</sup> The messages Estela received encouraged evangelism, not just praying the rosary. They emphasized that people have a choice to follow Mary and have reason to hope.<sup>90</sup>

Before Estela began receiving messages from Mary, she felt tension between her roles as an educated career woman and as a Latina wife, mother, and grandmother. Scholar David Badillo argues, “Within Latino communities it is often women, mothers, and grandmothers who are the leaders of popular religion. They offer blessings, arrange home altars, say the prayers, provide children and grandchildren with religious

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<sup>87</sup> Duarte, “Miracles happen, lives change when Blessed Mother speaks,” 1A; Connie Mabin, “Messages of Peace, Hope Delivered at Pittsburgh Medjugorje Conference,” *Erie Times-News*, 7 October 1996, n.p.; Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 49-51; Perkes, “Holy Visions in S. Phoenix,” *Arizona Republic*, 16 August 1989, B2.

<sup>88</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 50.

<sup>89</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 52-53.

<sup>90</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 83-84.

instruction, and lead the family in religious song. The strong Marian spirituality among Latinos results from the dominant role of women in popular religion.”<sup>91</sup> Badillo suggests this role emerged due to a lack of priests who understood Latino culture, leading many Latino Catholics to develop a religious life around personal devotions rather than a parish. Salesian Roger Luna suggests this priest shortage resulted from a lack of interest by the Spanish in creating native clergy, discrimination against Latinos by US priests, limited education among Latinos, and that the Church takes Latinos for granted. Priests often focused on regular Mass attendance, proper individual moral behavior, and the catechism, instead of the issues of direct import to Latinos, such as social justice, help for the needy, and the fight for just wages. This situation has led many Latinos to consider other options, whether pursuing the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, remaining Catholic without participating in the institutional church, or joining evangelical or Pentecostal Protestant churches.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> David A. Badillo, *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), xv. Other sources supporting the significant role played by mothers and older women in Latino religion include Tarcisio Beal, “Hispanics and the Roman Catholic Church in the United States,” in *Hispanics and the Church: Up from the Cellar*, ed. Philip E. Lampe (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1994), 41; Ana María Díaz-Stevens and Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, *Recognizing the Latino Resurgence in U.S. Religion: The Emmaus Paradigm* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 80-81; Díaz-Stevens, “Latinas and the Church,” 241-242; Orlando O. Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 4-5; and Gilberto M. Hinojosa, “The Mexican-American Church, 1930-1965,” in *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church, 1900-1965*, ed. Jay P. Dolan and Gilberto M. Hinojosa (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 109.

<sup>92</sup> Badillo, *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church*, 189, 194; Espín, *The Faith of the People*, 143; Fitzpatrick, *One Church Many Cultures*, 126-127; David F. Gómez, “El Movimiento Chicano,” in *Prophets Denied Honor: An Anthology on the Hispanic Church of the United States*, ed. Antonio M. Stevens Arroyo (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis

The Charismatic Renewal movement and evangelical and Pentecostal Protestant churches can appeal to Latinos because they fill a perceived void in the Catholic Church. These groups are similar to popular Catholicism in that they offer expressive, individual worship, can take place outside regular church hours, and do not require the presence of clergy. Charismatic Renewal emerged from interaction between Catholics and Pentecostals, particularly in the US, and is most commonly identified with speaking in tongues, receiving prophecy, and miraculous healings. More than five million Latino Catholics participate in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement.<sup>93</sup> Charismatic Renewal enables participants to have the personal faith experience they seek without the cultural rupture of leaving the Catholic Church. In addition, according to Badillo, “Unlike Latino Pentecostals, Charismatics tend to retain sympathy for the traditional Marian devotions central to Latino popular Catholicism.”<sup>94</sup>

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Books, 1980), 132; Dean R. Hoge, William D. Dinges, Mary Johnson, and Juan L. Gonzalez, Jr., *Young Adult Catholics: Religion in the Culture of Choice* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 119-120, 129-130; Roger B. Luna, “Why So Few Mexican-American Priests?” in *Prophets Denied Honor: An Anthology on the Hispano Church of the United States*, ed. Antonio M. Stevens Arroyo (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1980), 160.

<sup>93</sup> James Hitchcock, “Catholic Activist Conservatism in the United States,” in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 125-126; James P. McCartin, “‘The Love of Things Unseen’: Catholic Prayer and the Moral Imagination in the Twentieth-Century United States,” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2003), 211-219; Edward D. O’Connor, C.S.C., *I Am Sending You Prophets: The Role of Apparitions in the History of the Church* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing Company, 2007), 334-335; Arlene Sánchez Walsh, “The Mexican American Religious Experience,” in *Introduction to the U.S. Latina and Latino Religious Experience*, ed. Hector Avalos (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2004), 23, 31.

<sup>94</sup> Badillo, *Latinos and the New Immigrant Church*, 195.



Second only to Charismatic Renewal in participants, the Cursillo movement offers Catholics a way to reconnect with their personal faith. It is especially popular among Latinos, though non-Latinos also participate and non-Catholics have even formed their own similar efforts, such as the Walk to Emmaus. The Cursillo was the first lay movement to emerge from Latino Catholicism and expand to English-speaking Catholics and Protestants. Historian and theologian Timothy Matovina states, “one is hard pressed to find a Latino Catholic leader, especially those active during the first fervor of the movement in the 1960s and 1970s, who has never had any involvement or contact with the Cursillo.”<sup>95</sup> Indeed, religion scholars Ana María Díaz-Stevens and Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo concur, “Almost every Latino lay leader was a Cursillista. Moreover, there seemed to be an expectation that every practicing Latino Catholic would eventually make a Cursillo.”<sup>96</sup> Journalist and Latino scholar Moises Sandoval defines the *Cursillo* as, “a three-day program, experienced only once, of renewal and spiritual discipline. It combines charismatic and group dynamics techniques with an emphasis on sacrifice, confession, and physical acts of penance.”<sup>97</sup> The *cursillo de cristiandad*, or “short or little courses in Christianity,” aims at a renewal and revitalization of Catholicism, particularly in terms of language, which takes place primarily during a weekend retreat but also involves follow-up gatherings to refresh the participants’ commitment to

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<sup>95</sup> Matovina, *Latino Catholicism*, 109-110, 112, 130; Kristy Nabhan-Warren, *The Cursillo Movement in America: Catholics, Protestants, and Fourth-Day Spirituality* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 9.

<sup>96</sup> Díaz-Stevens and Stevens-Arroyo, *Recognizing the Latino Resurgence in U.S. Religion: The Emmaus Paradigm*, 137.

<sup>97</sup> Sandoval, *On the Move*, 84.

enthusiasm, joy, and change in the Church. While its initial structure focused on empowering lay men to reform their Church, faith, and environment by emphasizing their connection to the living Christ, the movement eventually developed separate retreats for women and is overseen by clergy. After beginning in Mallorca in 1944, the first Cursillo in the US took place in Texas in 1957, led by two Spanish pilots. As military members who had participated moved elsewhere, they brought the Cursillo with them and contributed to its geographic spread. Initially non-Spanish speakers disdained the Cursillo, but by the late 1960s, more non-Latino Christians were drawn to it as part of the religious experimentation taking place in both Protestant and Catholic churches. The Cursillo movement, with its lay leadership, use of native language, and emphasis on a personal conversion experience, anticipated some of the changes that would come with Vatican II. In 1967, more than a quarter of Latino Catholics rated the Cursillo as important, more than Vatican II. By 1981 Cursillo weekends were available in every US diocese. No country has a higher number of Cursillo centers than the US, and they are particularly popular in the Southwest. Because one makes the Cursillo only once, it became less prominent as people had done it and moved on to other activities, but it is still an important movement, especially among Latinos. There are nearly one million *cursillistas* (people who have participated) in the US today, including all members of the Ruiz family, and Reyes helped lead cursillos in Phoenix for most of his adult life.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Díaz-Stevens and Stevens-Arroyo, *Recognizing the Latino Resurgence in U.S. Religion*, 137, 193; Hinojosa, “The Mexican-American Church, 1930-1965,” 118; Marcene Marcoux, *Cursillo: Anatomy of a Movement: The Experience of Spiritual Renewal* (New York: Lambeth Press, 1982), 6, 20-21, 25-26, 36, 72, 76; Matovina, *Latino Catholicism*, 112; Nabhan-Warren, *The Cursillo Movement in America*, 18, 43,

The Virgin Mary appeared to Estela Ruiz at a time when South Phoenix was suffering from gang warfare, urban blight, and economic recessions. In 1993 Estela, her family, and some other members of the barrio formed a group called Mary's Ministries to spread the messages in South Phoenix and beyond. Conservative Catholics, they travel to several US cities with large Mexican-American populations and since 2000 to South and Central America, Africa, and Western Europe. They spread the idea that people can avert the triumph of evil through hard work, prayer, and a diligent spiritual life. They see rosaries, scapulars, and t-shirts of the Virgin of the Americas as signs of protection in an evil world, while faith courses, community activism and service, and conversions are signs of the Virgin's authenticity.<sup>99</sup> Mary's Ministries emphasizes developing a personal relationship with Jesus, starting the conversion process, and giving testimony, all features generally associated with evangelicalism. Followers of the Virgin of the Americas see Catholicism as the "true religion," but are happy to tell of non-Catholic pilgrims to the shrine, that the Virgin appeared for all, and that she can make anyone's faith stronger. Mary's Ministries moves beyond the idea of prayer as a weapon to more direct action, such as establishing a community charter school and efforts toward urban revitalization. Clearly they see an ongoing struggle between good and evil, but Jesus will win, believers can help, but those who do not accept Mary and Jesus will die.<sup>100</sup> Believers see themselves as fulfilling a covenant with Mary.

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47, 51, 57, 60, 65, 67; Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 140; Stevens-Arroyo, "The Emergence of a Social Identity among Latino Catholics: An Appraisal," 102.

<sup>99</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 86, 88-89.

<sup>100</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 98-100.

Mary's Ministries is unique among apparition groups because the messages were a catalyst for Catholic evangelization, social justice, and urban and social reform efforts. The development of prayer groups is nearly universal at apparition sites, but widespread reform took place only in South Phoenix. Members of Mary's Ministries believe the Virgin Mary appeared to Estela to save the Americas from corruption, materialism, atheism, racism, poverty, and violence. Despite the bishop not officially approving the apparitions, Mary's Ministries is supported by priests in Arizona, the Southwest, and Central and South America, as well as the International Director of the Vatican's evangelical initiatives, Fr. Tom Forrest, C.S.R.<sup>101</sup> The organization is more concerned with "simplicity" than "complex theology."<sup>102</sup> It is an example of a new direction for American Catholicism— grassroots movements and lay people who cultivate relationships with priests and bishops, complicating what it means to be Catholic. They follow the hierarchy while also being countercultural, searching for identity, and fusing official and popular Catholicism. Mary's Ministries has embraced Vatican II's emphasis on evangelism and ecumenism while remaining loyal to pre-Vatican II rituals they feel the current Church has abandoned and to Catholic triumphalism, the idea that the Catholic Church is the one true faith. Mary's Ministries tries to reclaim Latinos for the Catholic Church amidst a trend toward Mormonism and Pentecostalism by redefining the meaning of being Catholic and connecting with the needs of the Hispanic community. They admire the successful evangelism of Mormons and Pentecostals but also feel Catholicism is under attack, leading them to adopt some of the methods of Mormons and Pentecostals

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<sup>101</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 105.

<sup>102</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 109.

to win back or keep Latinos for the Catholic Church. Many Hispanic Catholics want a conversion experience, personal relationship with Jesus, and social reform, so Mary's Ministries tries to provide this in a Catholic context.<sup>103</sup> While acknowledging that many Catholics resist the charismatic or evangelical elements of the organization as "not Catholic," the organization believes these elements attract Latinos.<sup>104</sup> For many Hispanic Catholics, imagination, symbols, and rituals are more important than formal theology.<sup>105</sup> The Ruizes recognize that they need the support of the institutional church, but they do not want the Church to take over the organization. The sense of community offered by the organization can help promote Anglo-Latino interaction. Most Anglo participants believe in Estela's apparitions and are Marianists anyway. The goal of creating a family atmosphere encourages cultural understanding on both sides. Mary's Ministries illustrates how the laity are shaping twenty-first century American Catholicism by blurring the lines between official and popular Catholicism, mixing Catholic rituals, beliefs, and symbols with Hispanic needs and desires and Protestant evangelicalism. This lay-driven organization blends evangelical Protestantism with classic Catholic devotionalism and charismatic Catholicism.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Deck, "The Challenge of Evangelical/Pentecostal Christianity to Hispanic Catholicism," 426; Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 105-106, 109, 123, 136-137.

<sup>104</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 138.

<sup>105</sup> Allan Figueroa Deck, S.J., "'A Pox on Both Your Houses': A View of Catholic Conservative-Liberal Polarities from the Hispanic Margin," in *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, ed. Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 97.

<sup>106</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 138, 146-147.

The Ruizes have annual retreats the first weekend in December to commemorate the Virgin's visits to Estela. The family and Mary's Ministries have hosted the retreats since 1990. They honor the appearances of the Virgin, but more and more focus on the evangelism of Mary's Ministries. Family and assistants spruce up the house, yard, and shrine. Early retreats emphasized Marian devotion and the Virgin Mary's relationship with the Ruizes. 1998 was the first retreat where communion was offered, necessitating more priestly involvement. Pilgrims still come to the retreats even though there are no additional public messages from Mary, hoping for miracles and believing the place is sacred. Rival gangs visit the shrine peacefully. Believers have a procession through the streets of South Phoenix, praying for their neighborhood and seeing their rosaries as protective.<sup>107</sup> There are reports of healings, and events such as the sun spinning, rosaries turning color, or smelling roses where there are none are referred to as Mary's "candy kisses."<sup>108</sup> As early as 1989, a pilgrim reported tap water from the Ruiz home smelled rose-scented.<sup>109</sup> However, the retreats host few non-Mary's Ministries members since the interest in apparitions seems to have died down after the year 2000. Those pilgrims who do come learned of the site by word of mouth, Marian conferences and conventions, and the Internet. The shrine has also become more institutionalized, with greater clerical involvement and a stronger emphasis on Jesus and the language and rituals of the

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<sup>107</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 180-181, 188, 190, 193, 209-210.

<sup>108</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 197-203, 205; "Ruiz Family's Story of Conversion," *Our Lady Queen of Peace* (McKees Rocks, PA: Pittsburgh Center for Peace, Winter 1994), 8.

<sup>109</sup> Perkes & Lobaco, "Faithful drawn to Virgin Mary sightings," A7.

Church.<sup>110</sup> According to anthropologist Kristy Nabhan-Warren, “Mary’s Ministries has eclipsed the Virgin’s messages.”<sup>111</sup>

Estela Ruiz initially gained legitimacy as a visionary because of her connection with the Scottsdale visionaries, but she wanted to remain distinct.<sup>112</sup> Through her involvement with efforts to improve her community, related to education or race, and the involvement of her family, she achieved such a distinct status that religious historian Sandra Zimdars-Swartz and writer Mark Garvey write about both groups without acknowledging they were connected in any way beyond their location and timing.<sup>113</sup> The two groups do not differ simply because of race or class. Although the Ruizes sought to improve life in the barrio, they were middle class. Estela was well educated, as were most of her children-- all but one earned college degrees.<sup>114</sup> They worked to improve the situation of Latinos in the Catholic Church, but they also reached out to Anglos at the shrine and in their lives. The Scottsdale visionaries emphasized their willingness to leave their upwardly mobile lifestyles and their previous lack of religiosity before their Marian encounters just as Estela Ruiz experienced. The main differences were that Estela was middle-aged while the Scottsdale visionaries (with the exception of Fr. Spaulding) were

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<sup>110</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 207-209.

<sup>111</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 212.

<sup>112</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 72.

<sup>113</sup> Garvey, *Searching for Mary*, 124-125; Zimdars-Swartz, “The Marian Revival in American Catholicism,” 230, 232.

<sup>114</sup> Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio*, 68.

young adults or teenagers, and the Scottsdale visions ended earlier and without the development of organizations that Ruiz's longer-lasting apparitions inspired.



## CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

In his article, “Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity,” Catholic historian Robert A. Orsi describes Marian apparitions as moments where “the transcendent broke into time.” During these events, pilgrims not only feel closer to the Virgin Mary but also feel that she will act on their needs, desires, and fears.<sup>1</sup> While Orsi’s article focuses primarily on the apparitions at Knock, Ireland, and Lourdes, France, which both took place in the nineteenth century, he argues that these events are not limited to a particular moment in time. Apparition claims have happened throughout history and continue to occur in the modern world. Pilgrims look for relationships with the Virgin Mary but also with fellow devotees of Marian culture, and apparitions are a fundamental part of that culture, though they may still surprise even believers when a new apparition takes place.<sup>2</sup> Orsi suggests, “What is really real about the Marian event...is the presence of the supernatural in relationship with humans and the power of the needs, fears, desires, and imaginings, conscious and unconscious, that this exchange unlocks.”<sup>3</sup> Pilgrims want to share their experience with others, whether by telling about their interaction with the Virgin Mary or a visionary or by physical items such as bottles of water or books of messages. Orsi argues that it is important for historians to study

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<sup>1</sup> Robert A. Orsi, “Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity,” *Historically Speaking: The Bulletin of the Historical Society* Vol. IX, No. 7 (September/October 2008): 12.

<sup>2</sup> Orsi, “Abundant History,” 14.

<sup>3</sup> Orsi, “Abundant History,” 15.

these events in order to understand the realness of Mary's power and presence to her devout and how it affects the way they relate to the world.<sup>4</sup>

This dissertation has attempted to do just that. By studying apparition claims in a variety of locations in the United States since World War Two, the preceding chapters have illustrated the development of religious movements within Catholicism, individual believers assessing which sites are worthy of belief outside of the authority of the Catholic Church, and the importance of women within apparition culture, as visionaries and as pilgrims. They have also revealed how widespread the belief in these events has been as part of the religious practice of thousands of Americans.

The first chapter explored the role of Catholic anti-communism in the Cold War United States, especially as demonstrated in the messages received by Mary Ann Van Hoof at Necedah, Wisconsin. This was the only chapter that dealt with an actual schism that occurred when believers refused to obey the authority of the institutional Church.

The second chapter discussed the role of the Second Vatican Council and the changes that resulted from it in the ways that American Catholicism and Catholic identity changed in the twentieth century. Some of these changes directly contributed to the growth of the Marian visionary movement in the United States.

The third chapter compared six apparition claims in Ohio in urban, suburban, and rural parts of the state by visionaries from a variety of backgrounds. These apparitions had not previously been the subject of academic study. The chapter revealed more information about the development of pilgrimage culture in the United States.

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<sup>4</sup> Orsi, "Abundant History," 15.

The fourth chapter discussed the apparition claims of Nancy Fowler in Conyers, Georgia. The chapter focused particularly on the consumerism that surrounds most modern apparition events. Many pilgrims purchase items while they are visiting a site as well as souvenirs of their journey. Although Fowler was the most famous visionary of the apparition circuit during the 1980s and 1990s, she lost her family and went bankrupt.

The fifth chapter explored the apparition claims of eleven visionaries which started in the Phoenix/Scottsdale, Arizona area, and continued in Emmitsburg, Maryland. This chapter demonstrated the appeal of Marian apparitions across race and class, as the Scottsdale visionaries were white and generally upper-middle-class, while the Phoenix visionary was Latina and appealed to people living in the barrio.

Many of the visionaries were in contact with each other, creating a sort of apparition network. In addition to the visionaries who lived in the same general area, such as the Scottsdale/Phoenix visionaries and the four in the Greater Cincinnati area, Father Leroy Smith of Ohio talked with Nancy Fowler in Georgia and Father Jack Spaulding in Arizona. Rita Ring read Gianna Talone-Sullivan's book. Some appeared on talk shows. This reinforced the idea that the Virgin Mary was working through multiple visionaries at the same time and attracted attention for all of them. This is an important contribution that the dissertation makes in contrast to previous studies that focused on a particular apparition in isolation.

The dissertation also benefits from oral histories. The interviews conducted with city officials, church officials, neighbors, believers, and journalists contribute to a better understanding of what happens at apparition events, why people attend, and how sites are affected when apparition claims are made in a particular location. The people who live in

areas where these events take place are affected whether they take the apparitions seriously or not.

The development of parachurch organizations around most of the apparition events demonstrates an important religious framework outside of the traditional division between a church and popular religion. This form of religion has grown particularly since World War Two in the US and is worthy of more scholarly attention. Nearly all of the apparition events that I studied developed a parachurch organization in response.

Sacred space is another issue that can be seen throughout the dissertation. Pilgrims assign meaning to particular locations where they believe that the Virgin Mary has appeared to a visionary. However, in some cases, they assign meaning to the visionary, even as the visionary moves. This can be seen in the Ohio chapter when vision events shifted from Cold Spring, Kentucky, to Norwood, Ohio. Another example is Gianna Talone-Sullivan, who moved from Scottsdale, Arizona, to Emmitsburg, Maryland, then proclaimed her messages from a variety of locations, both physical and online. Believers were willing to travel to wherever she was speaking or read her messages on the Internet. They could create their own sacred space.

One persistent idea across several of the apparition claims was that the Virgin Mary was singling out the United States for special attention. This was particularly visible with several of the Ohio apparitions. Sister Mildred Neuzil said that the Virgin Mary wanted her to promote a special devotion to Our Lady of America, which involved creating a medal and a statue. She also said that the United States had a particular

responsibility to lead the world to peace and spiritual renewal.<sup>5</sup> Maureen Sweeney-Kyle reported that Mary had blessed the Maranatha Spring and Shrine as “the Lourdes of this continent.”<sup>6</sup> The Batavia visionary claimed that the Virgin Mary wanted particular priests to be her ambassadors, with Father Smith as the main ambassador, responsible for the middle part of the country; Father Donald Rinfret of Maryland would be the ambassador for the East until his death in 1997; and Father Lawrence Sweeney of Utah was ambassador for the West.<sup>7</sup> The parachurch group that formed at Necedah, Wisconsin, was called For My God and My Country, and the site features a shrine with statues of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.<sup>8</sup> Gianna Talone-Sullivan saw the

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Heintz, *A Guide to Apparitions of Our Blessed Virgin Mary* (Sacramento, CA: Gabriel Press, 1995), 204-205; René Laurentin and Patrick Sbalchiero, *Dictionnaire des <<apparitions>> de la Vierge Marie: Inventaire des origines à nos jours: Méthodologie, bilan interdisciplinaire, prospective* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), 304; Peter Mullen, *Shrines of Our Lady: A Guide to Fifty of the World's Most Famous Marian Shrines* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 168; Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, *Our Lady of America* (n.p.: 1993), 12, 25, 38.

<sup>6</sup> Laura Weldon, “Mixed Messages: Ministry in Lorain County has its believers— and skeptics,” *Plain Dealer*, 24 September 2005, E1.

<sup>7</sup> *Personal Revelations: Continued Guidance of Our Lady of Light* Vol. 5 (Ft. Mitchell, KY: Our Lady of Light Publications, 2005), 5; Pryor, “Mary’s Place, God’s Time,” 143; Reck, *Dear Marian Movement*, 202; Gerald G. Ross, ed., *Personal Revelations of Our Lady of Light* (Ft. Mitchell, KY: Our Lady of Light Publications, 1992), 26; Ross, *Personal Revelations of Our Lady of Light* Vol. 4, xii, 12-14, 16, 24.

<sup>8</sup> *The Apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Necedah, Wisconsin, USA* (Necedah, WI: For God and My Country, 1978), 16-20; David G. Bromley and Rachel S. Bobbitt, “Visions of the Virgin Mary: The Organizational Development of Marian Apparitional Movements,” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* Vol. 14, No. 3 (February 2011), 17-18; Peter W. Wood, “Pilgrimage and Heresy: The Transformation of Faith at a Shrine in Wisconsin,” in Alan Morinis, ed., *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 125; Peter Wyatt Wood, “Quoting Heaven: Narrative, Ritual, and Trope in an Heretical Shrine of the Virgin Mary in Rural Necedah, Wisconsin,” PhD diss. (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester, 1986), 743-746; Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz, *Encountering*

Phoenix/Scottsdale/Tempe area as the Center of Jesus' Divine Mercy and Emmitsburg, Maryland as the Center of Mary's Immaculate Heart.<sup>9</sup> While all of the visionaries claimed messages that applied to the world, this idea that the United States was particularly special to the Virgin Mary offered additional appeal to believers.

Although many of the visionaries were married women who suffered marital trouble or even divorced once their apparition claims began, I was not able to explore possible reasons for this in depth. None of the visionaries was willing to talk with me, and written sources generally offered few explanations. For instance, Gianna Talone-Sullivan's first divorce was blamed on her husband not wanting children and not being able to deal with her new spiritual life, but there was no explanation given for her second divorce, even though the couple had claimed the Virgin Mary brought them together.<sup>10</sup> Annie Ross Fitch ended her first marriage to a Muslim man around the same time that she started receiving messages from the Virgin Mary.<sup>11</sup> Nancy Fowler's husband believed that she was receiving visions, but he wanted a private life and did not want to participate

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*Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 262-263.

<sup>9</sup> Dom Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg: The Center of Her Immaculate Heart* (Goleta, CA: Queenship Publishing Company, 2000), xv, 111.

<sup>10</sup> Forker, *Our Lady of Emmitsburg*, xiv, 6; "Today's Record," *York Sunday News*, 21 November 2010, 01-08.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Faricy, S.J., and Lucy Rooney, S.N.D. de N., *Our Lady Comes to Scottsdale: Is It Authentic?* (Santa Barbara: Queenship Publishing Company, 1993), 35, 41; René Laurentin, *Our Lord and Our Lady in Scottsdale: Fruitful Charisms in a Traditional American Parish*, trans. Doris and Ernesto V. Laguerre (Milford, OH: Faith Publishing Company, 1992), 40.

in apparition events. He divorced her in 1997.<sup>12</sup> Maureen Sweeney-Kyle's first husband attended her first meetings, but he was skeptical and did not like the attention her driver was paying her. After thirty years of marriage, she divorced him in 1995, and in 1997 she married her driver, a man with a history of physical violence who became her spokesperson.<sup>13</sup> It seems reasonable that the attention a wife received as someone who could communicate with the Virgin Mary would change the dynamics of a marriage, as would messages that related to the visionary's life. This might also offer a path out of an already troubled marriage. How could a spouse argue with a supernatural message? The financial aspects of parachurch organizations could also put a strain on a marriage. It would be interesting to research other women in positions of religious leadership to see if these effects persist or are unique to visionaries.

Overall, the dissertation studied themes that reveal critical elements of the lived religious experience of thousands of believers in the United States since World War Two. Most of these believers are Catholic, so the changing position of Catholics within American society and within the Church after Vatican II is an important aspect of how their perception of their faith has been able to change over time, particularly their active role in it. Most of the visionaries and believers are women, so examining how women

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<sup>12</sup> Henry Farber, "Vision dims: Virgin Mary sightings lead to lawsuit," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 4 September 1999, G3; Mary Anne Gordon, "Preparing to Greet the Virgin Mary," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 12 October 1997, C1; Ann Marie Hancock, *Wake Up America! Take My Heart, Take My Hand* (Norfolk, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, 1993), 19; S. E. Vanderboom, "Bourdon: Jesus and Mary Picked Conyers," *Rockdale Citizen*, 12 October 1994, 12A.

<sup>13</sup> Michele M. Melendez, "Maureen Sweeney Speaks Softly and Carries Holy Messages to Thousands," *Plain Dealer*, 17 November 1996, 2B; Laura Putre, "Blessed Other," *Cleveland Scene* 30, no. 32 (12-18 August 1999), 9, 13; Weldon, "Mixed Messages: Ministry in Lorain County has its believers— and skeptics," E1.

have been able to find positions of leadership within a religious space that limits their ability to partake in official leadership allows a more nuanced view of women's relationship with their faith. While most of the visionaries and believers are white, there are a significant number of pilgrims who are Latinos and one Latina visionary that show how apparition events are not limited by race and in fact have additional meaning within Hispanic cultural traditions. The Internet and technology allow for believers to learn about apparition claims outside of their area and to participate in pilgrimage culture, including the associated consumerism. Despite the lack of official approval from the Catholic Church, those who participate in the apparition movement find meaning and spiritual connection in it.



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